

Year Three

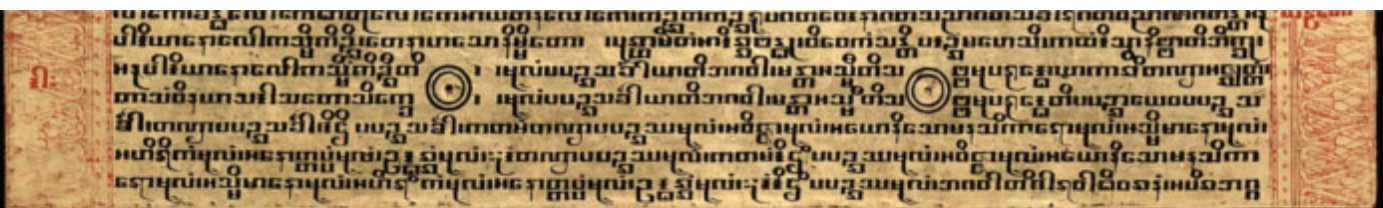


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3.1

Selected Suttas from the Pāli Canon



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Section 1: The Buddha

3.1.1

The Ariyapariyesana Sutta: The Discourse on the Noble Quest

Module compiled by Vadanya

Introduction

This module of suttas from the Pāli Canon is organised on the basis of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, so it makes sense to begin with an account of the Buddha's life up to his Enlightenment and his first attempts to help others to realise what he had realised. The Ariyapariyesana Sutta gives us such an account, but with an important emphasis – the difference between the noble quest, which led the Buddha to his Enlightenment, and which the Buddha's disciples are also engaged in if they are sincere, and the ignoble quest to find happiness from worldly concerns. This emphasis presents us, as readers, with a challenging question: in all honesty, to what extent do we seek to find our happiness in the things of the world – the ignoble quest – and to what extent do we seek fulfilment from a path of spiritual growth that allows us to transcend these concerns? In other words, to what extent do we still go for refuge to worldly things, and to what extent do we go for refuge to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?

Perhaps because the Buddha's main concern in giving this discourse was to point out the difference between these two quests, several of the features we would normally expect to find in an account of the Buddha's quest for Enlightenment are absent – for example, there is no mention of a wife and child, and none of the other usual stories surrounding his Going Forth. It could be that these were simply not relevant to the main point, and so were left out, or it could be that these are in fact mythic stories which developed later. If this latter is the case, this does not make these stories 'false' – as Sangharakshita has pointed out, there is such a thing as mythic truth, and mythic stories can describe what happened to the Buddha internally – in the heart and mind – in a way that goes far beyond mere surface historical accuracy.

The Ariyapariyesana Sutta (MN 26)

Abbreviated and condensed version by Vadanya, based on the translations of Thanissaro Bhikkhu and Maurice Walshe.

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, at Jeta's Grove in Anathapindika's park. Then early in the morning, having put on his robes and carrying his bowl, he went into Savatthi for alms. After his alms-round the Blessed One went with Ananda to the hermitage of Rammaka the brahman. Now at that time a large number of renunciants had gathered there for a Dhamma discussion, and the Blessed One stood outside the door waiting for the discussion to end. When the discussion had ended, he cleared his throat and tapped at the door. The renunciants opened the door for him, and he sat down on a seat made ready. Then he asked them: "Friends, what have you been discussing", and they replied, "Lord, our discussion was about the Blessed One himself."

Then the Buddha spoke, saying, “Monks, there are these two quests: the ignoble quest, and the noble quest.

“What is the ignoble quest? This is where a person, being subject himself to birth, seeks happiness in what is also subject to birth. Being subject himself to ageing, illness, and death, he seeks happiness in what is also subject to ageing, illness and death. Being subject himself to sorrow and defilement, he seeks happiness in what is also subject to sorrow and defilement.

“And what is it that is subject to birth, ageing, illness, death, sorrow, and defilement? Spouses, children, servants, goats, sheep, fowl, pigs, elephants, cattle, horses, gold and silver are subject to birth, ageing, illness, death, sorrow, and defilement. These acquisitions are all so subject, and one who is tied to them, infatuated with them, one who has totally fallen for them, being subject himself to birth, ageing, illness, death, sorrow, and defilement, seeks happiness in what is also subject to birth, illness, death, sorrow, and defilement.

“And what is the noble quest? This is where a person, being subject himself to birth, seeks the unborn, supreme freedom from bondage: Nibbana. Being subject himself to ageing, illness, death, sorrow and defilement, seeing the danger in these, he seeks the unageing, the unailing, the deathless, the sorrowless, the undefiled supreme freedom from bondage: Nibbana.

“I, too, before my Awakening, being subject myself to birth, sought what was also subject to birth. Being subject myself to ageing, illness, death, sorrow and defilement, I sought happiness in what was also subject to these things. But then the thought occurred to me, ‘Why do I, being subject myself to these things, seek happiness in what is also subject to them? What if I, being subject myself to birth, ageing, illness, death, sorrow and defilement, seeing the danger in them, were to seek the unborn, the unageing, the unailing, the deathless, the sorrowless, the undefiled, the supreme freedom from bondage: Nibbana?’

“So while still a black-haired young man, endowed with the blessings of youth, in the first stage of life – and while my parents were crying, with tears streaming down their faces – I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness.

“Having gone forth in search of the skilful, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I went to Alara Kalama and said to him: ‘Friend Kalama, I wish to practise in your doctrine and discipline’. It was not long before I quickly learned his doctrine, as far as mere lip-reciting and repetition. Then I thought, ‘I will endeavour to realise for myself the Dhamma that Alara Kalama has entered and dwells in, having realised it for himself through direct knowledge’. And it was not long before I too entered and dwelt in that Dhamma, having realised it for myself through direct knowledge. Then I went to him and said, ‘Friend Kalama, is this the extent to which you have entered and dwell in this Dhamma?’

“He replied, ‘Yes it is, my friend. It is a gain for us, a great gain for us, that we have such a companion in the holy life. The Dhamma I have entered and dwell in, having realised it for myself through direct knowledge, is the Dhamma you declare you have entered and dwell in, having realised it for yourself through direct knowledge. As I am, so are you; as you are, so am I. Come friend, let us now lead this community together’.

“In this way did Alara Kalama, my teacher, place me, his pupil, on the same level with himself, and pay me great honour. But soon I realised ‘This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment,

to dispassion, to stilling, to peace, to direct knowledge, to Awakening, to Nibbana, but only to reappearance in the dimension of no-thingness'. So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

"Then, still in search of the skilful, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I went to Uddaka Ramaputta and said to him: 'Friend Uddaka, I wish to practise in your doctrine and discipline'. It was not long before I quickly learned that doctrine, as far as mere lip-reciting and repetition. Then I thought, 'I will endeavour to realise for myself the Dhamma that Rama entered and dwells in, having realised it for himself through direct knowledge'. And it was not long before I entered and dwelled in that Dhamma, having realised it for myself through direct knowledge. Then I went to Uddaka and said, 'Friend Uddaka, is this the extent to which Rama entered and dwells in this Dhamma?'

"He replied, 'Yes it is, my friend. This, friend, is the extent to which I, too, have entered and dwell in this Dhamma, having realised it for myself through direct knowledge. It is a gain for us, a great gain for us, that we have such a companion in the holy life. So the Dhamma that Rama entered and dwells in, is the Dhamma you declare you have entered and dwell in. The Dhamma you declare you have entered and dwell in is the Dhamma Rama entered and dwells in. The Dhamma he knew is the Dhamma you know; the Dhamma you know is the Dhamma he knew. As he was, so are you; as you are, so was he. Come friend, lead this community'.

"In this way did Uddaka Ramaputta, my companion in the holy life, place me in the position of teacher, and pay me great honour. But soon I realised, 'This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to stilling, to peace, to direct knowledge, to Awakening, to Nibbana, but only to reappearance in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception'. So, dissatisfied with that Dhamma, I left.

"Then, ever in search of the skilful, seeking the supreme state of sublime peace, I wandered by stages in the Magadhan country. Eventually I came to the town of Uruvela, where I saw some delightful countryside, with an inspiring forest grove, a clear-flowing river with delightful banks, and many villages which might provide me with alms. I thought, 'This is the right place for a clansman intent on effort in the noble quest'. So I sat down to meditate right there.

"Then, being subject myself to birth, seeing the danger of birth, seeking the unborn, I reached the unborn supreme freedom from bondage, Nibbana. Being subject myself to ageing, illness, death, sorrow, and defilement, seeking the unageing, the unailing, the deathless, the sorrowless, I reached the unageing, the unailing, the deathless, the sorrowless, the supreme freedom from bondage, Nibbana. Knowledge and vision arose in me. Then I knew: 'My release is unshakeable. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming'.

"Then I thought, 'This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realise, peaceful, sublime, beyond the scope of words and reason, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation delights in worldly attachment, is excited by worldly attachment, rejoices in worldly attachment. For a generation delighting in worldly attachment, this conditionality and conditioned co-production are hard to see. This state, too, is hard to see: the resolution of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all worldly attachments, the ending of craving, dispassion, cessation: Nibbana. If I were to teach this Dhamma, others would not understand, and that would be wearying and troublesome'. As I reflected thus, my mind inclined to dwelling at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma.

"Then Brahma Sahampati knew my mind with his mind, and thought, 'The world is lost! The world is destroyed! The mind of the Tathagata, the Arahant, the Rightly Self-awakened One,

inclines to dwelling at ease, not to teaching the Dhamma!’ Then, just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm, Brahma Sahampati disappeared from the Brahma-world and reappeared in front of me. He placed his right knee on the ground, saluted me with his hands in front of his heart, and said to me: ‘Lord, let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma! Let the One-Well-Gone teach the Dhamma! There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are perishing because they do not hear the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma.

“‘Throw open the door to the Deathless! Like someone standing on a rocky crag seeing all below, with your total vision ascend to the palace of the Dhamma. Free from sorrow yourself, see those below submerged in sorrow, oppressed by birth and ageing. Arise and teach them the Dhamma! There will be those who understand’.

“Then out of compassion for beings I surveyed the world with the eye of an Awakened One. I saw beings with little dust in their eyes, and those with much; those with keen faculties, and those with dull; those with good attributes, and those with bad; those easy to teach, and those hard; some of them seeing disgrace and danger in the other world. Just as in a pond of lotuses, bred from the [dirty] water, some lotuses are still immersed in the water, some lotuses have reached the water’s surface, and some lotuses rise out of the water and stand clear, unwetted by it; so too, surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes, and those with much.

“So I answered Brahma Sahampati, saying, ‘Open are the doors to the Deathless. Those with ears, let them hear. Let them show their conviction’. Then Brahma Sahampati bowed down to me, and disappeared from that place.

“Then I thought, ‘To whom should I teach the Dhamma first? Who will quickly understand this Dhamma? Alara Kalama is wise, competent, intelligent. He has long had little dust in his eyes. He will quickly understand this Dhamma’. Then devas came to me and said, ‘Lord, Alara Kalama died seven days ago’.

“Then I thought, ‘Uddaka Ramaputta is wise, competent, intelligent. He has long had little dust in his eyes. He will quickly understand this Dhamma’. Then devas came to me and said, ‘Lord, Uddaka Ramaputta died last night’.

“Then I thought, ‘The group of five renunciants who attended to me when I was resolute in exertion were very helpful to me. What if I were to teach them the Dhamma first? Where are they staying now?’ And with the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human, I saw that they were staying near Varanasi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana.

“So I set out to walk by stages to Varanasi. Upaka the Ajivaka saw me on the road between Gaya and the place of Awakening, and said to me, ‘My friend, your faculties are clear, your complexion is pure and bright. Under whom have you gone forth? Who is your teacher? In whose Dhamma do you delight?’

“I replied, ‘I am one who has transcended all. I am unsullied among all the things of the world, freed by the end of craving. I have reached this state by my own efforts – who should I point to as my teacher? I have no teacher, and there is no other being like me in all the world. I am the supreme teacher, the Fully Enlightened One. I go now to set in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma. In a world that has gone blind, I go to beat the drum of the Deathless’.

“Upaka then said, ‘From your claims, my friend, you must have conquered the whole world’. And I replied ‘The real conquerors are those like me, who have ended the defilements. I have conquered unskilful qualities, and so, Upaka, I am indeed a conqueror’.

“With this Upaka said, ‘May it be so, my friend’, and, shaking his head, he left.

“Then, walking by stages, I arrived at Varanasi, at the Deer Park in Isipatana, to where the group of five ascetics were staying. From afar they saw me coming and made a pact with one another, saying, ‘Friends, here comes Gotama the contemplative: he has given up his striving, and is living in luxury. He doesn't deserve to be bowed down to’. But as I approached, they were unable to keep to their pact. One, standing up to greet me, received my robe and bowl. Another spread out a seat. Another set out water for washing my feet.

“So I said to them, ‘Lend ear, friends: the Deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practising as instructed, you will quickly reach and remain in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realizing it for yourselves in the here and now’.

“But they replied, ‘You did not attain to any superhuman states, or to any knowledge and vision worthy of a noble one by the austerities you practised when you were with us. So how can you have attained these things now, when you have given up your striving, and are living in luxury?’

I replied, ‘The Tathagata has not given up his striving, and he is not living in luxury. The Tathagata, friends, is an Arahant, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the Deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practising as instructed, you will quickly reach and remain in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realising it for yourselves in the here and now’.

“A second and a third time the five ascetics asked me the same question, and each time I replied as before. Then I said, ‘Have I ever spoken in this way before?’ And they replied, ‘No, lord. So I repeated, ‘The Tathagata has not given up his striving. He is not living in luxury. The Tathagata, friends, is an Arahant, rightly self-awakened. Lend ear, friends: the Deathless has been attained. I will instruct you. I will teach you the Dhamma. Practising as instructed, you will quickly reach and remain in the supreme goal of the holy life, for which clansmen rightly go forth from home into homelessness, knowing and realising it for yourselves in the here and now’.

“And so I was able to convince them. I would teach two of the renunciants while three went for alms, and we six lived off what the three brought back from their round. Then I would teach three while two went for alms, and we six lived off what the two brought back from their round. Then the group of five, having been instructed and exhorted by me, being themselves subject to birth, ageing, illness, death, sorrow and defilement, and seeing the danger of these, sought and attained the unborn, the supreme freedom from bondage: Nibbana. Being subject themselves to ageing, illness, death, sorrow, and defilement, seeing the danger of these, they sought and attained the unageing, the unailing, the deathless, the sorrowless, the supreme freedom from bondage: Nibbana. Knowledge and vision arose in them. Then they knew: ‘My release is unshakeable. This is the last birth. There is now no further becoming’.

“Friends, there are these five ropes of sensual pleasure. Which five? Forms seen by the eye that are wished for, pleasing, fascinating, enticing, fostering craving. Sounds heard by the ear that are wished for, pleasing, fascinating, enticing, fostering craving. Aromas smelt by the nose that are wished for, pleasing, fascinating, enticing, fostering craving. Tastes tasted by the tongue that are wished for, pleasing, fascinating, enticing, fostering craving. Sensations felt by the body that are wished for, pleasing, fascinating, enticing, fostering craving. These are the five ropes of sensual pleasure.

“Any brahmans or contemplatives who are bound by these five ropes of sensual pleasure – infatuated with them, having totally fallen for them, using them without seeing their danger or discerning the escape from them – you should know that such people have suffered a disaster. Just as a wild deer lying tied up has met with a disaster, because the hunter can do with it as he pleases, they have suffered a disaster. Mara can do with them as he pleases.

“But any brahmans or contemplatives not bound by these five ropes of sensual pleasure – not infatuated with them, having not totally fallen for them, who use them seeing their danger and discerning the escape from them – you should know that such people have not suffered a disaster. Just as a wild deer that is not tied up has not met with disaster, because when the hunter comes it can escape at will, they have not suffered a disaster. Mara has no power over them.

“It is like a wild deer-living in a valley in the wilderness. Carefree it walks, carefree it stands, carefree it sits, carefree it lies down. And why is that? Because it is beyond the hunter’s power. In the same way, a practitioner who is withdrawn from sensual pleasures, withdrawn from unskilful states, is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has gone beyond Mara’s vision, and he cannot be seen by the Evil One. Having seen with wisdom, his mental fermentations are ended. Having crossed over, he is unattached in the world. Carefree he walks, carefree he stands, carefree he sits, carefree he lies down. Why is that? Because he has gone beyond the Evil One’s range.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What are the present-day equivalents of goats, sheep, fowl, pigs, elephants, etc? What are the equivalents for you?
2. How much of your time and effort is devoted to the noble quest, and how much to the ignoble quest? (You might want to think about how much time each day you devote to each, and how much time you spend thinking about each.)
3. In what sense do you think Nibbana could be “the unborn, the unageing, the unailing, the deathless”? Do you think it means a stoical acceptance of death, or genuine escape from it? Do you believe there could be such a state as the genuinely Deathless?
4. Do you think the Buddha could really have decided not to teach? Why, or why not? What might Brahma Sahampati represent in this episode?

5. How would you describe the Buddha's motivation for seeking out the five ascetics? Does this tell us anything important?
6. Is the last part of the text, about the "ropes of sensual pleasure", telling us that we must avoid pleasure if we want to make spiritual progress?
7. What might it mean it say that the liberated person is "trackless"?
8. Spend some time thinking about some of the metaphors used in this sutta – the pond of lotuses at various stages of growing out of the dirty water; the deer, either tied up and at the mercy of the hunter, or else free, and becoming "invisible" to Mara. Do any of these have a particular resonance for you?
9. In what ways does this account of the Buddha's life differ from other accounts you have heard?

Introduction

In this sutta we meet the Buddha shortly after his Enlightenment, as he is in the process of digesting his enormous experience, reorganising his being in the light of it, and making the implications clear to himself. As part of this process he turns his mind to the subject of reverence, and his conclusions may come as a surprise to some Buddhists of the present day, living at a time when reverence is distinctly unfashionable. The Buddha takes it for granted that a sense of reverence, and obedience to something higher than our own desires, is essential for a happy life – even for a Buddha. (For a further exploration of this sutta, listen to Sangharakshita's talk, *Discerning the Buddha*, available on Free Buddhist Audio.) Sangharakshita regards this as an important text, because it brings out the crucial importance of reverence for the spiritual life.

The Garava Sutta (SN 6.2)

Condensed version by Vadanya based on the translation of Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

Thus have I heard.

Once, not long after the Buddha's Enlightenment, he was staying at Uruvela, on the bank of the Neranjara River, meditating at the foot of the goatherd's banyan tree. Then, while he was alone and in seclusion, he thought to himself, "To live without reverence is to be unhappy. But what brahmin or contemplative can I be a disciple of, looking up to, revering and obeying him?

"It would be for the sake of increasing my virtue that I would be the disciple of another brahmin or contemplative. But in all this world with its gods and demons, in this generation with its teachers and contemplatives, its royalty and common-folk, I do not see anyone who is more virtuous than I, of whom I could be the disciple, looking up to and obeying them.

"It would be for the sake of increasing my *meditative* concentration that I would be the disciple of another brahmin or contemplative. But in all this world I do not see anyone who is more perfected in meditative concentration than I.

"It would be for the sake of increasing my discernment that I would be the disciple of another brahmin or contemplative. But in all this world I do not see anyone who is more perfected in discernment than I.

"It would be for the sake of increasing my liberation that I would be the disciple of another brahmin or contemplative. But in all this world I do not see anyone who is more liberated than I.

“It would be for the sake of increasing my wisdom and vision that I would be the disciple of another brahmin or contemplative. But in all this world, with its gods and demons, in this generation with its teachers and contemplatives, its royalty and common-folk, I do not see anyone who has greater wisdom and vision than I, of whom I could be the disciple, looking up to and obeying them.

“But to live without reverence is to be unhappy. I shall look up to and obey the Dhamma. I will become a disciple of the Dhamma, looking up to, revering and obeying it.”

Then Brahma Sahampati, perceiving with his mind this thought in the Buddha’s mind, disappeared from the Brahma-world and reappeared in front of the Buddha, just as a strong man might extend his flexed arm. He saluted the Buddha with his hands held together at his heart, stood to one side, and said: “So it is, Blessed One! So it is, One-Well-Gone! Those who were Perfectly Awakened Ones in the past – they, too, dwelled in discipleship to the very Dhamma itself, looking up to and revering it. Those who will be Perfectly Awakened Ones in the future – they, too, will dwell in discipleship to the very Dhamma itself, looking up to and revering it. And let the Blessed One, who is at present the Perfectly Awakened One, let him too dwell in discipleship to the very Dhamma itself, looking up to it, revering it, and obeying it.”

Then Brahma Sahampati added in verse:

Past Buddhas, Buddhas yet to be, and he who is the Buddha now,
Removing the sorrow of the many,
All dwelt, will dwell,
As He dwells,
Revering the True Dhamma,
The natural law of the way things are.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. According to the Buddha, “To live without reverence is to be unhappy”. Do you agree? Why, or why not?
2. Is there anyone that you revere – or respect enough to take serious notice of their advice? Is there anyone that you acknowledge is further along the path than you are, from whom you could learn?
3. The Buddha thinks to himself that it would be for the sake of increasing various spiritual qualities that he would look up to and obey another teacher. How might an attitude of reverence help to develop the qualities he mentions?
4. The Buddha decides that he will look up to and revere the very Dharma itself. Do you think he meant his own teaching, as he formulated it in words? If not, can you find words to describe what he might have meant?
5. Can you imagine looking up to and revering something that was completely impersonal, like a scientific law? Do you think this is what the Buddha meant he would do?

6. Are there any situations or environments in which you have felt reverence, or associated emotions such as awe and a sense of wonder?
7. The sutta implies not only that a sense of reverence is essential to human happiness, but also that it is part and parcel of Enlightenment. Does this change your idea of what Enlightenment might be? Does it change your attitude to reverence?

Section 2: The Dharma

3.1.3

The Mahanama Sutta: The Discourse with Mahanama

Introduction

Our next sutta provides a link between the first part of this brief exploration of the Pāli Canon, on the Buddha, and the section that follows, on the Dharma. The connection lies in the fact that recollecting the Buddha, meditating on the Buddha and his qualities, and keeping him in mind as much as possible at all times, has been an important Dharma practice since the very earliest days of Buddhism. As we see in this sutta, it was recommended by the Buddha himself.

(In *Week 6, Part One of Year One* we heard about an old man called Pingiya who took this as his main practice, and we saw that the Buddha told him that this could carry him all the way to Enlightenment. An extract from *Pingiya's Praises of the Way to the Beyond* is included in that module, and this can be studied as an optional extra text in this module, for those who would like to revisit it.)

In the Mahanama Sutta the Buddha recommends six different reflections to his householder disciple Mahanama, all intended to keep his mind 'headed straight'. Any one of these might be effective, but it is the recollection of the Buddha and its extensions – for example the sadhanas practised by many Order members – that has taken on most prominence within the Buddhist tradition.

This sutta is relevant to all practitioners, whatever their circumstances, but it is perhaps most aimed at 'householders' like Mahanama – which in our context this means those who spend a lot of their time away from the supportive environment of the Sangha. Mahanama asks where he should 'dwell', as he cannot dwell with the Buddha, but he uses this language while recognising that our real dwelling place is the mind. A householder like Mahanama cannot dwell physically with the Buddha and Sangha, but the Buddha tells him that he can still dwell with them in his mind.

The Mahanama Sutta – the Discourse with Mahanama (AN 11.13)

Condensed version by Vadanya, based on the translation of Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying among the Sakyans at Kapilavatthu, in the Banyan Park. Now at that time Mahanama the Sakyan, a householder who had just recovered from being ill, thought to himself, "The end of the rainy season retreat is approaching, and soon the Blessed One will set out wandering". So he approached the Blessed One and, having bowed down to him, stood to one side and asked: "At the end of the three months, at the end of the rainy season retreat, when the Blessed One sets out wandering, in what dwelling place should we live?"

“Excellent, Mahanama, excellent! It is fitting for clansmen like you to approach the Tathagata and ask, ‘in what dwelling place should we live?’

“One who is aroused to practice is one of conviction, not one without conviction. One aroused to practice is one with persistence, not lazy. One who is aroused to practice is one in whom mindfulness is established, not a person of muddled mindfulness. One who is aroused to practice is one who is centred in concentration, not someone who is uncentred. One who is aroused to practice is discerning, and not undiscerning.

“Established in these five qualities, you should further develop these six states:

“Firstly you should recollect the Buddha, thinking, ‘Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in knowledge and practice, gone to happiness, knowing the nature of the world, the best trainer of those willing to be trained, the teacher of divine and human beings, awakened, blessed’. When a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Tathagata, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the Tathagata. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed feels ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahanama, you should develop this recollection of the Buddha while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, and while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

“Furthermore, you should recollect the Dhamma, thinking, ‘The Dhamma is well-expounded by the Blessed One, apparent here and now, timeless, of the nature of a personal invitation, progressive, to be understood individually by the wise’. When a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Dhamma, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the Dhamma. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed feels ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahanama, you should develop this recollection of the Dhamma while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, and while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

“Furthermore, you should recollect the Sangha, thinking, ‘The Sangha of the Buddha’s disciples is upright, proceeding methodically, walking the right path, these eight types of disciples are worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable source of merit for the world’. When a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the Sangha, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the Sangha. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed feels ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahanama, you should develop this recollection of the Sangha while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, and while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

“Furthermore, you should recollect your own virtues, thinking, ‘My virtues are untorn, unbroken, unspotted, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, conducive to concentration’. When a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting virtue, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on virtue. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed feels ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahanama, you should develop this recollection of virtue while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

“Furthermore, you should recollect your own generosity, thinking, ‘It is a gain for me, a great gain for me, that – among people overcome with the stain of possessiveness – I live at home, my awareness cleansed of the stain of possessiveness, freely generous, open-handed, delighting in being magnanimous, responsive to requests, delighting in the distribution of alms’. When a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting generosity, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on generosity. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed feels ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahanama, you should develop this recollection of generosity while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, while you are resting in your home crowded with children.

“Furthermore, you should recollect the devas, thinking, ‘Whatever faith the devas were endowed with when they became devas, the same sort of faith is present in me as well. Whatever virtue, knowledge, generosity and wisdom that the devas were endowed with when they became devas, these same qualities are present in me as well’. When a disciple of the noble ones is recollecting the faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and discernment found both in himself and the devas, his mind is not overcome with passion, not overcome with aversion, not overcome with delusion. His mind heads straight, based on the qualities of the devas. And when the mind is headed straight, the disciple of the noble ones gains a sense of the goal, gains a sense of the Dhamma, gains joy connected with the Dhamma. In one who is joyful, rapture arises. In one who is rapturous, the body grows calm. One whose body is calmed feels ease. In one at ease, the mind becomes concentrated.

“Mahanama, you should develop this recollection of the devas while you are walking, while you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are lying down, while you are busy at work, and while you are resting in your home crowded with children.”



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is the connection between the approaching end of the three-month rainy season retreat and Mahanama's question?
2. What effect do you think it would have to regularly call to mind the Buddha?
3. Where do you tend to "dwell" when you are not among the Sangha or in a Buddhist environment? Spend some time this week noticing where your mind has been dwelling, perhaps setting some regular times (for example work breaks, before meals, before bed) to become mindful of this, and report back. What proportion of your time are you thinking about things connected to spiritual practice, compared to worldly concerns?
4. Where does your mind tend to "dwell" when you are in a Buddhist environment? What is the difference, compared to times when you are not?
5. How could you keep your attention more firmly on the fact that you are a Buddhist practitioner, at times when circumstances do not support this?
6. Incorporate a brief recollection of the Buddha in your meditation practice this week, and keep up a connection with this as much as possible as you go about your life. (You could write your own brief praises of the Buddha for this, or use the practice provided in the appendix that follows.) Report back on any effects this has.
7. How do you respond to the idea of reflecting on your own generosity and other positive qualities? Try doing this in the first stage of your metta bhavana practice this week, and report back on the results.



Appendix for Week 3

A suggested Recollection of the Buddha practice for mitras in the Triratna Buddhist Community

To begin your morning practice stand before your shrine and chant:

Namo Buddhaya, namo Dharmaya, namo Sanghaya.

Kneel to make an offering, symbolically acting out your commitment with this physical gesture. Then rise, sit, settle, and say the following words slowly to yourself, connecting with their meaning in your imagination as strongly as you can. (You may wish to commit these words, or your own version of them, to memory.)

I call to mind the Buddha, perfectly awake to reality, the being of boundless mind, beyond the limitations of separate selfhood, free from all restrictions, endlessly creative, endowed with every positive quality, strong and noble, beautiful of mind, full of light, the infinite mind filled with empathy for all beings.

Spend a few minutes letting these words resonate, connecting in your imagination with the Buddha and his qualities. You may choose to focus on one particular quality that you are seeking to embody more fully.

Then move into your chosen morning meditation, seeking to keep a sense of the Buddha's presence and influence as you practise. At the end of your meditation say the following words to yourself to establish your motivation for the day ahead. If you do not intend to meditate, move straight on to these words.

By the power of the Buddha,
With the help of the Sangha,
As I live this day,
May I emulate the Buddha.

With his mind of kindness,
May I emulate the Buddha.
With freedom from grasping,
May I emulate the Buddha.
With freedom from craving,
May I emulate the Buddha.
Speaking the truth,
May I emulate the Buddha.
With bright awareness,
May I emulate the Buddha.

Above my reactions,
Above my limitations,
With his vast vision,
For the benefit of all beings,
With body speech and mind,
This day,
May I emulate the Buddha.

Having said these words, sit for a while focusing on your desire and determination to manifest the Buddha's qualities as fully as you can in the day to come. (Again you may wish to focus on one particular quality you wish to develop.) You may also wish to cast your mind forward to any situations you will encounter in the day to come that might be particularly challenging, and to imagine how you will deal with them skilfully.

To conclude the practice decide on five times in the day ahead when you will call to mind the intentions you formed this morning, perhaps reinforcing this at these times by silently chanting a mantra, and calling to mind your sense of commitment to the Buddha and his path. (For example, you could choose to do this when you arrive at work, at your morning break, at the beginning of the lunch break, at your afternoon break, and while travelling home from work. At each of these times spend a minute or two reconnecting with your intentions.)

You may choose to chant the refuges and precepts to finish your morning practice.

Rise, bow to your shrine, and enter the day's activities.

Introduction

Last week we moved on in our brief exploration of the Pāli Canon, from Buddha to Dharma, by looking at a sutta that links the two topics. The Mahanama Sutta showed that the practice of recollection of the Buddha has been an important aspect of Dharma practice, going right back to the days of the Buddha himself. This week we move on to look at some of the many other aspects of the Dharma described in the Canon. However this gives the compiler a serious problem. The Pāli Canon is packed with important Dharma teachings. In a module of the Dharma Training Course we cannot hope to look at all the individual aspects of the Dharma as they are presented in the Pāli Canon, so the suttas we explore need to have some general relevance to the Dharma as a whole. The sutta we will look at this week has such a relevance, because in it the Buddha gives advice as to how we can judge what is in fact Dharma, and what is not.

However this sutta also comes with a health warning. The Kalama Sutta is perhaps the most misunderstood, misquoted and misrepresented sutta in the Pāli Canon. It is often interpreted to mean that a Buddhist can disregard the Buddhist scriptures, the tradition, and the wisdom of those more experienced than themselves, and instead pick and choose the aspects of the teachings that they will accept, on the basis of their own personal views and preferences. It is also often seen as recommending a constantly sceptical approach to the Dharma. However this interpretation is manifestly wrong, for two reasons.

Firstly, it simply ignores at least half of what the Buddha says. The Buddha does indeed say that we should not accept a teaching just because it is traditional, or because of the reputation of the person who offers it. However he also says that we cannot trust our own perception of what seems logical, and nor should we plump for those ideas that we like, and reject those that we do not. This half of the teaching is ignored by those who would like to see it as meaning that we can make our personal views and preferences the touchstone for what is in fact the Dharma.

Secondly, this sutta needs to be viewed in the light of the context in which it was delivered, and the audience it was delivered to. The Kalamas ask the Buddha's advice because they have been bombarded with conflicting doctrines upheld by dogmatic teachers who denigrate all other points of view. In this context it would have been inappropriate for the Buddha to give the Kalamas *his* teaching as just another of the conflicting ones on offer; instead he does the appropriate thing, by seeking to give them some criteria for deciding between teachings – criteria that do not require belief in anything. The Kalamas are not followers of the Buddha, and he does not even ask them to accept the law of karma, although over and over again in the Pāli Canon when talking to his own disciples he emphasises that a belief in this is essential to the spiritual life.

What the Buddha does is to offer the Kalamas three criteria for accepting or rejecting a spiritual teaching:

- Does it seem to accord with your experience and intuition of what is skilful?
- Will it lead to benefit and happiness, or to harm and suffering?
- Would it be approved or disapproved of by ‘the wise’?

These three criteria need to be considered together, and the approval of those we recognise as wiser than ourselves is a crucial aspect of them. The Kalamas were not Buddhists, and the Buddha could not expect them to automatically include him among ‘the wise’. However, as Buddhists we do see the Buddha, not just as one of the wise, but as an Enlightened being – otherwise we cannot be said to be Buddhists. And for this reason, practising Buddhists often need to be ready to accept Buddhist teachings with a degree of faith, and a willingness to put them into practice without scepticism, in order to find out for themselves if they does in fact lead to benefit and happiness.

The Kalama Sutta (AN 3.65)

Condensed version by Vadanya, based on the translations of Thanissaro Bhikkhu and F. L. Woodward.

Thus have I heard.

Once the Blessed One was wandering among the Kosalans with a large community of renunciants, and arrived at Kesaputta, a town of the Kalamas. The Kalamas of Kesaputta had heard it said, “Gotama the contemplative, the son of the Sakyans, is indeed a Blessed One, worthy, rightly self-awakened, perfect in knowledge and conduct, gone to happiness, a knower of the world, the best trainer of those willing to be trained, teacher of human and divine beings, awakened, blessed. He has made known, having realised it through direct knowledge, this world with its devas, maras, and brahmas, its generations with their contemplatives and brahmans, their rulers and common people. He has explained the Dhamma, admirable in the beginning, admirable in the middle, admirable in the end. He has expounded the holy life, both in its particulars and in its essence, entirely perfect, surpassingly pure. It is good to see such a worthy one.”

So the Kalamas of Kesaputta went to the Blessed One. On arrival, some of them bowed down to him and sat to one side. Some of them exchanged courteous greetings with him and then sat to one side. Some of them sat to one side having saluted him with their hands palm-to-palm over their hearts. Some of them sat to one side having announced their name and clan. Some of them sat to one side in silence.

Then the Kalamas of Kesaputta said to the Blessed One, “Lord, there are some brahmans and contemplatives who come to Kesaputta and expound and glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, and disparage them. And then other brahmans and contemplatives come to Kesaputta. They expound and glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, and disparage them. They leave us uncertain and in doubt: Which of these venerable brahmans and contemplatives are speaking the truth, and which are lying?”

“Of course you are uncertain, Kalamas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So, Kalamas, don't judge a teaching by report or tradition or hearsay – because people often say it is true – nor because someone can quote the scriptures, nor by mere logic and inference, nor because you like a certain idea, nor because something is plausibly argued, nor by the reputation of the person who teaches it. When you know for yourselves that these qualities are unskilful, these qualities are blameworthy, these qualities are criticised by the wise, these qualities lead to harm and to suffering — then you should abandon them.

“What do you think, Kalamas? When greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For harm, lord.”

“And isn't it true that this greedy person, his mind possessed by greed, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm and suffering.”

“Yes, lord.”

“Now, what do you think, Kalamas? When malice arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For harm, lord.”

“And isn't it true that this malicious person, his mind possessed by malice, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm and suffering.”

“Yes, lord.”

“Now, what do you think, Kalamas? When delusion arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For harm, lord.”

“And isn't it true that this deluded person, his mind possessed by delusion, kills living beings, takes what is not given, goes after another person's wife, tells lies, and induces others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term harm and suffering.”

“Yes, lord.”

“So what do you think, Kalamas: Are these qualities skilful or unskilful?”

“Unskilful, lord.”

“Blameworthy or blameless?”

“Blameworthy, lord.”

“Are they criticised by the wise, or praised by the wise?”

“Criticism by the wise, lord.”

“Do they lead to harm and to suffering, or not?”

“They lead to harm and suffering. That is how it appears to us.”

“So, as I said, Kalamas, don't judge a teaching by report or tradition or hearsay – because people often say it is true – nor because someone can quote the scriptures, nor by mere logic and inference, nor because you like a certain idea, nor because something is plausibly argued, nor by the reputation of the person who teaches it. When you know for yourselves that these qualities are unskillful, these qualities are blameworthy, these qualities are criticised by the wise, these qualities lead to harm and to suffering — then you should abandon them.

“When you know for yourselves that these qualities are skillful, these qualities are blameless, these qualities are praised by the wise, these qualities lead to welfare and happiness — then you should enter and remain in them.

“What do you think, Kalamas? When lack of greed arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For welfare, lord.”

“And isn't it true that this ungreedy person, his mind not possessed by greed, doesn't kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person's wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare and happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

“What do you think, Kalamas? When lack of malice arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For welfare, lord.”

“And isn't it true that this unmalicious person, his mind not possessed by malice, doesn't kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person's wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare and happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

“What do you think, Kalamas? When lack of delusion arises in a person, does it arise for welfare or for harm?”

“For welfare, lord.”

“And isn't it true that this undeluded person, his mind not possessed by delusion, doesn't kill living beings, take what is not given, go after another person's wife, tell lies, or induce others to do likewise, all of which is for long-term welfare and happiness.”

“Yes, lord.”

“So what do you think, Kalamas: Are these qualities skilful or unskilful?”

“Skilful, lord.”

“Blameworthy or blameless?”

“Blameless, lord.”

“Are they criticised by the wise, or praised by the wise?”

“Praised by the wise, lord.”

“Do they lead to welfare and happiness, or not?”

“They lead to welfare and happiness. That is how it appears to us.”

“So, as I said, Kalamas, don't judge a teaching by report or tradition or hearsay – because people often say it is true – nor because someone can quote the scriptures, nor by mere logic and inference, nor because you like a certain idea, nor because something is plausibly argued, nor by the reputation of the person who teaches it. When you know for yourselves that these qualities are unskilful, these qualities are blameworthy, these qualities are criticised by the wise, these qualities lead to harm and to suffering — then you should abandon them.

“When you know for yourselves that these qualities are skilful, these qualities are blameless, these qualities are praised by the wise, these qualities lead to welfare and happiness — then you should enter and remain in them.

“Now, Kalamas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones, devoid of greed, devoid of ill will, undeluded, alert, and resolute, pervades the first direction, the second direction, the third, and the fourth, with an awareness imbued with metta. He keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect he pervades the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with metta, abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“He pervades all directions with an awareness imbued with compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect he keeps pervading the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness, abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

“Now, Kalamas, one who is a disciple of the noble ones, his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, and pure, acquires four assurances in the here-and-now:

“‘If there is a world after death, if there is the fruit of actions rightly and wrongly done, then with the break-up of the body, after death, I will reappear in a good destination, the heavenly world.’ This is the first assurance he acquires.

“‘But if there is no world after death, if there is no fruit of actions rightly and wrongly done, then here in the present life I live with ease, free from hostility, free from ill will, free from trouble.’ This is the second assurance he acquires.

“If my actions cause harm, yet I have willed no harm to anyone. Having done no evil actions, from where will suffering touch me?’ This is the third assurance he acquires.

“But if my actions have not caused harm, then I can assume myself pure in both respects.’ This is the fourth assurance he acquires.

“One who is a disciple of the noble ones, his mind thus free from hostility, free from ill will, undefiled, and pure, acquires these four assurances in the here-and-now.”

“So it is, Blessed One. So it is,

“Magnificent, lord! Magnificent! Just as if he were to place upright what was overturned, to reveal what was hidden, to show the way to one who was lost, or to carry a lamp into the dark so that those with eyes could see forms, in the same way the Blessed One has made the Dhamma clear. We go to the Blessed One for refuge, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha. May the Blessed One remember us as lay followers who have gone to him for refuge, from this day forward, for as long as we shall live.”



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is the significance of the Kalamas greeting the Buddha in so many different ways?
2. The Buddha tells the Kalamas a number of criteria that, on their own, aren't a reliable guide to whether a teaching should be followed. Why, in each case, could these be unreliable?
3. The three criteria given by the Buddha for accepting a teaching are our own experience, whether or not it will lead to benefit, and the testimony of the wise.
 - a. How do we test a teaching by our experience?
 - b. Before we have any experience of the effects of a teaching, how do we know whether it will be beneficial, and whether to try it out?
 - c. How do we know if someone is one of “the wise”?
4. The Buddha tells the Kalamas not to accept a teaching just because it is in a scripture. How far are the Buddhist scriptures a reliable source of knowledge?
5. The Kalamas are not followers of the Buddha. Do you think he would have given different criteria for testing the validity of teachings to people who had gone for Refuge to him?
6. Why does the Buddha teach the Brahma Viharas to the Kalamas?
7. The other teaching the Buddha gives to the Kalamas at the end of the sutta is called the Four Comforts. Why is this a suitable teaching for the Kalamas?

Introduction

As has already been said, in a short mitra study module we cannot explore all the many different aspects of the Dharma touched on in the Pāli Canon. With this in mind, the next two suttas we will look at have been chosen because they give a concise overview of the whole path, as well as giving important Dharma teachings in their own right.

The sutta we will look at this week, the Mangala Sutta, is from a group of texts called the Khuddakapatha - the Short Passages. This is a collection of short, versified texts used for chanting, and as a primer for novice monks. The Mangala Sutta was traditionally chanted to bring protection, and it is also included in an anthology called the Verses of Protection. The title of the sutta has sometimes been translated as 'protection', but according to the commentaries 'mangala' means 'that which is conducive to happiness and prosperity'. It has also been translated as 'auspicious', and as 'blessed'.

The Mangala Sutta is important because it gives us a concise overview of the Buddhist life, both from the point of view of the householder who works 'in the world' and supports a family, and from the point of view of the full-time renunciant. It also tells us something about the relationship between the followers of the two lifestyles. Finally, we should not dismiss the sutta's traditional role as a bringer of protection – if the different sections of a society or a Sangha lived as the sutta describes, then that society or Sangha would indeed be protected, as would the individuals within it.

The Mangala Sutta (Khp 5)

Version by Vadanya, based on the translations of Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Piyadassi, and Sangharakshita.

Thus have I heard.

Once the Blessed One was staying at Anathapindika's park, in Jeta's Grove, near Savatthi. Then, when the night was far spent, a deva appeared to the Buddha, lighting up the whole Jeta Grove with his radiance. The deva bowed to the Blessed One, stood to one side, and said in verse:

"Many devas and humans, longing for the good, have wondered, what is the greatest blessing of them all. Please tell me what it is!"

The Buddha then replied,

"Not to spend time with fools, but to keep company with the wise, and to honour those who are worthy of honour – this is the greatest blessing.

“To live in a suitable place, having made merit in the past, and to have set oneself on the right course – this is the greatest blessing.

“To have knowledge and skill, and a well learnt discipline, and to be pleasant in speech – this is the greatest blessing.

“To support mother and father, to cherish wife and children, and to follow a skilful occupation – this is the greatest blessing.

“To be generous in giving, to live ethically, to help one's relatives, and to avoid unskilful acts – this is the greatest blessing.

“To avoid evil and abstain from it, to refrain from intoxicants, and to stay mindful of what is skilful – this is the greatest blessing.

“To be respectful and humble, contented and grateful, and to listen to the Dhamma at suitable times – this is the greatest blessing.

“To be patient and obedient, to associate with bhikkhus, and to discuss the Dhamma when the time is right – this is the greatest blessing.

“Renunciation and a celibate life, seeing the Noble Truths face to face, and the realisation of Nibbana here and now – this is the greatest blessing.

“A mind unruffled by the ups and downs of life, freed from sorrow, cleansed of all defilements, and liberated from fear – this is the greatest blessing.

“To live in this state, always undefeated, going everywhere in happiness – this is the greatest blessing that there is, and the best protection.”



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. “*To live in a suitable place.*”
What might make somewhere ‘suitable’?
2. “*To support mother and father, to cherish wife and children.*”
Does this contradict the later line, “Renunciation and a celibate life”?
3. Are you on good terms with your mother and father? (Like the Buddha, Sangharakshita has emphasised that a positive attitude to our parents is fundamental to our spiritual development.) If not, what could you do to improve this relationship?
4. Does the sutta tell us anything about the relationship between the household life and the life of the renunciant? Does it tell us anything about the way the followers of the two lifestyles should relate to each other?

5. Do you think this distinction between the householder and the full-time renunciant is still relevant today? On a spectrum between the two, where do you sit?
6. Does the sutta tell us anything about the way we develop wisdom and Insight?
7. Are there any lines from the sutta that particularly speak to you? Are there any lines that you should particularly work on putting into practice?
8. In what sense would a non-renunciant who lived as described in the sutta be protected? In what sense would the renunciant described here be protected?

The Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Discourse on Metta What You Should Do

Introduction

The Pāli word ‘Karaniya’ means something like ‘what should be done’, so we could translate the title – inelegantly – as The ‘What You Should Do’ Metta Sutta.

Like the Mangala Sutta which we looked at last week, the Karaniya Metta Sutta presents us with a complete overview of the spiritual life, from the beginning to the final goal. Also like the Mangala Sutta, it was traditionally chanted to bring protection – indeed the commentaries tell us that the Buddha taught the sutta to a group of monks who were terrified by tree spirits while living in the deep forest; the monks returned and permeated forest with metta, which pacified the hostile spirits. This story may contain a worthwhile truth – that metta protects us, from harm from others, and from our own fear. However the importance of the sutta – and of the practice of the metta bhavana – goes far beyond mere protection. The Karaniya Metta Sutta is a crucially important text because it tells us that the practice of metta can lead us all the way to the goal – that metta is a path to Perfect Vision.

The Karaniya Metta Sutta (SN 1.8)

Version by Vadanya based on the translations of Ratnaprabha, Padmavajra, Piyadassi and Nanamoli.

If you know what is truly good for you
And want to reach a state of perfect peace,
Then this is how you need to live.

Start by becoming a capable person,
Who is upright and straightforward,
Easy to talk to, receptive, and free of conceit.

Become contented and easily satisfied,
Not too busy, with a simple life,

Keep your senses tranquil,
Have respect for others,
Don't get caught up in the concerns of the group¹
And don't do anything ignoble
That wiser people would criticise.

1 Many translators render this as something like ‘don't hanker after families’, however Nanamoli translates this as ‘unswayed by the emotions of the clans’. Our version of a clan is the group within worldly society that we have emerged from, and which we perhaps still identify with.

[Then you should meditate like this:]
Thinking, may all beings be happy and at peace,
May all beings be happy in their heart of hearts!

May all living things be well,
The weak, and the strong,
The small, and the large,
Those near, and those far away,
Those you can see,
And those you can't,
Whether living now, or yet to be born –
May all beings be happy in their heart of hearts!

May no one deceive another,
May no one look down on another,
May no one hate another,
May no one wish another to suffer.

Just as a mother cherishes her child,
Her only child,
Develop an unlimited heart of metta for all beings,
Develop an unlimited heart of metta for all the world,
Sending love and goodwill in all directions,
Above, below, and all around,
Unobstructed,
Beyond all enmity and hatred.

Whether you are at home or travelling,
Whether you are standing, sitting, or in bed,
In all your hours practise this mindfulness²,
Which is like living in heaven right here and now.

In this way you will leave wrong views behind
You will be filled with perfect vision,
And, going completely beyond craving,
You will be liberated from the rounds of rebirth forever.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. *“Start by becoming a capable person.”*
What might this mean? Why is this important in the spiritual life?

2 In Living with Kindness Sangharakshita points out that the phrase translated here as ‘practise this mindfulness’ could also be rendered as ‘radiate this mindfulness’; metta has a positive, blessing-like effect on others.

2. *“Easy to talk to, receptive, and free of conceit.”*
Why are these qualities important?
3. *“Not too busy, with a simple life.”*
How busy is too busy? Are you too busy? Does your life need to be simplified, and if so, how could you do this?
4. *“Keep your senses tranquil.”*
What might this mean?
5. *“Don’t get caught up in the concerns of the group.”*
What might this mean? What might the alternative translation mean?
6. In what ways is metta like a mother’s love for her child? What are the limits of this comparison?
7. Which well-known formulation of the Buddhist path does this sutta illustrate?
8. Are you surprised that this sutta tells us that metta leads to Insight? Was this your previous understanding of the path to Insight?
9. What is the connection between metta and Perfect Vision? Do you think Insight is possible without metta?
10. In view of the message of this sutta, do you give enough importance to the metta bhavana?

Section 3: The Sangha

3.1.7

The Kosambiya Sutta: The Discourse to the Kosambiyans

Introduction

This week we move on in our exploration of the Pāli Canon, from suttas elucidating the Dharma to discourses on the topic of Sangha. In the Kosambiya Sutta we hear about a group of bhikkhus who were definitely not a Sangha, and were behaving in a way that is destructive of Sangha, by polarising and forming factions, hanging on to their views, and refusing to do what was needed to come into harmony. The Buddha calls them “You misguided men!” in this translation – in others he is even blunter, saying “You foolish men”, or even “You stupid men!” He then goes on to give them a teaching on how to create harmony and unity in a Sangha, which is as relevant in our situation as it was in theirs. According to the commentarial tradition the bhikkhus were so attached to their quarrel that they chose to ignore this advice – your study leader will be able to give you more of the background. (However the fact that the Bhikkhus are said to be satisfied and delighted by the Buddha’s words might cast doubt on this story.) The sutta closes with a discourse on the qualities of a Stream Entrant, which is not strictly relevant to the main topic, but which is interesting in itself.

The Kosambiya Sutta (MN 48)

Abbreviated and condensed version by Vadanya based on the translations of Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

Thus have I heard: On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Kosambi in Ghosita’s Park. Now on that occasion the bhikkhus at Kosambi had taken to quarrelling and brawling and were deep in disputes, stabbing each other with verbal daggers. They could neither convince each other nor be convinced by others; they could neither persuade each other nor be persuaded by others.

Then a certain bhikkhu went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, he sat down at one side and informed him of what was happening. Then the Blessed One addressed a certain bhikkhu thus: “Come, bhikkhu, tell those bhikkhus in my name that the Teacher calls them.”

“Yes, venerable sir,” he replied, and he went to those bhikkhus and told them: “The Teacher calls to the venerable ones”. “Yes, friend,” they replied, and they went to the Blessed One, and after paying homage to him, they sat down at one side. The Blessed One then asked them:

“Bhikkhus, is it true that you have taken to quarrelling and brawling and are deep in disputes, stabbing each other with verbal daggers; that you can neither convince each other nor be convinced by others, that you can neither persuade each other nor be persuaded by others?”

“Yes, venerable sir.”

“Bhikkhus, what do you think? When you take to quarrelling and brawling and are deep in disputes, stabbing each other with verbal daggers, do you on that occasion maintain acts of loving-kindness by body, speech and mind in public and in private towards your companions in the holy life?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“So, bhikkhus, when you take to quarrelling and brawling and are deep in disputes, stabbing each other with verbal daggers, on that occasion you do not maintain acts of loving-kindness by body, speech and mind in public and in private towards your companions in the holy life. Misguided men, what can you possibly know, what can you see, that you take to quarrelling and brawling and are deep in disputes, stabbing each other with verbal daggers? That you can neither convince each other nor be convinced by others, that you can neither persuade each other nor be persuaded by others? Misguided men, that will lead to your harm and suffering for a long time.”

Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: “Bhikkhus, there are these six memorable qualities that create love and respect, and conduce to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord, and to unity. What are the six?

“Here a bhikkhu maintains bodily acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private towards his companions in the holy life. This is a memorable quality that creates love and respect, and conduces to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord, and to unity.

“Again, a bhikkhu maintains verbal acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private towards his companions in the holy life. This is a memorable quality that creates love and respect, and conduces to unity.

“Again, a bhikkhu maintains mental acts of loving-kindness both in public and in private towards his companions in the holy life. This is a memorable quality that creates love and respect, and conduces to unity.

“Again, a bhikkhu uses things in common with his virtuous companions in the holy life; without making reservations, he shares with them any gain of a kind that accords with the Dhamma and has been obtained in a way that accords with the Dhamma, including even the contents of his bowl. This is a memorable quality that creates love and respect, and conduces to unity.

“Again, a bhikkhu dwells both in public and in private possessing in common with his companions in the holy life those virtues that are unbroken, untorn, unblotched, unmottled, liberating, commended by the wise, not misapprehended, and conducive to concentration. This too is a memorable quality that creates love and respect, and conduces to unity.

“Again, a bhikkhu dwells both in public and in private possessing in common with his companions in the holy life that view that is noble and emancipating, and leads one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering. This too is a memorable quality that creates love and respect, and conduces to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord, and to unity.

“These are the six memorable qualities that create love and respect, and conduce to helpfulness, to non-dispute, to concord, and to unity.

“Of these memorable qualities, the highest, the most comprehensive, the most conclusive is this view that is noble and emancipating, and leads one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering. Just as the highest, the most comprehensive, the most conclusive part of a pinnacled building is the pinnacle itself, so too, of these six memorable qualities, the highest is this view that is noble and emancipating.

“And how does this view that is noble and emancipating lead the one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering? Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, considers thus: ‘Is there any obsession unabandoned in myself that might so obsess my mind that I cannot know or see things as they actually are?’

“Again, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘When I pursue, develop, and cultivate this view, do I obtain internal serenity, do I personally obtain stillness?’

“Again, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘Is there any other recluse or brahmin outside the Buddha's Dispensation possessed of such a view as I possess?’

“Again, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘Do I possess the character of a person who possesses right view?’

“What is the character of a person who possesses right view? This is the character of a person who possesses right view: although he may commit some kind of offence for which a means of rehabilitation has been laid down, still at once he confesses, reveals and discloses it to the Teacher or to wise companions in the holy life, and having done that, he enters upon constraint for the future. Just as a young, tender infant lying prone at once draws back when he puts his hand or his foot on a live coal, so too, that is the character of a person who possesses right view. He understands thus: ‘I possess the character of a person who possesses right view.’

“Again, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘Do I possess the character of a person who possesses right view?’ What is the character of a person who possesses right view? This is the character of a person who possesses right view: although he may be active in various matters for his companions in the holy life, yet he has a keen regard for training in the higher virtue, training in the higher mind, and training in the higher wisdom. Just as a cow with a new calf, while she grazes watches her calf, so too, that is the character of a person who possesses right view. He understands thus: ‘I possess the character of a person who possesses right view.’

“Again, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘Do I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view?’ What is the strength of a person who possesses right view? This is the strength of a person who possesses right view: when the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata is being taught, he heeds it, gives it attention, engages it with all his mind, hears the Dhamma as with eager ears. He understands thus: ‘I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view.’

“Again, a noble disciple considers thus: ‘Do I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view?’ What is the strength of a person who possesses right view? This is the strength of a person who possesses right view: when the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata is being taught, he gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration the Dhamma,

gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. He understands thus: 'I possess the strength of a person who possesses right view.'

"When a noble disciple is thus possessed of seven factors, he has well sought the character for realisation of the fruit of stream-entry. When a noble disciple is thus possessed of seven factors, he possesses the fruit of stream-entry."

This is what the Blessed One said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One's words.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. *"...there are these six qualities that create love and respect..."*
Why love and respect? What is the connection between them?
2. *"...both in public and in private..."*
Think of examples of both public and private acts of each of body, speech and mind. Are there ways that you could do more of such acts over the coming days?
3. *"...uses things in common with his virtuous companions..."*
Why is the sharing of possessions important in the creation of Sangha? Is this teaching meant for bhikkhus only? How applicable is it in the Triratna Community?
4. *"...possessing in common with his companions in the holy life those virtues that are unbroken..."*
Why are shared ethical values important for the creation of Sangha?
5. What is "this view that is noble and emancipating?" Why is it important for the creation of Sangha?
6. Do the seven factors discussed at the end of the sutta alter your understanding of what it means to be a Stream Entrant? Do any of them surprise you? Do any of them hold a particular interest for you?

Introduction

In the last sutta in this module we encounter an inspiring example of Sangha, which contrasts sharply with the non-Sangha we heard about last week. Here the Buddha visits three monks who describe themselves as “different in body ... but one in mind.” Sangharakshita has said that he regards this state, in which our limited personality is transcended, as hugely significant, and that it is, in a way, equivalent to Enlightenment – it represents a way of describing wisdom which provides a valuable corrective to the individualistic misconception of Insight that is prevalent among some contemporary Buddhists, and makes it clear that the cultivation of metta is an essential aspect of the path.

The Culagosinga Sutta (MN 31)

Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

Thus have I heard:

On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Nadika in the Brick House. Now on that occasion the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable Kimbila were living at the Park of the Gosinga Sala-tree Wood. Then, when it was evening, the Blessed One rose from meditation and went to the Park of the Gosinga Sala-tree Wood. The park keeper saw the Blessed One coming in the distance and told him: “Do not enter this park, recluse. There are three clansmen here seeking their own good. Do not disturb them.”

The venerable Anuruddha heard the park keeper speaking to the Blessed One and told him: “Friend park keeper, do not keep the Blessed One out. It is our Teacher, the Blessed One, who has come.” Then the venerable Anuruddha went to the venerable Nandiya and the venerable Kimbila and said: “Come out, venerable sirs, come out! Our Teacher, the Blessed One, has come.” Then all three went to meet the Blessed One. One took his bowl and outer robe, one prepared a seat, and one set out water for washing the feet. The Blessed One sat down on the seat made ready and washed his feet. Then those three venerable ones paid homage to the Blessed One and sat down at one side.

When they were seated, the Blessed One said to them: “I hope you are all keeping well, Anuruddha, I hope you are all comfortable, I hope you are not having any trouble getting almsfood. I hope, Anuruddha, that you are all living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”

“Surely, venerable sir, we are living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”

“But, Anuruddha, how do you live thus?”

“Venerable sir, as to that, I think thus: ‘It is a gain for me, it is a great gain for me, that I am living with such companions in the holy life.’ I maintain bodily acts of loving-kindness towards those venerable ones both openly and privately; I maintain verbal acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately; I maintain mental acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately. I consider: ‘Why should I not set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do?’ Then I set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do. We are different in body, venerable sir, but one in mind.”

The venerable Nandiya and the venerable Kimbila each spoke likewise, adding:

“That is how, venerable sir, we are living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. I hope that you all abide diligent, ardent and resolute.”

“Surely, venerable sir, we abide diligent, ardent and resolute.”

“But, Anuruddha, how do you abide thus?”

“Venerable sir, as to that, whichever of us returns first from the village with almsfood prepares the seats, sets out the water for drinking and for washing, and puts the refuse bucket in its place. Whichever of us returns last eats any food left over, if he wishes; otherwise he throws it away where there is no greenery, or drops it into water where there is no life. He puts away the seats and the water for drinking and for washing. He puts away the refuse bucket after washing it and he sweeps out the refectory. Whoever notices that the pots of water for drinking, washing, or the latrine are low or empty takes care of them. If they are too heavy for him, he calls someone else by a signal of the hand and they move it by joining hands, but because of this we do not break out into speech. But every five days we sit together all night discussing the Dhamma. That is how we abide diligent, ardent and resolute.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. But while you abide thus diligent, ardent and resolute, have you attained any superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a comfortable abiding?”

“Why not, venerable sir? Here, venerable sir, whenever we want, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, we enter upon and abide in the first jhana, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Venerable sir, this is a superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a comfortable abiding, which we have attained while abiding diligent, ardent, and resolute.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. But is there any other superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a comfortable abiding, which you have attained by surmounting that abiding, by making that abiding subside?”

“Why not, venerable sir? Here, venerable sir, whenever we want, with the stilling of applied and sustained thought, we enter upon and abide in the second jhana. With the fading away as well of rapture, we enter upon and abide in the third jhana. With the abandoning of pleasure

and pain, we enter upon and abide in the fourth jhana. Venerable sir, this is another superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a comfortable abiding which we have attained by surmounting the preceding abiding, by making that abiding subside.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. But is there any other superhuman state which you have attained by surmounting that abiding, by making that abiding subside?”

“Why not, venerable sir? Here, venerable sir, whenever we want, with the complete surmounting of perceptions of form, with the disappearance of perceptions of sensory impact, with non-attention to perceptions of diversity, aware that ‘space is infinite’, we enter upon and abide in the base of infinite space. Venerable sir, this is another superhuman state which we have attained by surmounting the preceding abiding, by making that abiding subside.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. But is there any other superhuman state which you have attained by surmounting that abiding, by making that abiding subside?”

“Why not, venerable sir? Here, venerable sir, whenever we want, by completely surmounting the base of infinite space, aware that ‘consciousness is infinite’, we enter upon and abide in the base of infinite consciousness. By completely surmounting the base of infinite consciousness, aware that ‘there is nothing’, we enter upon and abide in the base of nothingness. By completely surmounting the base of nothingness, we enter upon and abide in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Venerable sir, this is another superhuman state which we have attained by surmounting the preceding abiding, by making that abiding subside.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. But is there any other superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones, a comfortable abiding, which you have attained by surmounting that abiding, by making that abiding subside?”

“Why not, venerable sir? Here, venerable sir, whenever we want, by completely surmounting the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, we enter upon and abide in the cessation of perception and feeling. And our taints are destroyed by our seeing with wisdom. Venerable sir, this is another superhuman state, a distinction in knowledge and abiding, which we have attained by surmounting the preceding abiding, by making that abiding subside. And, venerable sir, we do not see any other comfortable abiding higher or more sublime than this one.”

“Good, good, Anuruddha. There is no other comfortable abiding higher or more sublime than that one.”

Then, when the Blessed One had instructed, urged, roused, and encouraged the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable Kimbila with a talk on the Dhamma, he rose from his seat and departed.

After they had accompanied the Blessed One a little way and turned back again, the venerable Nandiya and the venerable Kimbila asked the venerable Anuruddha: “Have we ever reported to the venerable Anuruddha that we have obtained those abidings and attainments that the venerable Anuruddha, in the Blessed One's presence, ascribed to us up to the destruction of the taints?”

“The venerable ones have never reported to me that they have obtained those abidings and attainments. Yet by encompassing the venerable ones’ minds with my own mind, I know that they have obtained those abidings and attainments, and deities have also reported to me: ‘These venerable ones have obtained those abidings and attainments.’ Then I declared it when directly questioned by the Blessed One.”

Then the spirit Digha Parajana went to the Blessed One. After paying homage to the Blessed One, he stood at one side and said: “It is a gain for the Vajjians, venerable sir, a great gain for the Vajjian people that the Tathagata, accomplished and fully enlightened, dwells among them and these three clansmen, the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable Kimbila!”

On hearing the exclamation of the spirit Digha Parajana, the earth gods exclaimed: “It is a gain for the Vajjians, a great gain for the Vajjian people that the Tathagata, accomplished and fully enlightened, dwells among them and these three clansmen, the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable Kimbila!”

On hearing the exclamation of the earth gods, the gods of the heaven of the Four Great Kings, the gods of the heaven of the Thirty-three, the Yama gods, the gods of the Tusita heaven, the gods who delight in creating, the gods who wield power over others’ creations, the gods of Brahma’s retinue exclaimed: “It is a gain for the Vajjians, a great gain for the Vajjian people that the Tathagata, accomplished and fully enlightened, dwells among them and these three clansmen, the venerable Anuruddha, the venerable Nandiya, and the venerable Kimbila!”

Thus at that instant, at that moment, those venerable ones were known as far as the Brahma-world.

The Blessed One said: “So it is, Digha, so it is! And if the clan from which those three clansmen went forth from the home life into homelessness should remember them with confident heart, that would lead to the welfare and the happiness of that clan for a long time. And if the retinue of the clan from which those three clansmen went forth, the village from which they went forth, the town from which they went forth, the city from which they went forth, the country from which those three clansmen went forth from the home life into homelessness should remember them with confident heart, that would lead to the welfare and the happiness of that country for a long time. If all nobles should remember those three clansmen with confident heart, that would lead to the welfare and happiness of the nobles for a long time. If all brahmins, all merchants, all workers should remember those three clansmen with confident heart, that would lead to the welfare and happiness of the workers for a long time. If the world with its gods, its Maras, and its Brahmas, this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and its people, should remember those three clansmen with confident heart, that would lead to the welfare and happiness of the world for a long time. See, Digha, how those three clansmen are practising for the welfare and happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of gods and humans.”

This is what the Blessed One said. The spirit Digha Parajana was satisfied and delighted in the Blessed One’s words.



Questions for reflection and discussion

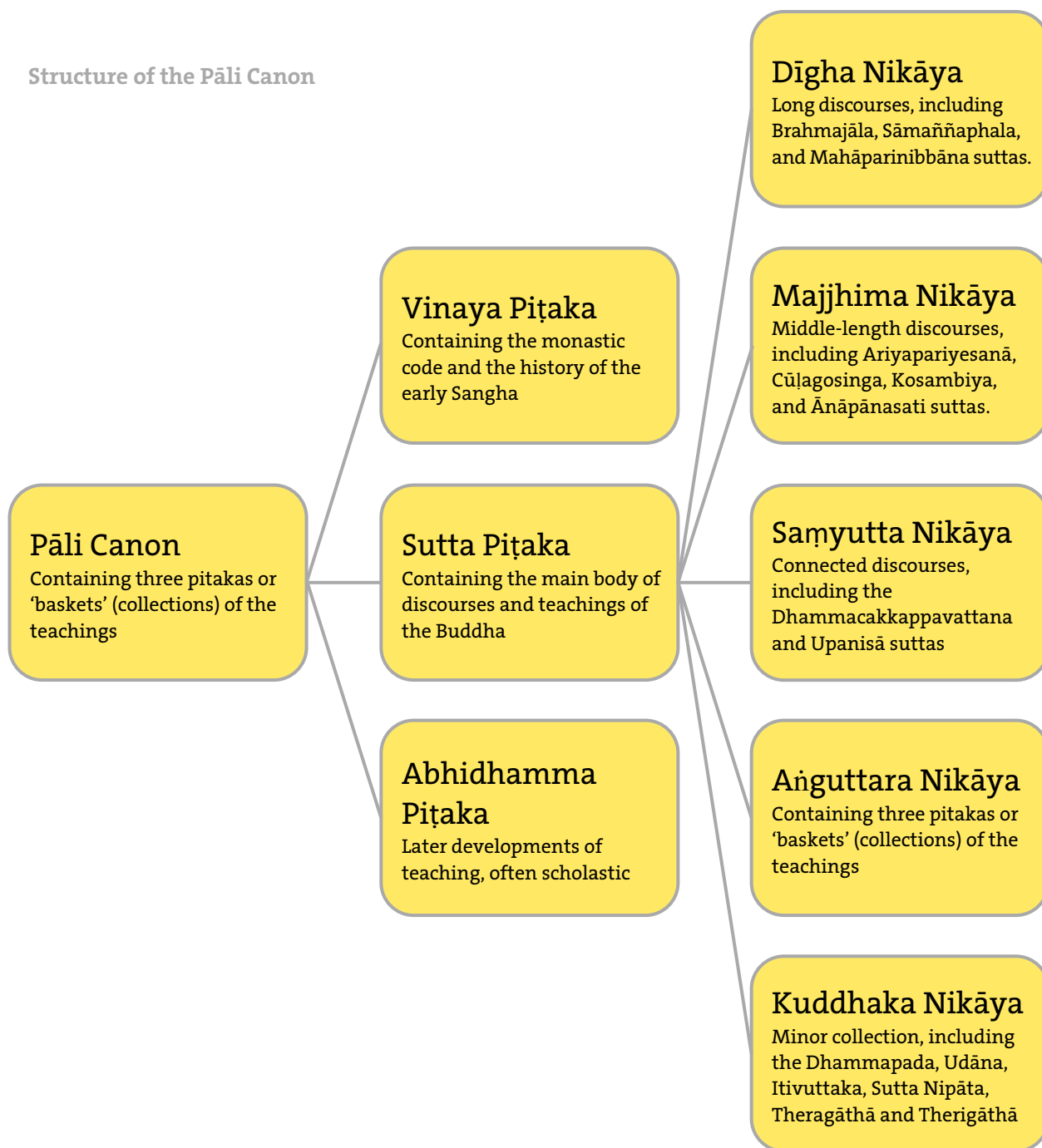
1. In what way is it a spiritual practice to “set aside what I want to do and do what others want to do”?
2. *“We are different in body, Venerable Sir, but one in mind.”*
What might it mean to be “one in mind”, and how might this relate to Sangharakshita’s teaching on groups, the true individual, and the spiritual community?
3. What is the difference between being “one in mind” like the monks in the sutta, and the state of mind that comes from unthinking conformity with those around us, or the “one-mindedness” of a mob?
4. What is the connection between preparing the seats, setting out the water for drinking, and so on, and achieving a “superhuman state”?
5. Why might remembering Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila with a confident heart lead to one’s welfare for a long time?
6. Do you think friendship such as that exemplified by Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila is a means to move towards Enlightenment, or an aspect of the goal itself?

You will already have met some of the Buddha's teachings from the Pāli Canon earlier in the course. The Sāmaññaphala and Meghiya suttas along with Piṅgiya's Praises to the Way to the Beyond were included in the Year One material and the story of the Anuruddhas (from the Cūḷagosinga Sutta) was also referred to there. Other suttas are included in various modules of the course, including the Satipaṭṭhāna and Ānāpānasati suttas referred to in 'The Way of Mindfulness' module, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta in 'Vision and Transformation', etc. At this point it may be helpful to have an overview of this very important strata of the Buddhist texts in order to place them in a broader context.

The Pāli Canon, as it is called, contains all the texts written in Pāli, the language that comes closest to that which the Buddha himself would have spoken. It contains the earliest known records of the Buddha's teaching which were originally preserved as an oral tradition and only written down several centuries after the Buddha's Parinibbāna. It consists of three 'baskets' (piṭakas) or collections:

1. The Vinaya Piṭaka which contains the monastic code.
2. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka which consists of the 'further' teachings or later developments of the Buddha's teaching, mainly scholastic in character.
3. The Sutta Piṭaka which contains the main body of the Buddha's teaching. Spiritually speaking, this is by far the most important of the three baskets. It is further subdivided into five sections as follows:
 - i. The Dīgha Nikāya or 'long discourses'. This includes the Brahmajāla, Sāmaññaphala, Sigālovāda and Mahāparinibbāna suttas.
 - ii. The Majjhima Nikāya or 'middle length discourses'. This includes the Ariyapariyesanā, Satipaṭṭhāna, Cūḷagosinga, Kosambiya, Angulimāla and Ānāpānasati suttas.
 - iii. The Saṃyutta Nikāya or the 'Connected discourses'. This includes the Dhammacakkappavattana and Upanisā suttas and approximately 2889 others!
 - iv. The Aṅguttara Nikāya or the 'Numerical discourses'. This includes the Kālāma sutta and approx 2300 others.
 - v. The Khuddaka Nikāya or 'Minor collection'. This includes 15 independent works, the main ones being:
 - The Dhammapada.
 - The Udāna – including the Bāhiya and Meghiya suttas.
 - The Itivuttaka.
 - The Sutta Nipāta – including the Mettā, Mangala and Ratana suttas and Piṅgiya's Praises of the Way to the Beyond.
 - The Theragāthā, verses of the elder monks.
 - The Therīgāthā, verses of the elder nuns.

Structure of the Pāli Canon



Reference Materials

Readings from the Pāli Canon. Eight extracts from the Pāli Canon, read by Sangharakshita. Includes many of the texts in this module.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=S01>

The Eternal Legacy by Sangharakshita, ISBN 1899579583, gives a thorough and coherent overview of all the different types of Buddhist texts, including the Pāli Canon.

http://windhorsepublications.com/the_eternal_legacy

In the Buddha's Words, Bikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Books. A great introduction to the Pali Canon.

<http://www.wisdompubs.org/book/buddha%E2%80%99s-words>

The Life of the Buddha: According to the Pali Canon, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. The life of the Buddha, told sequentially and from the Pāli Canon. Also available in PDF.

https://books.google.ie/books/about/The_Life_of_the_Buddha.html?id=nPvanPmdtoUC

http://www.khamkoo.com/uploads/9/0/0/4/9004485/life_of_the_buddha.pdf

Between the Twin Sal Trees, Sangharakshita. A series of reflections based around the Buddha's Parinirvana ('death'), stressing the importance of impermanence and explaining episodes recorded in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=156>

A Case of Dysentery, Sangharakshita. The Buddha and Ananda once tended a sick monk, neglected by his companions because of his 'uselessness'.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=152>

Human Enlightenment, Sangharakshita, audio series and PDF.

<http://freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X14>

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/bookshelf/human-enlightenment.pdf>

Who Is the Buddha?, Sangharakshita.

<http://freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=01>

The Buddha in the Pāli Canon, Ratnaghosha.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC2379>

Archetypal Symbolism in the Biography of the Buddha, Sangharakshita.

<http://freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=43>

Various seminars on Pāli texts by Sangharakshita are available.

https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/browse?cat=sangharakshita_seminars

3.2

Letters of Gold, Letters of Fire: Living with the Dhammapada



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Introduction

Module compiled by Saccanama

The teachings contained in the *Dhammapada* are literal truth, and deserve to be engraved on our hearts in letters of gold – or fire.

- Sangharakshita

The purpose of this module is twofold:

1. To explore in more depth the teachings contained in one section of those texts; i.e. the *Dhammapada*.
2. To open our hearts to the words of the Buddha contained in the *Dhammapada* and live with them for the next eight weeks.

You will need a copy of The *Dhammapada* and we will be using Sangharakshita's translation (ISBN 1899579354), available from Windhorse Publications:

[http://www.windhorsepublications.com/dhammapada the way of truth](http://www.windhorsepublications.com/dhammapada_the_way_of_truth)

We will also be listening to a series of five talks by Padmavajra on the *Dhammapada* which you will need to access via Free Buddhist Audio:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X37>

You may also want to review the introduction to the Pāli Canon provided at the start of *The Pāli Canon* module, *Year Three, Module 1* of the *Dharma Training Course for Mitras*.

The importance of the *Dhammapada*

The *Dhammapada* has been translated into English more times than any other Buddhist text with at least 30 versions having appeared over the last 150 years. It is often the one canonical text that non-Buddhists may have read and is considered a classic not only of Buddhist but of world literature. But its significance for practising Buddhists is not just its literary merit but its very clear and direct expression of what Sangharakshita calls, “Basic Buddhism.”

In *Part Five* of *Year One*, we looked at what provides the unity of Buddhism and one answer to that, in terms of doctrinal unity, is the core of basic teachings that are recognised by all schools, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Three Lakṣaṇas, karma and its consequences etc. The *Dhammapada* explores these teachings, as well as many others, in a memorable, easy-to-comprehend and direct way. So in looking at the *Dhammapada* over the next 8 weeks, we have the chance to hear directly from the Buddha some of his central teachings about how to practice the Dharma and free ourselves from suffering.

Format for the next eight weeks

Whilst the *Dhammapada* is not a long text by Buddhist standards, we will not have time to study it all during the next eight weeks. Instead, we will be using a series of five talks given by Padmavajra on a men's retreat at Padmaloka in the summer of 2007. These explore some of the key teachings and verses of the *Dhammapada* in some depth and place them clearly in the context of spiritual practice. We will then look at some written excerpts from a seminar by Sangharakshita on the Buddhavagga section of the *Dhammapada*. Finally, we will conclude with a close reading of chapters five and six: *The Spiritually Mature* and *The Spiritually Immature*.

However, I hope that there will be time to read the whole text aloud, and in a meditative context, during your group meetings over the next eight weeks so that you at least become familiar with the complete text. I also want to encourage you to 'live' with the *Dhammapada* much more closely over the next eight weeks. By that, I mean reading sections of it before or after your morning meditation, or before going to bed, or on your journey to work, or whenever you can find time. It may be helpful to keep the text with you all the time so that you can dip in and out of it. In this way, I hope that some of the words of the Buddha will begin to touch your heart and affect you more deeply. My own experience of reading the *Dhammapada* is often that an image or a phrase or a verse from whatever section I am reading will hit home or speak to me directly or challenge me. It very rarely seems irrelevant to my life or concerns.

Other suggestions of things you could do to enter more fully into the world of the *Dhammapada* over the next six weeks are:

- Illuminate your favourite verses or sections of the text; i.e. write them out in a beautiful way.
- Memorise certain verses.
- Have a copy of the text on your shrine.
- Treat your copy of the text with reverence and respect.

Perhaps you can think of other things to do as well, or you could come up with other ideas in your group.

Study guide and suggested questions

As usual, it would be helpful if you can take some notes as you work your way through Padmavajra's talks. This helps both with absorbing the material and avoids any tendency to go in one ear and out the other! It also gives you a summary to refer to in the group and in the future.

The following questions are here to help you to engage with the various topics covered in this module. They highlight some of the key themes in each unit 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 throughout 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.

You will need to listen to the first talk in Padmavajra's series entitled *The Essential Revolution – Verses 1 and 2* before the group. This gives a general introduction to the *Dhammapada* and places it in its traditional spiritual context before going on to look at the opening two verses of the whole work.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What are the implications of accepting the Buddha's teaching on the centrality of mind?
2. To what extent do you attribute your unhappiness and happiness to external circumstances?
3. Have you had a, “wonderfully liberating moment,” as Padmavajra describes in the talk? If so, describe it or talk about it with your group.
4. Padmavajra mentions the phrase, “Ecology of mind or consciousness.” What do you make of this phrase and his comments about looking at what we put in to our mind?
5. What are your associations with the terms, ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’?
6. “*Like a shadow that never departs.*”
Have you had an experience like this in relation to happiness?

You will need to listen to the second talk in Padmavajra's series entitled *Changing Hatred into Love – Verses 3 to 6* before the group.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Do you have a tendency towards blame and resentment in your life? If so, who or what do you tend to blame and what are the effects of that for you? How can you begin to move away from such blame and resentment?
2. If you have expressed anger or hatred in your life, what have been the consequences of that for you and others?
3. Padmavajra uses the term, “tough Dharma”. What do you think he means by that? How do you respond to the more uncompromising aspects of the Dharma?
4. In what way are blame and resentment passive?
5. How can you bring about a deeper, “activation of your heart?” What has already helped you to do this?
6. What is your own experience of forgiveness?
7. Have you suffered from a sense of disconnection and deadness? If so, how have you worked to overcome that?
8. Does reflection on the inevitability of death give you a sense of urgency in your practice? If so, how has this manifested?

You will need to listen to the third talk in Padmavajra's series entitled *Mindfulness is the Way to the Deathless – Verses 7, 8, 21, 23* before the group.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. *"Laziness is not living meaningfully."*
What are the implications of this statement for you?
2. Make a list of some of your own m̄aras.
3. What is meant by the term amata (deathless or immortal)? How do you respond to this term?
4. Describe an experience of unmindfulness in your own life and an experience of mindfulness. In your own words, what is the difference between the two?
5. How can you, "turn up for life" more fully?
6. What can you do to strengthen your overall sense of purpose?
7. Integration, inspiration, permeation and radiation. Can you relate to these terms in your own experience? If so, can you identify what conditions have supported them?

You will need to listen to the fourth talk in Padmavajra's series entitled *Seeing with Insight – Verses 277 to 279* before the group.

Questions for reflection and discussion

These questions are more specifically about reflecting on the three *lakṣaṇas*, as I presume you are at least familiar with them as ideas from earlier in the course (they feature in *Week 5, Part 4*, of *Year One* as well as in other parts of the course). You may wish to share your examples with the group.

1. Write about the following three types of experience of impermanence, describing how you know it is impermanent, what the effects of its impermanence are, and how you feel about its impermanence:
 - a. An experience you are currently having.
 - b. An experience from your past.
 - c. An experience from the world around you.
2. Write about a particular example from your own experience of each of the three kinds of suffering:
 - a. The suffering of suffering.
 - b. The suffering of change.
 - c. The suffering of conditioned existence; or existential suffering.
3. Write about an experience of happiness you have had, describing the conditions that gave rise to it.
4. Write about an experience of aesthetic appreciation you have had. How might it conduce to seeing not-self?

3.2.5

Flowers

You will need to listen to the fifth talk in Padmavajra's series entitled *Flowers – Verses 44 to 59* before the group.

Suggestions for reflection, research, and discussion

1. What is your response to the imagery of flowers? Do you respond to beauty as a means of communication? Where do you experience beauty in your world?
2. What might you need to do to become the “ideal student”?
3. What has been your own experience of falling in love; the “flower- tipped arrows of Māra”? In what ways has it helped or hindered your spiritual practice?
4. “*Wisdom comes through deep silence.*”
Do you agree? If so, how might you experience this silence more?
5. “*Mind your own business.*”
What is the relevance of this statement for you?
6. “*Talking about the Dharma is a practice.*”
How is this so?
7. Describe an experience from your own life where your, or others’ ethical actions have perfumed the world around you.

This week, we move from studying the text via Padmavajra's talks to looking at an edited version of a seminar given by Sangharakshita at Vinehall in 1981. This gives us both the opportunity of looking at a very important section of the *Dhammapada* not covered by Padmavajra but also a chance to experience Sangharakshita's way of approaching the Pāli texts. He has given a wide range of seminars on Pāli material, including sections of the *Udāna* and *Sutta Nipāta* as well as important individual suttas such as the *Mahāparinibbāna*, the *Sigālovāda* and the *Sāmaññaphala*. His seminars on the *Mettā Sutta* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* have already been published by Windhorse. At some point, I hope you will have the time to follow up some of these other Pāli texts via Sangharakshita's seminars as he has a distinctive and imaginative way of making them relevant to our own times and practice. In the meantime, we have the opportunity of looking at what he has to say about the Buddhavagga section of the *Dhammapada*. The whole chapter is divided over the next two weeks but please read the following extract before your group meeting this week:

Note

This edited version was produced by Vajrapriya and further edited by Vidyadevi. Sangharakshita's own translation of the text, published by Windhorse Publications in 2001, has been used as the basis for this version; this has necessitated a little (but not much) adjustment of the commentary.



179

That Enlightened One whose sphere is endless, whose victory is irreversible, and after whose victory no (defilements) remain (to be conquered), by what track will you lead him (astray), the Trackless One?

This verse speaks of the Buddha as having conquered yearning and therefore craving, thirst, hope and neurotic desire. Desire is not always neurotic, as we shall see in discussing the next verse. The verse makes the further statement that the Buddha's victory is irreversible, which raises the question of the difference between 'dhyāna' and Insight. The dhyāna experience, the *samatha* experience, is not enough. In that experience, cravings and negative emotions of any kind are suspended; you're free from them for the time being. But it is only by virtue of some genuine insight into the nature of these states, into your own mind, that they are finally and permanently transcended.

The word translated as 'whose sphere is endless' is '*anantagocaram*'. '*Gocaran*' means pasture or field ('*go*' is 'cow', '*caran*' is 'to go' so '*gocaran*' is literally 'where the cow goes'). Here the

meaning is extended to refer to a whole sphere of operations, and the Buddha, the Enlightened One, is described as one whose sphere, whose field of operations, is endless, '*ananta*'. In as much as the Buddha is the Buddha, in as much as he has realized the state of Enlightenment, in as much as he is one with the Unconditioned, his whole method of operation is Unconditioned, and therefore without any limits. As the verse goes on to say, it is not possible to fully understand the way in which he operates because one understands with concepts, with categories, and these impose limitations.

The Buddha is called '*apadam*', the trackless one. Somewhere else in the *Dhammapada* it is said that the Buddhas, the Enlightened ones, pass through the world just as birds pass through the sky. Birds flying through the sky leave no track or mark, and likewise the Buddha, by virtue of the fact that he has conquered all the passions, leaves behind no track, no karma. He cannot be traced. There is nothing you can get hold of, nothing he can be caught by.

To put it another way, he is creative. A habit is a regular way of doing things which is in consonance with your limited condition of being and almost compulsive. You don't want to change a habit, and this is an aspect of reactivity, suggesting a certain lack of creativity, a lack of adaptability or flexibility. But a Buddha is free from such compulsive patterns of behaviour and thought and being. He cannot be tracked; neither can he be defined. He is beyond thought, beyond understanding.

The apparently simple statements made in this verse about the Buddha mean quite a lot. It is salutary to bear in mind that the Buddha cannot be traced even by the words that he himself is recorded in the scriptures as speaking, taken just as words or ideas. You have to place yourself in harmony with what the Buddha says and try to feel your way through to its inner meaning through personal experience. Otherwise, you may think that by reading the words of the Buddha you know all about him, but in all likelihood you are as far away as ever.

The impression of Buddhahood this gives is that it is something glorious that soars way beyond. It gives a strong impression of the person who composed the verse too, an impression of an inspired devotion.

180

That Enlightened One in whom there is not that ensnaring, entangling craving to lead anywhere (in conditioned existence), and whose sphere is endless, by what track will you lead him (astray), the Trackless One?

In Pāli, the third and fourth lines of this verse are the same as the third and fourth of the previous verse, but the first two lines are different. Here, *taṇhā* rather than *assa* is used, suggesting that the two terms are really synonymous. *Taṇhā*, literally 'thirst', can be translated less literally as 'craving', but not as desire, because while craving is invariably unskillful, desire may be skillful or unskillful. There is a Pāli term '*chanda*', which means 'urge' or 'desire', and this can be either positive or negative. The Buddha distinguishes, for instance, between '*kāmachanda*' and '*dhammachanda*'; *kāmachanda* being the desire for sensuous pleasure while *dhammachanda* is the desire for the spiritual life itself. Likewise, you can speak of the desire for nirvana. But *taṇhā* is always unskillful, and it indicates a very powerful or primordial drive. If you were dying of thirst, you'd do anything to get water, and if you were in the sort of mental or emotional state described by *taṇhā*, you'd do absolutely anything to get whatever it is that you want. This thirst is essentially for continued conditioned existence, continued personal existence itself. You just want to go on being you. You cannot bear any threats to your so-called individuality. That's why, perhaps, you don't want to change, why

you want to go on keeping up the same reactive pattern that you are at present. This can also be described as '*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*', self-view; that's the more intellectual way of looking at it.

In this verse, *taṇhā* is accompanied by two epithets: ensnaring and entangling. '*Jāla*' is a net, so '*jalini*', the words translated as 'ensnaring', is one who possesses or who is equipped with a net. The point is that the nature of craving is to capture you, to entangle you just as if it were equipped with a net. You will know from your own experience that if you get into any situation in which craving starts operating powerfully, you really do get entangled. The second epithet, '*visattikā*', means 'adhering to', 'being attached to', or 'entangling'. So in the Buddha there is no trace of that sort of craving which ensnares and entangles 'to lead anywhere in conditioned existence'; that is, to lead one into a further state of conditioned existence or, in terms of karma and rebirth, into a future life.

Looking at it in very general terms, it is a state in which you don't make things more entangled or confused than they already are. You don't contribute to further conditionality. In a confused, turbulent situation, perhaps involving a number of people, if another person comes into that situation from the outside, very often they'll make things worse, even if they're trying to help. Because of the presence of craving in us we are likely to make the situation worse for ourselves and for others. But the Buddha doesn't do that. Because there is no craving, no thirst, no *taṇhā*, in him, he will clarify the situation, make it better and better, and will not store up any sort of conditioned existence for himself in the future.

181

Those wise ones who are intent on absorption (in higher meditative states) and who delight in the calm of renunciation, even the gods love them, those thoroughly enlightened and mindful ones.

"Those wise ones", ('*dhīrā*'); in other words those who have attained insight, '*vipassanā*', can be considered to be synonymous with Awakened or Enlightened ones, and it is interesting to notice that they are intent on absorption, '*jhāna*', given that some people speak in terms of 'dry' insight, insight attained without a basis of '*jhānic*' (Sanskrit: '*dhyānic*') experience. Here, wisdom and meditation go very much hand in hand.

The Pāli word translated as 'delight' is '*rati*', another term that can be used both in a negative and a positive sense. It is often used in the sense of craving. *Rati* is one of Māra's three daughters, for instance, and very often it is delight in worldly, sensuous things. But there is also '*dhammarati*', delight in the Dharma, and here we have those, "Who delight in the calm of renunciation." '*Nekkhamma*' is usually translated as 'giving up' or 'renunciation', as here. It's the natural disinterest you feel in worldly things when you start becoming interested in spiritual matters. It's not a forcible giving up or tearing yourself away; you're just not interested any more. The text speaks of, "Delighting in the calm of renunciation", and that includes delighting in the calm of disinterestedness. If you've got all sorts of worldly interests your mind can be really agitated, but when you no longer have those worldly interests your mind becomes calm and the wise person described here takes delight in that calm state of mind.

In the case of a lot of people, when they don't have anything in particular to do, their minds become calm in the sense that they don't have anything with which to occupy their minds, but they don't enjoy that calm state. They experience it as rather unpleasant and look around for something to do. Some people have this experience on solitary retreat. So it is not enough just to have a calm state of mind (which in any case has got to go far beyond the ordinary calm

state); you've got to take delight in that calm state and really enjoy it. Enjoy the fact that you've got no work, no responsibilities and no worldly interests of any kind, not even of a skilful nature, not to speak of an unskilful nature.

The word translated here as 'mindful' is '*sati*', which literally means recollection. The English word 'recollect' has its own significance here; sometimes the etymology of words can give us a clue to their real meaning. Usually the contents of the mind are in a scattered state and need to be recollected. Mindfulness is a further stage of development in the same direction. When you are mindful – 'mind full' – everything you do is imbued with mind, full of awareness, not as something superimposed upon what you do, but permeating it wholly. Mindfulness doesn't mean standing aside from yourself and watching yourself. You are in yourself and with yourself while you're doing something. The mindfulness is not an extra quality. It saturates the whole of what you do and is indistinguishable from it, or rather distinguishable from it only in thought. If it is distinguishable from it in fact, you are alienated from your experience. True mindfulness fills what you are doing from within; it doesn't look at it or onto it from outside. It saturates the flow of experience, like a colour being given to the flow.

182

Difficult is the attainment of the human state. Difficult is the life of mortals. Difficult is the hearing of the Real Truth (*saddhamma*). Difficult is the appearance of the Enlightened Ones.

It is difficult to be a human being: whether we see this within the context of karma and rebirth or within the context simply of this life, it is true. Before we start thinking in terms of spiritual life we must think in terms of being a healthy, happy human being, if that is at all possible.

'*Maccāna*', here translated 'mortals', literally means 'Those who die', and the word translated as 'life' is '*jīvatam*', which refers to livelihood. So the life of mortals is hard. Survival isn't easy, and the things we need aren't easy to get. Food and drink don't just appear. Clothing doesn't grow on trees. Houses are needed. Life can be difficult, especially in a country with a cold, wet climate. There are all sorts of obstacles. The suggestion is that to maintain your human state, or to maintain the conditions necessary for the realization of your human state, is also difficult. It isn't easy to live in a way which is appropriate to a human being, because you need all sorts of facilities which Nature doesn't provide; you have to provide them for yourself.

And it is also difficult to hear the '*saddhamma*', the Real Truth. In a literal sense it is less difficult now perhaps than it used to be because there are so many translations of the Buddha's teachings in so many languages; but to hear it in the sense of being receptive to it is quite another matter. Two points come to mind in this connection. One is that Triratna generally needs to make much more effort to make itself known and available. We shouldn't just wait for people to come along; we need to make ourselves known because there are many, many people who haven't heard of Triratna, but who would really benefit from it. The second point is that it doesn't matter what someone's starting point is. No one who walks into a Buddhist centre will be perfect, and they may not even be very positive, but if they hear the Dharma, they can change.

As for the last line of the verse, "Difficult is the appearance of the Enlightened Ones," what it really means is that it is difficult to become Awakened. This clearly follows from the previous lines. If it is difficult even to be a human being, difficult to live, difficult to hear the Dharma, how much more difficult it will be to become Enlightened. It stands to reason. That is why I

sometimes say, “Let people aim for Stream-entry.” That is an intelligible goal, something one can really aim for. The rest is probably just words. It is difficult for many people to form an idea of what a human being is like, not to speak of a Stream-entrant, or a Buddha.

183

The not doing of anything evil, undertaking to do what is (ethically) skilful (kusala), (and) complete purification of the mind – this is the ordinance (sasana) of the Enlightened Ones.

If you know any verse of the *Dhammapada* by heart, it may be this one: “*sabbāpapassa akaraṇaṃ, kusalassa upasampadā, sacittapariyodapanaṃ, etaṃ Buddhāna sāsanaṃ. Sabbāpapassa akaraṇaṃ*” – the non-doing of evil is quite straightforward. Usually it is said that it refers to the observance of ‘*śīla*’, ethics. Then ‘*kusalassa upasampadā*’: the cultivation of good; or even more literally, the acceptance of all that is skilful, the making one's own of all that is skilful, ‘*kusala*’. It's becoming an embodiment of skilful states of mind, skilful emotions, the transformation of oneself into a more skilled individual. ‘*Sacittapariyodapanaṃ*’ is the purification of one's thoughts – from all unskilful mental states, one could say, although that has already been covered by the previous verse.

‘*Etaṃ Buddhāna sāsanaṃ*’ is the teaching of the Buddhas. The word ‘*sāsana*’ is interesting. It means more than just teaching; it is in a way quite untranslatable. *Sāsana* in both Pāli and Sanskrit is also the word for government. It is in a way, ‘The order of the Buddhas’, but it is not an order emanating from a power base. Sometimes it is translated as ‘message’, but it is more powerful than that; it is irresistible. If you are really open you just have to accept it. The Buddha is sometimes referred to as the ‘*Dharmaraja*’, the King of the Dharma, and just as an ordinary king issues orders, the Buddha issues his orders, and those orders are the Dharma. But of course he is a king in a quite different way from the way in which an ordinary king is a king. His kingship is based not upon power, but upon love. Although it is rather a contradictory expression, the Buddha's orders are ‘love orders’. Perhaps the best word in English is ‘ordinance’.

184

Patient endurance is the best form of penance.

‘Nirvana is the Highest,’ say the Enlightened Ones.

No (true) goer forth (from the household life) is he

who injures another, nor is he a true ascetic who persecutes others.

The word translated here as penance is ‘*tapo*’. *Tapo* is connected with heat. The idea seems to have been that by the practice of meditation, as well as by the practice of asceticism in the sense of self-torture (I am referring to the pre-Buddhist period here) you could generate a sort of psychic heat, a heat that could under certain circumstances even be physically perceptible. In pre-Buddhist times they came to think of the spiritual life itself, so far as they understood it then, as a process of generating a psychic heat, even a spiritual heat, metaphorically speaking, in which all one's impurities would be burned up. Asceticism for the ancient Indians was thus the generation of this psychic heat in one way or another.

The word was adopted by Buddhists, and sometimes it is used in Pāli fairly literally or not quite literally but metaphorically in a rather simple and obvious way. It has the meaning of engaging in some kind of spiritual practice of an intensive nature, such as the ancient Indians believed resulted in the generation of what I've called psychic heat. You get the same way of looking at things later on in the Vajrayana, where there is the conception of the fiery energy,

the ‘*caṇḍālī*’, which blazes up in the lower psychic centre, ascends and unties all the knots and finally ascends into the thousand petalled lotus at the top. All this is associative symbolism. So in Buddhism *tapo* or ‘*tapas*’ came to mean the burning up of all mental impurities through intensive spiritual effort, especially meditation.

The Buddha took a number of terms from the previously existing Indian spiritual tradition. This was inevitable; he had to use the language that was current at the time. Sometimes he used the old words in a new way, sometimes in the old way, and sometimes he hovered in between. Here he is hovering in between. In this verse he says, “Patient endurance is the best form of penance.” It is as though he is talking to people who believe very much in ‘*tapasya*’ in the sense of self-torture, of inflicting penances upon oneself in order to generate this psychic heat and perhaps gain psychic power. The Buddha was saying to them, “Well, if you really want to torture yourself, if you want to give yourself something really difficult to do, just practise patience and forbearance. That is the best *tapasya*.”

In other words, you don't have to devise any special methods of self-torture. If you just lead your ordinary daily life, that will give you plenty of opportunities for self-mortification. If you are just patient and forbearing in the ordinary relationships of life, in the course of which you are going to come into contact with so many sorts of difficult people, that will be *tapasya* enough.

There is a certain irony, a certain humour here. If you read it seriously, as though somebody is saying, straight-faced, “Patient endurance is the best form of penance,” that is a meaningless platitude. But it isn't like that. It's as though the Buddha was saying with a little smile, “Look, if you want to go in for that sort of thing, if a spot of self-torture is your cup of tea, just be patient and forbearing when you meet people, however difficult they are. That is all you have to do. That is the best kind of *tapasya*, if that is what you are interested in.” You see? That is quite a different approach, isn't it? This is one of the things that we get a sense of if we go through the Pāli texts and look at the Pāli itself, not the English translations, which can be rather straight sometimes. The Buddha definitely had a sense of humour and it more often than not took the form of irony.

Irony, at least from one point of view, is an expression of proportion. When Socrates says, “A wise man like you would certainly know the answer to this,” he is really showing the man that he isn't wise at all, without actually saying so. So the Buddha doesn't attack self-mortification. He doesn't say, “It's a stupid, foolish, dangerous thing to do.” He just says, “Well, if you want to go in for that sort of thing, why not just be patient and forbearing?” and thus reduces the importance of that very one-sidedly extreme so-called religious practice, exposing it for what it is, showing up its emptiness.

Patience implies a certain amount of understanding. If you can understand why the other person is behaving as he is, that helps you not to react. Another factor is of course your normal, standard mood of *mettā*. People can be very irritating, but you have to maintain your *mettā* under all such circumstances, and that requires patience. Of course, that doesn't mean saying angrily, “Ah! That's stupid. Just forget about it.” That is *impatience*. Sometimes people behave like forces of nature, like the wind blowing or a tree crashing down across your path. It is not as though they are aware individuals deliberately behaving as they are. Carried along by their instincts or their feelings, they don't know what they are doing and they just happen to blunder into you. There is no point in getting angry with them. It is just unmindfulness on their part; they are not truly human beings when they behave in that way. What is the point of getting angry with them?

The verse goes on to say, “Nirvana is the Highest,’ say the Enlightened Ones.” Nirvana is the aim. One mustn't forget the goal, or lose sight of the end on account of the means. Perhaps the people who were engaged in tapasya had forgotten that if such practices were useful at all, they were useful only as a means to an end. Perhaps the second line is to be seen against the background of the first. Again, the Buddha is restoring a sense of proportion. He is saying, “Asceticism is all very well, patience and endurance are all very well, but they are only means to an end. It is Nirvana that is supreme.” But perhaps it goes even further than that. Perhaps the Buddha is reminding us to get our priorities right. It isn't work that is supreme. It is not even meditation that is supreme. It is not going on retreat that is supreme. It is not communication that is supreme. It is Nirvana that is supreme. Put first things first. We very often sacrifice what is of more importance to what is of less importance, but the basic principle is that Nirvana is supreme and everything has to be organised in accordance with that fact. Of course it is not really possible to put energy directly into Nirvana, because Nirvana is the culmination of a whole sequence of experiences. You can't skip any of them, you have to follow the path step by step. But you don't linger over any of the stages, or wander off in the opposite direction altogether.

It isn't easy to establish one's order of priorities. The hill immediately before you looms very large and it's easy to forget the mountains that lie beyond it. You may even wander around that hill for a while, completely forgetting the mountains.

Again, it is a question of what you take seriously. We should take most seriously that which is of the greatest importance – easy to say, but very difficult to do. For instance, you may decide that communication is your weak point, so you may decide to work on that in particular. You don't think that communication is the most important thing in life; it is just the most important thing for you for the time being. Taking a longer view, you may see that communication is not so very important, but for the time being it is important for you. Even if you are giving more time or attention to something for the time being, it doesn't necessarily mean that you have altered your order of priorities.

“No (true) goer forth (from the household life) is he who injures another.” ‘*Pabbajito*’ means ‘One who has gone forth’; that is one who has gone forth from worldly life but has not yet necessarily found the Buddha. In the India of the Buddha's time there was a class of people called ‘*parivajjika*’ (that's the Sanskrit form of pabbajito). They had left secular life, family life usually, but not always, and dropped out of all society. They had cut loose from the existing society, they had gone forth, but they had not yet been accepted into the spiritual community. Going forth is not the same thing as Going for Refuge. It is what you have to do before you go for Refuge. You have to go forth, if not literally at least mentally, from all worldly ties and conditioning, and then you go for Refuge. You cannot go for Refuge without having left home in the true sense.

And you have not truly even gone forth if you injure others. When you harm or try to harm another you are caught up in the power mode. To go forth means not just going forth from home in the sense of the parental roof, but going forth from all existing power structures. Nirvana is supreme, karuṇā is supreme, mettā is supreme – not force, not violence – so operate according to the love mode as much as you possibly can. Never try to invoke power to do work which can only be done by love.

“Nor is he a true ascetic who persecutes others.” The word translated as ‘ascetic’ is not pabbajito, the one who has gone forth, but ‘*samano*’, more familiar in its Sanskrit form,

'śramaṇa'. Two explanations for the term are given. Some say that a śramaṇa is one who is washed, one who is pure; others say that it is connected with another word meaning one who makes an effort, one who strives for spiritual development. In the Buddha's day, there was a distinction between the śramaṇas and the 'brāhmaṇas'. The brāhmaṇas were the priestly caste, those who believed in the Vedas, the caste system and so on. They were usually householders with wives and children, and they performed ceremonies, invoked the gods and so on. They were quite conservative, one could say. The śramaṇas, by contrast, rejected the Vedas and the caste system, and were very often wanderers. They rejected the household life and the traditional religion, as well as the claims of the brāhmaṇas to be superior, and the claims of the Vedas to be a religious authority, and the Buddha recruited his followers mainly from among them. They had rejected not only the household life but the religious establishment. They were not usually theists; the Jains were śramaṇas, and there were many other śramaṇa groups. In the eyes of his contemporaries, the Buddha was the leader of the biggest and most popular śramaṇa movement. The word is broadly equivalent to 'bhikkhu', and the two are sometimes used interchangeably. Bhikkhu is the more Buddhistic term in a way, suggesting more one who depends upon alms and observes certain rules, while śramaṇa makes the contrast with the brāhmaṇa. He is the 'non-orthodox' religious aspirant, the freelance, if you like. When a lot of these freelance people joined up together, they made a Sangha. The śramaṇa represent the spiritual ideal of giving up the whole of worldly life: family, religious establishment and all. And as this verse makes clear, a śramaṇa is also one who operates according to the love mode, not the power mode.

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Not to speak evil, not to injure, to exercise restraint through the observance of the (almsman's) code of conduct, to be moderate in diet, to live alone in a secluded abode, and to occupy oneself with higher mental states – this is the ordinance (sasana) of the Enlightened Ones.

Obviously, not to speak ill of others or harm them is an essential part of the Buddha's teaching. 'Pāṭimokkha' (translated here as 'code of conduct') is what eventually became the Vinaya rules followed by bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs. The word 'pāṭimokkha' (Sanskrit 'prātimokṣa') literally means a releasing or unbinding. Why exactly the list of the fundamental precepts was termed prātimokṣa nobody really knows, and there is quite a discussion amongst scholars about it. It seems that during the Buddha's own lifetime, the list of precepts was rather short, but later on, especially after the Buddha's Parinibbāna, the list grew longer and longer, until eventually in the Theravāda there were 227 precepts to be observed by the bhikkhus, 220 to be observed individually, and the remaining seven (they were rules of procedure) to be observed collectively. In the Sarvāstivāda there were 250 of these precepts altogether. Sometimes the prātimokṣa is referred to as a list of 150 or 152 precepts, the rest being more rules of etiquette than ethical precepts. But anyway, one had this list of fundamental precepts and the Buddha says here that restraint is to be exercised by means of observing them.

Usually the texts speak in terms of restraint of the senses, the mind being included as a sense. There is a natural tendency for each of the senses to seek out its appropriate object: the eye goes towards forms, the ear as it were goes towards sounds, the mind goes towards mental objects, and so on. The senses automatically tend to go towards their appropriate objects, whether skilful or unskilful. 'Sanvaro', 'restraint', is checking the senses until you have ascertained whether the movement of the sense organ towards the sense object is skilful or unskilful; that is, conducive to your spiritual development or not. An example often given nowadays is of the eye automatically moving towards advertisements in the underground railway or subway. When you are sitting in the train, and as you go up the escalators and walk

down the passageways, you are bombarded with advertisements for all sorts of things. Usually the appropriate sense organ, in this case the eye, automatically directs itself towards its appropriate object, in this case the advertisements. But what one is supposed to do from the Buddhist point of view is to check the organ in question, in this case the eye. You ask yourself, “Is it going to help me, is it a skilful thing to do, to gaze at these advertisements as I am sitting here or as I am walking along?”

So restraint is the checking of conditioned reflexes. We have got into the habit of allowing the senses to go where they want to go, without consideration of whether that is skilful or unskilful. The restraint doesn't represent any force of repression or crushing of the senses but only a checking from time to time as to whether or not the activity of the senses as they pursue or attend to certain objects is conducive to our development as individuals. Sometimes this is called, “Guarding the gates of the senses.” Here the senses are conceived of as passive. The psycho- physical organism is imagined like a medieval city with gates, and guards to see who is coming in. You set guards, as it were, at the gates of the senses, and watch impressions come in. Some impressions will give rise to skilful mental states and others will give rise to unskilful mental states, and you don't allow through the gates of the senses those impressions which are likely to give rise to unskilful mental states – this is another way of putting the matter.

The Buddha apparently attached great importance to this, and the monks were always being advised to guard the gates of the senses. This was easier then, because life was so much simpler. The Buddha usually gave just one example: that of a bhikkhu going to the village for alms in the morning, passing a pond in which village maidens are bathing, and allowing his mind to direct itself, through the eyes, to that particular sight, upon which there arise in him various unskilful mental states. The Buddha's advice to the monk would be that as soon as he becomes aware that through the eyes the mind is allowing in impressions which are likely to give rise to unskilful mental states he should take steps to divert his eyes from those objects and become very recollected.

But in modern times, life is much more complicated. We are bombarded by impressions all the time from all directions. It is extremely difficult to practise mindfulness and guard the gates of the senses if you literally live in a city of the modern sort. In the old days, in a walled city with gates, if there was a guard at the gate and an old woman came in, he would have a look at her and let her come in. Then if a cart came, he would stop it, look at it, and let it in. But suppose you had just one guard and tens of thousands of people clamouring to get in at the same time. Could one guard possibly deal with them all? But that is how it is if you live in a city nowadays. There are thousands of impressions clamouring, giving rise to all sorts of mental states, one after another, so quickly that you cannot keep track of them. If you want to practise in a more intensive way, really guard the gates of the senses, you have to go away into a retreat centre, or at least live in the country where the flow of impressions is restricted and you can deal with them one at a time.

The modern idea is that you shouldn't have any guards on the gates of the senses at all, that you should just let everything in or let everything hang out, as the case may be. But what the Buddha is saying is, “Don't allow yourself to react to impressions instinctively and without proper thought. Don't be merely reactive.” If a biscuit is put in front of your nose, you don't have to start salivating, not if you are a human being.

You experience the impression – you are not blocking off the experience – but you are not allowing any mental state of an unskilful nature to arise in dependence upon it. You are

between the result process of the mind and the action process of the mind. According to the teaching of the nidāna chain, in dependence upon contact with the external world there arise feelings: pleasant, painful or neutral; and in dependence on feeling, especially pleasant feeling, there arises craving. So that is the gap in which you are sitting, as it were; that is where the result process terminating in feeling and sensation gives rise to the action process beginning with craving. You sit at that point, just like the guard sitting at the gate, and scrutinize the impressions that you receive, especially noticing the feelings that arise in response to them. Instead of automatically grabbing hold of pleasant experiences and automatically thrusting away painful experiences, you consider them more widely, allowing your responses to be determined by considerations of skilfulness and unskilfulness. Those impressions which are likely to give rise to unskilful states you don't encourage, and those which are likely to give rise to skilful states you do encourage. Another way to put this is that faith is the positive emotional counterpart of *trṣṇā* or craving; it is the seed of creativity just as the craving is the seed of reactivity.

From one point of view, the precepts are a check list. Take the first of the ten precepts, that one should refrain from attacking or harming living beings. We have an instinct to harm other living beings, if they try to interfere with us or harm us; it's our natural animal reaction. But here is a precept which says: when you experience that natural urge to retaliate, that is a situation in which you have got to check yourself. Of course, one has to be careful not to think of ethical life simply in terms of observing lists of rules. This has happened to some extent in the case of the Theravada. These rules, if one uses that term at all, are simply helpful, or potentially helpful, as reminders of the sort of thing that one is supposed to be doing – or not doing.

The advice to be moderate in diet in this verse exemplifies this point. After all, food is one of those things that produces sense impressions. Food appeals to four senses at the same time: taste, touch, smell and sight. The obvious question is, "Is eating this skilful or unskilful?" and the answer won't be a straightforward yes or no; it is also a question of how much, and this is where moderation comes in. People's needs differ, so there can't be hard and fast rules about food. That is why the rule is left as moderation in eating. Moderation is the principle. There is no point in mentioning any specific quantity, because it will be too little for one person and too much for another.

As for the next line of the verse 'To live alone in a secluded abode' is not quite an accurate translation. Although the Pāli words literally mean 'lying' and 'sitting', the Pāli word '*panta*' is apparently equivalent to the Sanskrit '*pranta*', which means 'the edge' or 'the border', the edge of things; so the verse literally refers to having one's bed and one's seat on the edge of things. Since your home is where you sleep and sit, what it really means is living on the edge of things. It is living on the periphery of the group, so you are not affected by the gravitational pull of the group, even the positive group.

In the days of the Buddha, the bhikkhu subsisted on alms; that is, he had to collect food from the nearest village. He had to live far enough away from the village to be able to practise meditation in quiet, but near enough to be able to collect alms each day. It was considered that two to three miles was about right. When lay supporters offered to build a Vihāra for the Buddha, one of the points he made was that it should be near enough for people to be able to visit him and hear the Dharma. If the Buddha had made a habit of living of the midst of the jungle, he would not have been accessible to people who wanted to hear his Teaching. So to live on the periphery of things is a middle way between living right in the middle of it all and

cutting off your connection with other people completely – if it would really be possible to do that.

To consider our own version of this, our Buddhist centres and Right Livelihood businesses are often physically located in the midst of the city; but psychologically and spiritually we should be on the edge of things – separate enough to be able to follow our own way of life, our own ideals, but near enough to be able to keep in touch with people and encourage them to join us, so to speak.

The last ‘ordinance’ of this verse is that one should, “Occupy oneself with higher mental states.” The word translated as ‘higher mental states’ is ‘*adhicitta*’. ‘*Citta*’ means ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ and ‘*adhi*’ means ‘higher’. (There are various terms with this prefix used in Buddhism – the ‘*adhisīla*’, the ‘*adhicitta*’, the ‘*adhiprajñā*’ and so on.) *Adhicitta* is not just the painstaking practice of meditation or concentration exercises, it is not just the effort to develop those higher states; it is the enjoyment of them, the experience of the *dhyānas* which is what meditation is all about.

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Not (even) in a shower of money is satisfaction of desires to be found. ‘Worldly pleasures are of little relish, (indeed) painful.’ Thus understanding, the spiritually mature person

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takes no delight even in heavenly pleasures. The disciple of the Fully, Perfectly Enlightened One takes delight (only) in the destruction of craving.

The ‘*kaḥāpaṇa*’ is an ancient Indian coin said by some to be of Greek origin, and ‘*vassena*’ is a shower of rain, or even the rainy season; hence ‘shower of money’. But even if it showers gold coins, even if you’re able to satisfy all your desires, buy everything you want, there’s still no real satisfaction.

The word translated ‘of little relish’ is ‘*appaśāda*’, quite a difficult word to translate. It means something like satisfaction, delight, and it is sensuous rather than sensual; the Buddha is referring to any pleasure coming about as a result of contact between the six sense organs and their respective objects. The expression ‘of little relish’ suggests that it is not that there is no pleasure in the contact of sense organ with sense object. It would be unrealistic to say that. But there isn’t much pleasure, especially when one compares it with the pleasures of the *dhyānas* or of developing insight.

Indeed, worldly pleasures are painful, or potentially so, because even genuine pleasure must pass away, and one mustn’t think it is going to last forever. Furthermore, even at the time pleasure is limited and relative, because it derives from limited relative conditioned objects. So this is the gist of the text here: sensuous pleasures, even if they are pleasurable, have their limitations, and if you become attached to them, thinking that they are going to last forever, then the pleasure can turn into pain.

“Thus understanding, the spiritually mature person takes no delight even in heavenly pleasures.” What are these ‘heavenly pleasures’? The suggestion is not of gross, brutal pleasures but of very refined, aesthetic pleasures, the pleasures of culture. But even these more refined enjoyments are also transitory. They also are not the absolute and unconditioned happiness of Nirvana.

This is not to advocate a negatively ascetic attitude to life. We could hardly exist without pleasure. The body, the whole psycho-physical organism, enjoys breathing, feeling the air, feeling cold and heat (though not to extremes). It enjoys just experiencing itself being alive. All this is pleasure, and probably the psycho-physical organism could not go on existing without at least some experience of it; and the psycho-physical organism is the basis for our development as individuals, the basis for our attainment of Enlightenment, even. So it is not that Buddhism has a completely negative attitude towards pleasure. Buddhism does not say that all pleasure is wrong, or that you should try to eliminate it from your life. What it does say is that pleasure, which is a sense impression, should not be allowed to become the basis of unskilful mental activities, especially craving and grasping. A simple example is food. Enjoy food, but don't overeat because you want more of that enjoyment. Pleasure in itself is neither skilful nor unskilful. The sense or mind experience of pleasure is '*vipāka*'; it is the end result of the result process, it doesn't belong to the action process. It is your attitude towards pleasure which is either skilful or unskilful. And it is a mistake to try to guard against craving by eliminating pleasure. That just doesn't work, you can still be hankering after it in the depths of your being.

The spiral process towards Enlightenment is more and more pleasurable, but at each stage you must not, "Allow the pleasurable to lay hold of your mind."

This is the phrase the Buddha used in describing his own experience of the path to Enlightenment. So one must have a healthy attitude towards pleasure. Let pleasure come, experience it, enjoy it, whether of the senses or of the mind, but do not allow it to lay hold of your mind. Of course, that's a dangerous thing to say, because it can be misunderstood, or used as an excuse for running after pleasure, which is completely wrong, neurotic and compulsive. If you go outside in the morning and enjoy the sunshine and the fresh air, there is nothing unskilful about that; but if as a result of that pleasurable experience, craving and clinging arise, that is completely undesirable. It is very important to understand this rightly.

We are almost always in too much of a hurry to get on to the next thing, so that we are prevented from enjoying what we are doing. You see people doing this on retreat. There's the getting up bell, and then the morning meditation ... well, perhaps you want to finish the meditation quickly so you can get on with breakfast. You want to finish breakfast quickly so you can get on to the study session. You want to finish the study quickly so you can go out for a walk. You are always hurrying to the next thing. But if you are fully absorbed in what is happening and enjoying it, when you wake up in the morning, you enjoy waking up. Enjoy just lying there for a few minutes. Enjoy the sound of the bell. Enjoy brushing your teeth and washing your face. Enjoy walking down the stairs, enjoy the meditation. Enjoy your breakfast. Then a certain timeless quality will attach itself to the day. You won't be hankering after the passage of time or to get things over so that you can do something else. And in a way, you won't feel the passage of time. Time will be passing but you won't feel it passing in the negative way you usually do. Everything is happening but in a sense nothing is happening. There is time but there is also timelessness. You experience both whereas very often you experience neither.

In hurrying on the next thing you are alienated from the present experience. You may think that you'll go on to experience the next thing fully, but of course the same thing will happen again. The negative potentiality of our self-awareness is that we can detach our awareness from the present situation and imagine other situations in the future. Thus the very faculty that contains the seed of our higher evolution also contains the seed of a sort of fall – or at

least of a very negative development in the form of alienation. Animals aren't alienated. Only human beings can be alienated.

The verse goes on to say, “The disciple of the Fully, Perfectly Enlightened One takes delight (only) in the destruction of craving.”

The word for disciple is ‘*savako*’, ‘one who hears’, ‘one who is receptive’. Destruction of craving is ‘*taṇhakkhaya*’, ‘destruction or cessation of craving’. And ‘*rato*’, ‘delight’, is quite a strong word. Again, it is emphasized that it is not pleasure but craving that is destroyed. The fact that you enjoy even the bliss of Nirvana doesn't mean that you cease to enjoy the pleasures of the senses, but you give them their right place. Presumably even the Buddha will enjoy his food. He'll be aware of the pleasurable sensations arising in dependence on the contact of the tongue with, say, curry. The fact that he is at the same time enjoying the bliss of Nirvana will not preclude the possibility of his enjoying that pleasurable organic sensation.

It is said that the Buddha did experience painful sensations, but that his mind was not affected by them. From time to time, if the pain became really severe, he was able to withdraw, so to speak, into the higher dhyānas where he was no longer conscious of the body and therefore no longer conscious of the pain. He could do that to give his body a rest so that it could go on functioning a bit longer and he could continue his work in the world. If he hadn't done that, perhaps the body would not have lasted so long.

This raises the whole question of the relationship between the mind and the body. The Buddha said on one occasion that he does not say whether rūpa and jīva, that is to say the body and vitality, are the same or different. He left the connection between the two a mystery – or, you could say, he refused to think or speak in terms of an ultimate dualism. But if the physical body is undergoing suffering and you are conscious of that, that seems to intensify the suffering even on the physical level. So if you stop the consciousness of the suffering, even though you are ill, the suffering that you experience and the strain on the physical body is reduced at the same time. It is as though the fact that you are conscious of the suffering sets up an extra tension.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is your response to the description of the Buddha as “the Trackless One”?
2. What is the importance of the distinction between kamachanda and dhammachanda? How can you cultivate dhammachanda in your own practice?
3. *“Mindfulness doesn't mean standing aside from yourself and watching yourself. You are in yourself and with yourself while you're doing something. The mindfulness is not an extra quality. It saturates the whole of what you do and is indistinguishable from it, or rather distinguishable from it only in thought. If it is distinguishable from it in fact, you are alienated from your experience. True mindfulness fills what you are doing from within; it doesn't look at it or onto it from outside. It saturates the flow of experience, like a colour being given to the flow.”*
Can you distinguish in your own experience the difference between alienated awareness and integrated awareness as Sangharakshita describes them here? If so, share an example of each with your group.

4. *“Patient endurance is the best form of penance.”*
Give some examples from your own life of situations that require you to practice patience in the way Sangharakshita describes it.
5. *“One mustn't forget the goal, or lose sight of the end on account of the means.”*
How do you keep alive a sense of the goal – of nirvana – in your own practise?
6. How can you “guard the gates of the senses”, in your day-to-day life?

This week we will look at the concluding verses of the Buddhavagga, so please read the following seminar extract before the group meeting.

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Many people, out of fear, flee for refuge to (sacred) hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines.

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In reality this is not a safe refuge. In reality this is not the best refuge. Fleeing to such a refuge one is not released from all suffering.

A more literal translation of the Pāli would be, 'Many resort for refuge to hills, woods, groves, trees and shrines. Many men might feel tormented'.

You get a definite feeling of actually being tormented by fear coming over at the end. The verse refers to nature worship in various forms, such as you still find going on in India: a holy hill, a sacred grove, a sacred tree, a shrine. The word translated as shrine, '*caitya*', is just a heap of stones or a little improvised shrine of some kind. In Buddhist terminology *caitya* meant a stūpa, but its pre-Buddhistic usage is a mound or heap, very often of stones, which is an object or at least a focus of worship. One can imagine this nature worship, in a way it's a natural response. But in this verse, the Buddha is not speaking just in terms of nature worship. He's speaking of people tormented by fear resorting for refuge to these natural objects.

A large part of animism is empathy with other natural things. The basic sentiment is that of feeling yourself alive, animated, and feeling the life in other living things. If they are greater than you in some respect, whether they are bigger, stronger or whatever, you look up to that, you worship that. But subsequently, when you recognize yourself as a human being, as an individual, even though on a certain level you retain that feeling towards the tree or rock or fire, at the same time you recognize that there are specifically human qualities which you possess but they do not, which formerly you projected on to them. If you are a healthy human being and don't 'throw away' your paganism, you end up with the same feeling for Nature, the same empathy, the same animistic attitude, but also something more than that.

This is what we find in the Pāli Buddhist scriptures. Some of these texts come very close to the actual conditions under which the Buddha taught, and on many of their pages there are references to tree spirits and fairy-like creatures living in flowers, as though the whole of Nature is animated. That is the background of the Buddha's teaching. It was given not in cities, but in parks and groves and forests, on mountainsides and in caves, and we mustn't forget that. It wasn't an urban industrial background, or even an agricultural background. You get

the murmur of Nature in the background all the time when the Buddha is speaking: the trees rustling, the peacocks screaming, the tigers roaring in the distance. Animism is thus almost, on a certain level, an essential part of Buddhism.

But if you go for refuge to natural objects, expecting them to give you what they cannot, if you expect them to solve the problems of life for you, that is a terrible mistake. If you are searching for the Unconditioned, Nature will not give you that, so Nature cannot be a refuge. If you want to transcend the conditioned, Nature cannot help you to do that because Nature itself is conditioned. In the same way Buddhists don't believe that it is wrong to worship the gods of the round. They are more powerful beings existing on higher, more subtle planes and they can perhaps help you in worldly matters – they can give you good luck, wealth, success, prosperity – but they cannot help you on the path to Enlightenment. You do not take refuge in them, you do not go for refuge to them; you merely worship them.

There are two forms of fear: a positive fear and a negative fear. There is a rational kind of fear when you see quite objectively that something is dangerous and needs to be avoided. Tigers are dangerous, lightning is dangerous, and primitive man was very aware of all such things. This is positive, healthy fear; recognizing as dangerous things which really are dangerous. Then there is negative fear; neurotic fear which sees as dangerous things that are not dangerous at all. Some people are terrified of mice, for example.

One can subdivide positive fear into two kinds. The first is the natural, objective, even necessary fear of things that threaten life. But it is possible to go further than that. You can fear life itself, conditioned existence itself, in a healthy and objective way, because you can see that conditioned existence itself is a potential source of pain and suffering. And if you have a objective healthy fear of conditioned existence, you look for a refuge from it that can only really be found beyond it. If you look for a refuge from conditioned existence within conditioned existence – the hill or the grove – that is completely futile. A conditioned thing cannot give you refuge from the conditioned; only the Unconditioned can give you refuge from the conditioned – so sacred hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines are, “Not a safe refuge, not the best refuge. Fleeing to such a refuge, one is not released from all suffering.” That is to say, from the suffering, ultimately, of conditioned existence itself. A tree or a hill or an unenlightened human teacher cannot give you refuge from the conditioned; only the Unconditioned can do that.

It is true that the Mahayana maintains that both the conditioned and the Unconditioned are ‘*śūnyatā*’, that there is one ultimate reality which is *śūnyatā*. But it might not be very helpful to be told at the beginning of your spiritual life that everything is *śūnyatā*. You might draw from that the conclusion that it isn't really necessary to give up anything, because it's all *śūnyatā*. In the Theravada, however, it is quite impossible to make that mistake. From the Theravādin point of view, here is the conditioned and there is the Unconditioned, and the spiritual life consists in making the transition from the one to the other. That is a good practical basis. Perhaps when you have made the transition or you are well on your way you can start reflecting that conditioned and Unconditioned are ultimately *śūnyatā*, but if you start thinking that too early on in your spiritual career, you may not make any progress at all. I mean, are conditioned and Unconditioned non-dual for you.

That is why I sometimes say that in Triratna we follow the Mahayana in principle but in practice more often than not we are down-to-earth Theravada.

If you think that you are going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, but you are in fact taking refuge in something that is not a refuge, you are closing the door to any future development, and what could be more dangerous than that? You are in a much worse position than the ordinary person who isn't going for refuge to anyone or anything. Nāgārjuna says something like this, "The teaching of śūnyatā is the antidote to all delusions and all wrong views, but if you make the teaching of śūnyatā itself into a wrong view, what will be the antidote to that?"

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He who goes for refuge to the Enlightened One, to the Truth, and to the Spiritual Community, and who sees with perfect wisdom the Four Ariyan Truths –

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namely, suffering, the origin of suffering, the passing beyond suffering, and the Ariyan Eightfold Way leading to the pacification of suffering –

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(for him) this is a safe refuge, (for him) this is the best refuge. Having gone to such a refuge, one is released from all suffering.

Here going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the true Refuges, is contrasted with the false refuges of the previous verses. It is very important to understand what the Buddha is saying here. It is not a question of sectarianism; it is not a question of my group being better than his group. It is really a question of seeing the difference between the conditioned and the Unconditioned, seeing the difference between the object or figure that represents the conditioned and the object or figure that represents or embodies the Unconditioned. This is the crux of the matter.

The text says '*Sangha*', 'spiritual community', not 'bhikkhus'. That has some significance. In the Theravada, they take the Sangha to mean the bhikkhus, but in fact the object of refuge, according to the Theravada tradition itself, is the '*Ārya Sangha*', and the *Ārya Sangha* can include those who are lay people as well as those who are bhikkhus. In the Pāli Canon there are instances of lay people becoming Stream-entrants and therefore '*āryas*'.

The Pāli word translated as 'perfect wisdom' is '*sammāpaññā*'; so the text refers to one who sees not only with wisdom but with perfect wisdom; what the Mahayanists would later call Transcendental Wisdom. In the Pāli tradition there are three grades of '*paññā*': '*suttamāyāpaññā*', '*cintāmāyāpaññā*' and '*bhāvanāmāyāpaññā*'. *Suttamāyāpaññā* is the wisdom, knowledge or understanding that comes from hearing or reading somebody else's exposition. For instance, if you read these verses of the *Dhammapada* and understand them, that understanding is *suttamāyāpaññā*. Then there is *cintāmāyāpaññā*, the wisdom, the understanding, that arises as a result of your own independent thought and investigation. This is a more developed form of *paññā*. You have heard something, you have understood it, but you don't let it rest there. You turn it over in your mind, look at it from different points of view, investigate it and even develop your own approach to that topic. You understand it on your own terms, you relate it to your life as a result of your independent reflection. For instance, if you read these verses of the *Dhammapada*, you can understand them at once, but that is only *suttamāyāpaññā*. The process of reflecting on them may go on for years, and as a result of that you get a deeper and deeper understanding. You can always tell whether someone is giving a lecture on the basis of just the first kind of wisdom or on the basis of the second. The difference is very obvious.

Cintāmayāpaññā is a natural process if you are interested in the subject to which it relates. If you are interested in it you won't be satisfied with merely hearing or reading about it and understanding it superficially. You will retain it in your mind and keep thinking about it. You don't have to resolve to think about it at a specific time, though some people can do that. You don't have to have thinking sessions in the way you have meditation sessions. If you are interested in the subject you will turn it over in your mind, think about it from time to time and it will keep coming back to you and in this way you will develop your understanding of it.

It is possible, in fact, to develop a capacity to think when you want to. In the course of many years I have read quite a lot about the Dharma and other things, and sometimes I am too busy to think about what I have read, but then I say to myself, "All right, in a few weeks time when I have a free afternoon, I am going to think about that." And I set aside that afternoon and think about it. This requires a bit of practice, though; usually you have to take advantage of the times when you feel like thinking about whatever it is. Some people find it easier to reflect when they are engaged in some simple activity like walking up and down, while others find it easier to reflect when they are sitting down somewhere or maybe even lying down (though then there is an obvious danger). Writing on a subject helps to concentrate the mind as well.

Then there is bhāvanāmāyāpaññā. Bhavana literally means 'becoming' or 'making to become', 'developing', 'cultivating', and it is used to refer to meditation, so bhāvanāmāyāpaññā is the knowledge or wisdom or understanding that arises as a result of meditation; it is transcendental insight. It is this third kind of wisdom to which the Buddha is referring here. In other words, an intellectual understanding of the Four Noble Truths is not enough. There must be a realization of those Four Noble Truths. But what does insight into the truth of suffering mean? It is fundamentally a heartfelt, total conviction that nothing conditioned is really going to give you any happiness. You are convinced that however much sense pleasure you have, however much wealth or fame or intellectual knowledge you acquire, none of that is going to give you deep-down lasting satisfaction, and therefore you are not bothered about these things. If they come, you don't mind enjoying them; you might enjoy a glass of wine, but you don't think that ultimate happiness is to be found in the bottom of the glass. You are convinced that true happiness is to be found in only the Unconditioned. If you have this kind of insight into the truth of dukkha, this affects your whole outlook, your whole way of life. For you there is no mad rush after conditioned things; you don't try to grab them because you know that they cannot give you what you really want.

Verse 191 makes use of a formula often repeated in the Pāli Tipiṭaka, "The passing beyond suffering, and the Ariyan Eightfold Way leading to the pacification of suffering."

Usually, though, the words used are not – as here – '*dukkha atikkama*', translated as 'the passing beyond suffering', but '*dukkha nirodha*'. The word '*nirodha*', meaning 'cessation', is quite an important word in Pāli, and in Theravada Buddhism it is considered to be equivalent to Nirvana. The cessation of all suffering is Nirvana; or Nirvana is the cessation of all suffering. Nirvana is very often defined in the Theravada as the complete cessation of everything that has arisen because only that which had a beginning can have an end, and usually the Theravada leaves it at that. Because the whole ambience of the spiritual life, the attitude of people towards it and the implications of so many other teachings, suggest something positive beyond the cessation, the Theravada evidently doesn't feel any need to dwell too much upon what that might be. Theravādins would probably maintain that we are very well acquainted with the conditioned, and what we have to do is to get beyond it. We have to bring about an entire cessation, subjectively of thirst or craving, and objectively of mundane existence itself. What is left after that, if anything is left, we shall see, and in the meantime

there is no point in speculating. Other passages of the scriptures make it clear, however, that there is an Unconditioned reality behind the conditioned reality, though the Theravada doesn't use that expression. The Mahayana, possibly aware of the dangers of interpreting nirodha as the whole truth about Nirvana, goes into the positive residuum in much greater detail. It speaks in terms of *sūnyatā*, Absolute Consciousness (the '*ālaya*'), the Dharmakāya, the Dharmadhātu, though admittedly the Mahayana gets itself into difficulties if it starts taking its own philosophical formulations of the Unconditioned too literally.

You have to maintain a fine balance between the two: not say so little about the positive nature of the Unconditioned that you give the impression that there isn't an Unconditioned and that on the cessation of the conditioned you are just left with a blank; and on the other hand not say so much about the Unconditioned that you virtually turn it into a more refined form of the conditioned, as though with your mundane mind you could already understand exactly what the Unconditioned is, as though it were possible to formulate it in conceptual rational terms.

But the *Dhammapada* uses the expression '*atikkama*', literally 'going over or further, passing beyond, traversing, overcoming or overstepping'. We have to remember that even though certain wordings of the best known formulations are familiar to us, there are others. Usually any elementary book on Buddhism based on Pāli sources will refer to dukkha nirodha, not atikkama, but here we have the Buddha using that expression. We are therefore not obliged to speak in terms of the cessation of suffering as the third noble truth; it is just as valid to refer to it as the transcending of suffering. Certainly it is possible to transcend suffering without suffering actually having ceased, as in the case of the Buddha. He sometimes experienced pain, but he had transcended it in the sense that his mind was not disturbed by the experience.

The verse goes on to refer to the Eightfold Way leading to the pacification of suffering; so here is another expression – not the cessation of suffering but '*dukkha pasana*', the calming down of suffering, again quite an expressive way of putting it.

There are two points to be made here, one about the distribution of the Four Truths over the two processes and the other about their being called Aryan or noble. How do the reactive process and the creative process tie up with the Four Noble Truths? I've spelled this out in the '*Survey of Buddhism*', and it's something that one should be very clear about. In the case of dukkha, you've got first cause and then effect. In the sequence of the nidānas we usually put the cause first and then the effect, but here in the Four Noble Truths we have the effect; suffering, and then the cause; craving. In other words, you encounter the suffering first, and then you start looking around for the cause. If your approach is empirical and pragmatic, you will put the effect first and the cause second, but if your approach is deductive and philosophical, you will put the cause first and then the effect, because in time the cause does come first and the effect afterwards. And when we speak of the reactive process we put the cause first and the effect afterwards.

In the case of the second two truths you've got the effect followed by the cause, the effect, so to speak, being Nirvana, and the cause, the means by which we reach Nirvana, the following of the Noble Eightfold Path. But if you are thinking in terms of the creative process, the spiral, you must put the path first and the goal after the path. If you reverse the order from inductive to deductive, the Four Noble Truths encapsulate and summarize the reactive process and the creative process, the first and second truths being concerned with the 'round' and the third and fourth with the spiral path and the goal. Thus the whole of the Dharma is encapsulated

within this formula. As presented and expounded, the Four Noble Truths may seem dull and rigid, but if that is your impression you haven't understood them properly. After all, these formulae are just aides memoires from the days when there were no books, and people would have filled in the outline when they started talking about them.

These truths are called 'noble', '*ariyan*', because they are the truths of the Aryans; the truth as disclosed to the vision of the Aryans (Stream-entrants). You can only really see all conditioned things as suffering if you are a Stream-entrant. The Four Noble Truths are thus a presentation in a succinct form of the vision of the Aryans; they represent the way in which someone with Perfect Vision sees existence. He sees all conditioned things as unable to give ultimate satisfaction. In that sense he sees pleasure as pain – not that he doesn't experience pleasurable sensations but he sees quite clearly the limitations of that kind of pleasure. This is not usually explained in books on Buddhism. You get the impression that the Four Noble Truths are so called in order to give an honorific title to the Four Truths out of reverence. But it is not that at all. The Four Noble Truths are those truths seen by those who are Aryans. They are the way Stream-entrants see the world.

Another misunderstanding is that the more you experience dukkha, the more insight you have into it. This is not the case at all. As a Stream-entrant, you can be surveying the whole of conditioned existence in your meditation and seeing it as dukkha and at the same time your experience may be intensely pleasurable and blissful. On the other hand, you can have an intense experience of suffering but no insight into the truth of suffering whatsoever, and unfortunately this is the situation of most people. One could even say that the more insight you have into the truth of dukkha, the less dukkha you will feel, or the less you will feel it to be dukkha. Whatever dukkha you happen to experience can only be bodily anyway; the mere fact that vision has arisen means that you cannot experience mental dukkha, except in the very subtle way that Stream-entry is 'painful' in comparison with Arhantship, because it is a lesser degree of perfection.

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Hard to come by is the Ideal Man (*purisājañña*). He is not born everywhere. Where such a wise one is born, that family grows happy.

'*Purisa*' means 'man', 'male'. The Ideal Man could mean the Buddha, but it is as though in this verse the terminology isn't yet fully established. The term *purisa* was quite important in ancient Indian thought. It is not only the man, but the male; it also refers to spirit (*purisa*) as opposed to matter ('*prakrit*') – these latter being terms from the Shankya philosophy – so there are those overtones as well. The Buddha is sometimes given the pre-Buddhist epithet 'Mahapurisa', and described as having the characteristics, the '*lakṣaṇas*', of the Great man; there is a whole sutta devoted to that topic in the Pāli Canon. But here the term may or may not refer to the Buddha; the word is not differentiated as that yet.

Another translation might be, 'Hard to find is a True Individual'. But does an individual take birth anyway? Are individuals born? Are Buddhists born? No. They are made; or rather, they make themselves. In order to become an individual you need certain faculties which perhaps you are born with. Perhaps you are bright and energetic right from the beginning. But you cannot strictly speaking be born as an individual (unless you are consciously re-incarnating, so to speak, out of compassion).

And, "Where such a wise one is born, that family grows happy." '*Kula*' doesn't mean family in a narrow sense, it is more like clan, or 'ethnic-cum-social group', and this raises the question of

the relationship between the individual and the group. You cannot have a positive group without a spiritual community at its heart. The spiritual community sustains the group; the group cannot sustain itself. Even in classical times there were schools of philosophy, the mysteries and the oracles, which provided that kind of element, but we don't have it now; there is no spiritual community in the midst of our social, economic, or cultural group. That is reflected very clearly in the arts, which are virtually in chaos partly for that reason.

194

Happy is the appearance of the Enlightened Ones. Happy is the teaching of the Real Truth (*saddhamma*). Happy is the unity of the Spiritual Community. Happy is the spiritual effort of the united.

The word translated here as 'happy' is '*sukha*'; the arising of the Buddhas is potentially a source of happiness for all living beings, because the Buddhas show the way. And as for the Real Truth, sometimes in Pāli the word '*Dhamma*' is used, sometimes the word '*saddhamma*'. Sometimes the choice of word is for the sake of the metre, and sometimes there is a real distinction, because Dhamma was used very commonly in India for any sort of teaching, so sometimes the Buddha's teaching is especially distinguished as *saddhamma*, the real Dharma.

The Pāli '*sāmaggi*' is a more concrete word than the English word 'unity'. '*Sa*' is 'together' and '*maggi*' pertains to the path, so *sāmaggi* means the togetherness of those who are on the same path. The same-pathedness of the Sangha is a source of happiness; the happiness doesn't come from enjoying the experience of doing things together in a group sense. You are an individual, others are individuals, and your interaction enhances your enjoyment of your individuality. The same-pathedness of the Sangha is a source of happiness not only to those belonging to that Sangha, but also to those of the group within which the Sangha exists; to see the way in which the members of that spiritual community relate can be a source of inspiration to the group.

The last line of the verse tells us that another source of happiness is the intensive spiritual practice of those who are 'same-pathers'. I don't know whether it can be regarded as significant that one line is devoted to the happiness of the arising of the Enlightened Ones, one line to the happiness of the teaching of the Dharma but two lines to the happiness arising from the unity of the Order, the spiritual community.

195

He who reverences those worthy of reverence, whether Enlightened Ones or (their) disciples, (men) who have transcended illusion (*papañca*), and passed beyond grief and lamentation,

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he who reverences those who are of such a nature, who (moreover) are at peace and without cause for fear, his merit is not to be reckoned as such and such.

If the merit of someone who reverences those worthy of reverence cannot be reckoned, it's as though that kind of reverence has a sort of transcendental quality. If something cannot be reckoned, it is infinite, Unconditioned, Transcendental. Usually one thinks of wisdom as being transcendental, but here reverence is so described. The Pāli word translated as reverence here is '*pūjā*', and perhaps reverence is a rather feeble translation. It is more like devotion, worship; one could also translate it as 'He who worships those worthy of worship', 'He who is devoted to those worthy of devotion'. Or even 'He who has faith in those worthy of faith'.

In my *'Survey of Buddhism'*, when discussing the two Pure Land schools, I mentioned that Faith – as they use the term – is the emotional equivalent of Wisdom. One shouldn't think that Insight is necessarily intellectual in nature. It is important to realize that emotion can intuit the Unconditioned, that Insight is as much emotional as intellectual, and can therefore be expressed in terms of emotion as well as in terms of thought, and even in terms of reverence, worship and devotion. Reverence is not just silly sentimental emotionalism; it is a deeply heartfelt attitude which has an almost transcendental quality about it. It is something existential, not something just on the surface.

That is why you cannot just visualize the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as a concentration exercise, and why such practices are only given to those who are effectively committed to the Three Jewels, because it is only then that you have any sense of the Unconditioned at all – and these, after all, are forms of the Unconditioned. You cannot really visualize unless there is devotion there, and you cannot have that devotion unless to some extent you Go for Refuge.

The word translated as 'illusion' is *'papañca'*, which means something more like complications, entanglements – in other words, the whole samsaric process. Passed beyond the reach of distress and lamentation, they have transcended suffering. 'Those who are at peace' translates *'nibbute'*, which is the verb form of Nirvana. It is often translated literally as 'extinguished' or 'extinct', but the extinction is not of being, but of greed, hatred and delusion.

Merit doesn't seem to be stressed in the Buddha's teachings as far as we can make them out from the Pāli Canon, because the Buddha was concerned with the achievement of Enlightenment here and now in this life, and you are concerned with the accumulation of merit only if you want to be reborn after death in a happy heavenly world or in a prosperous human condition. The Buddha does say that if you follow the spiritual path and you don't manage to reach Enlightenment in this life, when you are reborn that will be to your credit, so to speak, and you will be able to start under better conditions, but the emphasis is not on merit-making for that purpose. A more useful approach might be to consider that you need *'puṇya'* (merit) in the form of positive, skilful mental states as a foundation for meditation.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Give some examples of healthy and unhealthy fears from your own life.
2. What do you think Sangharakshita means by, "I sometimes say that in Triratna we follow the Mahāyāna in principle but in practice more often than not we are down-to-earth Theravada."
3. What distinguishes a false refuge from a true refuge?
4. Give some examples of your own false refuges.
5. What are the implications of distinguishing dukkha atikkama from dukkha nirodha?
6. *"Faith is the emotional equivalent of wisdom."*
What relevance does this have for your own practice?

For the last week of our exploration of the *Dhammapada*, we will look more closely at two connected chapters of the text. The terms 'spiritually immature' and 'spiritually mature' translate the Pāli terms '*bāla*' and '*paṇḍita*', often translated as 'the fool' and 'the wise man'. Sangharakshita explains his translation of the terms in his Preface so it may be worth reading that if you haven't already done so. The only other preparation before your group is to read the two chapters themselves. Indeed, you may wish to read them a number of times during the week. During the group meeting itself, we will be looking at the verses in more depth and using them as an aid to reflection.

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. I suggest that, instead of following up one of the Suggested Questions, you take a number of verses from one of the sections of the *Dhammapada* that we haven't studied directly during this module and give a short presentation to your group about them, perhaps saying why those particular verses have struck you and what the images and teachings contained in them communicate to you. This will encourage you to read other parts of the text and it will give the group as a whole a chance to encounter a wider range of the verses contained in the *Dhammapada*. As part of your project, you could also 'illuminate' those verses.

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.

Supplementary reading on Pāli Texts

The Eternal Legacy by Sangharakshita, ISBN 1899579583, gives a thorough and coherent overview of all the different types of Buddhist texts.

http://windhorsepublications.com/the_eternal_legacy

In the Buddha's Words, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, ISBN 0861714911, is an excellent selection of the Buddha's teachings contained in the Pāli Canon.

<http://www.wisdompubs.org/book/buddha%E2%80%99s-words>

The Life of the Buddha, translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli, ISBN 9552400635, is a very helpful 'biography' of the Buddha taken solely from Pāli sources.

<http://www.wisdom-books.com/product/life-of-the-buddha/13367/>

Various seminars on Pāli texts by Sangharakshita are available.

https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/browse?cat=sangharakshita_seminars

Background material for the Dhammapada

There is a free audio version of Sangharakshita's translation of the *Dhammapada*, read by Subhadra.

<http://www.buddhistaudiobooks.com/audiobooks/view/7/Dhammapada>

Sangharakshita himself can be heard reading the *Buddhavaga* section from his translation of the *Dhammapada* on *Readings from the Pali Canon*.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=S01>

Letters of Gold: Imagery in the Dhammapada by Abhaya explores the symbols and images used in the *Dhammapada*. It is in Issue 4 of the *Western Buddhist Review*.

http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/letters_of_gold.html

The Dhammapada - Letters of Gold, Surata.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM789>

The Living Message of the Dhammapada by Bhikkhu Bodhi is a good overview of the teachings of the *Dhammapada* from a Theravādin perspective.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bl129.html>

3.3

Towards Insight, Reflection and Meditation



Introduction

Module compiled by Ratnaguna

This module is based on the book *The Art of Reflection* by Ratnaguna, and aims to encourage you to reflect more often, more systematically, more effectively, and more deeply. The book explores different aspects and dimensions of reflection, including reflecting on experience, a specific topic, a written text, and then, in the last two chapters, moves into contemplation (meditative reflection). The module concludes with two specific themes for reflection and contemplation – the nature of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*) and impermanence (*anicca*). In addition to the material in the book, there will be various exercises for you to explore in the groups and in your day-to-day life.

Every week you'll be asked to read a chapter of the book in preparation for the class. (Before the first class you'll be asked to read the Introduction as well as chapter 1.) Ratnaguna writes about this: 'Ideally I'd like this module to be a practical introduction to reflection, with the emphasis more on practice than on theory. I know that many people live full lives, with little time for reading, so don't feel that you need to read the whole of the relevant chapter before the class. One of the practices I recommend in my book is *reading slowly and reflectively*, and it would be a pity if you rushed through a chapter in order to finish it in time for the class. It would be better to read just a little and reflect on that. And especially, if you find one point in a chapter particularly interesting and spend the rest of the week just reflecting on that, then that would be fine. In fact, it would be excellent! If you don't have time to read the whole book during the six week reflection course, you can always return to it later and read it at your leisure.'

The Art of Reflection, Ratnaguna, Windhorse Publications, 2011

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-art-of-reflection/>

3.3.1

A Reflective Life

Before the first class, read and reflect on all or part of the Introduction and Chapter 1, *A Reflective Life*. In addition, you could try out some of the things that Ratnaguna recommends in the last section of Chapter 1: *Getting started on reflection*. That is, spend some time doing nothing. Notice what kinds of things you tend to think about. Try thinking about things from what he calls a Dharmic perspective.

3.3.2

Learning from Experience

Before class 2 read and reflect on all or part of Chapter 2, *Learning from Experience*. In addition, reflect on things that happen and on some of the things that you say and/or do. Specifically, if you find that you're in a negative state of mind, or have acted foolishly, or are suffering in some way, you could reflect on those experiences. The most important point is that you can reflect on anything and any experience – that way, nothing is lost, it's all 'grist to the mill'.

3.3.3

Dwelling on a Topic

Before class 3 read and reflect on all or part of Chapter 3, *Dwelling on a Topic*. In addition, spend some time reflecting on just one topic of your own choice. The point here is to stay with the topic, even though nothing may seem to come out of it immediately. Resist the temptation to move on to another topic. And – importantly – resist the temptation to read what others have written about it, or listen to what others have said about it in recorded talks. If you give in to that temptation you'll be working on the first level of wisdom, and this module is about learning how to work on the second and third levels. In his book Ratnaguna suggests a few ways in which you can reflect: talking to yourself, reflective writing, going for a walk, and reflecting with others. Try one or more of these methods this week. You may find the final section – *The pleasure of reflection* – helpful, in which he writes about reflection as a receptive, allowing process, rather than an effortful, doing process.

3.3.4

Reading Reflectively

Before class 4 read and reflect on all or part of Chapter 4, *Reading Reflectively*. Given the topic, it's particularly important to read this chapter – or a part of it – slowly and reflectively. Try doing what Ratnaguna recommends in the section *Slow reading*.

3.3.5

Imagining the Buddha

Before class 5 read and reflect on all or part of Chapter 5, *Imagining the Buddha*. In addition, you can, if you wish, continue to work on your own version of the Buddha Vandana (you will have begun work on this in the previous class). Practise the Buddhānussati meditation, either by downloading or streaming the guided meditation by Ratnaguna or Dayanandi, or by reading the script in Appendix 1. This appendix also includes other material on the Buddha Vandana.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC100>

3.3.6

Contemplating Reality

Before class 6 read and reflect on all or part of Chapter 6, *Contemplating Reality*. Practice the Contemplation of Impermanence meditation, either by downloading or streaming the guided meditation by Ratnaguna or Dayanandi or by reading the script in Appendix 2.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC101>

Appendix 1: The Buddhānussati Practice

Below is a document on the Buddhavandana, followed by a script of the ‘Contemplation of the Buddha’ meditation, which you can use if you are unable to access, or prefer not to use, the recorded meditation.

The Buddhavandana

This week you’ll be practising the Buddhānussati meditation – recollecting the Buddha – by contemplating the words of the Buddhavandana. To help yourself to engage with this practice, you can study and reflect on each of the qualities of the Buddha as expressed in the words of the vandana. Here it is in Pāli:

Iti’pi so Bhagavā, araham, sammā-sambuddho, vijjā-carana sampanno, sugato,
lokavidū, anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi, satthā deva-manussānam, buddho,
bhagavā’ti.

Here is Sangharakshita’s translation:

Such indeed is He, the Richly Endowed: the Free, the Fully and Perfectly Awake,
Equipped with Knowledge and Practice, the Happily Attained, Knower of the Worlds,
Guide Unsurpassed of Men to be Tamed, the Teacher of Gods and Men, the Awakened
One Richly Endowed.

And here is Thanissaro’s translation:

Indeed, the Blessed One is worthy and rightly self-awakened, consummate in
knowledge and conduct, well-gone, knower of the cosmos, unexcelled trainer of those
who can be tamed, teacher of devas and human beings, awakened, blessed.

To help you to understand more fully what each word means, I’ve copied below the relevant parts of the seminar that Sangharakshita led on the *Tiratana Vandana*. Following this I’ve given you the main definitions of each word from the Pāli- English Dictionary.

Extracts from the Tiratana Vandana seminar: the Buddha Vandana

Iti’pi so means ‘he is indeed’ or ‘indeed he is’. *Iti* is ‘thus’, *pi* is an emphatic particle (indeed) and *so* means ‘he’.

Bhagavā: probably the term by which the Buddha is most commonly addressed by his disciples in the Pāli texts. Where he is addressed as ‘Blessed One’ or ‘Lord’ the word being translated is Bhagavā. The word derives from the word *bhaga*, ‘fortunate’ or ‘lucky’. Bhagavā – *one who possesses fortune or blessings, one who possesses positive or good qualities*. In a

spiritual context Bhagavā came to mean one who possesses positive spiritual qualities, spiritual blessings, i.e. the Buddha. The word was used by his disciples to refer to the Buddha as their spiritual friend and teacher. It's an emotional term expressing great respect and devotion for the qualities of the Buddha. It suggests something positive and also impressive. One of the later derived meanings is *the sublime one* – the Buddha is spiritually impressive, awe-inspiring, sublime.

Araham: Literally means 'worthy' or 'worshipful', originally in a worldly sense (as in worshipful mayor) but through usage in a spiritual context it came to mean *one spiritually worthy in the highest sense*. More specifically in the Buddhist context it came to mean one who has destroyed all fetters, all defilements and impurities. Popular etymology explains it as *Arahanta* or *Arihanta*, *Ari* meaning 'enemy', *Hanta* meaning 'to destroy'. So *Arahant* means one who has destroyed all enemies – the enemies of the defilements or the enemies of the passions and so on. In a sense, the term Bhagavā emphasises what the Buddha is, what he has become in all his positive spiritual qualities, while the term *arahant* emphasises what the Buddha is not: what he has escaped from or conquered, emphasising his purity, tranquillity, his freedom from internal conflict, his complete transcendence of all states of spiritual limitation or bondage.

Sammā Sambuddho: 'the Holy and Perfectly Enlightened One'. The word Buddha originally meant one who understood, in the spiritual sense of understanding Truth or Reality. *Sam* is a prefix meaning 'full' or 'complete', so combining *sam* and *sammā* in this term is a heaping of superlative upon superlative, which we could render as *Wholly, Completely Enlightened, or Fully and Perfectly Enlightened*. So *Sammā Sambuddho* is the whole, complete Buddha, combining the Bhagavā and Araham aspects, and embodying the goal Buddhists aim towards: uniting an experience of compassion and tranquillity with wisdom, purity and boundless spiritual creativity. The term *Sammā Sambuddho* might better be rendered as The Infinitely Creative One.

Vijjā-carana-sampanno: *Sampanno* means 'fully and completely endowed with'. *Vijjā* means 'knowledge' – essentially the same as *Bodhi*. An appreciative, almost aesthetic, understanding. A whole, a perfect understanding, whereas *avidyā* or *avijjā* is the opposite. So broadly speaking, *vijjā* or *vidyā* represents Bodhi or Enlightenment. *Carana* literally means *walking* but it also means *practice* or *living*. It's from the same root as *carya* – as when we say that the Bodhisattva's *carya*, the *Bodhicarya*, the *Dharmacarya*, *Brahmacarya*, it's all from the same root, *carana*, to walk, to go, to live.

So *vijjā carana* is '*understanding and implementation*', you could even say theory and practice, except that it's not just theory; it's an actual realization. So you've got the two sides, you've got the inner realization and the external – the outer practical exemplification, and the Buddha is fully endowed with both.

Sugato: '*the Well-gone, Happily Attained, the Happy One*'. The Buddhas are smiling. The spiritual life should be a life of increasing emotional positivity and happiness, and Enlightenment itself is described as the Supreme Bliss.

Lokavidū: '*Knower of the world*'. There are two ways of looking at this:

1. The Buddha comprehends/sees through conditioned existence: e.g. it arises in dependence on conditions, is impermanent, can't give permanent satisfaction, doesn't possess ultimate reality of its own.

2. The Buddha knows the minds of people, understands the conditions under which they live, understands society, i.e. the Buddha knows the world both spiritually and in a more mundane sense.

Anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathi: *Anuttaro* means the ‘highest’ or ‘best’ or ‘supreme’. The Buddha is the highest or best or supreme guide for those who wish to restrain themselves or to direct their energies in the right way. Sometimes *anuttaro* is taken as a separate epithet, not as an adjective of *purissa-damma-sārati*. In which case it’s simply ‘*the Buddha is the highest*’ – the highest kind of being, the fully enlightened, liberated individual.

Sārathi is ‘charioteer’, *ratha* is ‘chariot’, *sa-ratha*, ‘the man who goes with the chariot’; the charioteer. Charioteer in the sense of leader or guide. So the Buddha is the charioteer, the leader or guide, for *purissa*, for ‘the man or men’, *damma*, ‘who wish to be controlled’ – or perhaps better – *for men of control*, or *men who want to control themselves*. It could be translated as restraint, the charioteer, *the leader or guide for men who wish to restrain themselves*, who wish to direct their energies properly.

Satthā deva manusānaṃ: *Satthā* is ‘teacher’, even *guru*, *deva manusānaṃ* is ‘of gods and men’. So the Buddha is described as *the teacher of gods and men*.

The Buddha is the teacher, the guide, or the shower of the way for all forms of sentient conditioned existence, whether lower or higher, grosser or more refined, and the devas, the gods of popular mythology, are regarded as coming in the latter category, and therefore as being in need of teaching.

Bhagavā’ti: ‘*ti* is an abbreviation for *iti*, ‘thus’. *He is like that*.

Definitions of the words of the Buddhavandana from the Pāli-English Dictionary

Bhaga: Luck, lot, fortune.

Bhagavant: Fortunate, illustrious, sublime.

Araham: To be worthy of, to deserve, to merit.

Sammā: Connected, in one. Thoroughly, properly, rightly; in the right way, as it ought to be, best, perfectly.

Sambuddha: Well understood.

Vijjā: Possessed of wisdom.

Carana: 1. Walking about, grazing, feeding. 2. The foot. 3. Acting, behaviour, good conduct.

Sampanna: 1. Successful, complete, perfect. 2. Endowed with, possessed of, abounding in, e.g. *vijjā-carana-sampanna* – full of wisdom and goodness.

Sugata: Faring well, happy, having a happy life after death.

Loka: ‘space, open space’. World, primarily ‘visible world’, then in general as ‘space or sphere of creation’, with varying degrees of substantiality. Often (unspecified) in the

comprehensive sense of ‘universe’. Sometimes the term is applied collectively to the creatures of this or other various worlds, thus ‘man, mankind, people, beings’.

Vidū: Clever, wise, knowing, skilled in.

Anuttara: ‘Nothing higher’, without a superior, incomparable, second to none, unsurpassed, excellent, pre-eminent.

Purisa: Man.

Damma: To be tamed or restrained; esp. with ref. to a young bullock.

Sārathi: Charioteer, coachman.

Satthā: Told, taught.

Deva: A god, a divine being.

Manussa: A human being, man.

Now make your own translation, using your preferred translations of each Pāli term:

Homage to the Buddha (Buddha Vandana)

Itipi’so:

Bhagavā:

Araṇṇ:

Sammā Sambuddho:

Vijjā-carana sampanno:

Sugato:

Lokavidū:

Purisa-damma:

Sārathi:

Anuttaro:

Satthā deva manusāṇaṇ:

Buddho:

Bhagavā’ti:

Contemplating the Buddha – Meditation Script

Itipi'so: Really, he is like this:

Bhagavā: The Blessed One

Richly Endowed with all positive / spiritual qualities, Sublime,

Arahāṃ: The (supremely) Worthy One, Excellent,

Free,

Who has destroyed all defilements and impurities.

Sammā Sambuddho: Wholly and Perfectly Enlightened, Fully and Completely Awakened,

Who Fully and Completely Understands,

The Infinitely Creative One.

Vijjā-carana sampanno: Equipped with Knowledge and Practice,

He lives [in accordance with] his full and complete understanding,

He Exemplifies his Inner Realization,

Sugato: the Happy One,

The Happily Attained,

Lokavidū: Who knows the world as it is,

Who has seen through conditioned existence.

Anuttaro: Unsurpassed,

The Highest, Supreme, Incomparable,

Excellent,

Purisa-damma-sārathi: The Charioteer, Leading others on the path of restraint,

Helping beings to redirect their energies towards higher consciousness,

to liberation.

Satthā-deva-manusānaṃ: Teacher of gods and humans:

Teacher of all levels of existence.

Buddho: Awakened, Enlightened,

Wise,

The One Who Understands.

Bhagavā'ti: The Blessed One

Richly Endowed with all positive / spiritual qualities, Sublime,

He is like that.

Appendix 2: Contemplation of Impermanence

If you are unable or unwilling to listen to the recorded guided meditation, you can use the script provided below (which is a transcript of the recorded meditation), having the script in front of you and contemplating each line in turn. You can also simply take a line or two from the script and spend the whole of the session contemplating that. You could even simply contemplate the word 'Impermanence'!

Alternatively, you could take a favourite text that deals with impermanence and contemplate that, for instance Kukai's poem 'Letter to a Nobleman', or the first few lines of the *Jarā Sutta* from the fourth chapter of the *Sutta Nipāta*.

Before actually contemplating impermanence, though, it is important that you do a session of *śamathā* practice – perhaps especially the *mettā bhāvanā*. This is because in contemplating impermanence we are introducing reflections that inevitably include old age, death, loss etc. – and you will need to try to make sure that these reflections do not tip you into a depression or a pessimistic mood. If you know that you are susceptible to depression or low moods, or that you have a tendency to look always on the 'dark side' of life, it may be best to reflect mainly on the positive aspects of impermanence, i.e. the fact that impermanence makes possible the spiritual path; that we can change for the better; that we can make spiritual progress etc. (In that case, you could contemplate the second half of the script provided below, from 'I am changing from moment to moment ... so why not direct those changes towards limitless freedom?')

Contemplation of Impermanence – Meditation Script

All compounded things are impermanent –
Subject to change (subject to alteration)
The universe, with its myriad suns and planets – is impermanent
Our own sun is impermanent
This earth is impermanent

The land masses – the continents and islands – are impermanent
The great mountain ranges are impermanent
The oceans are impermanent

The great forests are impermanent
All living beings are impermanent
All human beings are impermanent
Millions upon millions of human beings have been born,
have lived for a short while, and have died

I am no exception – I too am impermanent

I was born ...

I was once a child ... a youth ... an adult ...

I am growing old ... one day I will die

Knowing this, I practise the Dharma – now

I am changing from moment to moment ... so why not direct those changes
towards limitless freedom?

I can become more aware, wiser, kinder,

I can become a Stream Entrant, a Bodhisattva,

I can become fully Awake

Others have done it before me, so why not me?

All compounded things are impermanent

Knowing this,

I go for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,
for as long as life lasts.

Reference Materials

The Art of Reflection, Ratnaguna, Windhorse Publications, 2011

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-art-of-reflection/>

Towards Insight - Contemplations of the Buddha, Dayanandi and Ratnaguna.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC100>

Towards Insight - Contemplation of Impermanence, by Dayanandi and Ratnaguna.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC101>

Upajjhattana Sutta, Ratnaguna. A description and discussion of *the Upajjhattana Sutta*, where the buddha describes the five things everyone should reflect on often.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1206>

The Five Things Everyone Should Reflect On, Subhuti.

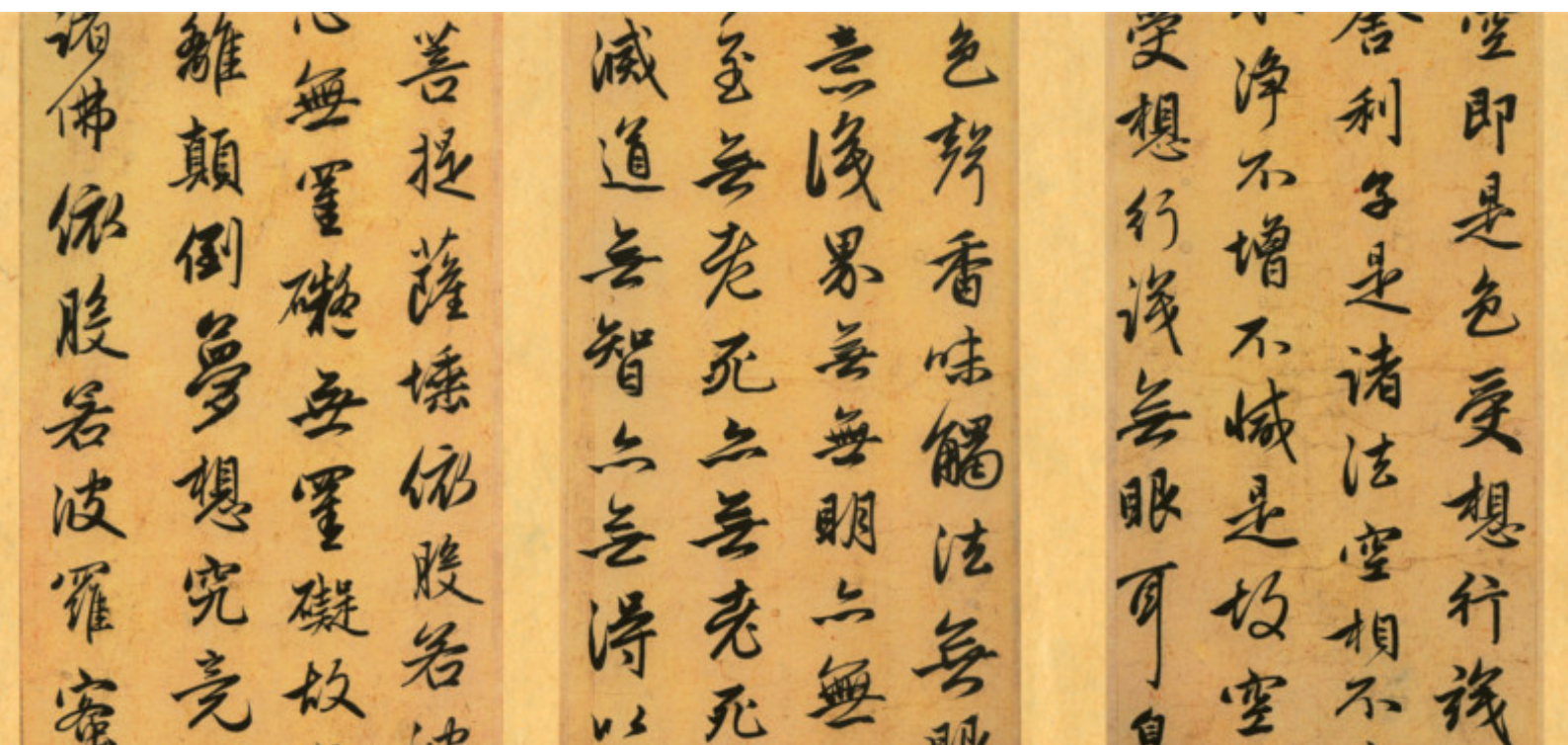
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC514>

The Three Lakshanas, by Jnanaketu, Abhaya and Saddhaloka. Further information about the Lakshanas, as an aid to unit 6.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X23>

3.4

In Search of the Middle Way: Mahāyāna Perspectives



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Module compiled by Vadanya

Introduction

In this module of the Dharma Training Course we will be exploring some important Mahāyāna approaches to the nature of reality, in particular:

- The Madhyamaka (or ‘Middle Way’) philosophy of Nāgārjuna and his successors.
- The Prajñā-Pāramitā literature which the Madhyamaka school tried to explain.
- The Yogācāra (‘Path of Practice’) or Cittamātra (‘Mind-Only’) vision of reality.
- The Tathāgatagarbha (‘Embryo of the Buddha’ or ‘Buddha-matrix’) doctrine, which gave rise to the idea of ‘Buddha-Nature’ that is so popular among some Western Buddhists.

Most of us get inspiration from reading books from a wide variety of Buddhist traditions, and some of us have direct contact with other schools. Every school of Buddhism we might come across in the world today, with the single exception of the Theravādin school of Southeast Asia, has been profoundly influenced by at least some of these doctrines – so it is important that we know about them. If we read a book on Tibetan Buddhism or Zen Buddhism or Tendai Buddhism or Pure Land Buddhism – as almost all of us do at one time or another – we need to have a critical appreciation of these teachings to make sense of what we are reading, to put it into its proper context, and to be able to benefit without falling into any of the pitfalls that these ideas can present.

We will not be looking at these doctrines from a purely academic interest – the aim is to explore how they can inspire us, and how they can feed into our practice of the Dharma. These ideas have the potential to transform the way we see the world, and therefore the way we live – but only if we approach them in the right spirit. Taken in the wrong way – approached in a literal-minded way, or seen dogmatically as the only truth – any of these ideas can have negative consequences for our practice. So as well as exploring these ways of looking at reality, we will also be exploring how Sangharakshita advises us to approach them, and how we can incorporate them into our view of the world.

The module is subtitled ‘In Search of the Middle Way’ – as you will see, finding a middle way between nihilism and eternalism in our approach to the Dharma is a recurring theme.

Roots in ‘original Buddhism’

The doctrines we will be exploring are usually regarded as specifically belonging to the later, Mahayana stage of Buddhism. But none of these ideas is really a new teaching, different from the teaching of the historical Buddha. All these teachings have their roots in what we might call original Buddhism, and to a greater or lesser extent we can find evidence for them in the

Pali Canon. In some cases the Mahāyāna Buddhists whose vision we will be exploring were reaffirming a way of looking at the world that seems to have been very much part of original Buddhism, but which had perhaps been lost sight of due to a dry literalistic approach to the Dharma among some later practitioners. In some cases they explored and elaborated these ideas, based on their own spiritual experience and practice, far beyond any of the recorded words of the Buddha, but in a way that we might speculate the Buddha would have welcomed. (After all he was only one man, and there was a limit to what he could express and pass on.) In some cases these later Buddhists perhaps took an idea too far, or interpreted it too literally, or gave it more emphasis than is always useful – you will have your own opinions about this as we proceed.

But it is important to realise that all of the ideas we will be exploring have their roots in original Buddhism. So before we launch into any of these specifically Mahāyāna expositions of the nature of existence, we need to ground ourselves in early Buddhism – we need to look at their roots in the teaching of the historical Buddha, in order to understand how they grew and flowered in later Buddhist traditions. This is what we will be doing in this first session of the module.

Pratītya Samutpāda

The central concept that the Buddha used to try to convey his vision of reality was *pratītya samutpāda* (Sanskrit), or *paṭicca samuppāda* (Pāli). Sangharakshita normally translates this as ‘conditioned co-production’, but it has also been translated as ‘dependent co-arising’ and ‘dependent origination.’

Conditioned co-production is often equated with the chain of the Twelve Nidānas illustrated on the outer circle of the Wheel of Life, which shows how our past conditions the way we act in the present, and how this in turn conditions the nature of our experience in the future. Sangharakshita has also emphasised the Twelve Positive Nidānas of the Spiral Path, as an example of the positive working of conditioned co-production, which shows how we can escape from this vicious circle. These two nidāna chains are discussed in the Mitra Course module *Pratītya Samutpada: The Nature of Existence* in year 2 and in Part 4 of the Foundation Course. From the point of view of our day-to-day practice these are the most important aspects of conditioned co-production, as they describe the working of the karmic level of conditionality, which is our main working ground as Buddhist practitioners. But crucially important as these nidāna chains are, they are just two of the possible formulations of the detailed workings of *pratītya samutpāda* – and there are other, different nidāna chains in the Pāli Canon, which illustrate the workings of karma in a different way. *Pratītya samutpāda* itself is the general principle that underlies these different formulations, and which points to a vision of reality as it might be seen by an Enlightened being³.

The Buddha summarised this general principle in the following well-known words:

This being, that becomes; from the arising of this, that arises; this not being, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.⁴

This is a deceptively simple formula, which could be taken to mean something we all already know very well – that things come into existence when the causes for them are in place.

³ For a more in-depth discussion of this point, see *A Survey of Buddhism*, Sangharakshita, pp.108-18.

⁴ For example, *Majjhima Nikāya* 38.

Perhaps Ananda thought that this was all that the Buddha meant when he said, as the Pali Canon records:

Wonderful, lord, marvellous lord, is the depth of this causal law and how deep it appears. And yet I reckon it as ever so plain.

To which the Buddha replied:

Say not so, Ananda, say not so. Deep indeed is this causal law, and deep it appears.⁵

Elsewhere the Buddha describes this insight as

...hard to perceive, hard to understand, calm, sublime, beyond logic, subtle, intelligible only to the wise.⁶

Because conditioned co-production is beyond logic and intelligible only to the wise, we can safely assume that if we think we understand it completely, as Ananda thought he did, we have got it wrong – or at least that we only see part of it. The idea that things come into existence because of causes, the commonsense principles of causality as we usually understand them, cannot be the whole of the Buddha's vision, for the simple reason that they are not beyond logic, and we, unwise as we are, can understand them very well. The Indians of the Buddha's time must also have understood them very well at the level of outer physical reality, or they could not have survived, let alone flourished as they did. It is virtually impossible to survive without this understanding, as without it the human ability to plan and reason is worthless. Indian society contained farmers who knew that to produce a crop they needed to put the causes and conditions in place – they needed to sow good seed at the proper time, to prepare the soil in the right way, and to provide other conditions such as water, manure, and protection from pests. Their society contained rulers who knew that to continue ruling they must put certain conditions in place, such as a good flow of tax revenue, a loyal band of followers, an army to keep order and protect their borders, and good relationships with their neighbours. If they had relied on spells and omens to produce their crops and maintain their kingdoms, they would quickly have died out.

So we can safely assume that the Indians of the Buddha's day were aware of the principles of causation and conditionality as they applied to such commonsense matters as these. But the Buddha extended these principles to show how they also operated in the inner world, in the psychological and spiritual dimensions of existence. This may have been a new idea to the people of his day, and in some senses it is likely to be a new idea to us too. We are used to thinking in terms of the physical and biological dimensions of existence affecting our inner world, the world of our thoughts, feelings and mental states. We are likely to try to improve our mental states by looking to outer things to make us feel happier. We may explain how meditation works by thinking that it does so by changing the working of the physical brain – by inducing certain patterns of brainwaves, uniting the left and right hemispheres, or whatever. If we feel depressed we may ask a doctor for a pill to change the chemistry of our brain. We are used to thinking that the material world – as it were – comes *before* the world of consciousness, and in one way or another causes and influences our consciousness and our mental states. But we are much less used to thinking of things happening the other way around, and of the inner world of our thoughts and feelings conditioning the outer world. And

⁵ *Mahānidāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 15.*

⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya II 36.*

in the Buddha's vision of conditioned co-production the inner world and the outer world are inseparably interrelated – they are two sides of the same coin.

The Pāli Canon makes it clear that in the world of conditioned co-production there is no question of the material world coming *before* the phenomena of consciousness and causing it – or indeed vice versa. The material world and consciousness arise together, they arise simultaneously, and they depend on each other. For example in a sutta called the *Sheaves of Reeds*, Śāriputra, said to be the wisest of the Buddhas disciples, explains this to another monk in the following way:

Very well then, Kotthita my friend, I will give you an analogy; for there are cases where it is through the use of an analogy that intelligent people can understand the meaning of what is being said. It is as if two sheaves of reeds were to stand leaning against one another. In the same way, from name-and-form as a requisite condition comes consciousness, from consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form... If one were to pull away one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall; if one were to pull away the other, the first one would fall.⁷

Name-and-form includes what we would call the physical body, and we are told that this does not precede and cause consciousness, and nor does consciousness precede and cause it – the two as it were lean on each other, like two sheaves of reeds. The two depend on each other – they mutually co-arise.

This is probably not at all easy for us to understand at first, because most of us have been strongly conditioned to think that matter gives rise to consciousness. We have also been strongly conditioned to think in terms of one thing preceding and causing another, rather than of things mutually conditioning each other and arising together. This illustrates the fact that the Buddha's vision of pratītya samutpāda is not the same as our commonsense ideas about how things happen because of causes and conditions, which we regularly apply to manipulate outer things and situations in our daily lives. The Buddha's vision of pratītya samutpāda obviously includes and validates these commonsense ideas, as well as extending them into the realm of mental and spiritual processes. But clearly it is not contained by them – there is more to it than that.

Without thinking we have plumbed the depths of pratītya samutpāda, we can say that it seems to point towards a much more complex and holistic version of conditionality than our commonsense understanding. It seems to point towards a vision of the world as a constantly changing flux of interrelated mental and physical processes, which interact with each other and mutually condition each other in a way that is too complex for the human intellect to fully comprehend. It points to a world where things, beings, and mental states are more like eddies in a stream, which constantly interact with each other and keep each other in existence – rather than being separate, independent objects or events.

This vision has two major implications, which are drawn out and explored in the Madhyamaka philosophy and the *Prajñā-Pāramitā* sutras we will be exploring over the coming weeks. These are:

1. Anātman, or the absence of 'self nature' in anything.
2. The inability of language and concepts to describe reality.

⁷ *Samyutta Nikāya* 12.67.

These ideas form two essential links between the original Buddhism taught by the historical Buddha, and the Mahāyāna ways of looking at the world we will be exploring over the coming weeks.

Anātman

The Three Lakṣaṇas

One extension of the principle of pratītya samutpāda is the teaching of the Three Lakṣaṇas, or ‘marks’ of conditioned things. These follow inevitably from the concept of pratītya samutpāda, because any of the phenomena within the flux of conditioned coproduction – any ‘conditioned thing’ – must be as the lakṣaṇas describe. If reality consists of a flow of processes that depend on each other and mutually condition each other in an almost infinite number of ways, then the following must be true.

1. Any conditioned ‘thing’ must be impermanent, because conditioned coproduction is a constant process of change. Hence all ‘things’ within the flow of conditioned co-production must have the quality or ‘mark’ of impermanence – the lakṣaṇa of *anitya* (Skt.) or *anicca* (Pāli).
2. No conditioned ‘thing’ can be said to exist independently in its own right, because any phenomenon within the flux of conditioned coproduction is conditioned by a host of other phenomena, and depends on innumerable other phenomena and conditions for its existence. Hence all conditioned things have the lakṣaṇa of *anātman*, or non-self nature. So pratītya samutpāda does not just tell us that ‘all things change’, but also that there are no ‘things’ – there *is* only change.
3. And because all the ‘things’ within conditioned coproduction are transient, and lack the inherent qualities we attribute to them, they cannot be relied upon to give us the sort of real permanent satisfaction that we often look for from them. Hence they all are marked by the lakṣaṇa of *dukkha*, or, to use an ugly but accurate translation, ‘unsatisfactoriness’.

The Śūnyatā Samādhi

The most difficult of these three lakṣaṇas to grasp is the idea that within the entire process of conditioned co-production nothing exists in its own right, as a thing-in-itself. Although a premature attempt to experience *anātman* could be highly damaging, if we could really know the fact of *anātman*, in our bones, and apply it to ourselves – and if this was combined with a strong foundation of integration and positive emotion – we would be freed from the prison of our egocentricity, into an expansive world of relatedness. If we could penetrate to the depths of *anātman*, it would become a Dharma-door to liberation. The *samādhi*, or higher level of consciousness, which we are traditionally said to enter if we fully penetrate the *lakṣaṇa* of *anātman* is called the *śūnyatā samādhi*, which Sangharakshita describes as:

...the state of full and complete realization of the nature of existence, which cannot be put into words.⁸

Meditations on Anātman

The Pāli canon contains many reflections and meditations intended to help practitioners to move towards a vision of *anātman*, most of which focus on the fact that we ourselves do not exist as unchanging, separate, independent beings. Many of these reflections and meditations involve analysing our experience in different ways into its component parts, and then

⁸ *Vision and Transformation*, Sangharakshita, p148.

reflecting that none of these parts can be called a self, and that what we usually call a self is nothing other than the collection of these parts.

1. The skandhas

One of the most common ways the Buddha analyses our experience in the Pāli Canon is in terms of the five *skandhas* (literally 'heaps'), which are:

- Form (*rūpa*) – the 'external' apparently solid aspect of our experience, from which we deduce the idea of matter.
- Feeling (*vedanā*) – the sense of pleasure or discomfort/irritation that accompanies each of our experiences, which has been called their 'hedonic tone'.
- Perception (*saṃjñā*) – our labeling and recognition of different aspects of our experience.
- Volitions (*saṃskāra*).
- Consciousness (*viññāna*).

These skandhas can be seen as completely summing up our experience of the world. In a number of suttas in the Pāli Canon the Buddha asks us to reflect on this fact, and to reflect that none of the skandhas is what we call our 'self', but that there could be no 'self' apart from the skandhas. Sometimes He asks us to reflect that each of the skandhas is constantly changing. Our form or *rūpa* appears to change least of all, but change it does. Biology tells us that our body is changing all the time, as old cells die and new ones are formed, and the constituents of these cells change constantly. But even at the gross level our form changes over time. We look quite different now from the way we looked as a child, and we will look very different again when we are older. If our form is the self, then has our old self gone away when our form changes, and a new one arisen? In which case how can we call it a lasting self? And if this is true of our form, how much more true is it of our mental processes, which the other four skandhas deal with, and which change almost from one moment to the next?

At other times the Buddha invites us to reflect that anything which can justly be called the self would be under our control, and would not cause us suffering against our will. He then asks us to think about each skandha, to reflect that it is not under our control, and that it does in fact cause us suffering against our will. With regard to the skandha of form for example, he points out that we do not have full power over 'our' body. We cannot make it larger or more handsome. We cannot stop it getting ill. We cannot stop it ageing. And because of this it causes us suffering against our will, in a way that nothing which we could rightly call 'myself' would do. In the same way he points out that we do not control our feelings, and that these also cause us suffering in a way that nothing worth the name of 'self' would do. And so on for the other skandhas.

So the Buddha uses the concept of the skandhas as a way to help us to see through our idea that we have what we normally think of as a 'self'. The list of the skandhas is essentially a tool to help us do this, not a technical description of what a human being is – it is an aid to reflection and meditation, and the Buddha also uses other classifications as tools for a similar purpose. For example he also asks us to divide up our experience in terms of the six senses - the five physical senses plus the mind - with their different sense organs, sense fields, and sense objects, and again he asks us to hunt for anything that we might rightly call a 'self' in the eighteen aspects that this gives rise to.

2. The dharma theory

After the Buddha's Parinirvāṇa some even more elaborate ways of analysing our experience developed, in what is called the Abhidharma tradition – the name means something like 'about the Dharma'. This tradition came to form an important part of the more conservative schools such as the Theravāda, which the later Mahāyāna lumped together as the Hīnayāna. The Abhidharma analysis divided the world and our experience into a number of 'dharma's' (usually written with a lower-case 'd', to distinguish them from the Dharma itself.) These hundred-or-so dharmas (different schools had different numbers) were again intended to cover the whole range of our experience, and most of them referred to mental events. The dharmas were seen as momentary phenomena that came into existence in dependence on what had gone before, and then vanished in an instant to be replaced by others.

It seems clear that the original aim of the analysis of experience into dharmas was similar to that of the skandhas – it provided a more comprehensive way of analysing our experience into changing, impersonal components, which could be used in meditation to change our vision of reality, and to deconstruct our idea of a 'self'. We can imagine that if we trained ourselves through disciplined meditation to see ourselves and the world around us as a constantly changing combination of instantaneous dharmas, flashing into existence for a moment and then dissolving into others, our view of ourselves would change dramatically. We would see ourselves and everything around us as more like a flickering image than a solid entity – perhaps like the forms produced by a film projector, which have no real substance of their own, but are an illusion produced by a quick succession of changing images. We would see ourselves as a succession of impersonal elements, and have no need to invoke the idea of a solid self. This could be a terrifying prospect – if we had not already developed a strong basis of integration and positive emotion we can imagine that the result might be the disintegration of our personality, rather than a creative Insight. But, with the proper preparation, no doubt meditating in this way could have the effect of dissolving our idea of a self, and opening up the possibility of the śūnyatā samādhi, the liberating vision of anātman.

The inability of language and concepts to describe reality

Along with the idea of anātman, the second great implication of pratītya samutpāda that is explored in the Madhyamaka philosophy we will look at next week, is the fact that the world we live in cannot be grasped and pinned down by the concepts of the rational, discursive mind, or by language, which is its main tool.

We have seen that the principle of pratītya samutpāda tells us that reality does not consist of a collection of separate, independent things and beings, connected by simple chains of cause and effect - which is the way we normally see it. This normal way of seeing things is embedded in the structure of our language, which divides the world into separate nouns that do simple things to other nouns, as in the sentence, "Jack crashes the car." Our language both reflects and conditions the way we think about the world, but because language does not reflect the reality of pratītya samutpāda, any ideas about the nature of things that we reach by reasoning with this language cannot be true in the absolute sense, because the very structure of the way we think when using language falsifies the nature of reality.

The Buddha does not talk about this inadequacy of language directly, but he refers to it in a number of ways. He tells us that his teaching is, "beyond the realm of words." He indicates that some questions framed in words are simply unanswerable. And he tells us that the sort of word-based views and opinions about the nature of things that religions and philosophies put forward cannot help us to see things as they are, and are in fact fetters.

Unanswerable questions

There are many instances in the Pāli Canon where the Buddha tries to indicate to his hearers that the questions they are asking do not make sense, apparently because the language of the question does not reflect the way things are. Over and over again someone puts a question to the Buddha which, from the Buddha's Enlightened point of view, makes no sense and cannot be answered. For example when someone asks him, "Does an Enlightened being continue to exist after death?" the Buddha replies that:

- They do not continue to exist,
- They do not cease to exist,
- They do not *both* continue to exist *and* cease to exist,
- They do not *neither* continue to exist *nor* cease to exist.

Other questions, such as whether the world is eternal or not, and whether the soul and the body are the same thing or not, all get the same treatment. What the Buddha seems to be doing here is saying that these questions cannot be answered, because from the Enlightened viewpoint they do not really make sense. He may also be implying that any answer framed in words which his hearers could understand would be false and misleading. The words that are used to frame the questions, or the words he could use to frame the answers, imply certain assumptions about the world that are not true. Perhaps it is a little like asking, "Where is the end of the rainbow?", or, "Would our house survive if the sky were to fall?" Both questions assume that because there is a word for something there is a real 'thing' that is designated by the word. But in fact 'rainbow' and 'sky' are not independent things, they are just convenient designations for phenomena that are produced by conditions, and depend on our perceptions for any reality they may have.

Views as fetters

There are several instances in the Pāli Canon where the Buddha says that the Enlightened being is beyond the sort of views that can be expressed in language. For example in the Sutta Nipāta he tells a householder called Magandiya:

There are no ties to him who is free from ideas, there are no delusions to him who is delivered by wisdom. Those who grasp ideas and views, wander about coming into conflict with the world.⁹

In his discourse with a wanderer called Vacchagotta he talks about:

...a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views... accompanied by suffering, distress, despair, & fever...¹⁰

He then goes on to say that such views do not lead "To calm, direct knowledge, full Awakening, Unbinding." The Buddha seems to be saying that our non-enlightened ideas about the world, based as they usually are on the faulty structure of language, do not explain reality, but stand between us and reality, veiling it from our eyes.

No views, or right views?

But at the same time as telling us that views are fetters, and that his own Insight is beyond words and logic, the Buddha placed Right View (which Sangharakshita translates as Perfect

⁹ Sutta Nipāta 847.

¹⁰ Majjhima Nikāya 72.

Vision) at the start of the Noble Eightfold Path, and on a number of occasions he stresses the importance of right view if we are going to get anywhere with the spiritual life. For example in the Majjhima Nikāya he says:

And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong view as wrong view, and right view as right view... One tries to abandon wrong view & to enter into right view: This is one's right effort. One is mindful to abandon wrong view & to enter & remain in right view: This is one's right mindfulness. Thus these three qualities — right view, right effort, and right mindfulness, run around and circle around right view.¹¹

And elsewhere, in the *Anguttara Nikāya* he says:

When a person has right view... whatever bodily deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever verbal deeds, whatever mental deeds he undertakes in line with that view, whatever intentions, whatever vows, whatever determinations, whatever fabrications, all lead to what is agreeable, pleasing, charming, profitable, & easeful. Why is that? Because the view is auspicious.¹²

So the Buddha seems to be saying that all views are fetters, at the same time as stressing the need for right view. How can we make sense of this paradox? This is one of the areas we will be exploring next week, when we explore the Madhyamaka, or 'Middle Way' philosophy championed by Nāgārjuna – one of the truly great figures in the development of Buddhist thought, who is often described as the second Buddha.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Do you tend to think that physical matter (in the form of the brain and nervous system) gives rise to consciousness? Do you find it difficult to think in any other way? (Most of us do.) In what ways do the Twelve Nidānas not fit in with this idea? Find some links in the chain that seem to go the other way – i.e. where consciousness seems to condition the outer world of our experience – and discuss these with the group.
2. The Three Lakkṣaṇas are usually seen as negative aspects of conditioned existence. Can you see any positive sides to impermanence and lack of self-nature?
3. Have you made the teaching of the skandhas your own? The Five Skandhas are a list that will crop up over and over again during this module, and you need to be thoroughly familiar with it. Be prepared to give a short presentation on the skandhas to the rest of the group if asked.
4. Do you think the skandhas completely cover the whole range of our experience? Try to think of some other ways of dividing up and analysing ourselves and our world, and tell the group about any you come up with.
5. Try reflecting on the skandhas this week as part of your meditation practice, in the way that the Buddha recommends. Reflect on each skandha in turn, seeing its changeable nature, the

¹¹ *Majjhima Nikāya* 117.

¹² *Anguttara Nikāya* 10.103.

way it is beyond your control, and the way it causes you suffering. Tell the group about any effects this has.

6. Do you understand the idea of *anātman* at the intellectual level? Does it seem convincing to you?
7. Do you like or loathe the idea that you do not have a lasting, independent self? Or is your response something in between? Tell the group how you feel about this teaching, and why.
8. In what ways could the idea of *anātman* be liberating? In what ways could it be dangerous? Do you think it would be a spiritually useful idea for you at the moment, at your present stage on the spiritual path?
9. Can you think of ways in which the ideas or 'views' of Buddhism have affected the way you live since you started practicing? Have they had a positive or negative effect? Do you think you would benefit by abandoning such views as 'fetters'?

Introduction

Sometime after about 100 BCE – which is to say three or four centuries after the death of the Buddha, and at about the same time that the Pāli Canon began to be written down – a type of Mahāyāna texts began to appear, which were given the name of Prajñā-Pāramitā Sūtras – discourses on the Perfection of Wisdom. Examples of such Prajñā-Pāramitā texts include the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñā-Pāramitā*, or *Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*, the *Heart Sūtra*, and the *Diamond Sūtra*. In his book, *The Eternal Legacy*, Sangharakshita suggests that these sūtras spring from an oral tradition dating back to the time of the Buddha.

The Prajñā-Pāramitā sūtras are written from the point of view of someone who sees the world as the Buddha described it – a world in which no thing and nobody has genuine existence, and in which the words we use to describe our experience do not point to anything that is ultimately real. They shift back and forth from this transcendental perspective to our usual point of view, playing with language to create a series of baffling contradictions and paradoxes. They are almost impossible to understand without some explanation.

Hearing a Prajñā-Pāramitā Sūtra such as the Heart Sūtra that we recite in the pūjā may give us an intuitive sense that something deep and important is being said, but those of us who like to have some intellectual grasp of the meaning of what we are hearing will want some clarification. This clarification was provided by one of the most important figures in the history of Buddhist thought, the great Nāgārjuna, whom some people have spoken of as a second Buddha. Nāgārjuna and his followers established what is called the Madhyamaka school – the Middle Way, or literally just ‘Middling’.

The Madhyamaka used language and logic to show the limits of language and logic, with the intention of leading us – not to a state of sub-rational stupidity - but to a trans-rational state in which we can use language and logic, while seeing through it to the mysterious and miraculous reality that it usually hides.

Nāgārjuna, Madhyamaka philosophy, and the Prajñā-Pāramitā sūtras

Nāgārjuna seems to have lived in Southern India, and to have been active sometime around 150 CE. We do not know many hard facts about him, but in Buddhist myth his name is closely linked to the Prajñā-Pāramitā Sūtras. It is said that these were guarded by the Nāgas, serpent-like beings who lived in the depths of the ocean. The Nāgas had preserved these teachings from the days of the Buddha, having been told not to release them until humankind was ready for them. When the time was ripe the Nāgas gave the original Prajñā-Pāramitā text to Nāgārjuna, who is sometimes shown in art as sitting on a raft, being given a book by a Nāga maiden. In *The Eternal Legacy* Sangharakshita suggests that the so-called Nāgas may have been a group of

practitioners who had preserved an oral tradition from the time of the Buddha. Alternatively he says that perhaps the story is meant:

...to be taken quite literally, and that the Prajñā-Pāramitā teachings actually were preserved on a plane that does not coincide with any geographical locale by a group of spiritually gifted non-human beings.¹³

Whether or not either explanation is literally true; the idea that these teachings were hidden ‘in the depths’ until human beings were ready for them has a clear mythic significance in its own right. Having been given these teachings – by whatever means – Nāgārjuna then went on to make good use of them. As Sangharakshita says in his *A Survey of Buddhism*:

After studying this profound teaching and realising its truth for himself, Nāgārjuna decided that, in order to counteract... the growing literalism and scholasticism of the Hīnayāna, the time had come for them to be made public. He therefore propagated the Prajñā-Pāramitā Sutras and composed a number of original works on its teaching. For this service, by means of which the true interpretation of the Buddha’s Teaching was preserved for humanity, Nāgārjuna may well be regarded as the Second Founder of Buddhism.¹⁴

Nāgārjuna’s original works, which explore and elucidate the meaning of the Prajñā- Pāramitā sutras, formed the basis for the Madhyamaka school, which came to have a profound influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the *Survey* Sangharakshita says that, “The teaching of Nāgārjuna is in substance identical with that of the Prajñā-Pāramitā sutras.” Because the Madhyamaka teachings give us a logical framework we can discuss – which the sutras generally do not – we will focus mainly on these this week. This will prepare us for an encounter with some actual extracts from the Prajñā- Pāramitā sutras in weeks 3 and 4 of this module.

Śūnyatā

Śūnyatā, which means literally ‘emptiness’, is a key word in the Madhyamaka. It is used to point to the indefinable quality of things when they are seen as they are, as aspects of pratītya samutpāda. In Nāgārjuna’s words:

It is dependent origination [pratītya-samutpāda] that we call emptiness [śūnyatā].¹⁵

The Buddha uses the Pāli word *suññata* in just a few places in the Pāli Canon, but for Nāgārjuna and his fellow Madhyamikas the word took on a new importance. For them *śūnyatā* combines both of the implications of the Buddha’s teaching of pratītya samutpāda that we looked at last week – *anātman*, or the lack of self-nature in phenomena, and the inadequacy of words and concepts to describe the nature of things. We will look at each of these two aspects of *śūnyatā* in turn, to explore how Nāgārjuna and his fellow Madhyamikas – as the followers of the Madhyamaka are called – developed and unfolded these original teachings of the Buddha.

Śūnyatā as lack of self- nature

For Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamikas one important reason that all things are said to be *śūnya*, or empty, is because they lack a self, and they did an important service for the Dharma by

13 *The Eternal Legacy*, Sangharakshita, p135.

14 *A Survey of Buddhism*, Sangharakshita, p341.

15 *Madhyamaka-kārikā* Ch24:18.

clarifying exactly what was meant by this. After all, a reasonable response to the statement that, “All things lack a self.” is to ask what, exactly, we mean by a ‘self’.

The Madhyamikas reasoned that to have what we can really call a self, a phenomenon or thing must have its own defining characteristics, its own innate quality. It should have ‘own-nature’, ‘own-being’ or *svabhāva* in Sanskrit. *Svabhāva* could perhaps be translated as ‘essence’. For something to have ‘own-being’, its qualities must be entirely its own, rather than resulting from other things. In other words they must be innate to the thing itself, and independent of the other things it is in relationship with. To take a trivial example as an illustration: if Fred is good natured with his friends, but angry and irritable with his parents, neither his good nature nor his irritability can be said to really belong intrinsically to Fred. Neither quality is inherent in Fred’s essence or ‘own-nature’, because Fred might be either at different times.

The Madhyamikas also argued that for a thing to have *svabhāva* or ‘own-being’, its characteristics must stay the same – really this is just another way of saying what we have already said. Fred is with his friends and his parents at different times, so sometimes he is angry, and later he is sweet. Again neither seems to be part of Fred’s own essential nature, which surely would not change - if he had one.

The Madhyamikas then went on to show that nothing in conditioned existence can possibly have *svabhāva*, or ‘own-nature’, so that nothing can have a self – at least of the sort they had defined. This of course follows inexorably from the Buddha’s teaching of *pratītya samutpāda* and the Three *Lakṣaṇas*. All things depend on a host of conditions for their existence, and – like Fred – their characteristics are influenced by the conditions they are in. Hence their qualities are not their own, and therefore they have no self as defined by Nāgārjuna. And of course all things are also impermanent, their qualities and attributes change over time, so that again these cannot be an inherent and essential part of the thing itself. Again their characteristics cannot be part of any *svabhāva*, or own-nature, so from this point of view also, things do not really have a self.

It could be argued that what Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamikas did here was simply to define a self in a way that guaranteed that nothing could be said to have one. This may be true, but at least we now know what we mean when we say that all things lack a self. We mean very precisely that nothing has an innate, independent self, which is not influenced by the things and events around it. And we mean that nothing has a fixed, unchanging self, which stays the same forever. Things and people may still have a self that is brought into being, supported and modified by conditions; and they may still have a self that changes over time. But they do not have an independent, unchanging self.

As well as defining what we mean by lack of self, Nāgārjuna and his fellow Madhyamikas also produced some powerful logical arguments to help us to see that our usual idea of a self is a mere fiction. One such argument uses the technique of analysing things into their separate parts, and then asking us to find the self among these parts – which we saw that the Buddha also used. An example of how the Madhyamikas developed this technique can be found in Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Śāntideva was a follower of the Madhyamaka philosophy, and in the condensed version of his great work used in the Dharma training Course, the argument that we human beings lack a self runs as follows. First he deals with 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, and then these atoms too can be broken down, until we are just left with empty space. 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?¹⁶

Then he deals with the mind:

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.¹⁷

Apparently neither the body nor the mind can be a self. So where is it? It cannot exist! Śāntideva illustrates his argument by the analogy of the trunk of a banana tree. What we think of as the trunk of a banana tree is in fact just a collection of leaf-sheaths wrapped around each other. If you hunt for the heartwood of the trunk by breaking off the leaves, you are left with empty space.

Śūnyatā as the inconceivability of things

The other important aspect of the Madhyamaka idea of *śūnyatā*, which is closely related to absence of self-nature, is that the phenomena of the world, and the nature of reality itself, cannot be described in words or captured and explained by our concepts. The nature of things cannot be conceived by the mind – that is, we cannot form a concept of them that captures their reality – so they are literally inconceivable. Not only are all things empty of self-nature, but all our ideas about them are empty of absolute truth.

We saw last week that the inadequacy of language to describe reality seems to be implied by the Buddha's vision of *pratītya samutpāda*. The structure of language takes for granted that the world consists of a collection of separate things we can name, which have certain qualities, and which act on each other in fairly simple ways. This simplification of the world is very useful for practical purposes, but it ignores some important facts about reality – namely *pratītya samutpāda* and the *lakṣaṇas*. Because the structure of language does not reflect reality, language cannot fully convey the nature of things, and the ideas about the world that we express in language are all, to some degree, false and misleading. So we saw that the Buddha refused to answer certain questions, because any answer he could give would be out of tune with reality. We also saw that he described the sort of views and opinions that can be expressed in words as 'fetters.'

Nāgārjuna took this idea and explored it to the full. He claimed that any viewpoint about the world expressed in language could be refuted using logical arguments that are acceptable to the person who holds it, and he applied his method to many of the philosophical views that were around at his time. In doing this he used types of formal logic that may not always seem obvious to us, and we do not have the space here to explore his technique. But within the rules of logic accepted by himself and his opponents, he showed that any view about the world can be reduced to absurdity.

16 From the condensed text used in *Week 8, Module 7 of Year 4*, on the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

17 Ibid.

We do not have to know about Nāgārjuna's logical techniques to see the point of what he is saying, and to see that it makes sense. Using words to show the absurdity of reasoning with words, he shows that words like cause and effect, mind and body, self and other, existence and non-existence, all point to ideas in our minds - mere mental constructions - and not to anything that has absolute reality. His analysis therefore solves the puzzle of why the Buddha refused to say whether the mind and body were the same or different, and why he would not say whether he would exist or not exist after death. And if cause and effect are just mental constructions we impose on reality, then we can see why Śāriputra used the analogy of two sheaves of reeds leaning on each other to illustrate the relationship between the links in the nidāna chain: neither one of any pair of links is really the cause or the effect – they arise together.

Nāgārjuna claimed to have no view of his own – his purpose was purely to show that all the views that anybody else could come up with were riddled with inconsistencies. For Nāgārjuna all our views about the world are based on vikalpa and prapañca, or 'false discrimination' and 'mental proliferation'. Vikalpa leads us to divide the process of pratītya samutpāda up into arbitrary parts, which we give names – which some Prajñā-Pāramitā sutras call 'mere play-words.' We then assume that these play- words point to something real, with their own inherent qualities that are either desirable or undesirable. And we then reason on this basis – prapañca – building completely false conceptual constructions, mere castles in the air, based on our arbitrary entities and their imaginary qualities. And then, to cap it all, we get lost in this world of verbal fictions and mental constructs, experiencing craving for the imagined qualities of this or that car, computer, shirt, or person, or getting anxious and upset about such imaginary things as success, fashionability, reputation, approval, security, wealth, fairness, our rights, and other people's wrongs. And meanwhile, while we are living in this world of mental proliferation in our heads, we forget to experience the miraculous, beautiful reality that is there in front of our noses.

Nāgārjuna's deconstruction of our imaginary world of concepts can be like the sword of wisdom, cutting away the layers of prapañca to allow us to get back to what is real. We can use it to get back to experiencing the world as it is – in the words of the Buddha to the ascetic Bahiya, we can use it to experience:

In the seen, only the seen. In the heard, only the heard. In the imagined, only the imagined.¹⁸

We could liken our ideas about the world to maps that we use to find our way around. They are useful for practical purposes, but they can never really convey the reality they represent. If we walk round Paris, say, focussing our attention on our map of the city rather than the reality, we will miss everything that makes our visit worthwhile – the actual sights, sounds, smells and tastes of the city. In the same way, if we go through life with our attention focussed on our maps of reality – our ideas about it – rather than on reality itself, we can never see things as they are.

Even the Dharma is empty!

Nāgārjuna applied his technique for deconstructing all views to our commonsense view of the world, and to the main philosophical and religious views of his time. But he did not stop there. He even applied his technique to the concepts that Buddhism uses to communicate the Dharma, deconstructing ideas like the Four Noble Truths, the Five Skandhas, the *kleśas*,

¹⁸ *Udāna 1.10.*

Nirvana, and even *pratitya samutpāda* itself. To take one example, the *skandhas* such as form and feeling do not exist in their own right, as things-in-themselves, separate from other things, any more than any other element of the world. They are also arbitrary categorisations based on *vikalpa*, mere play-words. We could easily think of other ways of dividing up our experience, and indeed both the Buddha and later Buddhists did this. So the *skandhas* are just labels that do not point to anything with absolute existence. And consequently any theories or reflections based on the *skandhas* are just further examples of imaginary conceptual constructions – they are just more castles-in-the-air. Nāgārjuna also pointed out that words like wisdom, faith, or purity, which are part of the way we think about the spiritual path, do not point to qualities that exist in their own right, because any meaning that they have is completely relative, and depends on comparison with their opposite. To quote Nāgārjuna on purity and impurity, as just one example:

Impurity cannot exist without being mutually dependent on purity and ... in turn purity exists only as related to impurity. Therefore purity as such is not possible.¹⁹

Nāgārjuna's most devastating attack against literalism in Buddhism was reserved for the dharma theory we discussed last week. We saw that the Buddha used the idea of the *skandhas* as a reflection to help people deconstruct their idea of having a fixed self. We also saw that later Buddhists refined this idea, dividing our experience into many 'dharma's', or constituents of existence. Reflecting on our 'self' as being a temporary, changing conglomeration of such momentary impersonal dharma's, which flash into existence and then vanish immediately, could be a powerful way of changing the way we see ourselves, doing away with the idea of a self. But over time, as Buddhism lost touch with its original inspiration and became more and more bogged down in literalism and scholarship, the dharma theory stopped being a tool to help us experience a glimpse of *anātman*, and become an end in itself. The arbitrary lists of dharma's took on their own importance. It was argued that the dharma's were a real description of the way things are, and that each of the dharma's had its own essential quality or *svabhāva*. Even if the things and beings that make up our commonsense map of the world did not have *svabhāva*, the dharma's did have such 'own nature'.

For Nāgārjuna this idea that the dharma's had *svabhāva* and provided a real picture of reality was a nonsense. The division of our experience into dharma's was just another example of *vikalpa* – useful if we see through it to the reality beyond, but poisonous otherwise. Clearly the lists of dharma's are arbitrary – after all, different schools had different numbers of dharma's, and divided up experience in slightly different ways. And most of the dharma's are just relative qualities that depend on their opposites for existence, so they have no absolute existence of their own, as we saw is the case for purity and impurity. Although the dharma theory may help us to see the truth of *anātman* as it relates to ourselves, it does not go the whole way. If we live in a world as seen through the lens of the *skandhas* or the dharma theory we will still be living in a conceptually constructed world. We will be seeing an idea about reality, rather than reality itself. To see the world as it is, we need to see not only that we ourselves lack self-nature, but also that the dharma's lack self-nature – there is no self-nature to be found anywhere. Mahāyāna Buddhists adopted this idea of *dharma-nairātmya* – the absence of self in dharma's – as a feature of their movement that distinguished them from the more literalistic followers of the so-called Hīnayāna, who accepted only the more limited *pudgala-nairātmya*, or absence of self in persons.

19 Quoted in *The Great Way*, Eric Cheetham, p.178.

Nāgārjuna even turned his attention to pratītya samutpāda itself - or at least to the naive and literalistic interpretation of it as mere cause-and-effect. Nāgārjuna argued that our usual ideas of one thing causing or producing another do not reflect anything real. His argument runs something like this:

Take the case in which we usually think that A gives rise to B. There are two possibilities about the relationship between A and B, as follows:

1. A and B are not really separate.
2. A and B are separate and independent.

In the first case we cannot really say that A gives rise to B, because they are both just different aspects of the same thing. In the second case, if A and B are separate things they each have a distinct 'own-being' or svabhāva. However if B is caused by A it is not independent – its existence depends on A – therefore it cannot have svabhāva. As we saw earlier, for something to exist as a thing-in-itself, its existence and its qualities must be innate, and not dependent on something else. So the idea that one independent thing could give rise to another is absurd. Nāgārjuna summed this argument up as follows:

Certainly a oneness of cause and product is not possible at all. Nor is a difference of cause and product possible at all.

In other words, if the cause and the effect are interdependent aspects of the same phenomenon – 'a oneness' – then there is no real cause and effect; while if the effect is independent of the cause – 'a difference' – the idea that it is caused by something else contradicts the very idea of its independence.

As Sangharakshita says in his *Survey of Buddhism*:

Nāgārjuna does not shrink from the conclusion that if causation is unreal the pratītya samutpāda is also unreal... The Hīnayānists had interpreted the Buddha's Conditioned Co-production as the temporal sequence... of ultimately real entities between which real causal relations obtained. In the interests of the correct interpretation of the Dharma Nāgārjuna showed that the pratītya samutpāda taught not a real causal relation between entities but their mutual dependence, hence their lack of independent selfhood, and that it consisted... not of realities, as the Hīnayānists thought, but only of appearances. Consisting as it did entirely of appearances the pratītya samutpāda was itself merely an appearance... it could not be said to exist, or not exist, or both, or neither.

Consequently it was to be equated with śūnyatā. In this way did the dialectic of Nāgārjuna, by exposing the contradictions inherent in the Buddhist doctrines themselves when taken literally, serve as a reminder of the supremely important fact that these doctrines... possessed not absolute but only relative reality, and were not ends in themselves, but only means to an end... By shattering the hard shell of literalism in which Buddhism was then imprisoned Nāgārjuna not only saved it from suffocation and probable death, but also gave it room for future development.²⁰

20 *A Survey of Buddhism*, Sangharakshita, p.347.

The vision of śūnyatā...

Emptiness is a very bad word for *śūnyatā* – it carries too many negative connotations to do justice to the idea. We might do better to translate *śūnyatā* as ‘The Mystery’, because it should remind us that we do not really understand existence, and point us towards the wonder of the world we live in, which our small commonsense ideas usually hide. To say, ‘all things are The Mystery’ probably gets us closer to the intended effect than the apparently nihilistic ‘all things are Emptiness.’ The vision of *śūnyatā* is one of connectedness, openness, and infinite potential – so that perhaps even ‘fullness’ would be a better translation than emptiness. The historical Buddha himself – who was not averse to a joke – seems to make this point in his *Lesser Sutra on Emptiness*, when he tells Ananda that “...through dwelling on emptiness I now experience abundance”.

The Madhyamaka vision, that sees that all things are *śūnyatā* because they lack a fixed nature and cannot be grasped by our intellect, could liberate us from our mind-made prisons into a world of wonder, mystery, and infinite potential. A correct vision of *śūnyatā* could free us into the world of reality-as-it-is, the world that cannot be described, so that the Prajñā Pāramitā sutras had to invent a nonsense word to point to the inconceivable, magical quality of everything within it – ‘Suchness’, or just the way things are. In the words of S Beyer:

The metaphysics of the Prajñā-Pāramitā is in fact the metaphysics of the vision and the dream: a universe of glittering and quicksilver change is precisely one that can only be described as empty. The vision and the dream become the tools we use to dismantle the hard categories that we impose on reality, to reveal the eternal flowing possibility in which the Bodhisattva lives.²¹

...and the dangers

But although the intention of the Madhyamaka philosophy is to free us from what William Blake calls our ‘mind-forged manacles’ into such a universe of ‘eternal flowing possibility’, it could have exactly the opposite effect. Nāgārjuna himself recognised that his teachings could be very dangerous to the spiritually immature; in his words:

A wrongly conceived *śūnyatā* can ruin a slow-witted person... It is like a badly seized snake, or a wrongly executed spell.²²

The two main dangers of what Nāgārjuna calls a “slow-witted” understanding of the Madhyamaka philosophy are:

- The danger of nihilism – if we use Nāgārjuna’s logic to deconstruct the ethical and spiritual values that give life meaning, so that we end up in a meaningless, nihilistic universe.
- The danger of jumping off the raft of the Dharma before we have reached the further shore – if Nāgārjuna’s critique of a literalistic approach to the teachings of Buddhism undermines our commitment to Buddhist practices and ‘right views’, such as the precepts, the Eightfold Path and so on.

The danger of nihilism

Both the Madhyamaka philosophy and the Dharma itself are often referred to as the ‘Middle Way’, and one important aspect of this is that they offer a middle way between eternalism and nihilism. Eternalism is the belief in eternal unchanging entities, especially God and an eternal

²¹ Quoted in *Mahayana Buddhism*, Paul Williams, p.52.

²² Quoted in *The Great Way*, Eric Cheetham, p.198.

soul. Eternalists believe in some form of continued existence after death, and accept that there are higher truths and values which are always valid. *The Longman Dictionary* defines nihilism as: ‘a view that rejects all values and beliefs as meaningless and unfounded’, and: ‘a doctrine that rejects any basis for truth and moral values’. Nihilists do not believe in an eternal God or soul, and hold that the consciousness ceases at death.

It is easy to see why Nāgārjuna was accused of nihilism in his own day, and why he himself recognised that his philosophy carried the danger of nihilism for those who grasped it wrongly. His argument that any philosophical viewpoint can logically be shown to be contradictory would seem to reject any basis for truth or moral values, and force us to reject ‘all values and beliefs as meaningless and unfounded’. If Nāgārjuna had been writing in the context of the Western academic tradition, that is what his teachings would have meant. In the Western academic tradition, the truth is supposed to be arrived at by reasoning and logic, and a teaching that tells us that reasoning and logic cannot arrive at the truth would indeed mean that there is no truth we can arrive at, and that any values we adopted were therefore purely arbitrary. But Nāgārjuna was not writing in the Western tradition, he was writing in the Buddhist tradition, and in Buddhism intellectual reasoning and logical argument are not seen as the way we arrive at ultimate truth. According to the Dharma the way we arrive at the ultimate truth is by a direct meditative experience of the nature of things – by Transcendental Insight, and by the echo of Transcendental Insight that we call *śraddhā*. As we saw last week, the Buddha himself said that his Insight was ‘beyond logic’, and what Nāgārjuna is doing is reminding us of this fact, in case we are tempted to think that we can understand what Enlightenment means by mere reason, without having the direct spiritual experience that it emerges from. According to Buddhism our views about the world can never be seen as being absolutely true, so the important question is whether or not they are helpful for the spiritual life – whether they will help us to become the sort of being who can eventually experience the truth directly.

Nāgārjuna was not rejecting all values – as we shall see he strongly upheld the ordinary teachings of Buddhism. And we can get an idea of how his ideas were used in practice from the writing of a distinguished Madhyamaka such as Śāntideva – with his highly devotional attitude and his uncompromising commitment to the Bodhisattva Ideal, it is difficult to imagine a less nihilistic approach to life!

Madhyamaka and materialism

Many of Nāgārjuna’s contemporaries would have been strongly influenced by the eternalism of Hinduism, and needed to be reminded of the other side of the coin to get back to the Middle Way. But today most educated people in the West have been strongly influenced by materialism, which is a fundamentally nihilistic worldview, so we need to undermine our nihilism rather than our eternalism. For us the danger of interpreting Nāgārjuna in a nihilistic way is especially strong.

In the philosophical sense, materialism is the belief that matter is what is primary in the universe, and that matter, when arranged to form a brain, gives rise to consciousness as a sort of accidental by-product. Materialism goes along with a fundamentally nihilistic worldview, because in a random world of dead matter, higher spiritual or ethical values can have no real basis. According to the materialist view the consciousness must end forever with the death of the body. Most of us have been strongly conditioned to see the world through the lens of materialism, because it dominates our educational systems. We may not be consciously aware of our materialistic views, and if we are practicing the Dharma we will also have some

spiritual or ethical values that are incompatible with materialism, but which we hold anyway, probably without reflecting on the contradiction.

Those of us who are self-declared materialists, rather than just being unconsciously conditioned to see things in a materialistic way, are often strongly attracted to the Madhyamaka philosophy, because it deconstructs the ethical and spiritual values which a materialist will see no basis for. However the real value of Nāgārjuna's approach is that it allows us to see through our own worldview, not that of others. And if we are materialists it is important that we apply the Madhyamaka critique to our own way of seeing things, because the nihilism that goes along with materialism is destructive to the spiritual life. Nāgārjuna himself has said that it is better to have an eternalist viewpoint 'as large as Mount Meru' than to be a nihilist who does not believe in spiritual values. As Sangharakshita says in his Survey:

Much less can we agree that one who refuses to accept the existence of a transcendental Principle, whether in the Buddhist sense or any other, can ever hope to understand a doctrine whose sole concern is with the realization of such a principle.

He goes on to say that someone who believes in God might have a better chance of understanding the Dharma than a sceptical nihilist!²³

So we must beware of combining Madhyamaka with materialism, or we will get the worst of both worlds. For many of us the most useful thing we can do with Nāgārjuna's ideas is to apply them to the basically materialist worldview that we have been conditioned to accept. And it is easy to show that materialism is as absurd as any other view. The very word 'matter' is after all just an abstraction, another example of *vikalpa*, our tendency to divide experience up into arbitrary categories, which we then start to believe have some absolute existence. We might ask ourselves whether we have ever experienced this 'matter' as something separate from our awareness – which of course we have not. And what meaning does it have to abstract one aspect of experience from all the others, and pretend that it can exist on its own, like one side of a coin without the other? Clearly the 'matter' which the view of materialism sees as fundamental to the universe is just another play-word. And if, as Nāgārjuna claims to show, our idea of cause and effect is just another example of an imaginary mental construction, what meaning can it have to say that matter, in the form of a brain, somehow 'causes' consciousness? We might just as well say that consciousness causes the brain, or better, that the two 'lean on each other' like sheaves of reeds, as we are told that consciousness and name-and-form do in the *nidāna* chain.

Madhyamaka and the Dharma – the 'Two Truths'

We have seen that Nāgārjuna's deconstruction of all views even extended to the basic ideas of the Dharma. His intention in doing this was to combat the literalism that had infected Buddhism, and to get back to the Buddha's original meaning. The Buddha did not see the verbal teachings of the Dharma as the absolute truth – he described them as a raft to get us to the other shore, and told us we should leave the raft behind when we got there. In Nāgārjuna's time there seem to have been many people struggling to carry the raft up the muddy slopes of the further bank when they should be leaving it behind. Or worse, there seem to have been many people making a career of furnishing and decorating the raft while it was still firmly tied to the hither shore, with no intention of ever casting off. Nāgārjuna's teachings about the emptiness of the Dharma were intended for these people, to help them see the raft for what it

23 *A Survey of Buddhism*, Sangharakshita, p.36.

is, and to remind them of its purpose. But if we take his teaching to mean that the raft is worthless, and jump off in midstream, we will be showing ourselves to be, as Nāgārjuna puts it, one of the ‘slow-witted’ people whom a wrong understanding of śūnyatā can ruin.

Nāgārjuna seems to have been well aware of this danger. To counter it he distinguished two levels of truth, the absolute truth, and the relative or conventional truth. The absolute truth is the indescribable Way-Things-Are, which cannot be described in words or concepts, and cannot be arrived at by reasoning. The relative truth is the map of the world provided by the words and concepts we use to describe and explain it. The teachings of Buddhism are a particularly positive example of relative truth. They give us an unusually accurate and helpful description of reality, which we need as a guide in the same way that we need a trustworthy map to find our way around a strange city. In Nāgārjuna’s words:

The teaching of the Dharma by the various Buddhas is based on the Two Truths: the relative truth and the absolute truth. Those who do not know the distinction between these two truths cannot understand the profound nature of the Buddha’s teaching. Without relying on everyday common practices [relative truths] the absolute truth cannot be expressed.²⁴

This teaching makes sense of the apparent paradox mentioned last week – that the Buddha both stressed the need for Right View, and also said that a Buddha abandons all views. To return to the metaphor of views as maps, we need an accurate map to find the Arc de Triomphe, say, but when we get there we should look at the monument, and not at the map.

So at our stage of the path we must not abandon the relative truth of the teachings of Buddhism. Relative truth is also true – in a way! In the words of Lex Hixon in his book *The Mother of the Buddhas*:

This paradox means that we must uphold, protect and even exalt... relative structures, beings and events, no matter how insubstantial they are from the standpoint of absolute truth. Our own reincarnational careers as continuous mind streams, and the moral imperative of universal compassion... are founded not on some form of illusory existence. In fact, because it is the proper sphere of compassionate action, the relative becomes more prominent, more spiritually charged, than the absolute.²⁵



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What do you experience when you chant the Heart Sutra – one of the Prajñā Pāramitā sutras - in a pūjā? Do you understand what it is saying? If not, do you think it can still communicate something worthwhile to you?
2. What, in your own words, is the connection between pratītya samutpāda and śūnyatā?
3. Do you think you have a self? What sort of a self might you have, and what sort don’t you have?

24 Quoted in *The Great Way*, Eric Cheetham, p.192.

25 *Mother of the Buddhas – Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra*, Lex Hilton, p.10.

4. Which of the following do you think has the greatest claim to being a 'thing- in-itself'?
 - A cell in your body.
 - The organ it is part of and depends on – say your liver.
 - Your whole body which your liver is part of and depends on.
 - The mind-body complex that your body is part of and depends on.
 - The society and ecosystem that your mind-body is part of and depends on?
5. Why, in your own words, do the skandhas belong to the realm of relative, and not absolute truth? Can you explain why some other Buddhist teaching of your own choice is also relative truth?
6. Do you think you are more in danger of taking the teachings of Buddhism too literally, or of practicing them too half-heartedly?
7. Do you tend more towards nihilism or eternalism? What could you do to counteract this, and to regain the middle way?

Introduction

Over the next two weeks we will look at some excerpts from the Prajñā-Pāramitā sūtras. Prajñā-Pāramitā is usually translated as ‘The Perfection of Wisdom’. Prajñā means wisdom. *Pārama* means ‘supreme’, and because of this Pāramitā is often translated as perfect, or perfection. But *pāramitā* is sometimes also explained as ‘pāram’ + ‘itā’, ‘gone to the beyond’, indicating its transcendental nature. So Prajñā-Pāramitā could also be translated as ‘the wisdom that has gone beyond’.

This wisdom that has gone beyond, or transcendental wisdom, is what the Prajñā-Pāramitā sūtras are all about. It is the wisdom that goes beyond words and concepts, beyond the rational mind, beyond our usual way of seeing the world, beyond limits. The Perfection of Wisdom texts are designed to cut through our concepts, to cut through any sense we have of knowing what the world is about, and therefore to cut through the limits we place on ourselves and the world. It is sometimes said that they are aimed at people of a predominantly intellectual type, whose approach to the spiritual life is through thinking, and who may fall into the trap of mistaking their concepts about reality for reality itself. However we all have plenty of concepts about reality that stop us seeing clearly, whether we know it or not, and whether we think of ourselves as ‘intellectual’ or not. The Prajñā-Pāramitā sūtras certainly ask us to think, but they are not particularly intellectual – in fact they are highly devotional, and use images and metaphors to get their point across perhaps more than they use logical argument.

The Prajñā-Pāramitā literature is designed to help the rational mind to go beyond the limits of the rational mind, and to convince it that reality is greater and more mysterious than its concepts. Its aim is not to make us abandon logic and reason, but to guide us towards a vision of reality that includes reason, but goes beyond it. We can shut down our thinking faculty by taking a drug, drinking many pints of beer, or incurring brain damage - but this does not make us Enlightened. We need to use our intellect to the fullest to see that our thinking is based on unconscious concepts we have been conditioned to accept. This means becoming more critical and discerning in the way we think, not descending into mindlessness.

The Prajñā-Pāramitā texts do not always make easy reading. Without some explanation they can seem impenetrable. So you need to have read, reflected on, and understood last week’s text on the Madhyamaka philosophy before you tackle this material. But even if you have read and understood what has been said in the last two sessions, the material we will be looking at may at times seem baffling and irritating – although it may also communicate something deep but not easily definable. These texts are meant to baffle the intellect, and, as Edward Conze has pointed out, if they do not irritate us they are not doing their job. Try to remember that Mahāyāna Buddhism sees patience in the face of the sometimes baffling nature of the Dharma as an essential quality.

We will look at extracts from the Prajñā-Pāramitā sutras chosen to give a glimpse of some of the main topics that these explore, under the following headings:

1. The place of faith and devotion.
2. Śūnyatā.
3. Similes and analogies.
4. Absolute and relative truth.
5. Spiritual attainments.
6. 'Suchness' and the nature of the Buddha.

We will explore the first three of these topics this week, and the remaining three next week.

Topic 1: The Role of Śraddhā and Devotion

Extract 1: from the Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā ²⁶

Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith! Remove the obstructing defilements, and clear away all your taints! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas, Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended!

Thus begins what, according to Sangharakshita, might be the oldest and original Prajñā-Pāramitā text.

Question: Why might the whole Prajñā-Pāramitā tradition begin by asking us to call forth love, respect and faith? What difference might this make to the effect the teachings have on us?

Extract 2: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines ²⁷

The Buddha: 'It is through the might of the Buddhas, of the Tathāgatas, that the Bodhisattvas study the Perfection of Wisdom, and that they make progress in training in Suchness. For it is in the nature of things that the Buddhas, who stand, hold and maintain themselves in immeasurable and incalculable world-systems, should bring to mind and uphold everyone who teaches and studies this perfection of wisdom. The Buddhas will bring them to mind and assist them. And it is quite impossible to cause an obstacle to someone who has been brought to mind and upheld by the Buddhas.'

Śāriputra: 'It is through the Buddhas' might, sustaining power and grace that Bodhisattvas study this deep perfection of wisdom, and progressively train in Suchness?'

The Buddha: 'So it is Śāriputra. They are... sustained and seen by the Tathāgata, and the Tathāgata beholds them with his Buddha-eye.'

Question: Do you think that anyone who saw the Perfection of Wisdom in this way would be more in danger of falling into the extremes of nihilism, or of eternalism?

Question: Do you find this an inspiring idea, or an example of Buddhism sliding into irrational religiosity? Can you relate your response to your tendency to either eternalism or nihilism?

²⁶ *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr. E Conze, p.9.

²⁷ *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr. E Conze, pages 158-159

Topic 2: Śūnyatā

Extract 3: from the Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā²⁸

Both I and Mine as dharmas are unreal and empty. By his own self has the fool become entangled in space. As someone who suspects he has been poisoned May well be struck down, although no poison has got into his stomach, Just so the fool who has admitted into himself [the notions of] I and Mine Is forced by that unreal notion to undergo birth and death again and again. Those who have these notions are defiled. Those who have no thought of I and Mine are purified. But there is no-one who is defiled, and no-one who is cleansed.

The last line is the sort of paradox that can be created by switching between the absolute and relative levels of truth – which the Prajñā-Pāramitā sutras delight in.

Question: Which of the two aspects of śūnyatā mentioned last week does this extract relate to?

Question: How do you respond to the analogies used here: the idea that we get tangled up in space (or the sky – the Sanskrit word is the same), and the idea that our situation is like that of someone who gets ill because they just think they have taken poison? Do these help you to get a feel for what is being said?

Extract 4: from the Heart Sutra²⁹

The Holy Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was coursing in the deep wisdom that has gone beyond. He looked down from on high and saw only the five skandhas, and that they were empty of own-nature.

Here, Śāriputra, form is emptiness
And that emptiness is form.
Form does not differ from emptiness,
Emptiness does not differ from form.

These are some of the most famous lines in all Buddhist literature. They deserve some reflection.

Question: What does the fact that Avalokiteśvara saw only the five skandhas mean?

Question: Why is the fact that the skandhas are empty of own-nature important?

Question: Why is it significant that these words are addressed to Śāriputra?

Question: What does 'form' stand for in the phrase 'form is emptiness'?

Question: Why is it important, not only that 'form is emptiness', but also that 'emptiness is form', and does not differ from it? (Or, as the version we chant in the pūjā has it, that emptiness is only form?).

Extract 5: from The Inconceivable State of Buddhahood, in the Ratnakūṭa collection³⁰

28 *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr. E Conze, p.51.

29 *Buddhist Wisdom*, E. Conze, pp.82-86 (slightly rephrased).

30 *Treasury of Mahayana Sutras*, tr Garma C. C. Chang, p.32.

Mañjuśrī said, ‘The five skandhas constitute what we call the mundane world... The basic nature of the five skandhas is emptiness. If that nature is emptiness, there is neither ‘I’ nor “mine’. If there is neither ‘I’ nor ‘mine’ there is no duality, there is neither grasping nor abandoning. If there is neither grasping nor abandoning, there is no attachment. Thus, free from attachment, he transcends the mundane world.’

This extract tells us one of the reasons that it is important to see mundane things as empty – because then we will free ourselves from attachment to them. In fact, in this extract, this seems to be given more importance than seeing anātman or non-duality!

Question: Do the Prajñā-Pāramitā extracts we have been looking at give you a sense of the possibility of liberation from our normal worldly concerns – or not?

Extract 6: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines³¹

[Enlightened beings do not view the world through the framework of the skandhas.]
But just this non-viewing of the skandhas is the viewing of the world. That is the way in which the world is seen by the Tathāgata.

And how does perfect wisdom show up the world for what it is? She shows that the world is empty, unthinkable, calmly quiet, and pure in itself.

This extract tells us why it is important, at the highest levels of the Path, to see the unreality of the skandhas. If we see the world through the lens of the skandhas, or of any other any system, such as the dharma theory of the Abhidharma, we do not see the world as it is, we see our ideas about it – hence, “just this non-viewing of the skandhas is the viewing of the world.”

However we need to see this statement in its context: it is addressed to experienced practitioners who have already used the meditation on the skandhas to deconstruct their idea of a world consisting of fixed ‘selves’ and ‘things’, and now need to take the final step of leaving behind the raft that got them to where they are. To see the world as consisting of the five skandhas could be a considerable step forward from seeing it in our usual commonsense way as consisting of ‘selves’ and ‘things’.

The extract hints at the fact that when we drop our ideas about the world and see things as they are, we do not see a cold or meaningless universe, but a mysterious and beautiful one: “...unthinkable, calmly quiet, and pure in itself.” This point is taken further in the next extract.

Question: Can you identify any of the conceptual frameworks through which you tend to view the world? Possible candidates might be political (e.g. socialism), social (e.g. egalitarianism), biological (e.g. Darwinism), psychological, or physical (e.g. materialism.) Can you accept that your preferred concepts, while useful in some areas, are merely relative truth, and in some ways distort reality?

Extract 7: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines³²

The Buddha: ‘ “Deep”, Subhuti, that is a synonym for Emptiness, for the Signless, the Wishless...for Nirvana.’

31 *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr. E Conze, p.179.

32 *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr. E Conze, pp.209-211.

Subhuti: 'Is it a synonym only of these, or of all dharmas?'

The Buddha: 'It is a synonym for all dharmas. For form and other skandhas are deep. How is form deep? As deep as Suchness, so deep is form...'

Subhuti: 'Of what is "immeasurable" a synonym?'

The Buddha: 'Of Emptiness, of the Signless, the Wishless.' Subhuti: 'Only of these and not of the other dharmas?'

The Buddha: 'Have I not described all dharmas as "empty"? And that which is emptiness, that is also immeasurableness. Therefore no difference can be apprehended between these dharmas. As mere words have they been described by the Tathāgata.'

Subhuti: 'It is wonderful how the Tathāgata has shown the true nature of these dharmas, and yet one cannot properly talk about the nature of dharmas.'

The Buddha: 'So it is, for one cannot properly express the emptiness of dharmas in words.'

The word *dharmas* is sometimes used in these sutras in a technical sense, to mean the supposedly fundamental elements of existence as described by the Abhidharma. But often it is used to mean something more like 'things' or 'phenomena', which are summed up by the skandhas. Although it is not precisely accurate, for the sake of understanding we could translate 'all dharmas' to ourselves as 'all things'. So the sutra is saying in effect that all things are deep and immeasurable, profound and infinite, mysterious and beyond our comprehension.

This extract illustrates the fact that seeing the truth of *śūnyatā* leads to an experience of the indescribable mystery and wonder of all things, and not to a nihilistic, meaningless universe. Emptiness, the sutra tells us, far from being a negative quality, is a synonym for deep and immeasurable. This vision of all things as mysterious, wonderful and full of potential is something that opens up most fully in meditation, and neither the *Prajñā Pāramitā* literature nor the ideas of the Madhyamaka can have the desired spiritual effect unless they are combined with meditation and devotional practice.

The mysterious, deep and immeasurable nature of things is inexpressible, so the sutra uses a nonsense word to describe it – 'suchness' (*tathāta*) or 'the way things are'. Things are just 'such' – the way they are! We will come across the idea of suchness again later in this selection.

Question: Have you ever had an inkling that the world is inexpressibly mysterious and 'deep'? If so, in what circumstances did this occur? How could you create the conditions to experience this again, and to deepen this vision?

Question: What are 'Emptiness, the Signless, and the Wishless'? How are they related to *śūnyatā* and the lack of own-nature in things?

Question: "No difference can be apprehended between these dharmas. As mere words have they been described by the Tathāgata." Can you describe what this means in your own words?

Topic 3: Analogies and similes

*Extract 8: from the Diamond Sutra*³³

As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp A mock show, dew drops, or a bubble, A dream, a lightning flash, or cloud
So should one view what is conditioned.

A 'mock-show' refers to a magical illusion, as when a magician makes his audience see something that does not exist. A more poetic but less literal translation of this famous verse is the following.

So you should view all of the fleeting worlds:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud;
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.³⁴

Question: In what ways are conditioned things like:

- A star?
- A lamp?
- A magical illusion?
- Dewdrops?
- A bubble?
- A lightning flash?
- A cloud?

*Extract 9: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 18,000 Lines*³⁵

Form is like a mass of foam, it has no solidity, it is full of cracks and holes, and it has no substantial inner core. Feeling is like a bubble, which swiftly rises and swiftly disappears, and it has no durable subsistence. Perception is like a mirage. As in a mirage of water absolutely no water at all can be found (so there is nothing substantial in that which is perceived). Impulses are like the trunk of a plantain tree: when you strip off one leaf sheath after another, nothing remains, and you cannot lay hand on a core within. Consciousness is like a magical illusion, as when magically created soldiers, conjured up by a magician, are seen marching through the streets.

This extract repeats many of the analogies used in the last one, but makes them more specific by relating them to particular skandhas. It also introduces some other similes that are very common – foam, a mirage, and the trunk of a banana tree.

Question: Which of the analogies used in the last two extracts seem most evocative or meaningful to you?

Question: Can you think of any other analogies that convey something of the lack of self-nature in things?

³³ *Buddhist Wisdom*, E. Conze, p.69.

³⁴ *The Diamond Sutra*, tr. by Mu Soeng, p155, after A F Price.

³⁵ *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom*, E. Conze, p.96.

Question and exercise: Do you think that this is a new, Mahāyāna way of seeing things, or can anything similar be found in the Pāli Canon? Try to find some similar teachings in the earlier texts. (Hint: a good place to start might be by searching for the word ‘foam’ – *pheṇa* in Pāli).

*Extract 10: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*³⁶

If a Bodhisattva even in his dreams sees that all dharmas are like a dream, then that should be known as the irreversible mark of an irreversible Bodhisattva... And immediately after he has woken up from his dream, he reflects, ‘Like a dream is all this that belongs to the triple world. And in that sense shall I teach about dharmas.’

This extract takes one particular analogy further – that our experience of the world is like a dream. This analogy is often invoked in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and seems particularly apt in view of the fact that the name Buddha means ‘one who is awake’ – and therefore one who sees dreams for what they are. We probably have all had the experience of waking up from a dream into another level of reality and being profoundly relieved that what we had been experiencing was not real. The dream analogy implies that we could awaken from our current experience to a higher level of reality in a similar way – and maybe with an even greater sense of release and liberation.

Question: What similarities do you see between dream experience and the world as described by the Prajñā-Pāramitā sutras?

Question: Have you ever had the experience of lucid dreaming – knowing that you were dreaming while still in the dream state? If so, how did this feel? Can you imagine what it might be like to have a similar experience in waking life? Do you think this might be a bit like the experience of Insight?

³⁶ *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr. E Conze, pp.227-228.

Topic 4: Absolute and relative truth

*Extract 11: from the Diamond Sutra*³⁷

The Buddha said to Subhuti, ‘All the bodhisattva-mahāsattvas, who undertake the practice of meditation, should cherish one thought only: “When I attain perfect wisdom, I will liberate all sentient beings in every realm of the universe...”

And yet although immeasurable, innumerable and unlimited beings have been liberated, truly no being has been liberated. Why? Because no Bodhisattva who is a true Bodhisattva entertains such concepts as a self, a person, a being, or a living soul. Thus there are no beings to be liberated, and no self to attain perfect wisdom.’

As we have already pointed out, the Prajñā-Pāramitā sūtras delight in creating paradoxes by switching between the absolute and relative levels of truth. The paradox created in this extract is one that crops up again and again, epitomising the apparent conflict between the merely relative truth of the Dharma – in this case expressed as the Bodhisattva Path - and the absolute truth of śūnyatā. The practitioner must somehow transcend this paradox, wholeheartedly working to save all beings, while at the same time seeing that no beings can really be said to exist. The implication of this for us is that to practice effectively we need to have what we might call ‘stereo vision’ – we need to keep both relative and absolute truth in view at the same time.

We must not abandon the raft of the Dharma before we reach the other shore, but at the same time we must remember not to take it completely literally.

Question: Why does a Bodhisattva entertain no such concept as a being?

*Extract 12: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines*³⁸

Śāriputra: Is there then no attainment, is there no Nirvana?

Subhuti: There is attainment, there is Nirvana, but not in the ultimate sense. It is by means of worldly conventional expressions that one conceives of attainment and Nirvana, of stream-entrants, and of all the other grades of achievement up to the Buddha – and not in the ultimate sense...

³⁷ *The Diamond Sutra*, by Mu Soeng, p.80.

³⁸ *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom*, E. Conze, p.87.

Śāriputra: And in the same way, also, do we differentiate the five realms of rebirth only by worldly conventional expression, and in the ultimate sense they do not exist?

Subhuti: So it is Śāriputra. Because in the ultimate sense there is neither karma nor karma-vipāka... neither defilement nor purification.

This extract is even more explicit than the last – the teachings, practices, and grades of attainment talked about by the Buddhist tradition belong to the realm of conventional truth only, and have no reality in the ultimate, absolute sense.

Question: Can you express in your own words what the sutra means by saying that the teachings of Buddhism are relative truth? Does this mean that they are not true?

Question: Which do you think is more important for us to focus on – the relative truth of the teachings of Buddhism, or the absolute truth of śūnyatā?

Extracts 13³⁹ and 14⁴⁰: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines

Subhuti: ‘How should a Bodhisattva who is only just beginning stand in perfect wisdom, how train himself?’

The Buddha: ‘He should tend, love and honour the good friends [kalyana mitras, or spiritual friends]. His good friends are those who will instruct and admonish him in perfect wisdom, and will expound to him its meaning. They will expound it as follows: “Come here, son of good family, make endeavours in the six perfections.”’

Subhuti: ‘How should a Bodhisattva train, if he wants to go forth to full and perfect Enlightenment?’

The Buddha: ‘The Bodhisattva should adopt an even attitude towards all beings, with a mind that is friendly, well disposed, free from aversion, avoiding harm or hurt. He should treat others as if they were his own mother, father, son or daughter... He should abstain from all evil, give gifts, guard his morality, perfect himself in patience, exert vigour, enter into the dhyānas, achieve mastery over wisdom, survey conditioned co-production ... and encourage others to do the same. In the same way he should stand in everything from meditation on the [four noble] truths to the stage when he realises that it is as a Bodhisattva that he will be saved. When he longs eagerly for all that, and trains himself in it, then everything will be uncovered for him.’

These extracts make it clear that, although the teachings of the Dharma have no more absolute reality than anything else that can be expressed in words, we still need to train ourselves wholeheartedly in the teachings and practices of Buddhism if we want to get anywhere. It is through these very practices – relative as they are - that the ultimate Perfect Wisdom will be ‘uncovered’ for us. Hence we are told to remember the importance of spiritual friendship – and told that our real spiritual friends will remind us to practice all the Six Perfections, not just wisdom. Then we are told to cultivate mettā, and again reminded to practice all of the Six Perfections – ethics, generosity, patience, effort, and meditation – and not just wisdom.

39 *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr E. Conze, p.188.

40 *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr E. Conze, p.199, slightly rephrased.

Elsewhere in the same sutra the Buddha also recommends, among other things, the practice of the Brahma Vihāras, training in the Ten Precepts taken by Order Members, and teaching the Dharma to others as part of a practice of dāna. It is only when we have practised these things to the utmost that we will genuinely have the vision to see through them. Until then our understanding that the Dharma is only relative truth is just intellectual - just more play words and conceptual castles-in-the-air. The Buddha's parable of the raft from the Pāli Canon makes the issue clear – until we reach the further shore we desperately need the raft, and should hang on to it tightly!

Question: If the Perfection of Wisdom teachings do not make any practical difference to the way we practise, why do we bother with them?

Extract 15: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines⁴¹

Śāriputra: 'What is the worldly, and what is the supramundane perfection of generosity?'

Subhuti: 'The worldly perfection of giving consists in this: The Bodhisattva gives liberally to all those who ask, while thinking in terms of real things. He thinks: "I give. That one receives. This is the gift. I renounce all my possessions without stint. I act as the Buddha commands. I practise the perfection of giving." Tied by three things he gives a gift. Which three? A perception of self, a perception of others, a perception of the gift.

The supramundane perfection of giving, on the other hand, consists of the threefold purity. What is the threefold purity? Here a Bodhisattva gives a gift, and he does not apprehend a self, a recipient, or a gift. Neither does he apprehend a reward of his giving. He surrenders that gift to all beings, but he apprehends neither beings nor self... That is called the supramundane perfection of giving.'

All the other perfections are said to be based on the Perfection of Wisdom. They need to be performed with at least a hint of the open, spacious attitude of wisdom if they are to be truly Pāramitās, in the sense of ways to transcend the self. This extract illustrates the difference that the wisdom perspective makes to just one Pāramitā – that of dāna, or generosity.

Question: Can you imagine the difference that practising dāna with the 'supramundane' perspective would make, compared to doing so with the worldly perspective?

Question: Can you guess what the difference might be between the worldly and the supramundane practice of any of the other Perfections?

Topic 5: Spiritual attainments

Extract 16: from the Diamond Sutra⁴²

Subhuti, what do you think? Does a srotāpanna (stream-entrant) think, 'I have entered the stream?'

⁴¹ *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom*, E Conze, pp.66-67.

⁴² *The Diamond Sutra*, Mu Soeng, p.101.

Subhuti said, “No, World-Honoured One, he does not. Why? Because while srotāpanna means ‘entering the stream’, there is no entering here.”

Subhuti, what do you think? Does an arhat think, ‘I have obtained arhatship?’

Subhuti said, “No, World-Honoured One, he does not. Why? Because there is no dharma that can be called an arhat. If an arhat thinks, ‘I have obtained arhatship’, this means that he has the idea of an ego-self, a person, a living being, or a soul.

“Although the Buddha has said that I am the foremost of those who have obtained the Samadhi of Detachment, that I am the foremost of those arhats who are liberated from unwholesome desires, I cherish no thought that I have obtained arhatship. If I did he would not have said of me, ‘Subhuti, who is the foremost of those who dwell in peaceful abiding, does not dwell anywhere, that is why he is called a dweller in peace.’”

Here is another of those paradoxes that the Perfection of Wisdom sutras love so much: if anyone thinks of themselves as a stream entrant or an arahant, they cannot be so. This may be difficult for us to understand, but we are told that it follows from the fact that those with real Insight no longer think of themselves as separate beings – he or she no longer thinks of him- or her ‘self’ at all. It also follows from the ideas in the last section about the merely relative truth of the Dharma. Reality cannot be cut up into parts or described in words, and this applies to the spiritual path as much as to anything else – so the stages of the path are as arbitrary as any other divisions of reality. Elsewhere in the Prajñā Pāramitā texts the Buddha says that someone with Insight does not see any dharma that could attain stream entry, and does not see any real dharma called stream entry that could be attained.

Question: Can you imagine – even very vaguely – what it might be like to not see the world in terms of self-and-other? Can you think of any analogies or metaphors that might communicate a glimpse of what this might be like?

Question: Does the merely relative truth of the stages of the path help to resolve the apparent discrepancy in the way these are described by different traditions – for example, how does it help us overcome the problems in correlating stream entry with the arising of the Bodhicitta?

Question: What do you think the Buddha meant when he said that Subhuti was the foremost of those who dwell in peace because he ‘does not dwell anywhere’?

Extract 17: from the Heart Sutra⁴³

Therefore, Śāriputra, because of his non-attainment, having relied on Perfect Wisdom, a Bodhisattva lives without mental hindrances. Without mental hindrances he is fearless and imperturbable, he is beyond upside-down views, and he attains Nirvana.

Question: Can you spot the paradox in this extract? Which aspect of the paradox represents relative truth, and which represents absolute truth?

Question: At the very highest level of the spiritual path, how might aiming for attainment prevent it from happening? Is aiming for attainment a good idea for those at our level?

⁴³ *Buddhist Wisdom*, E Conze, pp.101-102, slightly rephrased.

Then Subhuti asked these monks, ‘Elders, according to your understanding, have you ever achieved or realised anything?’

The monks replied, ‘Only presumptuous persons will claim that they have achieved and realised something. To a humble religious devotee, nothing is achieved or realised. How then, would such a person think of saying to himself, “This I have achieved; this I have realised?” If such an idea occurs to him, then it is a demon’s deed... Only the Buddha, the World-Honoured One, and Mañjuśrī, know our achievement and realisation.’

Question: How should we relate to goals like stream entry, in view of what is said about them here?

Question: If the very people who claim spiritual attainments are precisely those who we can be certain do not have them, how do we know who to respect and listen to?

Topic 6: ‘Suchness’ and the nature of the Buddha

*Extract 19: from the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*⁴⁵

From the very beginning Subhuti the Elder has been born after the image of the Tathāgata’s Suchness (tathāta). Because the Suchness of the Tathāgata and the Suchness of all dharmas are the same, and they are both the Suchness of Subhuti the Elder...

Subhuti’s Suchness is immutable and unchangeable, undiscriminated and undifferentiated, just as the Suchness of the Tathāgata. For the Suchness of the Tathāgata, and the Suchness of all dharmas, they are both one single Suchness, not two, not divided...

And for that reason, although we seem to have a duality when Subhuti has been conjured up from the Suchness of the Tathāgata, nevertheless nothing real has been lopped of that Suchness, which remains unbroken...

The Suchness of Subhuti is therefore just the same as the Suchness of all dharmas. Subhuti the Elder has undergone the experience of that Suchness by imitating in himself the unaltered Suchness, but in actual fact no-one anywhere has undergone a process of imitation...

And that is the Suchness through which a Bodhisattva, when he has definitely won full Enlightenment, comes to be called a Tathāgata. [Such-gone, or Such- come.]

Suchness is a sort of nonsense word used to point to the mysterious, inexpressible quality of all things, which is elsewhere described as deep and infinite. Things and beings lack the sort of fixed, independent qualities that we ascribe to them, but they all share one quality, which we could call ‘the nature of things’. We can only know this by direct experience, for example in meditation. And we cannot sensibly say much about it, so these sutras invent a word that

⁴⁴ *A Treasury of Mahayana Sutras*, ed. CC Chang, p.33.

⁴⁵ *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines and its Verse Summary*, tr E. Conze, pp.193-194.

points to it, but does not falsify it by seeming to describe it. An analogy might be the colour blue. We know the colour by direct experience, and nothing we say about it, such as that it is cool (like water) or warm (like a summer sky) will be any help in letting someone who is colour-blind experience it. So we might just call its quality 'blueness', which only means something if we have experienced it. In the same way the quality of reality is called Suchness (tathāta). The Buddha is often referred to as the Tathāgata, which can be translated as 'The One Who Comes From, or Goes To, Suchness'. The Prajñā- Pāramitā texts seem to interpret this to mean that the Buddha shares the quality of reality, and so he is reality.

Question: Does the extract mean that 'all is one'? If not, what does it mean, if anything?

Question: Can you see any other meanings in this extract?

Introduction

Around the Fourth Century CE a new movement emerged within Mahāyāna Buddhism, called the Yogācāra, or ‘Way of Practice’, sometimes also called the ‘Vijñānavāda’, or ‘Way of Consciousness.’ The Yogācāra joined the Madhyamaka to become one of the two important, defining, and mutually balancing movements in Mahāyāna Buddhism. As its name implies the Yogācāra based itself on the experiences of deep meditation, as compared to the Madhyamaka, which drew its conclusions more from abstract thought. And whereas the Madhyamaka approach runs the risk of leading the unwary into nihilism, aspects of the Yogācāra carry the opposite danger, and may lead us into eternalism if we approach them in the wrong way. The Yogācāra may have developed partly as a reaction to what was seen as nihilism in the Madhyamaka approach, or in response to a need to express the Dharma and the Goal in a more positive way, rather than relying on the negations of the Madhyamaka.

Like the Madhyamaka, the Yogācāra is not a single school, but rather a set of ideas and approaches to practice that evolved over time. It would be impossible to give an adequate account of the whole tradition in a single session of the mitra course.⁴⁶ However, one of the main aims of the module is to give mitras who read books originating from other traditions – as most of us do – some understanding of the background from which these ideas emerged, so that we can see them in context, with a critical appreciation, and be aware of any potential pitfalls that can arise from grasping at them in the wrong way. For this reason, in this module we will focus on the those Yogācāra ideas that mitras are likely to come across in their reading, as they are interpreted in those living Buddhist traditions in which the Yogācāra had a major influence, especially the traditions of Japan, China, and Tibet.

Western scholars have often seen the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra as being in direct conflict with one another, like two competing schools of philosophy in the West, and certainly there was a great deal of debate between their proponents. But to see the relationship between the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka in this way is to misunderstand the purpose of such movements within Buddhism, which was not so much to make an absolute statement about the metaphysical nature of reality – while rubbishing anyone who saw things from another perspective – as to help practitioners to move towards Awakening. Any Buddhist philosopher worth his salt knows that all views that can be expressed in words are at best relative truths, and in the realm of relative truth two apparently contradictory viewpoints can both be pointing to different aspects of the nature of things. Accordingly many Buddhists did not see themselves as exclusively Madhyamikas or Yogācārins, but used both ways of thinking for the purpose for which they were intended, trying to get the best of both worlds. For example the

46 For a more complete account of the early Yogācāra, see Subhuti’s four lectures entitled *Rambles around the Yogacara*, available on Free Buddhist Audio.

famous Chinese traveller and translator Hsuang Tsang, who is usually identified with the Yogācāra, wrote a long treatise called *The Non-difference of Yogācāra and Madhyamaka*.

Asaṅga and Vasubandhu

The first great figures in the Yogācāra tradition are Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, who lived in the fourth century CE. Tradition has it that Asaṅga received the Yogācāra teachings from the future Buddha Maitreya, who currently abides in a higher dimension of reality, teaching the Dharma. Western scholars cannot accept this tradition – it represents mythic truth, rather than the historical truth which is their province. They have therefore proposed that the real source of Asaṅga’s inspiration was a human teacher called Maitreya-nātha. But at the mythic level the traditional story may well be true. As its name implies, the Yogācāra teachings stem from the experience of deep meditation, and Asaṅga may well have been in contact with a source of profound wisdom during meditation, an experience that was equivalent to penetrating to another dimension of existence, in which he received teachings from the Buddha Maitreya.

Vasubandhu was Asaṅga’s half-brother, and a monk in the Sarvāstivādin tradition, one of the so-called ‘Hīnayāna’ schools that no longer survives. He became disillusioned by the over-intellectual dogmatism of some of his teachers, but at first was very sceptical about his brother’s Yogācāra ideas, and particularly about his claim that he had received them from Maitreya in meditation. He is said to have thought: “Poor Asaṅga. For twelve years he meditated in a cave, but all that came of it were enough fantastic teachings to overload an elephant!” However Asaṅga convinced him that his teachings were not a mere fantasy he had made up from nowhere, and Vasubandhu became very distressed that he had been so publicly disparaging of the Mahāyāna – he is said to have tried to cut out his tongue for the offence, but to have been prevented from doing so by two of Asaṅga’s disciples!

As we said earlier, we cannot hope to give a complete account of the Yogācāra in a single session of the Mitra Course. We will focus on just a few of the big ideas that you are likely to come across if you read books from other Buddhist traditions, and/or which amplify or modify the Madhyamaka ideas discussed earlier in the course.

The ideas we will explore are:

- The doctrine of ‘mind only’ (Cittamātra), and the Yogācāra interpretation of śūnyata.
- The doctrine of the ‘storehouse consciousness’ (ālaya vijñāna), a deep level of the mind that was held to underlie our usual experience.
- The Yogācāra amplification of the concept of relative and absolute truth – the doctrine of the Three Natures.

(The Yogācāra produced at least one other big idea that it is well worth knowing about, the *Trikāya* Doctrine on the three ‘bodies’ of the Buddha, but this does not fit in with the subject matter of this module).

‘Mind Only’ or Cittamātra

The Yogācāra is sometimes also called the *Vijñānavāda*, or ‘Way of Consciousness’, and the term *Cittamātra* (meaning ‘mind only’ or ‘thought only’) was used in Tibet and East Asia as a synonym for Yogācāra. Many Yogācāra texts are peppered with phrases such as the following, all from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*:

‘The world is nothing but mind.’ ‘Nothing is seen outside the mind.’

‘The triple world is mind itself.’ ‘All is mind.’

According to Sangharakshita in his *Survey of Buddhism*, Vasubandhu's "...best known work, the *Triṃśikā-vijñaptimātratā*, is mainly an attempt to show that there is no such thing as a material substance... and that only ideas exist."⁴⁷ The Yogācārins held that what is real is mind or consciousness, and that the so-called material world we see around us is brought into existence by mind, rather than vice versa. We are so used to thinking the opposite way round, that matter gives rise to consciousness, when it is organised into bodies and brains, that we may find it difficult to get our head round this idea at first.

Two analogies

Perhaps some analogies might help. The commonest analogy in Buddhist texts is that of the dream. In a dream everything we experience is brought into being by our mind. We may see what look like material things in our dreams, and to us they seem perfectly solid and real. The reality we experience is completely convincing, but when we wake up, we realise that what we experienced existed in our mind. Another analogy that the Buddhists of past ages could not have thought of is that of the virtual reality, such as the one that formed the basis for the film, *The Matrix*. In the film the people trapped in the matrix experience a perfectly convincing world, where the things around them seem solid and real, but the whole environment is in fact a mental construction, and the apparently real external things they experience have no existence of their own. The analogy of the virtual reality has some advantages over the dream metaphor, because the reality experienced in a world such as *The Matrix* is shared by many people, who all have the same perception of reality, and who interact with each other, whereas a dream is a purely private reality. If we took the dream analogy literally and decided that the other people we experience did not exist, this would obviously have disastrous consequences for our practice of the Dharma!

Isn't 'mind only' an absurd idea?

This idea that the world we live in is created by the mind is what Western philosophers call 'Idealism'. It may seem strange to us, but if we are willing to put aside our commonsense notions for a while we will see that it is far from absurd. After all, the only thing that we experience directly is consciousness. From the sense impressions that register on our consciousness we deduce the existence of external things, and then by a process of thought we form the abstract concept of matter. We then move on to explain the only thing we really know to exist – our awareness – in terms of this abstract concept. If we stand back from it, this seems a rather dubious process. It might be argued that to think that the one thing we know to exist – our awareness - is somehow less real than an abstract concept formed by that awareness is quite contrary.

As the eminent twentieth-century philosopher Bertrand Russell says in his book, *The Problems of Philosophy*:

Those who are unaccustomed to philosophical speculation may be inclined to dismiss such a doctrine as obviously absurd. There is no doubt that common sense regards tables and chairs and the sun and the moon and material objects generally as something radically different from minds and the contents of minds, and as having an existence which might continue if minds ceased. We think of matter as having

⁴⁷ *A Survey of Buddhism*, Sangharakshita, p.400.

existed long before there were any minds... But whether true or false, idealism is not to be dismissed as obviously absurd.⁴⁸

It must be admitted that we can never prove the existence of things other than... our experiences... In dreams a very complicated world may seem to be present, and yet on waking we find... that the sense data in the dream do not appear to have corresponded with... physical objects.⁴⁹

Very many philosophers – perhaps the majority – have held that there is nothing real except minds and their ideas.⁵⁰

Apparently the mind-only idea is reasonable enough that even an eminent Astrophysicist such as Sir Arthur Eddington can say:

To put the conclusion crudely – the stuff of the world is mind-stuff... The mind-stuff of the world is something more general than our individual conscious minds; but we may think of its nature as not altogether foreign to feelings in our consciousness... Having granted this, the mental activity of the part of world constituting ourselves occasions no great surprise; it is known to us by direct self-knowledge, and we do not explain it away as something other than we know it to be – or rather, it knows itself to be.⁵¹

Roots in early Buddhism

There is a great deal in the Pāli Canon and the Buddhist tradition which would seem to support the Yogācāra when it tells us that mind is primary, and that our external experiences are created by the mind. The very first words of the Dhammapada tell us that:

Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind.

The word translated as ‘experiences’ here is dhammas. As we have seen, this sometimes refers to the fundamental elements of existence, and is sometimes used to mean just phenomena, or ‘things’ – so one possible translation of this line is that “mind gives rise to all things.”

Then again, the Twelve Nidānas tell us that:

Conditioned by consciousness is name-and-form.

Then again, the teaching of the various realms of the Wheel of Life seems to tell us that the external world we experience is a reflection of our mental states, so that if we are hellish beings our mental states manifest as a hellish environment, while if we are godlike we experience a sort of heaven. In a similar way, the various planes of being described in Theravada Buddhism, the *kāmaloka*, *rūpaloka* and *arūpaloka*, clearly refer to states of being – in other words their basis is the consciousness of those who experience them – but they are also places, which beings inhabit. They are all types of *loka* – locations, or apparently external environments. Once again it would seem that according to Buddhism the apparently external world that beings experience is determined by the nature of their mind.

48 *A Survey of Buddhism*, Sangharakshita, p.400.

49 *Ibid*, p10.

50 *Ibid*, p5.

51 *The Nature of the Physical World*, Sir Arthur Eddington, Ch13.

So in some ways the Yogācāra idea that mind is primary seems to be well within the mainstream of the Buddhist tradition. The Yogācārins were also in the mainstream of Buddhism in that they derived their vision of reality from direct meditative experience, rather than from abstract thought. To quote Sangharakshita:

What they saw in these higher states of consciousness, in their meditation, was that nothing existed but mind: that all things were, in reality, mind, and that mind was all things. This is what they saw... not something they thought about – the thinking came later.⁵²

Deep meditation can give us an experience of the apparently infinite, timeless nature of mind. In meditation we may also have visions and other experiences that are far more significant and ‘real’ than anything we experience with our physical senses – and yet have nothing to do with any material object. We might ask ourselves, ‘Were Asaṅga’s sandals and cooking pot more real than his experience of Maitreya?’ The Yogācārins thought not. Asaṅga’s experience of Maitreya had a profound effect on whole cultures, and millions of individual human lives. His sandals did not.

‘Mind Only’ and *śūnyatā*

The Yogācāra did not abandon the concept of *śūnyatā*, but they gave it a different emphasis. Whereas, in the Madhyamaka, *śūnyatā* is used mainly to refer to the lack of self-nature and the inconceivable nature of phenomena, the Yogācāra, without denying these aspects, adds another. In keeping with their ‘mind-only’ emphasis, for them *śūnyatā* also points to the absence of duality between the perceiving subject and the object perceived. This non-duality implies that when we see a tree, for example, our idea that there is a ‘me’ doing the seeing, and a separate tree being seen, is an illusion. There is simply the perceptual situation, me-seeing-the-tree, which requires both the see-er and the seen in order to take place. Seeing the world in this way clearly requires a degree of genuine Insight that we can only get from deep meditative experience, but if we can go even a small way towards breaking down our hard sense of separateness from what we see around us, we can begin to open up to a sense of connectedness with the world, and to a deeper experience of the significance and beauty of things.

Is the ‘Mind Only’ doctrine ‘true’ – and in what way?

In his *Survey of Buddhism* Sangharakshita distinguishes between those aspects of Buddhism that are ‘doctrine’ and those that are ‘method’. ‘Doctrine’ refers to teachings that point to the truth about reality. ‘Method’ refers to teachings which, while they may not be true in the absolute sense, are nevertheless true enough to be useful, in that they help us to progress towards Enlightenment. This idea of doctrine and method is clearly related to Nāgārjuna’s idea of absolute and relative truth. (However Nāgārjuna would probably say that *all* Buddhist teachings are ‘method’, because the absolute truth cannot be expressed in words or concepts).

Despite what we have said about how reasonable the mind-only doctrine is, and despite the fact that there is a lot of support for it in early Buddhism, it is difficult to argue that it is in any sense absolute truth – so it would seem to come into the category of method rather than doctrine. A Madhyamika would have no trouble in deconstructing the mind-only doctrine, pointing out that the word ‘mind’ is just another product of false discrimination, another division of our indivisible experience into arbitrary parts that have no more reality than one

52 *The Depth Psychology of the Yogācāra*, Sangharakshita, available on freebuddhistaudio.com

side of a coin has without the other. “Where is this famous mind”, he might ask. “Can you show it to me? Can you point out its characteristics? Can you show me somewhere that it exists independently of the things that it is aware of? Mind is just as much an abstract concept as matter.

They are both mere play-words. And anyway the great Nāgārjuna has shown that our idea that one thing gives rise to another by cause-and-effect is absurd, so how can we say that mind is primary, and gives rise to matter?”

And perhaps the mind-only doctrine would get a similar treatment from some of the Buddha’s senior disciples in the Pāli Canon. Referring back to the *Discourse on the Sheaves of Reeds*, which we touched on in the first week of the module, we can be fairly sure that Ananda, reflecting the Buddha’s own teaching, would also tell us that mind does not cause matter, and matter does not cause mind – the two lean on each other like two sheaves of reeds. The two mutually co-arise, and are indivisible. If pushed to the limit, even a Yogācārin will admit that the idea of mind giving rise to matter is not absolutely true, a fact implicitly recognised by the Yogācāra idea of *sūnyatā*. If the perceiving subject and the object they perceive are non-dual, then it is nonsense to say that the mind of the observer gives rise to the thing he observes. The two are just different sides of a single perceptual situation.

So the ‘mind only’ teaching cannot be taken as absolute truth. But we need to remember what this means. A map is not the city it represents, but it may still be an excellent way of finding our way around. The ‘mind only’ doctrine may not be absolute truth, but it may still be a useful map of reality for us, which helps us move towards Awakening - as long as we are not too naively literalistic about how we interpret it. This makes it more ‘true’ than most other views about the world, most of which are not even relative truth. Buddhism would tell us that most of our commonsense views are simply false. ‘Mind-only’ is likely to be a much more accurate and dependable map of reality than ‘matter-only’, for example.

Could the ‘Mind Only’ doctrine be useful in our practice?

Because ‘Mind Only’ is likely to be a much better basis for the spiritual life than ‘Matter Only’, it is a doctrine that could be very helpful to us, especially if we have been conditioned to think in materialistic terms. Consciously using our imagination to see the world through the lens of the mind-only doctrine could help us to ‘bend the straw the other way’, and to be less dominated by a view that causes us to see the world around us as a dead machine.

Sangharakshita has pointed out that this is mainly how we contemporary Westerners see the universe around us – as something dead and lifeless. He has described this worldview as ‘pathological’, and compared it unfavourably with the way that more supposedly ‘primitive’ people see the world, which is as a living thing, full of magic and meaning. For many of us it would be a very useful practice to get out into nature, to put aside our critical thinking faculty for a while, and to allow ourselves to experience the world in a more ‘primitive’ way, as a place of wonder, where things and places have a beauty and significance that cannot be explained by a materialistic model. It would be very helpful to us to see the world as a manifestation of mind, as much as of matter.

For many of us it would also be a useful practice to put our critical thinking on hold in order to relate in a more wholehearted way to devotional practices and archetypal figures – if we are materialistic in outlook, the danger of falling into eternalism by doing this hardly exists for us. As an example of how we might do this, Sangharakshita has said that if we feel the desire to pray to a Buddha or Bodhisattva we should simply pray, and sort out the theology later – in other words, we should put our critical thinking, which is almost certainly dominated by

scepticism and materialism, on hold. Subhuti has taken this advice even further, and suggested that we should simply pray - and forget about the theology altogether!

Allowing ourselves to see the world as a place of living mind rather than dead matter could have a number of benefits for us, such as:

- We would be more open to a sense of awe, wonder, beauty.
- We would stop looking for happiness from material things, which we would see as illusory.
- It would be clearer to us that any happiness or fulfilment must be sought by changing our mind, so we would be more wholehearted in our practice.
- Many of the Dharmic ideas we perhaps find it difficult to accept because of our materialism would become plausible to us, including rebirth.
- The idea of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas we cannot see, but who exist on a mental plane and can have an effect on us, would be seen as perfectly possible.
- We would be more open to meditative experiences, and to a sense of endless potential in our meditation and our practice in general.

On the other hand if our worldview is basically eternalistic, then some of the practices described above might not be such a good idea. In that case we should perhaps focus more on the potentially nihilistic teachings of the Madhyamaka, in order to deconstruct any literalism or eternalistic religiosity in our approach to the Dharma.

Combining Madhyamaka and Yogācāra

However for most of us the best path is probably to combine the two ways of thinking – an approach that has a long and honourable tradition. A set of three meditations attributed to Asaṅga give us an example of how we might do this. In the first meditation we contemplate the idea that all things are mind-produced, so that we see the dreamlike quality of our experience. Then in the second meditation we contemplate the fact that mind, too, is śūnyatā – it has no absolute existence of its own, cannot be pinned down, and is constantly changing. This step is sometimes referred to as ‘liberating the antidote’: the mind-only doctrine is an antidote to deadening materialism and scepticism, but when it has done its job we need to liberate ourselves from this idea as well, lest we stay trapped in a literalistic approach to our own concepts. Sangharakshita points out that this process can work both ways – in the following quote he uses the phrase ‘One Mind’ as a translation of Cittamātra, which we translate as ‘mind-only’:

If one takes the expression One Mind too literally then one needs the concept of śūnyatā to dissolve that literalness. If you start taking śūnyatā literally there is no hope for one at all, according to Nāgārjuna!

Perhaps under certain circumstances the concept of Śūnyatā is an antidote for an over-literal understanding of the One Mind, but under certain circumstances also the concept of the One Mind is an antidote for an over-literal understanding of śūnyatā.⁵³

As Sangharakshita points out, Nāgārjuna was of course aware that śūnyatā could itself become an imprisoning idea, so that the Madhyamikas frequently made the point that śūnyatā is itself empty – it is just another concept, and as unreal as any other.

⁵³ Ibid.

Sangharakshita neatly sums up his advice on how we should relate to the two approaches by saying that in our doctrine we should be Madhyamikas, and that in our practice we should be Yogācārin. However this requires us to hold two ways of seeing the world in our minds at the same time – we perhaps need to adopt some Yogācāra ideas, and at the same time to use the Madhyamaka approach to remind ourselves not to take them literally.

The Ālaya Vijñāna – the ‘Storehouse Consciousness’

The second big idea of the Yogācāra that we will look at in this session is the concept of the *ālaya vijñāna*, a deep layer of the mind that underlies and gives rise to the surface consciousness, and so provides a measure of continuity. Ālaya vijñāna is usually translated as ‘storehouse consciousness’, although *ālaya* in fact means ‘home’ or ‘abode’.

The doctrine of the *ālaya vijñāna* is sometimes explained as an attempt to solve the problems that arise from trying to analyse the human experience into the skandhas or dharmas. These early Buddhist ways of dividing up our experience would lead us to see ourselves as a complex of ever-changing factors, which are constantly coming into existence and vanishing in a moment. If taken literally, rather than seen as a useful tool to help us experience a glimpse of anātman, this would imply that there is nothing in our being that lasts from one moment to the next. It would make it very difficult to see how the law of karma could operate, because it provides no basis for an action to produce a karmic effect many years after it was committed. The idea of the *ālaya vijñāna* may have arisen partly to explain this apparent contradiction. In the words of Edward Conze:

As soon as the advice to ignore the self had hardened into the proposition that ‘there is no self’, such concessions to common sense became quite inevitable.⁵⁴

The concept of the *ālaya vijñāna* may have been partly a theoretical “concession to common sense”, but like many Yogācāra ideas it probably also reflected a direct experience of the nature of the mind achieved during meditation.

Vasubandhu wrote of the storehouse consciousness as a sort of enduring stream or river of consciousness underlying all the others, which gives rise to all our experiences, and which he described as, “Flowing like a torrent”, constantly changing but at the same time keeping a certain identity of its own, rather like a river. His half- brother Asaṅga produced a more detailed analysis of the mind, which he divided into eight types of consciousness operating on three levels. According to this analysis the three layers of mind, in order of increasing depth, are as follows:

1. The awareness associated with each of the six senses: vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, as well as the mind seen as a sense organ for perceiving mental objects.
2. The *kliṣṭamanovijñāna*, or *manas*: this provides the basis for our thinking and our sense of self; in terms of modern psychology it is equivalent to the ego, the centre of our conscious personality; *kliṣṭa* implies defilement, *manas* comes from a root meaning to think.
3. The *ālaya vijñāna*, or storehouse consciousness, the deepest layer, which gives rise to all the other levels of consciousness.

Our actions of body speech and mind influence the *ālaya vijñāna*, which acts as ‘storehouse’, providing a way in which they can manifest as karmic consequences at a later time. A number of analogies are used to illustrate this. Sometimes actions are said to plant ‘seeds’ in the *ālaya*

⁵⁴ *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, E. Conze, p.143.

vijñāna, where they can grow to maturity and manifest later. Sometimes our actions are said to ‘perfume’ the ālaya vijñāna, changing its quality, and therefore giving rise to later effects. An analogy that seems in keeping with the ‘stream-like’ nature of the ālaya vijñāna, and which may appeal to us present-day westerners, with our growing environmental awareness, is of the ālaya vijñāna as like a river, which negative actions and mental states can pollute, just as pouring poisonous chemicals into a river would pollute it, damaging its ecology and producing all sorts of undesirable knock-on effects as time goes by. Conversely skilful actions might be seen as pouring pure spring water into the river, or adding some form of purifying agent which neutralises other pollutants - or perhaps as re- stocking with plants and fish.

How the idea developed

The concept of the ālaya vijñāna developed over time, particularly in Far Eastern Buddhism. Vasubandhu and Asaṅga seem to think of the ālaya vijñāna purely in terms of the psychology of the individual, so that we each have our own personal ālaya which provides some continuity to our mental and emotional processes, and explains how actions can produce later karmic effects. Later Yogācāra texts seem to imply that the ālaya vijñāna also has a deeper, transpersonal level, so that there is a level of mind that we all in a sense share, that we all influence, and that we are all affected by. According to this model the individual stream of the ālaya could be likened to the personal unconscious, which is such an important idea in modern psychology, while the deeper transpersonal aspect could be likened to the ‘collective unconscious’ described by the psychologist CG Jung. Jung saw this collective unconscious as a deep layer of mind that we all tap in to, and from which the archetypes which manifest in the dreams, myths, stories, art and meditations of human beings arise.

In view of the ‘mind-only’ view of the Yogācāra, this idea of a deeper transpersonal level of the ālaya vijñāna that we all share and tap in to seems to be an almost necessary development. If, as the Yogācāra says, the ālaya gives rise to the outer world we experience, then if we each have our own private ālaya, which is not connected in any way to anyone else’s, this leaves us all living in our own completely private world. The other people in our experience are then just figments of our own private mind, and we are justified in exploiting them in any way we like for our own benefit. This not a model of the world that will make for a successful spiritual life. If mind gives rise to our experience, and other people are as real as we are, then we must assume that other people apart from ourselves take part in this process of producing our joint experience, and therefore that there is some connection between the different mind-streams of different people, so that they can act together to jointly give rise to the world of experience they inhabit. However when we are engaged in this sort of speculation we should remember that Asaṅga and Vasubandhu were not trying to devise a complete metaphysical philosophy – which the Dharma tells us is impossible using words and concepts – they were simply trying to formulate some ideas that expressed their experience, and would be useful to other practitioners.

The concept of the ālaya developed further still, especially in Far Eastern Buddhism, so that it came to be seen as having what we could think of as an even deeper layer, which is completely pure, unstained, luminous and tranquil. This ‘undefiled ālaya’ is then sometimes distinguished from the ‘defiled ālaya’, which is produced from it when it is defiled by impurities. So for example in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra the ālaya is described as ‘completely pure’ and ‘luminous’, but ‘defiled by external defilements.’ This idea of the undefiled ālaya, which came to be seen as a sort of pure essence underlying all our minds, is closely related to the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine, which we will discuss next week.

The Three Natures (*Trisvabhāva*)

We have seen over the last few weeks that the distinction between absolute and relative truth is an important one in the Prajñā Pāramitā sutras. We have also seen that because the Madhyamaka tells us that the teachings of Buddhism are ‘merely’ relative truth, there is a danger that some people might be tempted to abandon them in a premature attempt to reach the wordless Absolute, which will be disastrous for their spiritual life. If the teachings of Buddhism are not in fact absolutely true, how can we really commit ourselves to them? In keeping with its practical emphasis the Yogācāra attempted to clarify this potential problem, through its teaching of the Three Natures (*trisvabhāva*). The *trisvabhāva* doctrine identifies three levels of truth, or lack of it, which are:⁵⁵

Parikalpita: This literally means ‘fully conceptualised’. If we see things in the *parikalpita* way we interpret them on the basis of our arbitrary division of one aspect of reality from another (*vikalpa*), our ‘mere play words’, and the conceptual constructions we build on this basis (*prapañca*). This is our ordinary worldly way of looking at the world, and is sometime translated as ‘Imaginary Nature’, because it is completely false and erroneous, with no basis in truth.

Paratantra: This literally means ‘other dependent’, and is often translated as the ‘dependent nature’ or ‘interdependent nature’. This is the world seen through the lens of *pratītya samutpāda*, and therefore of an understanding of the mutually dependent nature of things. This way of seeing things may still depend on concepts, but the concepts it depends on are an accurate reflection of the way things are, because they are in accord with *pratītya samutpāda*.

Pariniṣpanna: This literally means ‘fully accomplished’ or ‘fully perfected’, and is usually translated as ‘absolute nature’. This is the Insight which sees things as they are, unmediated by words or concepts of any sort. It is the absolute truth.

This teaching makes it clear that there is a level of truth that is not the absolute truth of Insight, and may still be mediated by concepts, but which is definitely not just false and ‘imaginary’, as is our normal vision of a world of independent selves and things. It opens up a space in which we can use words and concepts to approach the truth. This is an absolute necessity for us, because if we simply wait for the spontaneous arising of wordless Insight without this preparation, we may wait a very long time. For the time being our main working ground will be at the *paratantra* level, using the conceptual ideas of Buddhism to train ourselves to see the world more as it is. We can train ourselves to see the transient nature of things, the interdependence of things, and the way we and all things change according to conditions. We can use practices that lead us along a path of growth, without worrying about the fact that at the absolute level there is no path, and nothing that grows. And in this way we can prepare the ground for the absolute truth to arise. In the words of Eric Cheetham:

Parikalpita is the unreal worldly truth and Pariniṣpanna is reality itself. Paratantra is the link between the two and the means of access from the lower to the higher. For the Yogācāra... attention is therefore focused on the means of access to Reality. This is the Paratantra sphere.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ This interpretation of the Three Levels of Truth follows that of Sangharakshita in *A Survey of Buddhism*, and many others. There is another interpretation, in which *paratantra* is a neutral reality that is either misperceived (*parikalpita*) or correctly perceived.

⁵⁶ *The Great Way*, by Eric Cheetham, p.210



Suggestions for reflection, research, and discussion

1. Do you think the mind-only idea is absurd? Why, or why not?
2. In the text we suggest two analogies that could illustrate how things could be ‘mind-only’– our dream experience, and virtual reality. Can you think of any others?
3. Does the mind-only idea appeal to you at the emotional level? Why, or why not?
4. In your own words, what might be some advantages of seeing things as mind- only? What might be some dangers?
5. Do you think you would benefit from training yourself to see the world more as mind, and less as matter? If so, how could you go about doing this? Are there any practices you would like to take on, perhaps for a limited period, to experiment with this approach?
6. How do you pollute the river of the ālaya vijñāna? How could you make it purer and more alive?
7. Is the ālaya vijñāna the same as an eternal soul? How is it similar, and how is it different?
8. How are teachings such as anitya, anātman, and the law of karma paratantra? Can you think of any other teachings that seem to you definitely to be paratantra, rather than merely parikalpita?
9. *“We should accept ourselves for what we are, rather than trying to change ourselves.”* Why might this statement reflect a parikalpita rather than paratantra way of seeing the world?

The Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha-Essence) Doctrine and the Role of Mythic Truth

Introduction

Tathāgata is an epithet for the Buddha, meaning ‘Such-come’ or Such-gone’. In Mahāyāna Buddhism it is often interpreted as meaning one who has gone to, or come from, *Tathāta*, or Suchness – the nature of reality. *Garbha* has a range of meanings including, womb, embryo, root, essence, and matrix. So the word Tathāgatagarbha literally means something like Buddha-embryo, Buddha-root, or Buddha-essence. It refers to the idea that all beings somehow have within them the nature of the Buddha – an element that is pristine, luminous, naturally ethical, compassionate, and wise. When Western Buddhists speak of Buddha-Nature, Tathāgatagarbha is probably the traditional Sanskrit term that most closely matches what they mean.

The Tathāgatagarbha doctrine seems to have emerged within the Yogācāra tradition, and it is sometimes equated with the idea of the ‘undefiled ālaya’, so that it is seen as a basic, transpersonal level of awareness that somehow underlies all our different individual, defiled awarenesses. In other texts the Tathāgatagarbha is equated with Suchness: the nature of everything is called the Tathāgatagarbha when it is in a defiled state, and called the Dharmakāya when it is pure and liberated. Ideas about the precise nature of the Tathāgatagarbha differ widely between texts and traditions - as we shall see. And ideas very like that of the Tathāgatagarbha – as opposed to the word itself – can be found in texts that predate Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. Some support for it can even be found in the Pāli Canon.

Buddha-Nature in the Pāli Canon?

In the Chapter of the Ones in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha says:

This mind, O monks, is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed worldling does not understand this as it really is; therefore for him there is no mental development.

This mind, O monks, is luminous, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The instructed noble disciple understands this as it really is; therefore for him there is mental development.

The Buddha here seems to be pointing to something very like the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine: our mind is essentially pure, but it is defiled by ‘adventitious’ defilements – that is, by defilements that come from outside, and do not really belong to it. What we need to do is therefore to remove these defilements and allow the real nature of our mind to shine forth, not to construct something that is not already there.

Although the Buddha very seldom refers directly to this basic purity of the mind in the Pāli Canon, it seems to underlie his approach and his advice to his disciples. For example in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* and elsewhere, the Buddha teaches that if we practice the precepts and live in such a way as to let go of the hindrances, we will quite naturally experience the dhyānas – we only need a very simple meditation practice such as the mindfulness of breathing to do so, and for this reason the Buddha does not need to teach any complex or clever techniques of meditation.

So what the Buddha may be pointing at in the extract from the *Anguttara Nikāya* is that the first dhyāna is the natural state of the healthy human mind, and emerges effortlessly when we remove the defilement of the hindrances. However he implies that we still need to use this ‘luminous mind’ in a process of ‘mental development’ – note that these are the words he uses – in order to get to Enlightenment. This is a different idea from some interpretations of the Tathāgatarbha doctrine, in which the ‘luminous mind’ is seen as being identical with Enlightenment itself, rather than with the dhyānas. And it is a very different idea from the most extreme interpretations of the Buddha-Nature idea, in which all we have to do is to realise that we are already Enlightened, and no process of ‘mental development’ is needed.

Different interpretations

In the Tathāgatarbha Sutra the Buddha says the following:

Good sons, when I regard all beings with my buddha eye, I see that hidden within the kleśas of greed, desire, anger, and stupidity there is seated augustly and unmovingly the tathāgata's wisdom, the tathāgata's vision, and the tathāgata's body. Good sons, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of kleśas, have a Tathāgatarbha that is eternally unsullied, and that is replete with virtues no different from my own. Moreover, good sons, it is just like a person with supernatural vision who can see the bodies of tathāgatas seated in the lotus position inside the flowers, even though the petals are not yet unfurled; whereas after the wilted petals have been removed, those tathāgatas are manifested for all to see. In similar fashion, the Buddha can really see the Tathāgatarbhas of sentient beings. And because he wants to disclose the Tathāgatarbha to them, he expounds the sutras and the Dharma, in order to destroy kleśas and reveal the buddha nature. Good sons, such is the Dharma of all the buddhas. Whether or not buddhas appear in the world, the Tathāgatarbhas of all beings are eternal and unchanging. It is just that they are covered by sentient beings' kleśas. When the Tathāgata appears in the world, he expounds the Dharma far and wide to remove their ignorance and tribulation and to purify their universal wisdom.⁵⁷

The sutra goes on to give a number of analogies. The Tathāgatarbha is like a treasure buried under the house of a poor man – if only he knew it was there! It is like a Buddha-rūpa wrapped in dirty rags – those with normal eyes cannot see it, but the Buddha can. It is like gold that has been lost in a dung-pit – it is covered with filth, but its nature is never corrupted.

The Buddha's words here could be seen as a poetic illustration of the fact that all beings have the potential for Enlightenment, which is never lost no matter what their current state - this is what the Buddha sees when he looks at them with his Buddha- Eye. This interpretation is strongly supported by another of the analogies used: the Tathāgatarbha is like the stone of a

57 *Tathāgatarbha Sutra*, tr WH Grosnick, in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald Lopez, p.96.

mango – it does not look like much, but if it is buried in the ground it grows into the tree of Buddhahood. It is not a mango tree already!

However some texts go much further than this idea of the Tathāgatagarbha as the universal potential for Enlightenment. The Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra (not the same as the Pāli Mahāparinibbāna Sutta) even goes so far as to say that the Tathāgatagarbha is the True Self. It tells us that the Buddha teaches no-self in certain contexts, but also a Self – the True Self – in others. It reports the Buddha as saying, “I always teach that beings have the nature (svabhāva) of the Buddha. Is not this very Buddha-Nature a Self?” Elsewhere the Buddha does qualify this a little, saying that the Buddha-Nature is only a Self in a manner of speaking, but the fact remains that for this sutra the Tathāgatagarbha seems to be much more than just the potential for Buddhahood, and starts to sound rather like the Hindu idea of the unchanging, unstained Atman.

These differences between texts in the interpretation of the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine are reflected in the way it is interpreted by different schools of practice. These can perhaps be summed up in two ways: ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ versions of the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine.

‘Hard’ and ‘soft’ Tathāgatagarbha

These two different attitudes to the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine are illustrated by two contrasting parables in the White Lotus Sutra – although this very early Mahāyāna sutra never uses the word Tathāgatagarbha, the concept, if not the word, was obviously around at the time it was written down.

In one parable the son of a very rich father gets separated from his family at an early age, is forced to make his living in the most demeaning ways, and to live among the lowest strata of society. He picks up a number of coarse habits and ways of behaving which become second nature to him, he is dirty and unhealthy, and his self-image becomes poor. One day his father spots him, and tries to as it were to adopt him, although the son cannot accept that he is any relation to such a grand person, and is terrified of him. The father has to use all sorts of tricks and ruses to gradually befriend and retrain his son, starting by getting him to spend several years shifting the dirt from the outhouses. Gradually the son progresses to managing his father’s treasures and property, so that over many years he gradually leaves behind his coarse behaviour and his low self-image, and can eventually take over the aristocratic role of his father. According to Sangharakshita the father represents what we might call the ‘higher self’ of the son – what we might call his Buddha-Nature - from which he has become alienated. The son’s task is to re-unite with this higher self, but in order to do this he has to do a lot of work to train and develop himself, and to overcome the effects of many years of negative habits and conditioning.

In the contrasting parable in the same sutra, a poor man gets drunk with a rich friend, and while they are drunk the friend gives him a valuable jewel, so that he never has to be poor again. Fearing that his friend may lose the jewel while he is drunk, the rich friend sews it into his robe. But the next day, when he is sober and his friend has gone away, the poor man has no memory of the gift, and no idea he has a precious jewel sewn into his robe, so he goes about his life as before. Years later the two men meet again, and the rich friend is shocked to find that his friend still looks poor and downtrodden. He says, “What happened to the jewel I gave you?” and his friend replies, “What jewel?” The rich man then unstitches the poor man’s robe, and shows him that the jewel was there all the time; all his sufferings over the years had been unnecessary. The jewel here is obviously our ‘Buddha-Nature’, and the poor man is all of us. The parable seems to imply that all we need to do is to know that our Buddha-Nature is there,

and all our spiritual problems will be over – we do not have to do a lot of work and practice to make it manifest, as did the rich man’s son in the first parable.

The first of these parables illustrates what we might call the ‘soft’ approach to the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine, while the second illustrates the ‘hard’ approach. The ‘soft’ interpretation holds that we all have this ‘essence of the Buddha’, whether conceived of as the potential for Enlightenment or in some other way, but that we need to do a lot of work to make it a reality – we need to practice the Dharma. This is the point of view taken in *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, for example, a very important text for those schools of Far Eastern Buddhism that adopt the Buddha-Nature doctrine, which Sangharakshita describes as, “One of the best and most attractive expositions of Buddhist Idealism available.” *The Awakening of Faith* describes our Buddha Nature as like a precious jewel buried in gross rock. It is definitely there, it is what gives value to the rock, but it only becomes useful if we do a lot of work to mine it, to crush the rock, and to separate, cut, and polish the jewel.

It may be asked whether there is ever any need for one to discipline oneself in all good deeds and to try to save mankind, since... as can logically be inferred, [one has] nothing to do but to calmly contemplate suchness. In reply we say, ‘yes.’ Because the mind may be likened unto a precious jewel which is pure and bright in its essence but buried in gross veinstone. Now there is no reason to suppose that one can make it clean and pure only by contemplating it, and without applying any means [of purification] or a degree of workmanship.⁵⁸

The means of purification that the *Awakening of Faith* recommends are very much the same as those recommended by most mainstream schools of Buddhism, formulated as the Six Perfections: we should practice ‘all good deeds’, ‘try to save mankind’, cultivate *kṣānti* and *vīrya*, practice *śamatha* meditation, balance this with study and vipasyana meditation, and revere and meditate on the Buddha – in this case Amitābha.

This is typical of the ‘soft’ approach to Tathāgatagarbha: the idea may inspire us and give us energy and enthusiasm for practice, but it does not change the way we practice, and it certainly does not mean that we practice any less intensely.

What we might call the ‘hard’ form of the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine is very different. This interpretation sees our Buddha-Nature as a present reality – we already are a Buddha, and practicing to become more like a Buddha is therefore just a useless distraction. All we need to do is to believe and accept that we have Buddha-Nature - then we have found the jewel in our robe, and all our problems are over. We do not have to do anything else. All we need to do is to just sit and experience our Buddha Nature – or to just walk, just talk, just go to the pub.

Dangers of the ‘hard’ approach

If it is taken literally, the hard form of the Buddha-nature doctrine would indeed change the way we practice, and, it might mean that we do not feel the need to practice at all. Most of the practices of mainstream Buddhism rely on using the law of karma to help us change in a positive direction – a direction that moves us towards the Awakened Being we have the potential to become. But if we literally believe that we are already that Awakened Being, these developmental practices do not make sense. And if we are already Enlightened, why should we limit our spontaneous wisdom by practicing the precepts, for example?

⁵⁸ *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, tr T Suzuki.

Such a completely literal approach to the Tathāgatagarbha idea may seem so unrealistic that it is hard to believe that anyone could have taken it seriously, but it has its proponents in the modern West, and it has been a factor in traditional Buddhism, especially perhaps in Japan. For example Eisai, one of the great figures of the Zen school in Japan – which bases itself squarely on the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine – complains about this tendency in some of his fellow practitioners. Eisai spent two periods in China imbibing the authoritative Cha'an teachings, and when he returned from his second trip he was shocked to see the way that some Zen teachers presented the Dharma back in Japan. Referring to the followers of a certain Nonin, he says:

But these say, 'There are no precepts to follow, no practices to engage in. From the outset there are no passions; from the beginning we are enlightened. Therefore we do not practice, do not follow the precepts. We eat when we are hungry, rest when we are tired. Why recite the Buddha's name, why make offerings, why eat vegetarian food?'⁵⁹

He goes on to say that these people are like those who have a wrong view of emptiness – they must be avoided at all costs.

Tathāgatagarbha and our practice

Many people are inspired by the Tathāgatagarbha idea, and we need all the inspiration we can get in our practice. This is perhaps the most powerful argument for the doctrine, but there are also a traditional set of negative traits that the Buddha is said to have taught the doctrine in order to counteract, which include the following:

- Lack of confidence: If we feel we have no connection with Buddhahood, we may despair of ever reaching it; whereas if we believe there is something of the Buddha already in us, this can give us a great deal of confidence in our ability to change in a positive direction.
- Arrogance and conceit: These arise when we think we are special – either uniquely gifted or uniquely flawed; but if all beings share the Buddha-nature, we see that we are not special at all, and everybody deserves the same level of respect that we wish for ourselves.
- 'Not seeing others as oneself': Buddha nature is, at bottom, who we really are, but it is transpersonal, it is not anybody's property, and my Buddha-nature is the same as yours; if we truly saw this we would literally see others as ourselves, and the way we behave would be transformed.

But clearly the Tathāgatagarbha idea also has some definite dangers if we approach it in the wrong way, as we have seen. Is there any way that we can avoid the dangers while still benefitting from any inspiration and motivation to practice that the idea gives us? To answer this question we need to take a step back and consider what Buddhism tells us about the nature of truth, and about what Sangharakshita tells us about the difference between mythic and literal truth.

The Dharma tells us clearly that we cannot know the nature of things by talking or reasoning about it – we can only know it by direct experience, by Awakening. Anything said about it will be misleading. So the Buddha in the Pāli Canon avoids saying much at all about the nature of reality, and confines himself to a negative approach, telling us what is *not* true. It is *not* true to say that an Enlightened being continues to exist after death, or that he ceases to exist, or both, or neither. What is true is beyond the categories in which we are used to thinking.

⁵⁹ Quoted in *The Development of Japanese Zen*, P Yampolsky, in *Zen: Tradition and Transition*, ed K Kraft, p.143.

But we humans seem to need some positive statements about the nature of reality, if only to inspire us to move towards it. If we have no direct vision of our own, the purely negative approach of the Pāli Canon can easily lead us into nihilism, especially if it is combined with a basically materialistic outlook.

So the Mahāyāna sometimes tries to say something positive about the nature of things, as a concession to us unenlightened humans. It tells us that we are all the same Suchness as the Tathāgata and all other beings and things; or that mind underlies all things; or that we all have the Tathāgatagarbha. However these positive statements are metaphor, they are mythic and poetic truth, rather than literal truth. As such they are perhaps more ‘true’ than anything we could currently imagine as literal truth, but the fact remains that they are not literal truth. If we take them as myth and metaphor they might be helpful to our spiritual life, inspiring us and firing our imagination. But if we take them as literal truth, turning them into dogma, and believing all that would be implied if they were literally true, they could have very negative effects for us.

The Tathāgatagarbha doctrine is an example of this. If we engage with it as a creative myth it could inspire us and fire our imagination. If we imagine that we are a Buddha now with enough intensity, we may act, speak and think more like a Buddha – insofar as we can imagine what this might be like – and our potential for Enlightenment may be activated. To be at all realistic, such an imaginative exercise needs to be combined with practices that will help us to develop to become more like a Buddha, and which on the face of it are not compatible with the idea that we are already a Buddha. So we need to be able to hold two apparently conflicting ideas at the same time, without wishing to iron out the inconsistencies to produce a neat creed or dogma. We need to accept that we do not yet know the whole story.

But if we take the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine as literal truth, turning it into a dogma, and thinking that it is the only truth, all sorts of negative consequences will follow. If we believe we are literally Enlightened right now, why practice? We do not need to develop positive emotion through practices such as the mettā bhāvanā; perhaps we are an anxious, depressed or grumpy Buddha, but so be it - doing anything to develop beyond these traits would imply we are not already Enlightened, and would contradict our dogma. We do not need to cultivate śraddhā and reverence through practices such as pūjā; we may be an arrogant and individualistic Buddha, but again, so be it - to do anything to develop beyond these flaws would contradict our rigid view, and anyway, because we are already a Buddha, we ourselves are the proper object of our reverence!

To avoid the danger of this sort of literalism and dogmatic fundamentalism, Sangharakshita suggests that we should avoid the language of Buddha-nature and Tathāgatagarbha, and focus instead on the language of potential. However some people find that this does not have the same imaginative power as the Buddha-nature idea – the fact that we *could* become a Buddha in the future is hardly as encouraging as the fact that there is something of the Buddha in us already!

Perhaps we need a sense that we have some direct connection with Buddhahood, something we can experience now, to make our practice real and powerful. This sense could be provided by thinking more in terms of *śraddhā* – which Sangharakshita describes as, “The response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe.” It is this sense of something ultimate in us that we need in order to give us a heartfelt connection with the ideal, and to give us the confidence and longing that allow us to move towards it. For some people this

sense of ‘something ultimate in us’ is provided by thinking in terms of Buddha-nature, and perhaps there is no harm in this, as long as this is seen for what it is - an inspiring poetic vision, a creative myth, and not a dogma. But thinking more in terms of śraddhā has some definite advantages, because we feel faith in relation to something that we admit is beyond ourselves as we are now. We may have the seed or embryo of Buddhahood within us – the literal meaning of Tathāgatagarbha – and this ‘something ultimate’ may cry out to make itself heard, but we do not delude ourselves that full Buddhahood is anything other than a distant goal for us. In this way we avoid the dangers of self delusion, arrogance and spiritual inflation that go along with an immature approach to the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine.

Myth, poetry, and Mahāyāna visions of reality

We have seen that the positive statements that Mahāyāna Buddhism makes about the nature of reality are meant to be taken as myth and poetry, rather than as literal truth, and that when we take them literally and try to turn them into dogma we can get into all sorts of trouble. So perhaps the most effective of these Mahāyāna visions of reality are those that obviously present themselves as poetic and mythic, rather than masquerading as philosophy. One example of this – with which we will round off this module – is the vision of things presented by the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*.

This sutra presents us with a magical world in which each grain of dust contains innumerable world systems, and in which each moment contains eternity. It presents us with a vision of a holistic universe in which every phenomenon ‘interpenetrates’ every other, so that nothing is separate, and everything affects everything else, without the need for any direct chain of material causation. The universe is like one huge mind, or a dream, or a magical illusion. All of the apparently separate things and beings, from Buddhas on down, are all so intimately mutually interrelated that they cannot be said to exist as separate entities at all. This vision is illustrated by the image of Sudhana’s Tower, which Sangharakshita describes as follows:

...the interior of the tower reveals itself as being as wide as the sky... it contains countless palaces, porches and windows... gemstones and tapestries... gold and jewels... [and] countless beautiful birds sing melodiously... while throughout the infinity of the tower are disposed infinitudes of lotus flowers... [and] rows of trees and great mani-gems emitting rays of light. Within the tower are hundreds and thousands of towers, each one as exquisitely adorned as the main tower and as wide as the sky, at the same time offering no obstruction to all the rest.

Thus in the state of mutual interpenetration there is this perfect harmony and perfect order. Sudhana sees himself within all the towers collectively as well as within each single tower, and his joy knows no bounds. He is freed from individualistic notions, and revels in an emancipation transcending all limitations.⁶⁰

On that poetic vision of the magical world of mutual co-arising we will end this module.



60 *The Eternal Legacy*, Sangharakshita, pp.229-230

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Do you ever have a sense that your mind is “luminous” underneath its “adventitious defilements”? Does your experience in meditation ever give you a sense of this?
2. Which of the two parables from the Lotus Sutra described in the text appealed most to you when you first came across it – the story of the rich man’s son that Sangharakshita calls the ‘Parable of the Return Journey’, or the parable of the jewel in the robe? Can you identify why it appealed to you?
3. Which parable do you think is a more realistic description of the spiritual life, and why? (Note that this is a different question!)
4. Do you find the Tathāgatarbha idea inspiring? If so, tell the group how bearing it in mind alters your approach to practice.
5. Do you suffer from any of the negative tendencies that the Buddha is said to have taught the Tathāgatarbha doctrine to counteract, i.e:
 - Lack of confidence.
 - Thinking you are special
 - ‘Not seeing others as oneself’

Try to be honest!

6. Are you ever tempted to abandon or reduce your emphasis on ‘developmental’ practices such as the mettā bhāvanā? If so, has this session changed your attitude to these practices? (How often do you do the mettā bhāvanā?)
7. In what way is Sangharakshita’s idea of śraddhā as, “the response of what is ultimate in us to what is ultimate in the universe,” similar to the Tathāgatarbha idea? In what ways is it different?
8. Which of the Mahāyāna visions of reality discussed in this module means most to you?

Reference Materials

The Eternal Legacy by Sangharakshita, ISBN 1899579583, gives a thorough and coherent overview of all the different types of Buddhist texts.

http://windhorsepublications.com/the_eternal_legacy

Wisdom Beyond Words, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/wisdom-beyond-words-the-buddhist-vision-of-ultimate-reality/>

Wisdom Beyond Words – Heart Sutra, Sangharakshita.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=73>

Wisdom Beyond Words – Diamond Sutra, Sangharakshita.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=74>

The Depth Psychology of the Yogacara, Sangharakshita. An exploration of the ‘Mind-Only’ doctrine.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=42>

A Survey of Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. Chapter 2 explores the transition from the Hīnayāna to the Mahāyāna whilst chapter 3 looks at some of the different schools of the Mahāyāna. Chapter 4 explores the Bodhisattva Ideal in some depth.

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

Visions of Mahayana Buddhism, Nagapriya, Windhorse Publications.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/visions-of-mahayana-buddhism/>

A Concise History of Buddhism, Andrew Skilton. An overview of the Buddhist tradition and its development, including the Mahayana.

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

Mahāyāna Buddhism, Paul Williams. Routledge, ISBN 780415356534. This is one of the best surveys of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

<https://www.routledge.com/products/9780415356534>

The Great Way, Eric Cheetham

https://books.google.ie/books/about/The_Great_Way.html?id=VM1SAAAACAAJ

3.5

The Bodhisattva Ideal



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Introduction

Module compiled by Vajrashura and Saccanama

By now we have explored different aspects of what Sangharakshita calls ‘Basic Buddhism’ and the path laid out therein. Here Sangharakshita explores the path as conceived by, and practised in, Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Some of the most important doctrines and practices of Mahāyāna Buddhism are covered here, including:

- The Arising of the Bodhicitta.
- The Bodhisattva Vow.
- The practice of the Six Perfections (*Pāramitās*).
- The Ten Stages (*bhūmis*) of the Bodhisattva Path.
- The Bodhisattva hierarchy and the *Trikāya* doctrine.

Whilst covering a lot of ground in this series, some of it dealing with advanced stages of the spiritual path, Sangharakshita manages to make it all relevant to our own living of the spiritual life. He does not attempt an historical survey of Mahāyāna Buddhism – if you are interested in that, see the *Background Reading* section below.

Notes

In this series Sangharakshita takes for granted the Indo-Tibetan understanding of the ‘three yānas’. However, his thinking on the three yānas has changed since he gave these lectures – he no longer considers them to represent stages in the development of the individual – and it is important that you understand this when you study them. The development of his thinking on the three yānas was covered in *Part 5*, week 3 of *Year One* of the course.

If you haven’t studied this, please read either that or the source from which it was taken – chapter 2 (*The Unity of Buddhism*) of Subhuti’s book *Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition* (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 9780904766684), especially pages 39-53. If you want to, you could raise this issue for clarification in your first group meeting.

Primary Study Material

The primary study material for this module – i.e. the core material that is essential to read before your group meetings – is the series of lectures by Sangharakshita entitled *The Bodhisattva Ideal*, comprising the following lectures

1. The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal
2. The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart

3. The Bodhisattva Vow
4. Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life
5. 'Masculinity' and 'Femininity' in the Spiritual Life
6. On the Threshold of Enlightenment
7. The Bodhisattva Hierarchy
8. The Buddha and Bodhisattva: Eternity and Time

These lectures were originally given by Sangharakshita in 1969. We would strongly recommend listening to the audio lectures for this module – Sangharakshita's humour, energy and inspiration come across through listening to him in a way that you just can't get from the text.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X09>

The texts in this document are slightly edited versions of the talks, the editing being personally done by Sangharakshita for a series of booklets called *Mitrata*, produced between 1985 and 1988.

There is also a book – *The Bodhisattva Ideal* (Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579206) – which contains these lectures and lots more material inserted into them from seminars by Sangharakshita. For the purposes of the study material here, we have stayed with the original lectures, as some of the chapters in the book are too long for a weekly study group, though note that the book is well worth reading too.

Study Guide and Suggested Questions

This module is substantial in its spiritual scope, so make sure you set some time aside to prepare the material before your group meeting. As usual, it would be helpful if you can take some notes as you work your way through the primary material. This helps both with absorbing the material (avoiding any tendency to 'go in one ear and out the other'!) and gives you a summary to refer to in the group and in future.

The questions following each lecture are there 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 lecture, Sangharakshita introduces his theme and locates the origin of the whole Bodhisattva Ideal within the life of the Buddha himself.

Free Buddhist Audio link for audio talk:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=65>

Tonight it falls to us to consider 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal'. But before we go on to that principal topic of the evening, just a few words about the series as a whole. Most of you, I think, will have seen our latest Newsletter. And no doubt you will have noticed the illustration on the cover of that Newsletter. It shows a hand holding just a few leaves. It is evidently the Buddha's hand — there's a robe hanging down. This illustration illustrates the Buddha's parable of the *simsapā* leaves.

It is said that the Buddha was wandering, as often was his custom, in the forest — presumably to get away from the heat of the day — with a few of his disciples. The Buddha often taught in a very simple, direct way — not always with long and elaborate discourses. On this occasion, it is said, he just bent down and scooped up a handful of leaves. Then he asked his disciples, "Tell me, what do you think: these leaves which I hold in my hand, as compared with all the leaves of the forest, are they few or are they many?" The disciples of course replied, "Well, in comparison with all the leaves in the forest the few leaves which you hold in your hand are as nothing. They are just a handful." So the Buddha said, "So it is with all the truths which I have realized compared with what I have been able to reveal to you." So this is something upon which we need often to ponder. Even though the scriptures, in which we find the Buddha's teaching, are voluminous they represent just a fraction of the Buddha's infinite knowledge and understanding.

So the Dharma, the teaching, Buddhism, is, in any case to begin with, a handful of leaves. But in this series we are offering, as it were, just a few leaves from that handful itself, not even the whole handful. The Bodhisattva Ideal is a very, very vast subject. It is conterminous practically with the whole of Buddhism. One cannot possibly hope to exhaust this subject, even in the course of eight lectures. Therefore the series as a whole is entitled simply '*Aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal*'. Not only will the series present certain selected aspects, but it will not deal with the subject systematically. It will try to deal with it much more directly, in terms of the spiritual life and experience itself, with a minimum of historical and doctrinal detail.

So much by way of preface. Now we come to tonight's subject proper, which is, as I've said, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal'. When one begins to speak on this subject of the Bodhisattva Ideal, though one might have studied it for many years, though one might have spoken upon it many times, all the same, one hardly knows where to begin. Even in the

handful there are so many leaves one hardly knows which one to take up first. But these lectures are meant for beginners as well as for more advanced students, so perhaps it is best this evening to begin right at the beginning, with the word 'bodhisattva' itself.

It's a Sanskrit word, and it may well be unfamiliar to at least some of you. The word bodhisattva consists of two parts: *bodhi* and *sattva*. *Bodhi* means 'Knowledge', it means 'Awakening' — not knowledge in the ordinary sense, not awakening in the ordinary sense. It means knowledge in the sense of supreme knowledge; spiritual knowledge; knowledge of Reality. It means awakening in the same sense: awakening to Reality; awakening to the ultimate truth of things; penetrating to the heart of existence; seeing Reality; seeing Truth face to face and becoming one with it. *Bodhi* is, of course, in English translations usually rendered as 'Enlightenment'. That's good enough, provisionally speaking, provided, of course, we don't understand Enlightenment in the eighteenth century rationalistic sense; provided we understand it in its full spiritual, even transcendental sense. This Enlightenment, this bodhi, is the Ultimate Goal of the Buddhist life. This is what we are really concerned with: Enlightenment, Awakening, supreme knowledge.

Now *sattva*, the second part of the word, means simply 'a living being' (not necessarily a human being, it can mean any living being, even an animal, even an insect). So bodhisattva means an 'Enlightenment being' (a 'being of Awakening', if you like). Therefore, the term means a being whose whole life is dedicated to the attainment of Enlightenment.

So, we may say provisionally that the Bodhisattva is the ideal Buddhist. The Buddhist, ideally, is dedicated to following the teaching of the Buddha, and by following that teaching to realize the same spiritual experience as the Buddha himself. Therefore, we may say that the Bodhisattva, all of whose energies are devoted to the attainment of Enlightenment, is the ideal Buddhist. We may also say, therefore, that the Bodhisattva Ideal is the Buddhist Ideal itself; the Bodhisattva Ideal is the ideal of the Higher Evolution, of one's self-transformation from unenlightened to Enlightened humanity. The Bodhisattva Ideal, in a word, is the ideal of the attainment of Buddhahood.

This is the literal meaning. I've gone into it a little more carefully and closely than usual, for the benefit of those who may not have encountered this word — or this ideal — before. This is the literal meaning of the word bodhisattva. It is what logicians call the 'denotation' of the term: the plain, simple, straightforward, verbal meaning. But there is also what is known as the 'connotation'. The connotation means various associated shades of meaning which are not given directly in the literal meaning of the term itself. The connotation of the term bodhisattva is expressed by an important rider to the main definition. A Bodhisattva is described as one who is dedicated to the attainment of Enlightenment not for his own sake only, but for the benefit of all living beings. This is the full, doctrinal, traditional definition of the term bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva is not just one who is striving for Enlightenment. He is not striving for it just for his own benefit, just for his own individual emancipation, his own private Nirvana, but so that he may benefit, so that he may lead to the same state, all living beings whatsoever. This is the rider that is added.

So, what is the significance of this rider? Why was it added? Why was it not merely said that the Bodhisattva aims at the attainment of Enlightenment? Surely, that was enough. Why add this qualification: 'for the benefit of all living beings'? Why this implied distinction, as it were, between the attainment of Enlightenment for one's own sake, and the attainment of Enlightenment for the sake of others? To understand this matter we have to go back to the origins of Buddhism, we have to get down to certain fundamentals of human nature itself.

If we think about the matter we see that there's a quite important distinction between what a person is and does and what he or she says (or what he or she writes). The two — the being or doing on the one hand, and the saying or the writing on the other — are very often incommensurate. We may find, for example, that a certain person, say a psychoanalyst, may write about love, write a whole book about love, very, very beautifully indeed. They'll explain to you all about it: what love is, how it develops, how it grows, how one is to maintain the state of love, how one goes against it, what one is to do when things go wrong, and so on and so forth. But, very often, if one examines the life of that psychoanalyst, one will find that, though they seem to know all about love, though they're able to write about it very fluently, their own life fails to be, in any way, an embodiment of love. So there is an incommensurability here. Love is manifested yes, in words (in the written word), but not in the life.

On the other hand, one may have the opposite case. One may have the case of a person who really does embody love in his or her life. So even other people, meeting quite casually with this person, feel that this person is kind, is affectionate, that this person radiates goodwill (as the Buddhist expression is). But the person may not have a very adequate, verbal expression of that. They may not be able to talk about it, may not be able to analyze it, may not even be able to put it into words at all — even to those to whom they are quite close. So this is the sort of situation that we find: as between being and doing on the one hand and verbal expression on the other there is very often a sort of chasm — the one does not always correspond with the other.

Now, let us apply this to the Buddha himself. Let us apply it, in other words, on the very highest level. The Buddha by very definition was, we might even say is, a Fully-Enlightened being. Now, we hear these words, we even pronounce these words, but it's very, very difficult for us even to imagine what an Enlightened being must be like. We read the scriptures, and we read books about Buddhism. We read that a Buddha knows Reality, he's compassionate, he's wise, and so on and so forth. But most of the time, usually, these are just words. We don't really make an effort of imagination to try to realize what these words really mean, what a Fully-Enlightened being really is. Even if we encountered an Enlightened being it is very doubtful whether we would be able to recognize that that person was an Enlightened being. Now, in the case of an Enlightened being his Enlightenment (his inner experience, his knowledge of Reality) expresses itself primarily in terms of what he is and what he does. (This is the primary expression: in terms of being.) It expresses itself only secondarily in terms of what he says.

In the case of the historical Buddha, the Buddha, Gautama the Buddha, he didn't actually write anything, he didn't get even as far as that. There was verbal expression in oral communication, but nothing actually written. It is interesting, incidentally, to observe that there is no evidence that the Buddha could even read or write. This is a bit significant. If we think about it it should give us considerable food for thought, that an Enlightened being like the Buddha, in all probability, could not read, could not write, had never read a book, never read a newspaper, hadn't even read the *Dhammapada*, hadn't even signed his name to a document, was quite innocent of all these things. The Buddha just spoke; the Buddha just taught orally. However, though he might speak quite a lot, though he might even speak about Enlightenment itself, nothing that he said could fully or adequately express what he was. What the Buddha was infinitely exceeded what he said. This is, of course, evident from the parable of the *śimsapā* leaves, when the Buddha told the monks that what he had realized was infinitely greater than what he had imparted in verbal communication to the disciples.

This incommensurability between what the Buddha was and what he was able to express is underlined in a very striking manner by an incident which occurs quite a number of times in the scriptures. We're told that the Buddha meets a certain monk, or the monk meets the Buddha. And, either in reply to a question or spontaneously, the Buddha gives a few words of instruction (most of them are still in the scriptures; they are usually just a few, very simple words). Then, to our astonishment we read that hearing those words monk so-and-so (or nun so-and-so) became Enlightened, became an Arahant. This is really staggering. We can't help thinking, "But why? How?" We read those same words, we read them a hundred times over, we might even read them aloud, but nothing happens. There might be a dim glimmer of understanding; we might just think, "Well, of course, yes, it is so." We agree. We accept. But nothing 'clicks', nothing happens. We certainly don't go spiralling up into Enlightenment — nothing like that.

So, how did it happen? How was it that on these occasions — and there are quite a number of them recorded in the scriptures — these few words, apparently, were able to produce such a tremendous effect? You might try to explain it by saying, "Well, after all, the monk was prepared." That is true (it's not the whole truth, but it is true). Very likely he had been meditating for years and years before he approached the Buddha and put his question. So he was ready and receptive. But it isn't the whole explanation. There's another factor to be taken into consideration, a factor which is even more important, but which — though so important — we often overlook. That fact is the Buddha himself. It wasn't just a question of those words being spoken, of those words appearing in the air, as it were. It was the Buddha speaking those words. (In a sense it didn't really matter what the Buddha said.) It wasn't so much what the Buddha said to the monk that made the impression and brought about the transformation, it was what the Buddha himself was which produced the impression and brought about the result.

Sometimes, we are told, the Buddha didn't say anything at all, didn't even have recourse to words. But the effect was still the same. The effect was tremendous. We all know the story of the golden flower. This is a Zen story. We know how the Buddha, without saying anything, held up a golden flower in the midst of the assembly. All the monks were sitting round; hundreds, thousands of them, all quietly sitting, meditating. They all saw the Buddha hold up this golden flower. The Buddha didn't say anything. And no-one understood what he meant by it, except one very old disciple, Mahākāśyapa. He understood what the Buddha was getting at. So he looked at the Buddha, and he smiled. And the Buddha looked at him, and he smiled. We are told that that was the origin of Zen. But that, as they say, is another story. The anecdote may be apocryphal. It is said now to have been invented about a thousand years later. That doesn't really matter; the story embodies a very important truth indeed. The truth is that the Buddha taught and influenced people quite as much by what he was and by what he did as by what he said. Borrowing a modern idiom, we may say of the Buddha that the man himself, the Enlightened man, was the message. We may even say that Buddhism is the Buddha; the Buddha is Buddhism.

Thus, during the lifetime of the Master on earth, the tremendous results — in the way of the production of so many Enlightened beings — were produced not just by the words he uttered (words which are still available in the scriptures), but by his tremendous presence and personal influence — the influence which emanated, as it were, from him.

But after his death, after his *parinirvāṇa* (as it's called), a change set in — at least in certain quarters. There are several accounts available of what happened, but they are rather contradictory and confused. However, they seem to agree that not long after the Buddha's

parinirvāṇa a very large number of his monk disciples held a big meeting. They discussed, in effect, the question 'What is Buddhism?' This is, of course, a question which still very much concerns all of us. So far as we are concerned the Buddha is, as it were, dead, dead within us, in the sense that we are dead to (not aware of, not awake to) our own inner Buddha-nature. Therefore, inasmuch as he is dead we too discuss from time to time 'What is Buddhism? What is the path to the realization of Enlightenment, to the recapturing of our own, lost Buddhahood?'

After the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* it seems that there were two parties among his disciples, representing different points of view. One party said, in effect, that Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha. Buddhism is the 'Four Noble Truths', plus the 'Noble Eightfold Path', plus the 'Three Signs of Conditioned Existence', plus the 'Twelve Links of the Chain of Conditioned Co-production'. These teachings, in their entirety, given out by the Buddha during his lifetime, constitute Buddhism. Buddhism is the teaching, the doctrine.

The other party disagreed with this. Not that the other party rejected the teaching. On the contrary, they valued the teaching very highly indeed. But they did not agree that Buddhism was fully embodied in the verbal teaching. According to these people — and they seem to have been rather in the majority — Buddhism was embodied in two things. One, of course, was the teaching itself (consisting of various doctrines, various rules of conduct, and so on). The other was the life and the example of the Buddha himself. They felt that, if anything, the latter (the life and the example of the Buddha) was the more important, was even more important than the verbal, doctrinal teaching.

Let us look into this just a little more deeply. Let us try to place ourselves imaginatively in the position of those early followers of the Buddha, those who were unable to identify Buddhism exclusively with the verbal teaching. And, in case some of you may be thinking that we have wandered rather far from our subject, let me observe at once that we are very close now to the origin of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

The Buddha died. The Buddha passed away. By all accounts the disciples were grief-stricken. Not quite all of them. The Arahants, we are told, those who were Enlightened for themselves, who had gone beyond all passions, all sorrows, were not moved. Everybody else, we are told, was struck almost dumb with grief. According to tradition, even the animals were affected.

There are very, beautiful representations in Buddhist art of this very solemn, final scene, the Buddha's passing away. They are mainly Chinese in origin, and they usually show a scene in the forest. (It is rather interesting and significant, incidentally, that the Buddha was born in the midst of trees, and he gained Enlightenment under a tree, and he also died in the midst of trees.) The scene which the scriptures conjure up for us, the scene which is depicted by these ancient Buddhist artists, is of a grove of sal trees. Sal trees are very, very beautiful. I've often seen them in India. They are perfectly straight; they are just one straight, slender stem. They are not quite even a foot in diameter. They are very, very straight, and they grow up to a height of about twenty or thirty feet. They have broad, green leaves and beautiful, white flowers. So we are told that the Buddha passed away, lying on a stone couch at the foot of a cluster of these sal trees. And these representations show the disciples — monk disciples, kings, princes, merchants, wandering mendicants, brahmins, traders, flower-sellers — in attitudes of grief, grouped around him; and, a little further away, the different animals of the forest, and domesticated animals — all of them weeping, as if to say that the whole world shared a common grief in the loss of the Buddha. And there's a little folklore incident here which says that among all the animals there was only one animal which did not weep. That was the cat.

That's why the cat in Buddhism, I'm afraid, has a rather bad reputation. There was a rule which said that Bodhisattvas are not supposed to keep cats, as cats are supposed to be devoid of feeling, because even on the occasion of the Buddha's passing away the cat just went on presumably licking her paws, and didn't take very much notice.

But, however great their grief might have been, however great their grief undoubtedly was, even though they felt that — in the words of the scriptures — "the light of the world had gone out", still, slowly the disciples recovered — as we all have to recover on these occasions — from their grief. And they started taking stock of the situation. The Buddha was gone. At first they couldn't believe it, that the Buddha was no longer there. But, eventually they had to settle down to life without the Buddha (life in a 'Buddha-less' world, as it were), which, especially for those who had lived in his presence for many years, was a terrible change.

But, eventually they settled down, and they started taking stock of the situation, and they started trying to understand what they were left with. What did they have left, now that the Buddha was gone? Some said, "Well, we've got the teaching that the Buddha has given us, the doctrines: the 'Eightfold Path', 'Seven Stages of Purification', the 'Five *Skandhas*'. We've got the rules of behaviour: the ten rules, the hundred and fifty rules, and so on. We've got those." Some of them were quite satisfied, or more or less satisfied to be left with the teachings. They felt that they'd got it, as it were, all there. They, perhaps, were the more intellectual ones. They, perhaps, were those who were quite happy analyzing and classifying the teaching (the tradition which later became what we know as the Abhidharma).

There were, however, many disciples who were not satisfied with that. Yes, they had the teaching. They had nothing against the teaching, but they weren't satisfied. They felt that there was something missing from their lives now that the Buddha himself had gone. They couldn't help remembering the Buddha. Even when they were supposed to be thinking of the teaching, committing those long lists of terms to memory, they couldn't help thinking of the Buddha. They couldn't help thinking of his qualities. They couldn't help — so far as we can see — recalling various incidents in his life, incidents with which many of them must have been personally acquainted, incidents which exemplified his personal qualities.

For instance, some of them no doubt remembered the occasion when the Buddha was going round from one little hermitage to the next, and he found in one little hut an elderly monk just lying on the floor in a terrible condition. (He had evidently been there for days and days without any attention, any help.) And the Buddha asked Ānanda who was going round with him, "What is this? What has happened?" And Ānanda said, "He's an elderly monk. He hasn't got a very good temper. He's not very popular with the other monks, so they've neglected him. He's lying here in his own filth without anyone to care for him." So the Buddha sent Ānanda for water, and the water was heated. And we are told that the Buddha took the head, and Ānanda took the feet, and they lifted him onto a bed. They washed him. They made him comfortable. Then the Buddha, we're told, called all the monks together. And he said, "Monks, you have neither father nor mother, nor brother, nor sister. You have given up the world. You must be brother and sister, you must be mother and father, to one another." Then he said, "He who wishes to serve me, let him serve the sick."

So, incidents like this, incidents which show the Buddha's practical Compassion, surely must have remained in the memories, in the minds, in the hearts, of many of the disciples after his passing away.

Some of them, especially the lay disciples, might have recalled the story — again a famous story which some of you, no doubt, have read or heard about — of Kisāgotamī. In India, in those days as at the present, infant mortality was very, very high. The story goes that a young woman, a newly-married woman, lost, soon after his birth, her only child. As mothers naturally tend to be she was very much attached to the child. She couldn't believe that the child was dead. She didn't want to believe that the child was dead. She took it in her arms from house to house asking for medicine to make it well. She became almost crazed with grief.

The Buddha, we are told, heard about it. And people, in fact, sent Kisāgotamī to the Buddha, saying, "He is a great physician. He can heal your child." So she asked him to help her and to heal her child, to bring her child back to life. So, what did the Buddha do? What did the Buddha say? He didn't give her a long sermon. He knew that would be useless (she was crazed with grief; she couldn't listen to words of that sort). So he said, "I will cure your child if you bring me a certain medicine." Very eagerly she said, "Of course." So he said, "Bring me just a few grains of sesamum seed: but bring them from a house where none have died." So, off she went, knocking on the door of house after house. Everywhere she went, yes, they were ready to give the sesamum seed, but when she asked, "Has anyone died in this house?" they said, "Do not remind us of our grief. The dead are many; but the living are few." From house to house she went. At every door that she knocked, at every house from which she sought the sesamum seeds, she learnt the same lesson: the dead are many; but the living are few. Death comes to all. Death takes away father or mother, or brother, or sister. She wasn't the only one who had been bereaved.

Eventually she came back to the Buddha. She just sat quietly at his feet. The Buddha said, "Where is your child?" She didn't have the child any more. She had just left the child's body in the jungle. She didn't say anything for a long time. Then at last she said, "Give me a refuge." And she became a nun.

So this is another story which the monks, after the Buddha's death, remembered. They remembered how sympathetic he was; how understandingly he dealt with Kisāgotamī, with this poor woman who had been bereaved of her only child.

The Buddha, however, didn't have just these qualities of sympathy, of love. He also had more vigorous qualities. No doubt they remembered his fearlessness, his equanimity. No doubt they remembered how the Buddha behaved when one of his disaffected disciples, Devadatta, tried even to take his life. We are told that Devadatta was the cousin of the Buddha, but he was a very ambitious man. He had been with the Buddha for quite a number of years. He was very good at meditation. He had all sorts of supernormal powers. He could do all sorts of psychic tricks. But he was ambitious, and he was proud. One day he went to the Buddha, when the Buddha was a very old man, and he said, "Lord, you are now old. Please retire. Don't give yourself any trouble. I will take over the Sangha. You, please go into retreat. Spend your time quietly and happily." So, what did the Buddha say? The Buddha knew his mind, so he said, "Even to Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana I would not hand over the Sangha, much less still to you." Devadatta was so incensed, and so offended by these words, that he resolved to take the Buddha's life. He conspired with a wicked king with whom he was on friendly terms. He bribed the king's elephant trainer to release against the Buddha a mad elephant. But nothing happened. So Devadatta got desperate. He knew that the Buddha used, sometimes, to walk at the foot of the Vultures Peak. So he climbed up on to this rocky peak, and he pushed a great boulder down, right on to the Buddha. It bounced down the hillside and just missed the Buddha, though a splinter pierced the Buddha's foot and drew blood.

After these incidents the other disciples became very, very alarmed for the Buddha's safety, for the Buddha's life in fact. They thought they ought to protect the Buddha. So, without saying anything to him, they constituted themselves into a sort of bodyguard. They ringed the vihāra (where the Buddha was sleeping) with a circle of disciples, some with sticks. They were going to guard him. During the night the Buddha came out. (The Buddha never spent the whole night sleeping; he would sit up half the night meditating.) In the middle of the night he came out. He saw all these monks around. So he said, "Monks, what is this?" The monks said, "Lord, we're protecting you." So the Buddha said, "Go away. The Buddha needs no protection. Go away." So, slowly and shamefacedly they all just melted away. The Buddha just remained there by himself. This was the spirit of the Buddha. This was his fearlessness.

No doubt there were other occasions on which the Buddha showed qualities no less remarkable. There was, for instance, the Buddha's great love of silence. We usually think of the Buddha as talking — giving sermons, giving discourses. But it wasn't always like that. There's a very wonderful story in the scriptures about how the physician Jīvaka, who was the Buddha's physician and also the physician of Ajātaśatru, a neighbouring king, took the king on a midnight visit to the Buddha. Apparently they were all sitting on the roof of the palace admiring the full moon. It was the full moon of October (when the lotus is supposed to bloom). They agreed that it was a wonderful night for a visit to a holy man. (You see the Indian tradition: not, a wonderful night to go to the cinema, or to go somewhere like that; a wonderful night to go and see a holy man.) It was twelve o'clock at night. The moon was full; the bright moonlight was over everything. So, off they went. Being a king he had to go in state, in style. So we are told that five hundred elephants were saddled, and five hundred ladies of the harem were mounted on the elephants. The king went off at their head with Jīvaka, to visit the Buddha in the depths of the forest.

As they got into the depths of the forest it was very, very dark. The king, after all, was a king, and he'd got his throne by foul means, and he had a guilty conscience. He became afraid, and he became suspicious. He stopped and he said, "Jīvaka, are you leading me into a trap?" (This is the way the minds of kings worked in those days.) So Jīvaka said, "Fear not, your majesty. It's just a little way ahead. The Buddha lives in the depths of the forest." So they went on a few more hundred yards, and it became darker and darker, and more and more silent — they couldn't hear anything at all. So Ajātaśatru said to Jīvaka, "Jīvaka, are you sure you are not leading me into a trap?" So Jīvaka said, "Be not afraid, your majesty. There's no trap." Then Ajātaśatru said, "But you've told me that the Buddha is living there with two thousand five hundred monks. There isn't a sound. With two thousand five hundred monks, well, you should be able to hear them a mile away." But Jīvaka insisted, "Don't worry. Look — just over there you can see the lights burning in the Buddha's pavilion." Sure enough, as they got near, there was a great circle made under the trees. And there was the Buddha sitting in the midst, surrounded by his two thousand five hundred disciples. All were perfectly silent. All were sitting there in the light of the full moon. There was not a movement, not a sound — perfect silence. So the king, with all his fears, with all his suspicions, came upon this sight. He came into this clearing. And we are told that he said to Jīvaka, "O that my son might experience peace of mind such as this." (In India they are very much attached to their sons, and so, if you wish anything, you wish it for your son.) So this was Ajātaśatru's wish. This goes to illustrate another great quality of the Buddha: his love of peace, his love of solitude, his love of silence.

To touch upon something rather different, some of them must have remembered stories concerning what we would call miracles, all sorts of odd things that used to happen when the Buddha was about. There were supernatural happenings, even, as it were, miraculous happenings, something for which there was no rational explanation. They might have recalled

how people used to say that, when the Buddha was staying anywhere, during the night you'd see marvellous figures, hovering around, going to see the Buddha, even going to speak with the Buddha. Sometimes — it might even be — the Buddha would give them instruction during the night, just as he gave to human beings during the day.

So surely, after the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, stories of this kind from the life of the Master must still have been very, very fresh in the minds of the disciples. Surely many of them must have felt that these stories (stories like the story of the sick monk and the story of Kisāgotamī) conveyed something of tremendous importance. Many of them might have felt that these incidents exhibited the qualities of the Buddha, and therefore conveyed something that the formal teaching (the 'Four Noble Truths', the 'Eightfold Path', the 'Five *Skandhas*', and so on) did not succeed in conveying. In other words, the stories were able to convey the personal influence of the Buddha, the personal effect of the Buddha on the minds and the hearts of the people with whom he came in contact. They conveyed, in other words, the direct impact of an Enlightened being, above and beyond all words.

We can get an example of this — a very beautiful example — from the story of Ānanda. Ānanda, you probably know, was one of the Buddha's cousins. For more than twenty years he was the Buddha's personal attendant. He went with the Buddha everywhere. If the Buddha was invited for lunch, Ānanda went. If the Buddha went to give a sermon, Ānanda went. If the Buddha received visitors, answered questions, Ānanda was present. He was always present. He was always there. He was the Buddha's shadow, as it were; his personal attendant, his servant, his disciple. And the Buddha, we gather, was all in all to him.

When the Buddha was about to pass away, Ānanda — we can understand — felt it more deeply than anybody. The *Mahā-parinibbāṇa Suttanta* relates to us the scene. The Buddha was inside, (as it were) dying. Ānanda, we're told, went to the door of the hermitage where the Buddha was staying at that moment (before he moved out into the open air). And Ānanda, we are told, stood leaning against the lintel. (The door must have been very, very low, and he was leaning with his elbow against the lintel.) As he was leaning there in that way he was thinking that the Buddha was going to pass away very soon — in a matter of hours, or at most within a matter of days. He was so upset, he was so grieved, that he was weeping bitterly. And as he wept he said to himself, "The Master is about to pass away from me: he who is so kind." These were Ānanda's words which were heard by other disciples and reported to the Buddha, who then called Ānanda.

These words of Ānanda, as he stood there, leaning against the lintel of the door and weeping, are of the very greatest significance. Ānanda, as I've said, had been with the Buddha twenty years. He had heard the Buddha deliver hundreds of discourses, no doubt often abstruse, deeply philosophical, deeply mystical discourses. He had heard him answer thousands of questions. He must have admired his brilliance, his affability, the very easy way in which he handled difficult questions. No doubt Ānanda must have also witnessed all sorts of odd things about the Buddha, all sorts of strange, supernormal happenings. But what was the overall impression of the Buddha's person, of the Buddha's character, upon Ānanda after those twenty years when he had heard so much? The overall impression which the Buddha made upon Ānanda is given in those few words which Ānanda uttered as he wept: 'he who is so kind.' This is very significant. Not, 'he who is so wise', or 'he who is so Enlightened', or 'he who has such a deep, philosophical understanding', or 'he who is such a brilliant debater', or 'he who has worked so many miracles', or 'he who is so brave', or 'so tireless'. Not that, but 'he who is so kind'.

This was the overall impression of the Buddha after twenty years of intimate day-to-day contact: 'he who is so kind.' We can say that half of Buddhism is in that remark. The origin of the Bodhisattva Ideal is in that remark. We may say that the Buddha's Wisdom is revealed in the teaching: the 'Four Truths', the 'Eightfold Path', the 'Chain of Conditioned Co-production', the analysis of the being into the 'Five *Skandhas*', all sorts of other, deep, difficult, abstruse teachings found in the scriptures. These teachings embody the Buddha's Wisdom. But his love, his Compassion, his sympathy — which had so deeply impressed Ānanda more than anything else — was revealed in his life and his personal example.

So we can now, perhaps, understand the position of the disciples after the Parinirvāṇa, the position (that is to say) of those disciples who could not identify Buddhism exclusively with the verbal teaching of the Buddha. We can perhaps understand now what they were getting at. They were saying, in effect, that Buddhism was not just Wisdom — as represented by the teaching. They were saying that Buddhism was also love, it was also Compassion — as exemplified by the life of the Buddha. They were saying that both should be taken into consideration in a formulation of Buddhism itself. They were saying (in a way) that the Buddha himself — the life, the person, the inspiring example of the Buddha — cannot be left out of Buddhism, cannot be left out of his own religion. In other words, they were saying that the Buddhist life is not just a development of Wisdom; it is also a cultivation of love, a cultivation of Compassion. We should try to attain Enlightenment, yes; try to 'Awaken', try to see the Truth, yes — this represents the Wisdom aspect. But we should try to attain it for the sake of all sentient beings — this represents the Compassion aspect. These two together — Wisdom aspect (attainment of Enlightenment aspect), and Compassion aspect (attainment of Enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings) — constitute the Bodhisattva Ideal.

Now we can see how and why the Bodhisattva Ideal originated. In general the Bodhisattva Ideal is a statement of the Buddhist Ideal itself, the ideal of the Higher Evolution, the ideal of evolution from unenlightened to Enlightened humanity, to Buddhahood. But the Bodhisattva Ideal itself also stresses that Buddhism comprises not just the teaching of the Buddha, but also his life and his personal example. In practical terms this means that we must develop both Wisdom and Compassion, both the self-regarding and the other-regarding aspects of the spiritual life. During the coming weeks we shall be seeing how this works out, how this principle — or this pattern — works out in detail.

Now, before concluding, just a couple of observations. I have said that the Buddha cannot be left out of Buddhism. This statement links directly with what will be our concluding function of the evening, the Sevenfold Puja. The Puja brings us, as it were, face to face with the Buddha. This is why we stand, or sit, directly facing the shrine and the image. This enables us to contemplate the Ultimate Goal. The teaching is, as it were, for a moment forgotten. When we sit for the Puja, when we look at the Buddha image (or picture), we do not think of the teaching for that moment — at least, the teaching occupies a subordinate place. For a moment we are face to face, as it were, with Buddhahood. We contemplate Buddhahood: and we recognize in that Buddhahood our own, true nature.

Our second and final point relates to Wisdom and Compassion. These are what we may describe as the 'self-regarding' and the 'other-regarding' aspects of the spiritual life. These two aspects (the self-regarding and the other-regarding) constitute the basic polarity of the spiritual life: Enlightenment within, through Wisdom; manifestation without, through Compassion. There are many manifestations of this basic polarity of the spiritual life (the self-regarding and the other-regarding aspects). Some of these we shall be exploring in the coming weeks. For instance, we shall be studying 'Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life', and

"Masculinity" and "Femininity" in the Spiritual Life'. In this way we shall come to understand some of the most important aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal. We shall come to see in detail, as we have tried to see, this evening, in general, the origin and development of the Bodhisattva Ideal.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What are the distinctive emphases of the Bodhisattva Ideal?
2. *"Once the Blessed One was staying at Kosambī in the siṅsapā forest. Then, picking up a few siṅsapā leaves with his hand, he asked the monks, "What do you think, monks: Which are more numerous, the few siṅsapā leaves in my hand or those overhead in the siṅsapā forest?" "The leaves in the hand of the Blessed One are few in number, lord. Those overhead in the siṅsapā forest are more numerous." "In the same way, monks, those things that I have known with direct knowledge but have not taught are far more numerous [than what I have taught]. And why haven't I taught them? Because they are not connected with the goal, do not relate to the rudiments of the holy life, and do not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to self-awakening, to Unbinding. That is why I have not taught them." (S.N. 56.31)*
What is the significance of this story of the siṅsapā leaves for us?
3. In what ways can the Bodhisattva be described as "the ideal Buddhist"?
4. Which do you connect with more – the teaching of the Buddha or his life and example? Does this reflect any general trends in your life? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each way of connecting?
5. What is the Buddha's attitude to Kisāgotamī? What is your response to this story?
6. Why do you think fearlessness is stressed as an aspect of Enlightenment?
7. What makes a Buddha unique? What does this tell us about Enlightenment?
8. Is the Buddha alive to you now or is he merely a historical figure? If he is alive to you, in what way?
9. Do you find the Bodhisattva Ideal personally inspiring? If so, in what ways does it inspire you?

We have already come across the 'Bodhi Heart' – or 'Bodhicitta' – in Part 4, week 6 of Year One, whilst Śāntideva's method of developing it – the Sevenfold Pūjā – has been introduced in Part 5, week 7 of Year One. Here, though, Sangharakshita places it in a broader context and introduces another traditional way to develop it.

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Last week we addressed ourselves to the question: Who or what is a Bodhisattva? We saw that a Bodhisattva – as the term itself suggests – is one who seeks to gain Enlightenment; is one whose whole being, in fact, is orientated towards Enlightenment. We then saw that a Bodhisattva is further defined as, 'one who seeks to gain Enlightenment not for his own sake only, but for the sake of all sentient beings'. Now, there arises a most important, practical question: How does one become a Bodhisattva? In other words, how does one embark upon the actual realization of this sublime, spiritual ideal? This is where we come in this week. The answer to this question is quite short and straightforward, but it demands considerable explanation. The traditional answer to the question is: one becomes a Bodhisattva upon the awakening of the Bodhi Heart. 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart' is, of course, our subject for this week.

Let us go back for a moment to the original Sanskrit term. This is *bodhicitta-utpāda*. *Bodhi* means, as we saw last week, 'spiritual Enlightenment', or 'spiritual awakening', (consisting in the seeing of Reality face to face). *Citta* means 'mind', it means 'thought', it means 'consciousness', it means also 'heart'; it means all of these things. *Utpāda* means simply 'arising' or, more poetically, 'awakening'.

This term, *bodhicitta-utpāda*, is one of the most important terms in the whole field of Buddhism, certainly in the whole field of the Mahayana. It is usually translated into English as 'the arising of the thought of Enlightenment', but let me say at once that this is exactly what it is not. In a sense you could hardly have a worse translation. It's not a thought about Enlightenment at all. We can think about Enlightenment as much as we like. We can think about it, read about it, talk about it. 'Enlightenment is both Wisdom and Compassion' – the words come very glibly from our tongues, and we think we know all about Enlightenment. We are thinking about Enlightenment perhaps even now. The thought about Enlightenment undoubtedly has arisen in our minds as we sit here, but the Bodhicitta has not arisen -- we haven't become transformed into Bodhisattvas. The Bodhicitta is something very much more than a thought about Enlightenment. Guenther translates it as 'Enlightened Attitude'. I personally sometimes translate it (I translated it like this in *The Three Jewels*) as the 'Will to Enlightenment'. In the title of tonight's talk we speak of it as the 'Bodhi Heart'. Although all

these alternative translations are considerably better than the 'thought of Enlightenment', none of them is really satisfactory. (This isn't altogether the fault of the English language. We may say it's the fault of language itself. We might even say that 'Bodhicitta' is a very unsatisfactory term for the Bodhicitta.) The Bodhicitta is, in fact, not a mental-state (or -activity, or -function) at all. It is certainly not a 'thought' (not a thought which you or I can entertain). If we think of Enlightenment, that is not the Bodhicitta; the Bodhicitta has nothing to do with thought. It is not even an 'act of will', if by that I mean my personal will. It is not even 'being conscious', if by that I mean my being conscious – or your being conscious – of the fact that there is such a thing as 'Enlightenment'. The Bodhicitta is none of these things.

We may say that the Bodhicitta basically represents the manifestation, even the irruption, within us, of something transcendental. In traditional terms – and I am thinking now of Nāgārjuna's exposition of the Bodhicitta in a little work which he wrote on that subject (a very short but very profound work) – the Bodhicitta is said to be not included in the 'Five *Skandhas*'. This is a very significant statement indeed. It gives us a tremendous clue to the nature of the Bodhicitta. This statement of Nāgārjuna, representing the best Mahayana tradition, requires a great deal of pondering.

Some of you might not have encountered these 'Five *Skandhas*' before. *Skandha* is another of those untranslatable terms. It is usually translated as 'aggregate', or 'confection', or something equally unsatisfactory. It is really untranslatable. It literally means 'the trunk of a tree', but that doesn't get us very far. However, the 'Five *Skandhas*' are one of the basic, doctrinal categories of Buddhism. Whether it's Pali literature, Sanskrit literature, Tibetan, Chinese, over and over again you get references to the 'Five *Skandhas*', the 'Five Aggregates', or, as Dr. Conze delights to translate the term, the 'Five Heaps' (which doesn't help us very much either). Let us refer back to these 'Five *Skandhas*' a little, so that we are quite sure where we are, and what we are trying to ponder on.

The first of the 'Five *Skandhas*' is *rūpa*. *Rūpa* means 'bodily form', it means anything perceived through the senses. Secondly there is *vedanā*. *Vedanā* means 'feeling', it means 'emotion' – positive, negative, pleasant, painful, etc. Thirdly there is *saṃjñā*, which is, very roughly, 'perception'. (Sometimes it is translated 'sensation', but it seems that 'sensation' is a more suitable translation for *vedanā*.) *Saṃjñā* is the recognition of something as that particular thing. When you say, "that's a clock", that is *saṃjñā*; you've recognized it as that particular thing, you've identified it, pointed it out, labelled it. Fourthly, the *saṃskāras*. This term is more difficult still to translate. By some German scholars it is usually translated as 'steering forces'. We may say, very roughly indeed, 'volitional activities', i.e. acts of will, etc. Fifthly, *viññāna*, which is 'consciousness': consciousness through the five physical senses, and through the mind at various levels.

So these are the 'Five *Skandhas*': *rūpa* (material form), *vedanā* (feeling, emotion), *saṃjñā* (perception), *saṃskāras* (volitional activities), *viññāna* (consciousness). I must warn you that if you want to make anything of Buddhist thought at all, especially on its more technical side (its philosophy, its metaphysics), you must know these 'Five *Skandhas*' 'inside out', as it were. You must be able to reel them off, and know what you are talking about, otherwise you won't get very far with Buddhist philosophy. This, however, is just by the way – we are not dealing so much now with Buddhist philosophy.

In Buddhist thought, generally speaking, these 'Five *Skandhas*' are regarded as exhausting our entire psychophysical existence. In the entire range of our psychophysical existence, on all levels, there's nothing – no thought, no feeling, no aspect of our physical existence – which is

not included under one or another of these 'Five *Skandhas*'. This is why, at the very beginning of the *Heart Sutra*, the text says that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, coursing in the profound Perfection of Wisdom, looked down on the world (looked down on conditioned existence), and saw Five Heaps (Five *Skandhas*). That is just what he saw. No more than that. He saw that the whole of psychophysical conditioned existence consists of just these five things; nothing occurs, nothing takes place, nothing exists, on the conditioned level of existence (the *saṃskṛta* level) which cannot be included under one or another of these 'Five *Skandhas*'.

But the Bodhicitta is not included in the 'Five *Skandhas*'. The 'Five *Skandhas*' comprise all that is of this world, so when we say that the Bodhicitta is not included in the 'Five *Skandhas*', it means that it is something altogether out of this world, something transcendental. It is not a thought, nor a volition, nor an idea, nor a concept, but – if we must use words at all – it is a profound, spiritual (read 'transcendental') experience: an experience which re-orientes our entire being.

Perhaps I can make this rather obscure matter clearer with the help of a comparison – and it is only a comparison – from the Christian tradition. You can imagine someone in a Christian context talking about 'thinking of God'. When you talk about 'thinking of God', even if you are a pious churchgoing person, it doesn't mean very much – you just think about God. You might think of God as a beautiful old gentleman seated in the clouds, or you might think of God as Pure Being, Knowledge, Wisdom, etc. But 'thinking about God' would be just thinking about God. You wouldn't describe it as a spiritual experience, or as a profound experience of any sort. Suppose, however, you speak of 'the descent of the Holy Spirit', this would be a very different thing indeed. Thinking about God is one thing, but having the Holy Spirit descend upon you, and into you, so that you are filled by the Holy Spirit, is a quite different thing.

So it is just the same in the case of 'thinking about Enlightenment' (or the 'thought of Enlightenment') on the one hand, and the actual arising of the Bodhicitta on the other. If the thought of Enlightenment is analogous to thinking about God, the arising of the Bodhicitta is analogous to the descent upon you – in full force, as it were – of the Holy Spirit. Now this comparison is just for the purpose of illustration – if possible, illumination. There's no question of equating these two different sets of doctrinal and spiritual concepts. I am concerned only to try to make clear the nature of the difference between thinking about Enlightenment and the arising of the Bodhicitta. The Bodhicitta is not just a thought about Enlightenment, but is a profound spiritual experience, even a profound, spiritual, transcendental 'entity'.

Not only is the Bodhicitta transcendental, but the Bodhicitta is not individual. This is another point that Nāgārjuna makes. We speak of the Bodhicitta as arising in this person or that person, and one might then therefore think that there were in existence a number of Bodhicittas – apparently a glorious plurality of Bodhicittas – arising in different people, making them all Bodhisattvas. In fact, it isn't so at all. Different thoughts (even if they are thoughts of the same thing) may arise in different people. But just as the Bodhicitta is not a 'thought' of Enlightenment, it is not an individual thing – it is not anybody's individually – so there is no plurality of Bodhicittas arising in different people. *Your* thought of Enlightenment is *your* thought of Enlightenment, *my* thought of Enlightenment is *my* thought of Enlightenment; there are many thoughts. But *your* Bodhicitta is *my* Bodhicitta, and *my* Bodhicitta is *your* Bodhicitta; there is only one Bodhicitta.

The Bodhicitta is only one, and individuals in whom the Bodhicitta is said to have arisen participate in that one Bodhicitta, or manifest that one Bodhicitta, in varying degrees. The Mahayana writers bring in that very well-worn, but still very beautiful, illustration of the

moon. (I don't know whether it is full moon day tonight. I think perhaps it's tomorrow. But we have outside, as you probably noticed as you came along, a very, very beautiful, almost full, moon, shining in the clear blue sky, with just one or two stars in attendance, as it were.) This old Buddhist simile tells us that the Bodhicitta is like the moon (like, if you like, the full moon). The Bodhicitta is reflected, as it were, in different people (i.e. it arises in different people) just as the moon is reflected variously in different bodies of water. There are many reflections, but only one moon; in the same way, many manifestations, but one Bodhicitta.

Now, though we used the expression 'reflection', which is a bit static, we are not to think of the Bodhicitta in purely static terms. What is known in the Mahayana tradition as the 'Absolute Bodhicitta' – the Bodhicitta in its Absolute aspect, outside space and time – is identical with Reality itself. Being identical with Reality, the Absolute Bodhicitta is beyond change, or rather, is beyond the opposition between change and non-change. But this doesn't hold good of what is known in the tradition as the 'relative Bodhicitta'. The relative Bodhicitta is, as it were, an active force at work. This is why, as I said a little while ago, I prefer, personally, if I have to translate the term 'Bodhicitta', to speak of it as the 'Will to Enlightenment' (bearing in mind that one is speaking of the relative, as distinct from the Absolute, Bodhicitta). This Will to Enlightenment though, is not an act of will of any individual. 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 like to use this word 'will', but there's really no other.) We might think of the Bodhicitta as a sort of 'cosmic will' at work, if you like, 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. This being the case it is clear that individuals do not possess the Bodhicitta. If you possess it, it's not the Bodhicitta (it's something else; it's your own thought or idea); the Bodhicitta – the transcendental, non-individual, cosmic Bodhicitta – you've missed. Individuals do not possess the Bodhicitta. We may say that it is the Bodhicitta that possesses individuals. And those of whom the Bodhicitta 'takes possession' (in whom this Bodhicitta arises) become what we call 'Bodhisattvas'. They live for the sake of Enlightenment; they strive to actualize, for the benefit of all, the highest potentialities that the universe contains.

So much, then, for the Bodhicitta. Very much more could be said about it. Some of the Mahayana sutras in particular, are never tired of singing the praises of the Bodhicitta. I remember that a few years ago, when I was in Kalimpong, I was compiling a book on the whole field of Buddhist canonical literature. And I came, amongst other things, to the Mahayana sutras, and among other sutras to the *Gaṇḍavyūha*. I wanted to quote just a few verses of what the *Gaṇḍavyūha* said in one place about the Bodhicitta. And, believe it or not, there were hundreds and hundreds of clauses, and hundreds and hundreds of illustrations, comparing the Bodhicitta to this, comparing it to that, comparing it to a gold mine, comparing it to the sun, comparing it to the moon, comparing it to everything. You got the impression – after going through this vast array of similes and comparisons – that, for the Mahayana author of the sutra (traditionally, the Buddha), the Bodhicitta was just everything. It was hymned and it was praised almost as though it were a sort of deity. You certainly didn't get the impression of someone's thought or idea. You got the impression, rather, of something vast, something cosmic, something sublime, which descends into, and penetrates, and possesses, people who are receptive to it – not anything individual, not anything limited in any way. So the

Mahayana sutras (not only the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, but many other sutras) sing the praises of the Bodhicitta inexhaustibly.

But tonight we have no more time to say anything more on the subject of the Bodhicitta, so this must suffice for the present. A further question arises for our consideration, to which we now have to turn. We have understood what a Bodhisattva is, we have understood how one becomes a Bodhisattva through the arising within one of this glorious Bodhicitta, now the question arises: How does the Bodhicitta itself arise? This is a very mysterious matter. The Mahayana sutras supply one of their unfailing similes. They say that the arising of the Bodhicitta within us is like a blind man finding a priceless jewel on a dunghill at night. It is so wonderful, it is so unexpected – who would think that a blind man just poking his way round the dunghill in the middle of the night would find a priceless jewel? So, in the same way, who would have thought that in our case, living as we are in the midst of the world – earning our living, raising our families, going along to meditation classes once a week – in us this Bodhicitta should ever have arisen? This is the simile that the Mahayana sutras give.

But, wonderful as it is, unexpected as it is, the arising of the Bodhicitta is, in fact, not at all a matter of chance. It is one of the most fundamental principles of Buddhist thought that whatever arises in the universe, at any level, arises in dependence on causes and conditions; not by chance, not as a result of 'fate', not as a result of the 'will of God', but in dependence upon natural – and even the supernatural is natural – causes and conditions. This applies also to the arising of the Bodhicitta within us. That event, that phenomenon, depends upon the creation of certain mental and spiritual conditions. These mental and spiritual conditions we can create within ourselves. When we create them, the Bodhicitta will then arise.

This fact draws our attention to one of the most important principles of the entire spiritual life: the need for preparation. We are usually, most of us, in far too much of a hurry. I don't mean just that we are working hard. I don't mean just that we are putting a lot of effort into things. I don't even mean that we are doing things quickly. I mean that we are just in too much of a hurry. This means that we usually want results rather quickly. And, because we are so anxious to secure the results we very often neglect the preparations, we neglect the very conditions upon which the results depend. This is one of the reasons, if not the main reason, why we so often fail. But, on the other hand, if we make sufficiently careful preparations we can usually quite safely leave the results to look after themselves. We shall find that we almost succeed without noticing it.

This applies very much to meditation. If you want to meditate, for instance at home, you should not just sit down and just think you can meditate – that isn't possible. In the East there is a tradition that when you want to meditate, you should first of all go into the room in which you are going to meditate, and, very slowly and carefully, sweep it – you sweep the floor with a broom. You dust the room – if necessary, you dust the image of the Buddha there. You tidy the room. You do all this slowly, gently, mindfully. Then – in a meditative sort of mood – you change the flowers; you throw away the old flowers – in some Eastern countries you throw them into running water, not on the dust heap – and you cut fresh flowers, you put them in a vase, you arrange them thoughtfully: you take your time over it. Then, maybe you light a candle, maybe you light a stick of incense. You look around, just to see that everything is in order – maybe the window open for a bit of fresh air, the door shut to keep out disturbances. You arrange your seat, making sure it is placed square, and that if you are sitting on a piece of cloth it is properly folded. Then you sit down. You just adjust your clothing, put your feet into the proper posture – your hands. Even then, very often, you won't start meditating, you'll recite the Refuges, the Precepts, a few invocations to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Then – and only

then – you will start meditating. If one proceeds in this way, preparing, paving the way, then there is a very much greater chance of success. This is the case not just with regard to meditation, but even with regard to comparatively ordinary, daily activities. If you want to write something, if you want to paint a picture, even if you want to cook, the secret lies in the preparation.

It is just the same with regard to this matter of the arising of the Bodhicitta. One should not even think of becoming a Bodhisattva. (One should not even *think* of it.) It is not anything that you can become; it's not anything that you can sort of go into, follow a course, get a certificate – "you are a Bodhisattva". (I'm sorry to say that even in the East there are establishments which give certificates of this sort. People have these certificates framed and put up on their wall for all to see -- "I'm a Stream-Entrant", or "I'm a Bodhisattva". It's a sort of ecclesiastical rank or dignity, which is nonsense.) One shouldn't even think of developing the Bodhicitta. One can't even do that. One can't even think of it. It's out of the question. It's a waste of time. But, one can very well think of creating within oneself the conditions which will enable the Bodhicitta to manifest.

There are two ways of doing this. One way is associated with the name of Śāntideva, the other way is associated with the name of Vasubandhu. Both are great Indian masters of the Mahayana— Śāntideva in the seventh, and Vasubandhu probably in the fourth, centuries CE. Both of them are traditionally recognized as being themselves Bodhisattvas. Their two methods, though different, are complementary, and can even be combined.

Śāntideva's method is, frankly, more devotional. It is known as *anuttara-pūjā*, or 'Supreme Worship' ('Supreme Adoration' even). It consists in a series of what we may describe as seven spiritual exercises. Each of these exercises is expressive of a certain phase of the religious consciousness. When we externally go through certain ceremonies or recitations, corresponding to these different phases of the religious consciousness, then the Supreme Worship is known as the 'Sevenfold Worship'. We are, of course, quite familiar with this inasmuch as it is the 'Sevenfold Puja' – or Sevenfold Worship – that we recite every Friday evening after our lecture, before we disperse. But, though we perform externally – though we recite with our lips – we must always recollect that the Supreme Worship, even the 'Sevenfold Puja', is essentially a sequence of devotional and spiritual moods and experiences, which, between them, pave the way for the arising of the Bodhicitta. Many of you are familiar with the 'Sevenfold Puja', and have joined us in reciting it here in this very room, but, for the benefit of those who are new to it, and those who perhaps haven't participated in it ever before, let me just very briefly go through these seven items.

First of all, there's what we call 'Worship' itself, worship proper. This is addressed principally to the Buddha: not just to the human, historical figure, but to the Buddha as the symbol or representative of the Ideal of Enlightenment itself. When we perform *pūjā*, or when we adopt the attitude of worship within our hearts, it means that we recognize with deep devotion, with great reverence, with awe, the sublimity, the value, of this Ideal of attaining Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. And, feeling so powerfully and profoundly filled with this devotion, we cannot but make offerings, we cannot but give something. The most popular offerings are flowers, lights, and incense (though there are indeed many other things). These are offered before the Buddha image, representing our feeling of worship, of devotion, even of adoration, for that – as yet very distant – Ideal of Supreme Enlightenment. This is the 'Worship'.

Secondly there is what is known as the 'Obeisance', which literally means 'bowing down'. This consists simply in the payment of outward physical respect. Buddhist tradition says it is not enough just to feel something mentally. You are not just a 'thinker', you've not just got a brain; you've got speech, you've got a body, too. So, in any religious exercise all three must participate – body, speech, and mind. So one makes an external obeisance. At least, one puts the hands together in reverence and salutation. This is a gesture, also, of humility; we not only see the Ideal shining in the distance, but we recognize that as yet we are far from it. The Ideal, just like the Himalayan peaks, is there in the distance, and we are here. We have just put our foot onto the ... I won't even say onto the road, but onto a little path, leading to a lane, leading to a road, which leads to the pathway, leading to that sublime Enlightenment. So we, as it were, bow down, we make obeisance from a distance, seeing the Ideal shining afar off. This is what is meant by the 'Obeisance'.

Thirdly, there's the 'Going for Refuge'. We go for refuge to the Buddha, to the Dharma (or Teaching), and the Sangha (or the Spiritual Community). We began in the 'Worship' by recognizing the Ideal (by just seeing it, venerating it, responding to it emotionally); then, in the 'Obeisance' we recognize (by our salutation, our obeisance) the distance at which we stand from it. Now, in this third stage, this phase of 'Going for Refuge', we commit ourselves to the actual realization of the Ideal. We recognize the Ideal 'there', we recognize that we stand 'here', and now we resolve that we will go forward from 'here' to 'there'. We commit ourselves to the realization of that Ideal; we commit ourselves to the Way leading to that realization; and we commit ourselves to the Company – the spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood – of all who walk that Way to Enlightenment along with us. This is the 'Going for Refuge'.

Then, fourthly, 'Confession of Faults'. Some people don't feel quite happy about this – I don't know whether it is because they feel they don't have any faults. What it really represents is a 'recognition' of the darker side of ourselves, that side of ourselves which we would rather other people did not see, which we would rather ourselves not see – which we try to forget, but which is always dogging and pursuing us, just like Mephistopheles dogging and pursuing Faust in Goethe's great poem. But, though we recognize this darker side – though we recognize our little weaknesses, our little shortcomings, our little backslidings, our little meannesses, our little furtivenesses, even our own, downright, plain, open, honest wickedness – this is not a matter of breastbeating. It is not a matter of proclaiming oneself the greatest sinner that ever lived. It is merely a realistic appraisal of our own shortcomings, as well as the resolve that, in future, we shall do our best to overcome them – because they are just so much luggage, so much extra weight, that we have to carry on this journey to Enlightenment, on which, of course, we have to travel very light indeed. So, this is 'Confession of Faults'.

Then, fifthly, 'Rejoicing in Merits'. This means that we think of the lives of good, noble, virtuous, holy people; Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, great saints and sages; even great poets, great artists, great musicians, scientists, even ordinary people whom we know – who have exhibited, or who do exhibit, in their lives, outstanding human and spiritual qualities. We read about their lives, we admire them. We read their works, we recollect them. We think, "What a wonderful example – what heroism," or, " – what nobility, – what self-sacrifice, what fortitude, – what determination, – what purity, – what love, – what compassion!" We derive tremendous encouragement and inspiration from all this. We think, "Isn't this a marvellous thing that here in this wicked world, where one can encounter so much meanness and so much misery, at least from time to time, there do appear people of this sort", – you meet them, and you feel a little uplifted; you read about them even, you feel a little uplifted. You rejoice in the fact that the world can produce people of this sort. You rejoice in the fact that good, holy, and enlightened people live at every age of human history, in every part of the world, succouring

and helping the rest of humanity in so many different ways – whether saint or sage, teacher or mystic, even as a scientist or administrator, the humble worker in a hospital, anybody who helps in any way to raise humanity to higher, more divine heights.

This is what is meant by 'Rejoicing in Merits': feeling happy in people's virtues. It is not denigrating, nor debunking – which now seems to be the fashion – but appreciating, and enjoying, and feeling happy in the contemplation of, other people's good qualities, good deeds, and good nature.

Then, sixthly, 'Entreaty and Supplication'. This means that we request those who are more enlightened than ourselves to teach us. It doesn't mean that unless we ask they are not going to teach. It doesn't mean that they have to be begged or cajoled into teaching. This should express our own attitude of inner readiness, and receptivity. We are saying, as it were, "I am open, please teach me. I would like to receive, please give." Unless there is this attitude of receptivity we can gain nothing, much less still the Bodhicitta. So this is 'Entreaty and Supplication'.

Seventh and lastly, 'Transference of Merit and Self-surrender'. According to Buddhist tradition, when you perform any good action you acquire a certain amount of merit which helps you on your way. So, if you perform the ceremony of the 'Sevenfold Puja', if you enact within your own heart the Supreme Worship, a certain amount of merit accrues to you. But, what do you do with it? At the end, when you've gained it, you give it away. You say, "Whatever merit I might have gained by this performance," – whether it's pūjā, whether it's meditation, whether it's listening to a lecture, whether it's giving some money to a charity – "let that merit be shared by all, not just by me; not just for the sake of my own individual Emancipation (not just so that I can go to heaven leaving aside other people), but for the benefit of all."

So, at the end of this Puja one resolves, "Let this be for the benefit of all, not just for me." When one lifts this to a higher, and ever higher spiritual level, this of course becomes the Bodhisattva Ideal itself; one doesn't seek to gain even Enlightenment for one's own sake, but for the sake of all.

So this is the Supreme Worship, the method of Śāntideva, and I repeat that, even though we may recite it, chant it, perform it, it's not just a ceremony. It is not even just a set of spiritual exercises. It is essentially a sequence of devotional and spiritual moods and experiences (the performance of the external Puja may help, of course, induce the corresponding religious moods and experiences), and it is on account of these that we can become transformed to some extent. If our hearts are filled with sublime feelings of devotion; if we really feel the distance which separates us from the Ideal; if we are really determined to commit ourselves to the realization of the Ideal; if we truly see the darker side of our own nature; if we honestly rejoice in the good deeds of others; if we are really receptive to higher spiritual influences; if we really wish to keep nothing back for ourselves alone – then, in dependence upon these states of mind and consciousness, the Bodhicitta, one day, may be able to arise. This is the soil, as it were, in which the seed of the Bodhicitta, once planted, can grow and flower.

Śāntideva's method is more devotional; Vasubandhu's method is more 'philosophical'. In Vasubandhu's method the arising of the Bodhicitta depends upon four factors. Let us briefly see what they are.

First, it arises in dependence, Vasubandhu says, on the 'Recollection of the Buddhas'. One thinks of the Buddhas of the past; one thinks of Śākyamuni, Gautama the Buddha, and of his

great predecessors in remote aeons of 'human pre-history' (what scholars would refer to as legendary times): Dīpaṅkara, Koṇḍañña, and so on. And one reflects, in the words of the sutras, "As they were, so are we. As they became, so may we become." In other words, they started off as human beings, so do we. They started off with weaknesses and imperfections, so do we. They started off with all sorts of limitations, so do we. But then, look what they achieved. They transcended their limitations. They became Buddhas. They were human, we are human; what they achieved, we too may achieve – if only we make the effort. This sort of reflection is called the 'Recollection of the Buddhas', deriving inspiration from their example. This is one of the factors upon which the Bodhicitta arises.

Secondly, 'Seeing the Faults of Conditioned Existence'. Conditioned Existence is a technical term in Buddhism for phenomenal existence of every kind: physical, mental, and even what we might call in the West 'spiritual'. Whatever arises in dependence on causes and conditions is all called Conditioned Existence. It is axiomatic for Buddhism as a spiritual tradition that all conditioned existence is impermanent. It arises, it passes away. It may be an idea, it may be an empire. It may arise and disappear in an infinitesimal fraction of a second, or it may arise and disappear over a period of millions, even billions, of years, as in the case of a great galactic system. But whatever arises, sooner or later ceases. So everything conditioned is impermanent, transitory, and therefore also – Buddhism says – a sorrowful, in the sense of not ultimately satisfactory, not ultimately most deeply satisfying, because, however great the satisfaction, an impermanent thing cannot give permanent satisfaction. So, sooner or later pain comes; the separation comes, the wrench comes, and then comes suffering. Everything also is, in a word, unreal: not in the sense that it doesn't exist and it isn't there, but what we think of as that particular thing is only the surface of something deeper. It isn't real in and by itself. It's only partly real, it's only relatively real. So one sees that conditioned existence as a whole has these 'faults', as they are technically called: it is impermanent, it's riddled with unsatisfactoriness, and it isn't ultimately real. One knows that nothing conditioned can fully satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. The human heart is always craving for something permanent above and beyond the flux of time, something blissful, something permanently satisfying – which does not pall after a while – something also which is entirely real and true. In this way one 'Sees the Faults of Conditioned Existence'; one pierces and penetrates through the conditioned to the Unconditioned beyond. And, in dependence upon this factor also, this 'Seeing the Faults of Conditioned Existence', arises the Bodhicitta.

The third factor in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta arises is 'Observing the Sufferings of Sentient Beings'. And what a lot of sufferings there are! One has only got to open one's newspaper just to read about some of them. People hung, people shot, people executed, people burned to death. In the common run of things, people dying in all sorts of painful ways, from all sorts of dreadful diseases, or from hunger, from famine, from flood, from fire. Every day, almost every hour, almost every minute of the day – even as we are sitting here so peacefully – in other parts of the world many people must be dying very painful deaths, many people must be suffering in all sorts of horrible, and dreadful, and agonizing ways. One doesn't need very much imagination to realize this when one thinks in terms of volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes, and aeroplane crashes, to say nothing of war, to say nothing of sudden death. Even if one thinks of something to which, in our callousness, we have become very accustomed: deaths on the road (due to careless driving very often, or to careless walking) – even that is sufficiently horrible.

So one reflects upon all these sufferings to which human existence is heir, to which flesh itself seems heir. Even the struggle of getting on in the world, of 'making both ends meet', of leading a happy human existence: sometimes it seems very difficult indeed. You strive and you

struggle to do the decent thing, to do the right thing, to do the honest thing. You strive to lift your head a little bit above the waves. You've just got your head above the waves, and you're swimming with all your might (as it were), and you're sort of gasping for breath, and ... a great wave comes along and overwhelms you again. Down you go, and maybe up you come (yet again) to go through it all over again – again and again. This is human life.

So if one looks at it objectively one sees that in many ways – no doubt this is only one side of the picture, but it is a side which we very often ignore – human life is very often a painful and miserable thing (as one of the English philosophers said, "nasty, brutish, and short"). And these are the sort of things that we should bear in mind. And I have mentioned only the sufferings of human beings, but what about the animals? What about all those animals that are trapped for fur, or slaughtered, either for human consumption or just for human pleasure, for sport (as it's called): – "the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable", as somebody said of foxhunting? So if one thinks of these things, if one observes, if one 'feels' the sufferings of sentient beings, then this also, Vasubandhu says, is a factor in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta arises.

Then, fourthly and lastly, there is the factor of the 'Contemplation of the Virtues of the *Tathāgatas*' ('*Tathāgatas*' means the Buddhas, the Enlightened Ones.) There are several ways of doing this. One can contemplate those virtues – and 'virtues' here doesn't mean just the ethical virtues, it means the spiritual qualities – by reading, say, the life of the Buddha, or the life of Milarepa, who also was an Enlightened One. One can do it by just performing a *pūjā* in front of an image, just sitting, perhaps, and looking at the image, trying to feel what is behind the image (what it represents, what it symbolizes). Or, as in Tibetan Buddhism, one can contemplate the spiritual qualities of the Buddhas by means of visualization exercises, by conjuring up a sort of vivid mental picture, a sort of archetypal vision, of the Buddha, or of a Bodhisattva who also symbolizes Supreme Enlightenment. What one does in these practices – and this, of course, is summarizing very drastically indeed – is to see this visualized form more and more vividly, and then gradually feel oneself, as it were, merged with it. Whether it is the Buddha of Infinite Light, or the Buddha of Eternal Life, whether it's the Red or the Blue Buddha, whether it's the Bodhisattva of Compassion or Wisdom, you contemplate them, you visualize them clearly, you feel and see yourself connected with them by a shaft of light which gets brighter and brighter, shorter and shorter, until the two of you merge. Your heart, as it were, merges with the heart of the Buddha, the heart of the Bodhisattva, the heart of Enlightenment. And in this way one 'Contemplates the Virtues of the *Tathāgatas*'. And in dependence on this factor also, the Bodhicitta arises.

This is Vasubandhu's method. The Bodhicitta here arises in dependence on: Recollection of the Buddhas; Seeing the Faults of Conditioned Existence; Observing the Sufferings of Sentient Beings; and Contemplating the Virtues of the *Tathāgatas*. In dependence on all these four factors simultaneously, the Bodhicitta arises. And surely, without even going into these traditional details too closely, it isn't very difficult to understand why and how this should be. By the Recollection of the Buddhas one becomes convinced that Enlightenment is possible. They have attained, why should not I attain? In this way energy and vigour is stirred up. On Seeing the Faults of Conditioned Existence (how impermanent it is, how basically unsatisfactory, not ultimately real) one becomes detached from conditioned existence, indifferent to it. The trend, or the stream, of one's existence sets in the direction of the Unconditioned. Then, by Observing the Sufferings of Sentient Beings – whether in imagination or, close at hand, in actual fact – surely, in this way compassion arises, love arises, sympathy arises. We don't think only of our own salvation, we want to help, we want to succour. Then, by Contemplating the Virtues of the *Tathāgatas* (their Purity, their Peace, their Wisdom, their

Love, their Enlightenment, their Eternal Life, their Infinite Light) gradually, as I described, we become assimilated to them, and approach the Goal.

And as these four, as it were, coalesce; as energy, and detachment, and compassion, and this 'becoming one' with the Buddhas, all start coalescing within our hearts – then the Bodhicitta arises, then the 'awakening of the heart' has been achieved, then a Bodhisattva is born.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Why do you think Buddhism encourages you to break your experience down into the skandhas? Can you conceive of anything beyond the skandhas?
2. How would you describe the bodhicitta? Can you identify any analogues of it in your own life or the lives of those around you?
3. How would you explain the difference between the 'absolute' and 'relative' bodhicitta?
4. Is the bodhicitta something that attracts you? If so, why? If not, what part of you doesn't like it?
5. *"If we make sufficiently careful preparations, we can leave the results to look after themselves."* What bearing might this statement have on your own spiritual practice?
6. What is puṇya? Do you think this concept is useful for you or others?
7. How do you respond to Śāntideva's method for developing the bodhicitta? Is there anything in it you might use in your Dharma practice in the coming week?
8. Which of Vasubandhu's four factors might be particularly relevant for you right now for the arising of the bodhicitta in your Dharma life?

In this lecture, Sangharakshita explores the importance of taking vows in the spiritual life and goes on to look at the four great vows of the Bodhisattva, which are an important part of Far Eastern Buddhism. Note that in preparing the transcript of this talk Sangharakshita has recast part of it in order to make the meaning clearer.

Free Buddhist Audio link for audio talk:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=67>

Tonight we are concerned with 'The Bodhisattva Vow'. The Bodhisattva Vow is one of the most important, practical aspects of the Mahayana tradition. In a sense, tonight's talk is a direct continuation of last week's. Last week we saw that the Bodhicitta has two aspects. There's first of all the Absolute Bodhicitta: identical with Enlightenment, identical with Reality, above and beyond time and space. Then there is the relative Bodhicitta: the Bodhicitta which manifests 'within' the stream of time. Now the relative Bodhicitta in turn has two aspects. These are known respectively as the 'vow aspect' and the 'establishment aspect'. The establishment aspect refers to what are known as the 'Six *Pāramitās*', or the six transcendental virtues, the practice of which carries the Bodhisattva to supreme Enlightenment. The 'Six *Pāramitās*' are: Giving (or Generosity), Uprightness, Patience, Vigour (or Energy), Meditation, and Wisdom. These six transcendental virtues will be dealt with in the next three lectures. This evening we are concerned with the first of the two aspects of the relative Bodhicitta, the vow aspect.

The question which arises is, of course: What does the Mahayana mean when it speaks of the Bodhisattva's Vow? The word in the original Sanskrit is *praṇidhāna*. *Praṇidhāna* means 'vow', 'inflexible resolution', 'determination', 'pledge', and so on. It is understood to be something very solemn and special; also something public, not private; and something irrevocable -- something which when it has been made can never, under any circumstance, be withdrawn. We may even describe the Bodhisattva's Vow as a sort of promise which the Bodhisattva makes at the commencement of his career upon the arising of the Bodhicitta within him. It is a promise made to the universe at large — or to all sentient beings. This is the word meaning — what the word *praṇidhāna* means. But the word meaning does not help us very much in understanding the truth of the matter, so let us now look into it a little more deeply.

We saw, last week, that the Bodhicitta represents a sort of cosmic will to universal redemption. Its manifestation in the individual, in dependence on the appropriate conditions, is what is known technically as 'the arising of the Bodhicitta'. Now, as we also saw, the Bodhicitta itself is not individual, but universal; there's only one Bodhicitta in which all Bodhisattvas participate. But this one Bodhicitta — 'one' though it is — manifests in individuals. Not only does the one Bodhicitta manifest in individuals, but it also expresses itself through them. This expression of the Bodhicitta through the individual, this individual expression, as it were, of the Bodhicitta,

is what is known as 'the Bodhisattva's Vow'. The Vow, therefore, may be defined as the concrete, practical expression of the Bodhicitta in the life and work of the individual Bodhisattva. This expression is not single; it's multiform. Traditionally we do indeed speak of the Bodhisattva's Vow, but the Vow is, in fact, a set of vows. We can now begin to see the difference between the Bodhicitta on the one hand and the Bodhisattva's Vow on the other. The Bodhicitta is one, and different Bodhisattvas participate in it; but the vows are individual: the vows reflect the Bodhisattva's special interests and aptitudes within the framework of the Bodhicitta and the wider framework of the Bodhisattva Ideal itself.

At this point, as this may begin to sound a little abstruse, a comparison may possibly help. We may say that the Bodhisattva himself is like a glass prism. The Bodhicitta is like pure white light shining through the prism. The vows of the Bodhisattva are like the different, coloured lights which emerge from the prism on the other side. Thus there are three things: the prism, representing the Bodhisattva; the pure white light shining in, representing the Bodhicitta; and all the colours of the rainbow shining out, representing the Bodhisattva's Vow.

We can pursue this sort of comparison even further. We can go so far as to say that this pure white light of the relative Bodhicitta streams from the sun of the Absolute Bodhicitta. And we can further say that this pure white light of this one Bodhicitta shines through hundreds and thousands of individual prisms. As it shines through them all each one produces its own particular combination of colours. We know, of course, only seven colours of the rainbow, but in some kinds of meditation we try to visualize colours which as yet we don't know. So if we can think of all these prisms — as the white light shines through them — emitting not just the seven colours that we know, but hundreds of thousands of wonderful colours that we don't know, then perhaps we shall get some idea of how this one Bodhicitta shines through the minds of different Bodhisattvas producing all these innumerable combinations of vows.

We see, in this way, that provision is made both for unity and for variety. We see that the Bodhisattvas all participate in one Bodhicitta (this is the source of their unity). But it manifests itself in them all in different ways. Each Bodhisattva expresses that one Bodhicitta in his or her own way. This individual expression — in terms of life, work, career, and activities — is what we call the Bodhisattva's Vow.

We usually think of a vow as something verbal, rather like the oath you take in court. But the Vow is not just a verbal expression. It's not just that the Bodhisattva says, "I will do *this*, and I will do *that*". The Vow is an expression in terms of the life and work and activity of the Bodhisattva. It is not just a question of the Bodhisattva's conscious intention. To change the metaphor, we may say that the vows of the Bodhisattva are so many sparks struck from the Bodhisattva's total being — not just from his mind or will, but from his total being — under the tremendous impact of the Bodhicitta.

The Mahayana scriptures make mention of a number of different sets of vows. Some of these sets of vows are associated with the names of various great Bodhisattvas. For instance, there are the celebrated forty-eight vows of the Bodhisattva Dharmākara (who became the Buddha Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light). These forty-eight vows are enumerated at length in the *Large Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra*. (*Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra* means the 'Sutra of the Adornment of the Land of Bliss'). Again, the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* (the 'Sutra on the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva's Path') mentions ten great vows. These ten great vows of the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* have been summarized as follows: (1) to provide for the worship of all the Buddhas without exception; (2) to maintain the religious discipline that has been taught by all the Buddhas, and to preserve the teaching of the Buddhas; (3) to see all the incidents in the earthly career of a

Buddha; (4) to realize the Thought of Enlightenment, to practise the duties of a Bodhisattva, to acquire all the *pāramitās*, and purify all the stages of his career; (5) to mature all beings and establish them in the knowledge of the Buddha, viz. all the four classes of beings who are in the six states of existence; (6) to perceive the whole universe; (7) to purify and cleanse all Buddha-fields; (8) to enter on the Great Way (the Mahayana), and to produce a common thought and purpose in all Bodhisattvas; (9) to make all actions of the body, speech, and mind fruitful and successful; (10) to attain the supreme and perfect Enlightenment, and to preach the doctrine. All these ten vows of the *Daśabhūmika Sutra* are clearly different aspects of the Bodhisattva's one determination to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Well-known as these sets of forty-eight and often are, perhaps the most famous set of Bodhisattva's vows is the set of 'The Four Great Vows'. These 'Four Great Vows' of the Bodhisattva are recited daily throughout the Far East: in China (at least they used to be recited in China — one doesn't quite know now), Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Tibet, Vietnam, and so on. These 'Four Great Vows' are usually given as follows: (1) May I deliver all beings from difficulties; (2) May I eradicate all defilements; (3) May I master all *dharma*s; (4) May I lead all beings to Buddhahood.

Let us try to understand some at least of the implications of these vows. But before we do that I would like to make one comment. I've observed that these 'Four Great Vows' are recited daily throughout the Far East, which suggests that every Bodhisattva or would-be Bodhisattva, makes the same four vows. But it isn't quite like that. The 'Four Great Vows' obviously comprehend the spiritual aspirations of many people, but one is not necessarily obliged to adopt this particular set, or any other set, even though found in the scriptures. Any individual Bodhisattva — the scriptures make this quite clear — is free to formulate his own set of vows, if he or she so wishes, in accordance with his or her own particular aspirations, within, of course, the general framework of the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. The main consideration is that the vows should be universal in scope. This is the common characteristic of all these vows. They don't have reference to mean, or petty, or immediate objectives, but to something ultimate, something remote, something universal.

Now for the 'Four Great Vows' themselves.

1. May I deliver all beings from difficulties

You will notice that the Bodhisattva starts at the beginning. Here by 'difficulties' is meant worldly difficulties. It's as though whoever framed these vows said to the would-be Bodhisattva, "Forget for the moment about helping people spiritually. That is very difficult indeed." It is very difficult indeed to help other people spiritually even if one is qualified to give spiritual help, as occasionally is the case. Many people indeed do ask for spiritual help, but even when someone is qualified to give it very few people are able really to receive it and act upon it. Therefore the Bodhisattva begins, as it were, in a small way — because everybody can give, to some extent, material, tangible help and assistance to other people. It is said, under the heading of this particular vow, that the Bodhisattva, or the would-be Bodhisattva, should be sympathetic and helpful in the affairs of everyday life. The Bodhisattva should do, on all occasions, whatever he or she can do to help: be friendly, co-operative, helpful, and so on. There's no need to go into details because I think everybody understands the sort of attitude that is meant here. The only thing I want to add to this is that when the Bodhisattva's Vow speaks of 'delivering all beings from difficulties' it is understood that 'beings' includes not just human beings, but even animals as well.

Those who take the Bodhisattva Vow seriously should not be satisfied just being helpful in this way in the affairs of everyday life, useful and necessary though that is. They should be prepared to go a little further, should be prepared to go even a little out of their way to help those in difficulties. In this connection I'd like to suggest four kinds of people in difficulties we can particularly help today. First of all, those who are now euphemistically called 'senior citizens' — not that that makes it any easier for them. Lots of our senior citizens have to live alone, and they not unnaturally often feel lonely or neglected. So here is a whole class of people who are in difficulties of some kind — maybe nothing very serious or acute, but certainly very often lonely, friendless, and feeling perhaps very much neglected. One who takes the Bodhisattva Vow seriously could very well make a point of trying to establish contact with one, or two, or three old people in the neighbourhood and maintaining a friendly human contact and relationship with them, which will obviously do them a very great deal of good.

And then, secondly, there are the sick. Not just those who are down with 'flu for a couple of days', but especially those who are confined to hospital, sometimes with very serious, painful diseases, for long periods of time. It often happens that even their closest relations, after a while, begin to forget. They think, "Well, I can go next week or the week after. After all, old so-and-so's there all the time; he won't go away; I can go and see him any day". So what happens? In the end they don't go at all, and the weeks and months slip by. It may be your own brother or sister, your own father or mother, uncle or aunt, but, strange as it may seem, very often you just don't go along. Hence there is a very great deal of work which can be done in this particular field, with people of this sort. Many of these people in hospital, especially those who have been there a long time, and especially those who are also old, have no relations or friends to go and visit them. Thus here too there is something very practical and concrete which we can do.

Then, a third class of persons, are people in prison. It may not be possible for us to visit them personally, but at least we can write. Quite a lot of prisoners appreciate people writing to them and helping them to keep in touch with the world outside, and making them feel that they still in a sense belong to that world to which, one day, they will have, in most cases, to go back. This is another kind of person in difficulties that we can very easily help.

And then, fourthly, I would suggest the psychologically disturbed: those who are neurotic, mentally unbalanced, or suffering mentally in one way or another. Many of them may need 'expert help'. Here we certainly shouldn't try to venture into a field in which we are not really qualified; though, at the same time, I cannot help thinking that the 'expert help' — from all that one hears about shock therapy in hospitals, for instance — sometimes makes things worse instead of better. In fact, I might even go so far as to say, as a result of my own contact with this particular field, that I am convinced that there is no psychological solution for psychological problems. In the long run there is only a spiritual solution.

It wasn't so many weeks ago that I read — I think it was in the *Evening Standard* — a report which stated that in the year 1967, in this country, five thousand young people committed suicide. (I wasn't able to verify that figure, but I suppose it's more or less accurate; a hundred or two more or less doesn't make it any less shocking.) If one has a little imagination and thinks about this, what does it mean? It means that in that one year five thousand young people, who ought to have been on the threshold of their lives, looking forward to the future, were so overcome by problems and difficulties (largely mental, I should imagine) that they felt they had no alternative but to opt out — in other words, to commit suicide. A case by case study might make very interesting and revealing reading. No indication was given as to what their reasons might have been, but obviously the five thousand young people who ended their lives

in that way were under very considerable stress. And one cannot help thinking that, had some friendly person been at hand at the appropriate moment, quite a number of those who did commit suicide might have been saved. Here is a whole field of work. Here is a whole class of people in difficulties, or potentially in difficulties, who can be helped — the mentally disturbed, especially the mentally disturbed younger people.

These are four classes of people in difficulties which I've suggested as very proper objects of the Bodhisattva's help, if he takes his first Great Vow seriously: the old, the sick, the prisoners, and the psychologically disturbed. But we can go even farther afield than this. We can help refugees, the homeless, the starving, the underprivileged, in all countries of the world. This sort of thing, however, is very difficult to do directly; not everybody can just up and go away to Africa or India and help. If we want to help at all we usually have to do it indirectly through a charitable organization, though many of us are not a little suspicious of organized charity. One sees that a large proportion of the funds subscribed are absorbed by administrative expenses etc., so that only a small proportion reaches the people for whom the money was intended. So perhaps personal action is best. I remember a story in this connection concerning one of our own Friends. He isn't here tonight but I can just tell this little story about him.

This particular Friend of ours was very much concerned with the problem of race relations. He felt that he had to do something about it. He was a rather active sort of person, and a good speaker, and having been politically involved in the past he thought at first that he might join some organization and, perhaps, carry out some militant action. But then he thought, "No, that doesn't really do any good. If I really believe in inter-racial harmony I should begin by practising it myself." Since he happened to have a spare room in his house, he advertised that he was willing to put up any coloured student. He got several coloured students in succession (I think most of them were university students from America). He said that it was a very interesting experience indeed adjusting his own relations with these people, and really learning to live in harmony, friendship, and understanding with a person of another colour. So this is the sort of attitude I feel that we should adopt: not thinking in terms of sending out help to remote areas, or doing something highly organized, militant, and dramatic, but helping people personally and directly, within the context of our own immediate lives.

This, then, is the first Great Vow of the Bodhisattva: May I deliver all beings from difficulties. These are just a few of the ways in which some of us can deliver some other people from at least some of their difficulties. These remarks are obviously only suggestive, not definitive; there's so much that can be done if only we have the heart. This is the first thing that the Bodhisattva sets himself to do: to help living beings in immediate, practical, material difficulties. He doesn't at this stage presume to think of helping them spiritually — leading them to Enlightenment. At this stage he thinks, "It is enough if I can just give them a helping hand in the affairs of everyday life."

2. May I eradicate all defilements

Here two questions arise. Firstly, what are the defilements, and secondly, how are they to be eradicated? The term 'defilements' covers all negative emotions, psychological conditionings, prejudices, preconceptions, or in other words, all that binds us to the Wheel of Life and makes it revolve yet again. There are several, traditional lists of these defilements. For instance, there's the list of what are known as the 'Three Unwholesome Roots': Craving, Hatred, and Ignorance. They are symbolized by the cock, the snake, and the pig of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. When you see this vividly depicted Tibetan Wheel of Life, with its circles and subdivisions, you see these three animals right in the centre, at the very heart of the Wheel — the wheel of our own lives. The cock represents craving, the snake hatred, and the pig ignorance.

Another list of defilements is that of the 'Five *Nivaranas*'. *Nivarana* (literally 'covering') is usually rendered as 'hindrance'. These 'Five Hindrances' are: craving, hatred, restlessness and anxiety, sloth and torpor, and indecision.

Perhaps the most useful list of defilements is that known as the 'Five Poisons': distraction, anger, craving, conceit, and ignorance. While I am on the subject, it occurs to me that this word 'poison' isn't used accidentally. The negative emotions are poisons quite literally. If you indulge in negative emotions you're poisoning your whole system, not only in the metaphorical sense, but even quite literally. I remember, in this connection, some rather horrifying experiments which were carried out in the United States. (I don't know why it is, but all these interesting experiments seem to be carried out in the United States, and one reads about them two or three years later in the *Readers Digest*.) The experimenter made a number of people angry in the laboratory and then popped a bag over their mouth and nostrils. As they breathed in and out a slight film was deposited on the bag. He kept on doing this, and when the film was thick enough it was scraped off. It was brown in colour, and found to be a deadly poison. So, apparently, all the negative emotions are quite literally poisonous, and when we indulge in them we quite literally poison our own system. You might even have noticed yourselves sometimes that when you're overpowered by a very powerful negative emotion, especially that of anger or hatred, you get a sharp, stabbing pain either in the stomach or in the heart. This is the poison as it were eating into your vitals. So it is no accident that this particular list of the defilements refers to the 'Five Poisons' — they're quite literally poisonous. We're poisoning ourselves all the time we are indulging in distraction, anger, craving, conceit, and ignorance.

The defilements can be eradicated in a number of different ways; but the best thing to do is to attack them at source. In this connection the Buddha gives an illustration. He says, "Suppose there's a gang of robbers operating in the kingdom, how does the king go about destroying them? He finds their hide-out and destroys it; then the robbers can no longer operate." Similarly with the defilements: you have to find their hide-out; you have to attack them, and root them out, at source. Their source, of course, is in the mind. That's where they are to be eradicated. One does that through meditation: meditation helps to eradicate the defilements.

As some of you know, in the Buddhist tradition there are five basic meditation exercises, each of which is an antidote to one or another of the 'Five Poisons'. First of all, the poison of **distraction**, or the tendency of the mind to jump about from this to that. We speak of people having a 'grasshopper mind', or a 'butterfly mind', by which we mean that they are unable to settle on one thing for any length of time. It's a matter of being — in T. S. Eliot's famous line — 'distracted from distraction by distraction'. That just about summarizes modern life; it is a constant process — every day, every week — of being 'distracted from distraction by distraction'. The antidote to this, at least as a mental state, is the Mindfulness of Breathing. I don't think that there is any need for me to describe the practice; it's familiar to most of us because in the FWBO we practise it in all our meditation classes. One-pointed concentration on the breathing process is the antidote to all our distractions.

The second of the 'Five Poisons' is **anger**. This is said to be the most un-Bodhisattva-like of all defilements: you can give way to craving, or steal, or tell a lie, and in your heart of hearts you may still be a Bodhisattva; but if you really lose your temper, then bang goes all your Bodhisattvahood — you have to start all over again, because anger is directly opposed to compassion. One of the works quoted in the *Śikṣā-samuccaya* says (in effect), "Here are you promising to deliver all beings, and to be kind and compassionate to them, and then what do you go and do? You go and get angry with one of them! So there really isn't much substance in

your Bodhisattva Ideal or your Bodhisattva Vow." Therefore the Bodhisattva is advised to avoid anger at all costs. The antidote to anger is again quite simple. It's the Metta Bhavana, the development of universal loving-kindness: the beautiful practice which so many of us find extremely difficult. But, though difficult it's familiar because this too we practise in our meditation classes. And many people do know from their own experience, at least from time to time, that this particular negative emotion of anger can be dispelled through this particular practice — the deliberate, mindful development of love and good will towards all living beings. Thus one eradicates the poison of anger through developing universal loving-kindness.

Thirdly, we come to **craving**. In a sense it is the Poison *par excellence*. It is not just 'desire' but what we may describe as 'neurotic desire'. Take, for instance, the case of food — without being philosophical — just ordinary food. We all have a desire for food and enjoy eating it — this is quite normal and healthy. But the desire for food becomes neurotic when we try to use food as a substitute satisfaction for some other need, whether mental or emotional. Only last night I was reading a report by a writer for girls' magazines to the effect that many girls who read the magazines wrote in to say that when faced by emotional problems they felt an uncontrollable urge to eat sweets. This is a neurotic desire. In other words, it's a craving.

As we can see, only too easily, craving is quite a problem, especially in modern times. There's a whole vast industry geared to the stimulation of our craving and to nothing else. This is, of course, the industry — or whatever you like to call it — of advertising. It is geared to persuading us, with or without our knowledge, that we 'must' have this, that, or the other. In fact, we may say that advertising is one of the most unethical of all the professions.

Craving can be eradicated by various practices. I'll mention just a few of them. (You can see how big the problem is from the number of the antidotes.) Some of the antidotes, I must warn you in advance, are quite drastic. For instance, contemplation of the ten stages of decomposition of a corpse. This is still quite a popular practice in some Buddhist countries. It is said to be especially good as an antidote for sexual craving, in other words for neurotic sexual desire. I won't describe the stages one by one that might be a little too much for some of you.

If one can't go the whole hog there is a milder version of this practice: meditating in a cremation ground. In India, as you probably know, they don't usually bury, they usually cremate, and a special area called a cremation ground or a burning ground is set aside for this purpose — very often on the banks of a river. One is advised to go there at night, alone, and to sit and meditate. I can assure you that these cremation grounds are not always very pretty places, at least by day. There are fragments of charred bone and charred cloth lying about, and usually there is quite a stench of burning human flesh in the air. But, it can be a very beneficial and interesting, and even I would say exhilarating, practice.

I had one experience of this myself many years ago, on the banks of the River Ganges, not far from Lucknow. There was a beautiful stretch of silver sand that was used as a cremation ground, and it was the night of the full moon. Everything was completely silvered over, and one could just make out the low mounds here and there on the sand where cremations had been held. Little bits of bone and pieces of skull lay scattered around. It was very quiet and peaceful, and one really felt quite away from the world. There was nothing depressing about the experience at all; one can only say that it was exhilarating. One felt, as I say, away from it all, almost as though one's own cremation had already taken place. In this connection it is interesting that when a Hindu becomes an orthodox sannyasin he performs his own funeral service, going through the motions of cremating himself. The idea is that when one becomes a sannyasin, and gives up the world, one is civilly dead and no longer exists so far as the world is

concerned. This is the last thing he does before donning his yellow robe. This association of death with renunciation and the eradication of all worldly cravings represents the same sort of idea.

If even an occasional visit to the graveyard is too much (it may be too much for quite a lot of people), and one wants a still milder form of the same kind of practice, one can simply meditate on death: that death is inevitable, that it comes to everybody in due course, and that none can escape it. Since it must come, why not make the best possible use of one's life? Why devote one's life to unworthy ends? Why indulge in miserable cravings which don't bring any satisfaction and happiness in the long run? In this way one meditates upon the idea of death. This is an antidote for craving in general, whether for possessions or success or pleasure.

One can also meditate upon impermanence: that everything is impermanent, that nothing lasts (whether it is the solar system or your own breath); from instant to instant everything is changing. One remembers that everything is going to pass away just like clouds drifting through the sky. This meditation has the same general effect as the other practices I have mentioned. One can't hang on very determinedly to things when one knows that sooner or later one is going to have to give them up.

There is another kind of practice. This consists in what is known as 'the contemplation of the loathsomeness of food'. I'm not going into the details of this practice either, because they are rather unpleasant and have been made so quite deliberately. But this practice is very good for young ladies who are neurotically addicted to sweets.

Out of the various antidotes to craving one should select the exercise suited to one's need. If one feels that craving is very strong, and really has one in its grip, then by all means just grit your teeth and go off to the cremation ground and, if you can find a corpse or something reminiscent of death, even if it's only a bone or two, dwell upon the idea of death. Some people familiarize themselves with this idea by keeping skulls and bone around them.

After all, what is there to be afraid of? In my flat at Highgate I've got a highly polished old skull-cup. One day a lady came to tea, and was asking about my Tibetan things. She told me she loved everything Tibetan, so I said to her, "Would you like to see *this*?" and put it into her hand. She nearly dropped it, as though it had been a live coal. She said, "Oh, but it's a skull!" I said, "Of course it is: the Tibetans are always using them." Tibetans, I would say, are very fond of these things. They're very fond of anything made out of human bone or a human skull. They like rosaries made out of bits of human bone; they like thighbone trumpets; and they like skull-cups. This is because they take a quite natural, common-sense view of death. They don't think there is anything morbid or macabre in it as we do. We've been brought up in the wrong way. We've been brought up in the Christian tradition in which the word 'death' sends a shiver down one's spine. But this isn't the Buddhist way of looking at it. Death is something just as natural as life. I often quote, in this connection, those very beautiful words of the great modern Bengali poet, Tagore: 'I know I shall love death because I have loved life.' He sees life and death as the two facets of the same thing, so that if you love life you will love death. This is paradoxical but true.

It is now time for us to pass on to the fourth of the Poisons, which is **conceit**. The original term is sometimes translated as 'pride' but I think 'conceit' is better. We all know about conceit from our own experience and I need not say very much about it. Conceit may be described as one's experience of oneself as separate, not only separate but isolated, not only isolated but superior.

The antidote for this poison of conceit is meditation on the six elements. The six elements are earth, water, fire, air, ether or space (*ākāśa* in Sanskrit), and consciousness, and these are represented by various geometrical forms which build up into a stupa. Earth is represented by a cube, which is the base of the stupa; water by a sphere, which rests on the cube; fire by a cone on top of the sphere; air by an inverted bowl (symbolizing the firmament); ether by a flame in that bowl, and consciousness by the space in which the whole arrangement stands. The stupa has a great symbolical significance, the forms representing the six elements being arranged in order of increasing subtlety — the grossest at the bottom and the subtlest at the top.

How does one do this meditation? First one meditates upon earth. One reflects, "In my physical body there is the solid element, earth, in the form of flesh, bone and so on. And where does this come from? It comes from the earth element in the universe, from the solid matter in the universe. When I die, what is going to happen? My flesh, bone and so on are going to disintegrate and go back to the earth element in the universe: 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.'" One thinks and reflects in this way — though this is just an outline of the meditation, which is much more elaborate.

Then one takes up the water element in one's physical body, thinking, "In me there is blood, sweat, tears, and so on. This is the water element. Where does this water element in me come from? It is not my own; it doesn't really belong to me. It came from the water around: from the rain, from the seas, from the streams. One day I shall have to render it back. One day the liquid element in me will flow back into the liquid element in the universe."

Then one meditates upon the element fire (still more subtle). One reflects, "In me there is heat, there is warmth. Where does this come from? What is the great source of heat for the whole solar system? It's the sun. Without the sun the entire solar system would be cold and dark. So the warmth in me comes from that source. And when I die, what will happen? Heat — which is one of the last things to leave the body — will withdraw from my limbs until in the end there is just a little hot spot at the top of the head. When that disappears I shall be dead. The heat element in me will have returned to the reservoir of heat and light for the whole universe." This is how one meditates on the element of fire, reflecting that that too has been borrowed for a while and must be rendered back.

Then one thinks of air. "What is the air element in me? It's the air in my lungs. I'm taking it in and giving it back every instant. It doesn't really belong to me. None of the elements belongs to me, but in the case of the breath I have it only for a few instants at a time. One day I'm going to breathe in and breathe out, breathe in and breathe out ... and then not breathe in again any more. I will have given my breath back finally. I will be dead. My breath won't belong to me then, so it doesn't really belong to me even now."

Then one meditates upon ether or space. One reflects, "My physical body occupies a certain space. But when that body disintegrates what becomes of the limited space it formerly occupied? It merges with the infinite space around or, in other words, disappears."

And then, what about consciousness? You reflect, "At present my consciousness is associated with the physical body, and with the space occupied by that body. When the body ceases to exist, and the space it formerly occupied merges with infinite space, what will become of that limited consciousness? It will become unlimited. It will become free. When I die physically I will experience, just for an instant, that unlimited consciousness. When I 'die' spiritually my consciousness will finally transcend all limitations whatsoever and I will experience complete freedom." In this way one meditates upon consciousness.

This is only a summary, but it may give you some idea of how one meditates upon the six elements of earth, water, fire, air, ether and consciousness. Meditating in this way one applies the antidote to the poison of conceit. One progressively dissociates oneself from the material body made up of the gross elements, from the space occupied by that body, and from the limited consciousness associated with that body and that space. Thus one becomes totally free: one becomes Enlightened.

The meditation on the six elements is a very important practice, as you have probably gathered already. It is well symbolized by the stupa consisting of five geometrical forms superimposed one upon another. There are variants of the practice. One can visualize the forms as coloured. The cube or square will then be yellow, the sphere white or blue, and so on. In this way one can vary the practice, making it easier and perhaps more congenial.

The fifth Poison is that of **ignorance**. Here is meant spiritual ignorance, or unawareness of Reality — in a sense, the basic defilement. The antidote for this is meditation on the 'links' (*nidānas*) of conditioned co-production. There are twenty-four of these, twelve worldly, pertaining to the cyclical order of existence, and twelve spiritual, pertaining to the spiral order of existence. While the first twelve represent the Wheel of Life, the second twelve represent the stages of the Path. One set corresponds to the reactive mind, the other to the creative mind. There is no time to describe all this in detail this evening. We have here the subject matter for several lectures, and I have in fact often spoken on these things before.

These are the five basic meditations: mindfulness of breathing, which is the antidote to the poison of distraction; development of universal loving-kindness, which is the antidote to the poison of anger; various forms of meditation on impermanence, death, impurity, and so on, all of which are antidotes to the poison of craving; meditation on the six elements, the antidote to conceit; and meditation on the *nidānas*, the antidote to spiritual ignorance. With the help of these five basic meditations the Bodhisattva eradicates the defilements and thus fulfils the second of his 'Four Great Vows.'

3. May I master all dharmas

I'm going to deal with this and the following vow somewhat more briefly than I dealt with the first two. By dharmas here is meant, primarily, the teachings of the Buddha, as contained within the scriptures of the Hinayana and of the Mahayana, as well as the teachings of all the Buddhist schools. The Bodhisattva doesn't belong to this school as opposed to that school. He doesn't even belong to the Mahayana as opposed to some other *yāna*. He studies and masters the *dharmas* of all *yānas*, all schools, all sects, and all traditions. Not only that, but the Bodhisattva, we are told, should master even the non-Buddhist religious and philosophical systems. Some scriptures go so far as to say that the Bodhisattva should study secular arts and sciences, especially rhetoric and prosody (which were very much in favour during the Indian Middle Ages). We're told that he should study these subjects because this will increase his power of communication: he'll be able to put across his message more effectively if he has these arts and sciences at his fingertips. A few of the sutras even say that the Bodhisattva should master various trades, such as that of the potter. Then, knowing the vocabulary and outlook of these trades, he will have a fresh range of reference, with the help of which he will be able to get the teachings across to more and more people. In other words, he'll be able to 'speak their language'. Knowing the sort of language — both literal and metaphorical — which they normally use, he will be able to communicate his attitudes, ideals, and aspirations more effectively. This, then, is the Bodhisattva's third Great Vow: to master all *dharmas*; to master

the teachings of Buddhism, the teachings of non-Buddhist schools, and even all the humanistic subjects.

4. May I lead all beings to Buddhahood

This, of course, is the ultimate aim. This the Bodhisattva does by teaching, by example, and also by silent communication of his influence.

Such are the 'Four Great Vows': (1) May I deliver all beings from difficulties; (2) May I eradicate all defilements; (3) May I master all *dharma*s; (4) May I lead all beings to Buddhahood.

Perhaps now we are in a position to understand something at least of the implications of these 'Four Great Vows', which are recited daily in all centres of Mahayana Buddhism. Together they constitute the heart of the Mahayana, the heart even of Buddhism itself. Together they constitute the Bodhisattva Vow — the concrete, practical expression of the Bodhicitta in terms of the life and the work of the individual Bodhisattva and the foundation of his whole subsequent career.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is a vow and what might be the value of making one? (You may want to reflect on any personal experience of vow-taking.)
2. Can one take the Bodhisattva vow literally? How might you explain your position on this to someone else?
3. Could you imagine the type of vows you would make upon the arising of the Bodhicitta?
4. Sangharakshita talks about helping others in practical ways. In what kinds of practical ways might you help people in the week ahead?
5. How do the meditative antidotes to the five poisons fit with Sangharakshita's system of meditation (explored in *Week Two, Part Four of Year One*)?
6. Why is anger the worst of all the poisons? Is this your experience?
7. The six element practice is considered an antidote to conceit. Is there anything in your own spiritual practice that has a similar effect?
8. The third great vow of the Bodhisattva is "May I master all *dharma*s". What does this mean for you?

Looking at the practice of the Bodhisattva as the resolution of various opposites, Sangharakshita here begins his exploration of the six pāramitās by contrasting generosity and ethics – dāna and śīla. He takes a different approach to his exploration of ethics than you might expect.

Free Buddhist Audio link for audio talk:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=68>

Last week we saw that the relative Bodhicitta has two aspects. We saw that there is a vow aspect and an establishment aspect. The vow aspect refers to the Bodhisattva's Vow itself (with which we were concerned last week). The establishment aspect refers to the practice of the 'Six Pāramitās', or 'Six Transcendental Virtues': Giving, Uprightness, Patience, Vigour, Meditation, and Wisdom. We shall be dealing with these 'Six Transcendental Virtues', these 'Six Perfections' as they are sometimes called, in the course of the next three weeks. Tonight we are dealing with the first two: Giving (*dāna*) and Uprightness (*śīla*). We are dealing with these two as expressions respectively of altruism and individualism — *dāna* being the expression of altruism, and *śīla* being the expression of individualism. In other words, we are dealing with them as the other-regarding and the self-regarding aspects of the spiritual life.

First, however, let us go back a little and make a few general observations. Let us go back to the first lecture on 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal'. Those who were present will remember that the Bodhisattva Ideal originated, historically, in an attempt to do justice to two great aspects of Buddhism: the Wisdom aspect, as expressed in the Buddha's verbal teaching, and the Compassion aspect, as expressed not so much in the verbal teaching but — more abundantly at least — in the life and activity of the Buddha.

The Bodhisattva Ideal, we saw in that lecture, represents a union of opposites — to begin with, a union of Wisdom and Compassion. That the Bodhisattva Ideal represents a union of opposites is true of the beginning of the Bodhisattva's career, is true of the end of the Bodhisattva's career (where Wisdom and Compassion are united in their highest power, in Enlightenment itself), and is true of all the stages in between. So much in fact is the Bodhisattva's very spirit a union of opposites, that we can perhaps describe the Bodhisattva himself as a sort of living contradiction. This is one of the reasons why the Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva Ideal are so very difficult to understand. Generally speaking, we may say that the Bodhisattva synthesizes the sublimest heights and the profoundest depths of existence: the mundane and the Transcendental, samsara and Nirvana. More specifically, as we shall see today, the Bodhisattva synthesizes the altruism and individualism. (In next week's lecture we will see how the Bodhisattva synthesizes the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' approaches to the spiritual life.)

Now there is a misunderstanding to be cleared up. If you read books about Buddhism, especially popular books, and especially perhaps books about the Mahayana, you will find it sometimes said that the Bodhisattva is not concerned with his own salvation, but is concerned with the salvation of other beings. You may even read — people sometimes put it rather poetically — that the Bodhisattva postpones his own entry into Nirvana: he sees, as it were, the gates of Nirvana shining afar off, and he says, "No! I am not going to enter. I want to help others to enter first." Very often the Bodhisattva Ideal is presented in this quite appealing and attractive poetic form. And you will find that the Bodhisattva comes to be contrasted with the Arahant (the Arahant is the perfect man, or the realized man, of the Theravada). The Arahant is said to be concerned only with his own salvation, and the Arahant Ideal is said, therefore, to be selfish. In contrast to this, the Bodhisattva Ideal is said to be unselfish. The Arahant Ideal is said to be individualistic; the Bodhisattva Ideal is said to be altruistic.

In this way you find, in some literature on Buddhism, that a sort of controversy develops, with people (even) taking sides. You will sometimes find that the followers of the Arahant Ideal criticize the followers of the Bodhisattva Ideal, or criticize even the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. Sometimes they point out that charity begins at home. Here, they say, is the Bodhisattva wanting to help others to gain Enlightenment, but he has not gained it himself. This, they say, is like a person trying to pull others out of the ditch when he is right in the ditch, in the mud, himself. They say, "This isn't possible. First you must get out yourself, and then you can help others out."

Now the Arahant Ideal may or may not be selfish — I am not going to say anything about that this evening — but one can say that the Bodhisattva Ideal itself is certainly not one-sided. This is the misunderstanding to be corrected. The Bodhisattva Ideal does not represent altruism *as opposed* to individualism; the Bodhisattva is not concerned with saving others *as opposed* to saving himself. As I have already said, the Bodhisattva synthesizes opposites. In this case he synthesizes the opposites of helping oneself and helping others, individualism and altruism. He synthesizes these opposites in the spiritual life by practising *dāna* and *śīla*.

This tension between altruism and individualism, regard for others and regard for self, is not confined to the spiritual life: it occurs at every level of human existence. After all, we exist as individuals, but we also exist as members of society, that is to say, we exist in relation to other individuals. We have our own needs: material needs, psychological needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs — which obviously we have to consider. But others too have their needs (usually of the same kind as our own, at least in principle). And these needs too we have to consider, because we have to live with other people, in society. We cannot ignore altogether the needs of others.

But, often it happens that the two come into conflict: our needs as individuals and the needs of other individuals, the needs of society. This can happen in the wider life of the community or in our own very personal life; our needs come into conflict with the needs of others or at least with the needs of one other.

But at the same time, despite that conflict of needs — or at least that tension between needs — we continue to depend upon others and others continue to depend upon us. Thus it comes about that we find ourselves in a familiar and rather painful predicament. We find that sometimes we cannot live with other people, but at the same time we find that we cannot live without them. It is rather like the snake in the fable. The snake in the fable caught a frog. But the frog was so big the snake could not swallow it down. At the same time, owing to its curved front teeth, the snake could not vomit the frog out. So the frog was just stuck there with the

snake, able to neither swallow it nor reject it. We are very often just like that with people. We cannot live with them — apparently; yet also, it seems, we cannot live without them. One might say that if we cannot live with people, we cannot live without them — I think that takes a little thinking over! And conversely, if we can live with people, we can live without them, and vice versa. This is paradoxical, but true. We can probably say that only those who can live without people -really without people — can live with them.

What we undoubtedly need is a social context which will enable us to do both: to live with people and also live without them; to regard our own needs and regard the needs of other people; to be altruistic and also individualistic. This perhaps is the meaning of living in community. However, this is probably taking us just a little too far afield and it is time we got back to *dāna* and *sīla*.

It is not without reason that *dāna* is enumerated first among these 'Six *Pāramitās*'. It seems that our natural human tendency is to take, to draw towards ourselves, for ourselves. If any new proposition comes up, whether it is in connection with our working life or our home life, our usual — maybe half-conscious — reaction is to think: "What is there in it for me?" There is always a self-reference. There is always this tendency of grasping. Those of you who have seen the Tibetan Wheel of Life may remember that right at the hub there are three animals, one of which is a cock. This cock represents craving. It is right there at the hub of the Wheel of Life, right there in the midst (as it were) of our own hearts. It gives recognition to the fact that craving — not just ordinary healthy desire, but actual craving — very often dominates our life, at least unconsciously. We are all in the grip of this craving, all impelled by this thirst. So everything that we do, everything in which we become interested, has a self-reference underneath.

The Bodhisattva, if he is to get anywhere near Enlightenment, has got to completely reverse this tendency, or turn it (as it were) inside out or upside down. Giving therefore comes first, because giving is the direct opposite of grasping.

It is as if the teaching said to us, "You may not be very moral — you may not be very strict about your observance of the Precepts; you may not be able to meditate for hours at a time — in fact even five minutes may be difficult; you may not be very learned in the scriptures — you may not have read very much: but if you want to lead a spiritual life, if you aspire to lead any sort of higher life at all, then the very least that can be expected of you is that you will give, that you will be a little bit open-handed." From the standpoint of the Mahayana (at least), if you are generous, then whatever else you may be — you may be a thief, you may be a murderer, you may be a prostitute, you may be anything else — there is, spiritually speaking, some hope for you. Conversely, the ungenerous person, the person who finds it difficult to look outward to the needs of others, cannot, at least not for the present, lead a spiritual life. Such a person may be rigidly virtuous, may strictly adhere to all the Precepts, may even be quite well versed in Buddhist philosophy, but, for the present at least, from the standpoint of the Mahayana, there is, spiritually speaking, no hope for him.

Now the Bodhisattva is the giver *par excellence*, the ideal giver. Giving is not just a question of transferring possessions. Giving, or generosity, is above all else an attitude of heart and mind. Indeed, it is an attitude of one's whole being. One does not just give with one's hand, one does not even just give with one's heart, one gives with one's whole being; one's whole being is involved in the act of giving. This is why Walt Whitman, in a very memorable line, says, 'When I give, I give myself.' That does not mean "I give personally, with my own hand", but "I give my whole being when I give; I give myself, because nothing less than that will do." And this is very

much the Bodhisattva's attitude. If we want to get away from Buddhist philosophy and technical traditional definitions, if we want to forget even about Enlightenment as a concept, and if we want to define the Bodhisattva in some original way which will mean something more to us, we may perhaps describe the Bodhisattva as the person who gives himself: gives himself all the time and gives himself to everybody.

The Buddhist scriptures have got much to say on this topic of *dāna*. It is also a very popular theme for discourses in the East. If you go, in the evening or on a full-moon day, to a temple, in any Eastern Buddhist country, and sit amongst the people listening to the sermon, and just listen to what the monk or the lama is saying, you will find, in nine cases out of ten, that he is speaking on this subject of *dāna*.

The scriptures consider *dāna* under a number of different headings. Those of you who have done any study of Buddhist texts will know that they are rather fond of dividing and subdividing subjects. Sometimes you can get a little bit lost in this, but for serious study it is quite helpful. This evening, so far as *dāna* is concerned, I am going to follow that tradition, but let us remember that we are concerned with the spirit of giving, not just with the letter of the teaching — the technical details. The scriptures usually deal with *dāna* under the headings of: (1) to whom the gift is given; (2) what is given; (3) how it is given; and (4) why it is given. These four headings, with their sub-divisions, are believed to exhaust the whole subject of *dāna*.

First of all, to whom the gift is given. Ideally, or in principle, all sentient beings are the objects of the Bodhisattva's generosity. That is the ideal; that is the principle. But it is practically impossible: very, very few people are even in the position of being able to benefit the whole human race. Nevertheless one must at least uphold the ideal.

The scriptures mention three classes of recipients to whom the Bodhisattva should pay particular attention. First of all, there are his own, or her own, friends and relations. It is no use the would-be Bodhisattva being very kind and friendly so far as strangers and people outside are concerned, if at home he is difficult, awkward, and an uncomfortable person to live with — if not actually cruel. Sometimes you find cases of this sort: someone has a wonderful reputation outside his or her home for being so kind, so generous, so good, but at home is a petty tyrant or something else equally unpleasant. Therefore the tradition says that the recipients of the Bodhisattva's generosity are, in the first place, his own kith and kin. Charity begins at home, but the emphasis is on the verb — it begins at home but does not by any means end at home. It is rather like the practice of the Metta Bhavana. You start the practice of the Metta Bhavana by developing feelings of metta towards yourself, then towards a near and dear friend, and so on. In the last stage of the practice you extend the feelings of metta to all the people in the room, and all the people in the town, and the country, and the continent, till eventually you are feeling metta to the whole world, even to the whole universe. Generosity, giving, should be like this. It may begin right in your own home, but you should try to extend it wider and wider, in fact as wide as you possibly can.

The second class of people who should especially be recipients of the Bodhisattva's generosity are the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the helpless (among the helpless, tradition includes all animals). I dealt with this to some extent last week when speaking of the first of the 'Four Great Vows' of the Bodhisattva — the vow to deliver all sentient beings from difficulties — so I will say nothing more about it now.

The third of the special recipients of the Bodhisattva's generosity are those who are leading a full-time religious life. Traditionally Buddhism considers it the duty of society to support all

those who are engaged in any kind of higher spiritual life or higher creative work and activity. Usually it amounts to supporting the monks, nuns, lamas, spiritual teachers and so on, but ideally it should include all those who are engaged in any kind of higher creative work, including painters, musicians, writers etc. At the same time, there should be, on the part of society, no attempt to coerce either the religious person or the full-time artist into conforming to the ideas and ideals of the supporting society. Complete freedom is essential both for the religious person and for the creative person. Usually the (at least implied) condition of support from society is that one should support the status quo; if one supports the status quo one can, usually, be sure of some kind of support, but not otherwise. This, from a Buddhist point of view, is entirely wrong. The support should be a free support, whether it is given to the full-time religious person or to the artistically creative.

Now secondly, what is given as *dāna* — or what can be given. Potentially this is coextensive with whatever can be possessed; whatever you possess you can give away. But to assist us further, there is a six-fold classification of the kind of things that can be given as *dāna*.

Buddhism starts off right at the bottom with material things, like food, clothing, shelter. If one goes to the Buddhist countries of the East one sees in operation the Buddhist tradition of generosity and hospitality. I remember that I had abundant experience of this myself when I was in the East, whether it was in India or elsewhere. I remember that I used to come down from the hills, come down from Kalimpong, every winter, and usually make my first halt in Calcutta at the monastery of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. Usually when I arrived there, there would be a gathering, maybe of ten, or twenty, or thirty monks from different parts of the Buddhist world, many of whom would be known to me either personally or through correspondence or reputation. And it was often my experience that as soon as one walked in, someone would say, "Do you need anything?" One monk would say, "Do you want any new robes?" If you wanted them, they would be handed over at once. Or another — a more modern sort of monk — might say, "Do you want a typewriter?" Or a monk might ask, "Where are you going? Do you want some money?" This was their attitude: to give, to share.

In the same way, if one went to any layman's house, they would consider it a disgrace if you sat down even for half an hour without being offered something to eat and drink. In this country, unfortunately, it is a little different. People usually hesitate to go along to the houses of other people at what they think might be lunch time or tea time, because then they would place the host in the embarrassing position of having to offer them something — embarrassing all round!

I remember a rather extreme example of the generous attitude of people in the East. I was staying for six months with a Burmese friend. He happened to be a member of the former Burmese royal family. He was very, very poor at that time, but was unstintingly generous. So generous was he that it was very difficult to stay with him; you had to be very, very careful. If you said, "Oh, I like that", he would say, "Take it!" It would be given on the spot. If you said, "Oh, this is an interesting book", he would say, "Take it!" Anything that you admired was given. This apparently was their custom. After a while you learned to be very careful, particularly because you could not refuse — it was very bad manners indeed to refuse anything. You could give him something back, or at least give him something later on (there was no question of giving back), but you had to accept at that particular time.

In some parts of the Buddhist world the lay people (especially) make a practice of giving something every day. After all, you are taking something every day, if it is only air or food; why not give something every day? Some Buddhist families in the East always look out for a

beggar or a monk to whom they can give food, or a poor person to whom they can give a piece of cloth or something of that kind. In this way they are giving all the time. It may not be very much — it may only be a few coins or just a few spoonfuls of rice — but at least they are training themselves, they are getting into the habit of giving, and thus giving becomes an integral part of their everyday existence. Giving should not be something you do once or twice a year — at Christmas or at birthdays — but something that you are doing all the time. Thus there is a constant outflow to counterbalance the constant process of taking in that we do only too easily and readily.

The second thing that can be given — this may come as a surprise to some of you — is not material but psychological. It is called 'the gift of fearlessness'. As one goes about one finds that so many people are very, very worried and anxious: they appear strained and tense; they seem to have something on their mind all the time; they do not seem at ease or at peace; they do not seem happy. The Bodhisattva has to deal with this. He has to try to give people strength, encouragement, and freedom from fear by his very presence, by his personal inspiration. There is in Buddhist art a very famous representation of the Buddha (as well as of various Bodhisattvas) in what is called 'the *abhaya mudrā*'. The *abhaya mudrā* means the *mudrā*, the hand-sign, of fearlessness. The Buddha, by this *mudrā*, is saying, "Fear not. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid, because essentially there is nothing to fear."

We can go so far as to say that fear is the great modern disease. It is not appendicitis, nor even cancer, nor even heart disease that most of the time kills us' prematurely: it is simply fear. I remember in this connection a very interesting little episode which was told me by a friend of mine in Kalimpong. He was a well known Russian Tibetologist. He happened to pay a visit to the United States of America. When he came back he told me that he had had a very interesting experience there. Apparently he was just disembarking when he paused and thought, "That is strange. That is very odd. There is a peculiar atmosphere here, like a fog — something clinging, something clammy. What on earth can it be?" He was a very sensitive person. He thought, "It isn't anything physical — it isn't coming from factory chimneys or the exhaust pipes of cars — so what is this grey, heavy, clinging atmosphere?" Then, he said, it suddenly struck him that this was fear. He realized that this was fear exuding, as it were, from the people of that vast continent; they were all living in fear.

We have the expression 'to smell fear'. You can quite literally smell fear. If someone is afraid, you can smell it: a dog can smell it, and, very often, if their senses are sufficiently acute, a human being can smell it too. So when you have a whole nation living under the influence of fear, the whole psychic atmosphere is, as it were, poisoned. The fear becomes tangible, becomes perceptible, becomes like a great oppressive cloud over the land. In the midst of this cloud of fear — this darkness at noonday — people are living, working and all the time trying to breathe. This fear is like a dark pall, in Wordsworth's phrase, hanging over our spirits. In modern life there is something more than just the threat of the atom or hydrogen bomb hanging over us: there is the fact that people seem unable to trust one another, have no confidence in one another, have no confidence in life itself. People are all the time shrinking as though they are about to receive a blow; they are all the time overpowered by fear.

Those who practise meditation will know that in meditation from time to time an experience of fear comes up very powerfully. At first it may be a fear coming from your childhood — or even earlier — but a stage may come, for some people at least, when a basic, primordial fear comes up. This is a terrible fear, but not a fear of anything in particular. It is an existential fear, a fear which goes right down to the bottom of one's being, right down to the roots of existence. It is a fear which one has to face and overcome.

The Bodhisattva, by his very presence, by his very example — by showing the example of a person who has himself conquered fear, transcended fear — gives freedom from fear. Thus the Bodhisattva gives fearlessness in the world of beings who are overcome by fear.

Thirdly, the Bodhisattva gives education and culture. We find that wherever Buddhism went in Asia, it was a carrier of culture — that is art, science, and knowledge of all kinds — not just a carrier of religious teachings and practices. The Bodhisattva spreads secular knowledge also, because through the arts and the sciences the mind and the heart — the intelligence and the emotions — are refined and become more closely attuned to spiritual things. This gift of knowledge, this gift of culture, this gift of education (even in the ordinary sense) is therefore, we find, one of the things which the Bodhisattva is to give.

Fourthly, the Bodhisattva may, upon occasions, give his life and limbs. This particular form of giving is the subject of many a Jātaka story (the Jātaka stories are stories about Gautama the Buddha's previous lives). Some of these stories will strike the Western mind, especially the modern Western mind, as rather lurid, not to say melodramatic. For instance, there is the story of the Bodhisattva giving away his wife and children. Sometimes people get all het up about this and say, "Were the wife and the children the property of the Bodhisattva that he should give them away just like so many goods and chattels?" Some people get very excited over this, but the story is not to be taken this way. The story just illustrates how the Bodhisattva should give up, should renounce, even those things which are naturally nearest and dearest to him.

Nothing being dearer than one's own life and limbs, there are stories in the Jātakas of how the Bodhisattva, or the Buddha-to-be, gave them away too. There is a very lurid story of how the Bodhisattva on one occasion sacrificed his body to a starving tigress so that she could feed her cubs. If you take that literally it raises all sorts of questions and problems (we won't go into them now). Perhaps a modern equivalent of this particular gift is donating one's blood (though perhaps we shouldn't go into that either). I understand there is quite a bit of controversy concerning the magnetism of different kinds of blood and whether, therefore, from an occult point of view, donating blood is desirable.

One thing that we should not ever forget in this connection is that if we take the Bodhisattva Ideal seriously, if we take Buddhism seriously, if we take spiritual principles seriously, we may be required, under certain circumstances, to sacrifice our life for those principles and ideals.

Here in this country we have it, in many ways, very, very easy. One of the great blessings we enjoy in this country is comparative religious freedom: in fact, almost complete religious freedom. Here we are free to profess and to practise Buddhism. If we want to be a Buddhist, there is nobody and no law that can stop us. We can study Buddhism, meditate, practise *dāna*, perform a Puja; we can do whatever we like. We are very fortunate that this should be so. It isn't so in all parts of the world. If you were to live, for instance, in a communist country — China, or Czechoslovakia, or Tibet — you would find it very, very difficult to practise Buddhism. Not just to single out the communist countries, you cannot be a Buddhist in a Muslim country. I have some friends who tried to follow Buddhism in Persia, which is a predominantly Muslim country, but it was just not possible. They were not preaching or propagating Buddhism, but as soon as it was known that they were Buddhists, they were stoned. In the end they had to leave. Not to speak of the Muslim countries, what about the Roman Catholic countries? It is very difficult to be a Buddhist in some of those countries. It is very difficult to send Buddhist literature into some Roman Catholic countries. I remember a friend of my own, a French woman, who crossed over from France to Spain a few years ago.

When she passed through customs with a load of Buddhist literature — which she was studying — in her luggage, she was told: "Such literature is not allowed in our country." As far as I know, there has been no public lecture on Buddhism ever given in Catholic Spain. In fact, not to speak of an oriental religion like Buddhism, there you cannot openly preach Protestantism!

So we should perhaps recognize how fortunate we are in this country in being able to enjoy complete religious freedom and toleration; but also we should recollect that in this modern world, under some regimes, it might not be so easy for us, and we might have to be prepared even to sacrifice our lives for the sake of our principles and ideals. We have to ask ourselves the question: "Would I be prepared to sacrifice my life?" It is easy enough to come along to a lecture like this; but suppose you had to do it at night, in fear of being found out, with an eye open for the police or the informer. Would you come then? If, perhaps, you meditated in peril of your life, or read a book on Buddhism in peril of your life, or stood up and spoke on Buddhism in peril of your life, would you do any of these things? Or would you not perhaps be amongst the majority who thought, "Well, I'll be a Buddhist in my next life; it is too difficult in this one."

If we are to take the Bodhisattva Ideal seriously, if we are to think seriously in terms of *dāna*, then we have to be prepared for the giving, if necessary, even of our own life and limbs for the sake of the principles and ideals which we hold dear and in which we believe. This does not mean that we should throw away our life in a foolhardy, showy, and reckless manner, but we must ask ourselves whether, if the sacrifice was really necessary, we would be prepared to make it.

Then, next, there is the giving of merit. The idea of merit is that if you do a good deed you get a certain amount of merit 'chalked up' to your credit; the more good deeds you do, the more merit you accumulate. The idea of merit is very prominent in the Hinayana. It is a good idea in a way, because it encourages people to perform good deeds. But there is another side to it: it tends to foster individualism. You think of the spiritual life in terms of accumulating enormous amounts of merit which are your personal property — your merit. In my *Survey of Buddhism* I have quoted the example of the Jain mendicant who performed austerities for years on end until he had a very large number of units of merit chalked up to his account. Eventually he got the idea that he didn't want to be a mendicant any more; he wanted to return to the lay life and set up a business. So what did he do? There was another mendicant who hadn't got so much merit but had got some money. So the first mendicant sold his merit to the second one and with the proceeds set himself up in business — and lived happily ever after! This then is what happens when you take this idea of merit very literally, not to say literalistically.

Then the Mahayana came along. The Mahayana said, as it were, "We can't have this because this is individualism. But at the same time, people are very attached to this idea of merit: they believe in merit; they think they have got merit by performing these good actions. All right, we shall ask them to give up their merit, share their merit, transfer their merit." In this way the Mahayana counteracted the rather rigorous individualism of the previous approach.

If we want to consider it in non-traditional, non-technical, even non-Buddhist terms, we can say that this idea of giving up merit means that one should not hang on to one's virtues; one should not say to oneself, as it were, "What a nice little virtue I have got! It's mine!" If you have this attitude, you treat your virtue like the child that you've produced: you're proud of it; you're complacent; you stroke its head; it's your little pet virtue and it isn't anybody else's. The Mahayana, as I say, discourages this sort of approach and says, "Give it up! Share it! Spread it

around a bit!" Francis Bacon said, 'Money is like muck — the better for being spread.' One may say the same about merit: merit also is like muck — the better for being spread around among a number of people.

Lastly we come to Dharma *dāna*, the gift of the Dharma, the gift of the truth, the gift of the teaching. This is said to be the highest of all gifts. You can give a person material things, give them psychological security, give them education and culture, even sacrifice your life and your limbs, even share your precious merits, but the greatest of all gifts is the sharing of the truth that you have understood — perhaps after much toil, pain, and difficulty. This Dharma *dāna*, this giving of the gift of the teaching, by word, by precept, or by example, is traditionally the special duty of the monks, of the lamas, of the masters, and so on. But it is at the same time emphasized that all can participate in this great responsibility. In fact, one cannot help it. One is, in fact, giving all the time: you are giving out something all the time; something is radiating from you all the time. If you have imbibed anything of Buddhism, then inevitably — whether you like it or not — you must give out Buddhism in your commerce with other people. This does not mean that on every possible — or impossible — occasion you just drag in the word 'Buddhism' and become a Buddhist bore. It does not mean that you should become like the ardent Roman Catholic in one of G. K. Chesterton's stories, who, whatever topic of conversation was started, would bring it round to the Roman Catholic Church. One day in a pub he met a man who was very fond of fishing, so said to him, "Oh, fishing? I'm interested in fishing too. There was a very famous fisherman once. His name was Saint Peter ... " In this way he got on to the Pope and the Catholic Church. This is not what is meant. In the course of a conversation what you have taken in of Buddhism should express itself naturally, without necessarily being labelled as Buddhism.

So much then for 'what can be given'. This is the most important heading of the four. Let me just summarize, by way of a list, the six things which can be given: (1) material things; (2) fearlessness; (3) education and culture; (4) one's life and limbs; (5) one's merit; (6) the Dharma.

Thirdly how should one give? There is no need to spend much time over this; it is very simple. First of all, we are told, one should give courteously. I am afraid that in the East, where beggars are concerned, people sometimes sin against this precept. They perhaps see a beggar begging in the street — maybe he is just squatting at the roadside — and they fling him a coin rather contemptuously. Buddhism, however, says that when one gives, to whomsoever, whether it is to a beggar or even to an animal, one should give courteously. And then, one should give happily — with a smiling face. This is of psychological importance. What is the use of giving something if you give it with a frown? It undoes half the effect. And then, one should give quickly, without delay. This is especially important in the East where sometimes a person's life depends upon somebody else's prompt generosity. Then, do not give as though you are unwilling to give, as though you are being forced into it. Then, give without subsequent regret. Having given, feel happy that you have given; don't think, "I suppose I had to. It would have been better if I had not. What a pity I did."

And then, we are told, give without talking about it to other people — don't say anything. I remember once I was attending a meeting in South India. Before the meeting someone had sent along a very, very small sum of money — about fourpence — as a contribution. Then in the middle of the meeting he got up and in a loud voice asked the organizer, "Did you receive my donation?" This is the sort of thing which does happen. So one should give without drawing attention to one's generosity. Then, the Mahayana sutras say, give to friend and to foe: if your enemy comes along and is in need of help, give to him as much as to your friend. And then, give to good and bad: don't discriminate between the so-called good person and the

so-called evil-doer. And further, we are told one should give everywhere and at all times, but observing due proportion (discriminating and giving to people according to their real needs, not according to their apparent wants).

Now fourthly and lastly, there is the question of why *dāna* should be given. This introduces the very important question of motive. Some people give — sometimes give on a grand scale — for the sake of reputation. I am sorry to say that this is very common in India: big business people, millionaires, multimillionaires, subscribe large sums of money for hospitals and dispensaries, but always say quite openly, quite blatantly in fact, "My name must be there!" — they insist that the hospital or dispensary be named after them. Sometimes they give on the express condition that if they donate so much money, then the building which is erected will be named after them — it is usually a very long name! Other more religious people may give with the idea that after death they will go to heaven, that they are 'laying up treasures in heaven' for themselves. According to Buddhism, this is not a very noble idea. Buddhism does teach that if you lead a virtuous life you will get the reward of it later on, but you should not lead a virtuous life with that as your motive. The Bodhisattva gives simply and solely so that he may be helped by his generous action (helped by the destruction of greed which it brings about) to gain Enlightenment — not just for his own sake but for the sake of all sentient beings.

This brings us now from *dāna* to *dāna pāramitā*, the Perfection of Giving, Transcendental Giving. The word *pāramitā* literally means 'that which conveys to the other shore', in other words, the other shore of Nirvana (the Unconditioned, the Absolute, the Void). Strictly speaking, there is only one *pāramitā* (we do speak of six or ten), which is *prajñā* (Wisdom) *pāramitā*. *Prajñā* is Wisdom in the sense of the direct realization of *śūnyatā*, the Voidness. *Dāna pāramitā* really means the practice of giving conjoined with the experience of *śūnyatā*. For this reason, true *dāna*, *dāna pāramitā*, is often technically referred to as *trimaṇḍalapariśuddha*, which means 'of a threefold circle of purity'. The threefold circle of purity is that in the act of giving there is no idea of self (no idea of I am giving), no idea of a recipient (that I am giving to him or to her), and no idea of the act of giving (that I am giving). This does not mean that there is a state of blankness, stupidity, unconsciousness; there is perfect, clear awareness. The giving is also natural, spontaneous, inexhaustible. It is a giving, one may say, out of the depths of one's own inner experience of Reality, one's own one-ness with the spirit of Compassion in accordance with the needs of sentient beings. So much, then, for *dāna pāramitā*, the Perfection of Giving, the embodiment of the altruistic aspect of the Bodhisattva's life and work.

Now we come to *śīla*, the second *pāramitā*, which embodies the more individualistic, more self-regarding aspect of the Bodhisattva's life. This, we may say, corresponds to the aspect of self-purification — not exclusively so, but perhaps predominantly so.

In dealing with *dāna*, we made use of the traditional classification; but in the case of *śīla* I propose to adopt a different procedure. Traditionally, *śīla* is expounded in terms of (i) the 'Five Precepts', (ii) the 'Ten Precepts', which result in a threefold purification of body (through three precepts), speech (through four precepts), and mind (through three precepts), and (iii) also the special 'Sixty-four Precepts' for Bodhisattvas. This is familiar ground, and today I am going to take it all for granted. Today we shall be concentrating on Buddhist ethics as applied to three different spheres of human life, which affect practically everybody: food, work, and marriage.

First, a word on *śīla* in general. A little while ago I rendered *śīla* as 'uprightness'. This is more or less the literal meaning. It is generally rendered — in fact I have myself rendered it in some contexts — as 'morality', but this evening I have deliberately avoided doing this. I've avoided this term morality because I find, especially when I am in conversation with my younger

friends, that for many people it has rather unpleasant connotations. The word morality is associated with the traditional, the conventional, not to say the reactionary moral attitudes which many people believe are now outdated and outworn, in other words, those which are based on orthodox Christian doctrines, not to say dogmas.

While we are on the subject, I cannot help observing, as a result of my own study not only of religion in the West but of the general history of the West, that orthodox Christian moral ideas and ideals, which are not necessarily those of the Gospels themselves, have probably done much more harm than good in the West. Amongst other things, they have been responsible for generating in millions of people feelings — in some cases very, very strong feelings indeed — of sinfulness and guilt. Such feelings have, I am sure, ruined the lives of countless thousands, even countless millions, of human beings in the West. I think it is only fair to observe that especially in the sphere of sexual ethics the influence of orthodox Church Christianity has been disastrous.

I emphasize this because all of us, having been born, brought up, and educated in the West, are to some extent influenced by these attitudes and assumptions. It is not a question of accepting or not accepting Christianity; even in the case of those who consciously reject Christianity (atheists, humanists, agnostics, and so on), they are often deeply influenced by Christian ethical assumptions. It is very important that we should try to understand this because if we do not understand it, if we are not aware of these processes at work in our own lives, we shall unconsciously carry Christian attitudes, especially in ethical matters, over into our Buddhist life, with resultant confusion and possibly chaos.

Not so very long ago, at a meeting, I did happen to remark that in my opinion Buddhism could become widespread in England only if there was first a revival of paganism. Everybody at the meeting thought this was a great joke and that I was pulling their leg. But there was just one man who thought I might be serious. So after the meeting he came to me and said, "What did you mean by that remark? What do you mean by paganism?" I said, "I mean by paganism an abandonment of Christian — that is to say, orthodox Church Christian — ethical attitudes; only if one gets rid of these can the way be paved for the introduction and practice of Buddhism on a wider scale."

Now let us come to the application of Buddhist ethics to the three aspects of life already mentioned. Here the treatment will be only suggestive, not exhaustive.

First of all, food. We had some not very long ago, because we all have to eat. In this country we have to eat several times a day; in some countries they eat only once a day, or sometimes once every other day. It is as well we should be aware that we eat twice a day, or three times a day — some of us I believe eat four times a day, what with little snacks, or at least cups of tea and biscuits, in between meals! Obviously eating, the ingestion of this material we call 'food', occupies a very important place in our lives. I don't know how many thousands of hours per lifetime we spend in this fascinating activity, but it must be rather considerable. Being such an important activity, one to which we devote so much time, energy, and money, one for which we require special provision in our houses in the form of kitchens and utensils and so on, it requires to be brought within the influence of Buddhism: we cannot think to leave it outside, unaffected by our Buddhist ideals.

In this matter of food, there are several principles which can be applied. The most important principle, obviously, is that of non-violence, or, more positively, the principle of reverence for life. This means, in practice, abstention from flesh food; in other words, it means

vegetarianism. Some of the Mahayana sutras say that the Bodhisattva can no more think of eating the flesh of living beings than a mother can think of eating the flesh of her child. This is how the Bodhisattva should feel.

In the Western Buddhist Order we do not make strict vegetarianism compulsory, but we certainly do expect that all our Members, and possibly all our Friends too, will make a definite step in the direction of vegetarianism. I know that sometimes at home circumstances may be difficult and it may not be possible to be strictly vegetarian, but at least one can give up certain things, or one can give up on certain days of the week or on certain occasions. After all, no-one is perfectly non-violent; it is comparative, a matter of degree. But in this respect we should certainly be as non-violent as we can, should reverence life as much as possible. We may say that vegetarianism of any degree is a direct application to our lives of the very important principle which animates the Bodhisattva: the principle of Compassion.

Even this, however, is not enough. One should also eat, in justice to oneself, food which is pure and wholesome. By 'pure' I do not mean refined to such an extent that there is no goodness left in it. That is not pure, not naturally pure, at all; that is simply chemically pure.

We should eat only as much as is necessary for maintaining good health. Sometimes we forget that the purpose of eating is just to keep the body going. If one is down to a subsistence level diet, as people often are in the East, one knows this very well; in the West, where we very often have an optimum diet, one does not always know this.

Then again, one should not eat neurotically. I mean by this that one should not eat using food as a substitute satisfaction for some other — usually emotional — need. This is what people do. Lots of people over eat, because they are using food as something to make up for a frustrated emotional need.

Then again, one should eat quietly and peacefully. I think this is very important. In a previous lecture I have referred to that abomination 'the business lunch'. At the business lunch you try to do business while you are at the same time supposed to be eating. I think that this is the height of uncivilization; this is grossly uncivilized conduct. Eating should be quiet and peaceful. Incidentally, to eat in a public restaurant or some sort of coffee bar, somewhere where there is a lot of noise — clatter and rattle, and loud conversation — is, I am sure, not good for any sensitive and mindful person.

Above all you should eat mindfully — with awareness of what you are doing. This is the great Buddhist principle here. You should not eat while trying to read a newspaper, or trying to discuss some business deal, or having an argument with your wife; you should eat mindfully, knowing what you are doing. Sometimes I have been asked whether Buddhists have a grace which can be recited before meals. In Tibet and Japan, in some of the monasteries, they do have, but the original practice was not like this. Originally there was no grace to be recited by the monks before meals: the monks were simply asked to eat mindfully. To eat mindfully is a religious exercise in itself.

I cannot think of a more beautiful example which combines all these qualities than the Japanese Tea Ceremony. There, just a small group of people — two or three, maybe four people at most — gather together in some quiet corner of a garden in a little rustic hut. They sit around a charcoal stove and listen to the kettle simmering away. Very quietly, very peacefully, with very slow, graceful, delicate, mindful movements, the tea is poured out. It is handed round to the guests. People sip it. They are just there together, engaging in this very ordinary,

everyday activity of drinking tea. I shudder to think how sometimes we drink tea in this country — slopping it in our saucers and so on. The Japanese Tea Ceremony does show to what a pitch of perfection, even these ordinary, everyday activities of ours can be raised if only we apply mindfulness. After all, you could eat your cornflakes mindfully ... I was going to add, "And you can eat your steak and onions mindfully!" I might risk a paradox here and say that it is better to eat your steak and onions mindfully than your nut cutlets unmindfully. I don't know. What you lose on the swings you seem to gain on the roundabouts. I think, though, that everybody can understand the principle involved: even eating, this quite ordinary activity, can be made into a sort of art, can be made even into a *do* ('way') in the Japanese sense of the term. I think I could say that if someone ate every day mindfully, drank tea every day mindfully, and could live eating and drinking mindfully year after year, then after a few years it might well be that they would have gained as much as other people might have gained from a sustained practice even of meditation.

Secondly, the Buddhist attitude towards work. I must begin by saying that in the West we have all got the wrong idea about work. To begin with, we think — and sometimes say — that everybody should work. We mean by this that everybody should work for money. We think and say that it is wrong not to work, that it is sinful not to work — not to be 'gainfully employed' as the phrase is. This attitude is undoubtedly a legacy from Protestantism (you can look up that very famous classic *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* by Tawney, and find it all detailed there.) Most of us find that if we take a few days off and just not do anything, we have a bit of a bad conscience about it, not to say feel guilty about it — as though we ought not to have a few days off, *ought not* to be enjoying ourselves, *ought not* to be just not doing anything. Some people, because of the way they have been brought up and conditioned, cannot spend a few extra hours in bed in the morning without feeling horribly guilty about it. Sometimes, if we see people sitting down and not doing anything, we feel fidgety and uncomfortable: we want to get them moving and doing something, because it is almost a standing menace to us if they are sitting there quietly like that while we are getting on with it.

This attitude is not new; you find it in the Gospels in the story of Martha and Mary. Martha was bustling around getting everything ready; Mary was just sitting at the feet of Christ listening — actually listening — when there was food to be prepared and served, and washing up to be done! Christ, you may remember, said that Mary had the better part, or, more colloquially, she had the best of the bargain, while Martha had only the second best. In the West we tend to be very much Marthas rather than Marys. In fact, this feeling that we have to be doing something is, in the West, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, including, of course, the United States of America, a sort of disease.

I remember when I lived in Kalimpong a very worthy French woman who had become a Buddhist nun, who stayed in Kalimpong for some time. She was a tremendous activist; she was always doing things. She had her cell in spic-and-span condition; she was always washing, and scrubbing, and wringing out, and rinsing, and putting out to dry, and taking in to scrub again; she was feeding cats and feeding dogs; she was whitewashing things; she was climbing up ladders; she was carrying big buckets of water; she was studying Sanskrit, and consulting her Pali dictionary, and reading Tibetan; she was going to the bazaar: she was doing, morning, noon and night. One day she came to me for advice about her spiritual state! So I said, "My dear Anila," ('Anila' is how one addresses nuns; in Tibetan it means 'auntie') "there is one thing you must learn." She said, "Oh, what is that?" She was all agog to learn it! So I said, "You must learn to waste time." Her face fell. In fact it went scarlet — I am not sure whether with rage or indignation. And without another word she turned and went away. But she did come again, and I referred to this. I said, "Seriously, you must learn to waste time. Even

though you have become a nun you have got a compulsive urge to work. Just look at these Indians and Tibetans. They sit around; they don't do anything all day. Look how wonderful it is!" When I said that she almost spat with contempt. Nevertheless there was a very great deal of truth, I am sure, in my advice.

Unfortunately in the West we only too often look down on those who don't or won't work. We call them by all sorts of rude names: 'social parasites', 'layabouts', and so on. We don't consider them at all respectable. Incidentally, it did occur to me while I was thinking over this lecture that the Buddha himself, so far as we know, never did a single day's work in his life. He was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family. He had lots of servants. He never did any work at home — not a stroke! According to the best accounts, he spent most of his time in three palaces with singing girls, dancing girls, and musical instruments. This is what the scriptures tell us. Then, after he left home, after he went out as a mendicant, he lived off other people: other people gave him food and clothing — he never did anything for those things. He preached of course, but he would have preached anyway, just as the sun shines anyway. He never did any work in the sense of working for money. So this is perhaps something to consider, that the Buddha, the Enlightened One, never did a single honest day's work in his life.

I have been speaking of work in the sense of employment; but there is such a thing as creative work. Creative work, we may say, is a psychological necessity. We do need to create; we do need to produce. It may only be in the form of cooking, or may only be in the form — I say 'only' but it is in fact a very important activity — of bringing up children. It may be in the form of writing or painting. It may be some constructive social venture. Whatever the particular activity, we do need to create: this is a human need. *But* satisfying the need to create need not be linked with employment.

If one thinks for just one moment of the ideal society, no-one should have to work for wages. I think that the ideal state of affairs would be one in which one gives to the community whatever one can in the way of one's labour, one's productivity, one's creativity, and the community gives to each person whatever he or she needs for his or her own life — not only needs materially but also needs psychologically and spiritually.

However, the day when that will happen is, I think, quite a long way off and meanwhile we do have to be gainfully employed in the ordinary sense. So here we have to apply the principle of Right Livelihood. I have often spoken about this so I am not going to say very much about it on this occasion. In brief, Right Livelihood means that through one's means of livelihood there should be no exploitation of others and no degradation of oneself. If one does have to engage for any reason in work which is non-creative, mechanical, repetitive, then try to work part-time; with regard to this sort of work, the principle to be applied is 'do as little of it as possible', i.e. as little as is compatible with one's existence economically in the world. In any case, however one is employed, there should always be time for meditation, for study, for contact with friends and other positive and creative things.

Thirdly and lastly, we come to the topic of marriage, which is another of those aspects of life affecting practically everybody in one way or another, formally or informally. The Buddhist conception of marriage is very different from the traditional Western one, is very different, in other words, from the traditional Christian one. On this subject we really require a whole lecture, but this evening there is only time for a few salient points.

Traditionally in Buddhism, marriage is not regarded as a religious sacrament; in other words, God does not come into it. At the same time, it is not regarded as a legally binding and legally

enforcible contract: marriage should not be something that you go to law about in order to coerce somebody — the married partner — into doing something or not doing something that you want them to do or do not want them to do.

According to Buddhist tradition, marriage is primarily simply a human relationship: a human relationship which is recognized by society (in the form of one's family and one's friends). You may be interested to hear that in the Buddhist countries of the East, whether it is Tibet, or Burma, or Ceylon, or Japan, there is no such thing as a wedding ceremony in the Western sense. We have become so used to thinking of the wedding ceremony — the wedding dress, the orange blossom, the church bells ringing — as something so essential, you may wonder how on earth Buddhists in the East get along without it. But in the Buddhist East one just does not have that sort of thing. If one has anything at all after the couple concerned have come together, one has a feast, which they give to their friends and relations, and an announcement: they call everybody together and say, on that occasion, after feasting them, "We are living together. We are man and wife." In this way it becomes known to everybody — then that is that!

Sometimes the feast is given after several years. I remember a quite amusing case between a Sikkimese friend of mine and his wife, who did not give their feast until they had been together for twenty years. They were not regarded, however, as living in sin in the interval. In the Buddhist East, living together and being married are regarded as the same thing. There is a little story I sometimes tell to illustrate this. A visitor came to Kalimpong and wanted to have a conversation with a certain friend of mine who didn't understand English, so I had to go along and act as interpreter. In the course of the conversation, the visitor wanted to put across to this Tibetan friend a remark about a certain couple whom he knew, to the effect that they were living together but weren't married. I translated this very carefully for the benefit of the Tibetan, but he looked puzzled and said, "But if they are living together, they are married!" This is the Buddhist view, that marriage consists in living together; it does not consist in the legal contract, nor in the social convention, nor even in the feast and the announcement. For Buddhism, the marriage is primarily the human relationship itself.

Now after the feast you may, if you like, go along to the monks at the temple or monastery and ask for a blessing, but this is not a wedding ceremony. The monks bless something that has already happened — the relationship; they do not make or create the relationship. The monks simply recognize the relationship and give their blessing that the couple concerned may live together happily in accordance with the spirit of the Buddha's teaching, helping each other to practise it.

With that background, it is only inevitable that in Buddhism divorce (by mutual consent) should be recognized. In all Buddhist countries, from ancient times, there has never been any difficulty about dissolving a marriage, if the persons concerned wish it.

Also one finds that in most of the Buddhist countries the wife after marriage retains her own name. We think we are comparatively emancipated in this country, but in this country if Miss Brown marries Mr Smith, she becomes Mrs Smith, whereas in the Buddhist countries of the East, the woman after marriage retains and uses her own name — she doesn't just duplicate her husband's name.

One must also say that in the Buddhist countries of the East there is no one pattern of marriage relationship. This is perhaps rather surprising to us. Buddhism nowhere says that monogamy is the only possible form of marriage. It says that monogamy is possible, polygamy is possible,

polyandry is possible. You will find all these institutions in most Buddhist countries. For instance, in practically all Buddhist countries you find polygamy recognized; in Tibet, in the old days, you found polyandry also recognized and accepted as a perfectly respectable form of marriage. It is not correct to say that in Buddhism monogamy is the norm and is good, but polygamy or polyandry is sinful. On the contrary, these are alternative patterns, and whether you follow this or that pattern depends on your social tradition, on you yourself and on the people with whom you are involved. One cannot label one way of living together as 'good', the other as 'bad': these are relative. What is important for Buddhism, what Buddhism pays attention to, is not the particular set-up, but the quality of the human relationship(s).

Now all this may sound very strange, even very revolutionary, to some people who have not really got into the spirit of Buddhism, and who are still, as I said earlier, carrying over into Buddhism Western, especially Christian, ethical assumptions. But we must understand that these ideas have been common in the Buddhist countries of the East for centuries past. For instance this way of looking at marriage: we think it is quite revolutionary if a woman continues to use her own name after marriage, but this has been the common thing in all Buddhist countries for centuries. So perhaps even in ordinary social matters like these, Buddhists in the ancient Buddhist East were more enlightened (in the common sense of the term) than even many people are in the West nowadays.

So much then for *śīla*, or uprightness, which represents the predominantly self-regarding aspect of the Bodhisattva's life. We must not forget however that it is *śīla pāramitā* — *śīla* as a Perfection, as a Transcendental Virtue, as conjoined with Wisdom — with which we are concerned. Uprightness, even the greatest uprightness, is not in Buddhism an end in itself, but a means to Enlightenment. If uprightness is regarded as an end in itself, then it becomes, according to Buddhism, a hindrance. *Dāna*, giving, too, if regarded as an end in itself, becomes a hindrance. *Dāna* as an end in itself is what we call humanitarianism or secular philanthropy: it is good, but isn't good enough -- it doesn't go far enough. *Śīla* as an end in itself corresponds to morality or ethics: sometimes morality is a good thing, but only too often it is harmful. The Bodhisattva practises *dāna* and *śīla* as means to Enlightenment. He practises them, that is to say, as Perfections. In this way, he fulfils the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Give a brief account of where your best interest seemed to conflict with someone else's. Were you able to transcend this conflict?
2. Reflect on your own practice of *dāna*. How might you intensify it?
3. In what way might it be that "we are all in the grip of craving"? How might *dāna* loosen this grip and reverse these tendencies?
4. Do we experience the Dharma as 'the greatest of all gifts'? Why / why not?
5. How do *dāna* and *śīla* constitute a pair in your experience?

6. Sangharakshita says it is important to establish contact with our pre-Christian past. Do you share this view? Explain your answer. How might you establish this contact?
7. How have Christian ethics affected your own ethical life? Do they continue to do so?
8. How might you distinguish between conventional and natural morality in your daily life? Why is this distinction important?
9. What are your own habits and attitudes towards eating? What is your attitude towards work?
10. What would the purpose of marriage be in Buddhism? Does this have any relevance to your situation?

Continuing his exploration of the resolution of opposites, Sangharakshita takes a slightly unusual approach to the pāramitās of kṣānti and vīrya.

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In the course of this series of lectures we have seen that the Bodhisattva represents a living union of opposites. The Bodhisattva synthesizes the mundane and the Transcendental, synthesizes Wisdom and Compassion. Last week we were concerned with altruism and individualism. We saw that the Bodhisattva synthesizes these opposites too; we saw that the Bodhisattva embodies both altruism and individualism. Today we are concerned with another very important pair of opposites and with the way in which the Bodhisattva synthesizes these. Today we are concerned with 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in the spiritual life.

In the title of this lecture on the printed programme you will have noticed that the words 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are in single inverted commas. This indicates that we are not to take these terms too literally: we are to take them in a more metaphorical sense. How they are really to be understood in this context we shall see in due course.

This evening we are still concerned with the establishment aspect of the Bodhicitta; in other words, we are still concerned with the practice of the 'Six Pāramitās'. Last week we dealt with *dāna*, Giving, and *śīla*, Uprightness, the first two *pāramitās*. This week we are dealing with *kṣānti*, Patience, and *vīrya*, Vigour, the third and the fourth *pāramitās*. It is these which represent, within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, the 'masculine' and 'feminine' aspects of the spiritual life — or, represent the active and the passive poles of the Bodhisattva Ideal. *Vīrya* represents the 'masculine' aspect; *kṣānti* represents the 'feminine' aspect. Incidentally, in the ancient Indian languages, in a compound of this sort, the feminine usually comes first. For instance, in Pali and Sanskrit one always says *mātā-pitaro*, 'mother and father' — one never says 'father and mother'. In English it is very often the opposite. Today we are following the Indian order and are dealing first with *kṣānti*, then with *vīrya*. After that we shall try to see in what way *vīrya* represents the more 'masculine' aspect and *kṣānti* the more 'feminine' aspect in the spiritual life.

Kṣānti is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful words in the whole vocabulary of Buddhism. It combines quite a number of associated meanings; no single English word is sufficient to do justice to the richness of meaning which the word *kṣānti* contains. Literally, *kṣānti* means 'patience', 'forbearance'. But it also includes the idea of gentleness or docility, even the idea of humility. Sometimes we say that humility is not a Buddhist virtue, but we mean humility in the more artificial, self-conscious sense. In this connection, there is a little story about

Mahatma Gandhi. When he started one of his ashrams in India he drew up a list of all the virtues which the inmates were supposed to practise. Right at the head of the list he put the virtue of humility. Someone pointed out to him that if you practised humility self-consciously, then it was not real humility and your practice was hypocritical. So Gandhi crossed it out and wrote at the bottom of the list 'all the virtues are to be practised in a spirit of humility' — which was a rather different thing. If one takes humility in the right sense — as an unselfconscious self-abnegation of spirit, or as an unawareness of self — then one can include humility also as part of the connotation of *kṣānti*. *Kṣānti* also contains very definite overtones of love, even of compassion, of tolerance and acceptance, and receptivity. On the negative side, *kṣānti* covers such things as absence of anger and absence of the desire for retaliation and revenge.

It is not very difficult to understand from these facts what kind of spiritual attitude *kṣānti* represents. Generally speaking, we may say that it represents, within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, the antidote to anger. In other words, it is a form of love. You may remember that *dāna*, giving, the first of the *pāramitās*, represented, within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, the antidote to craving. In the same way, *kṣānti*, patience, forbearance, or love, within the context of the same Bodhisattva Ideal, is the antidote to anger.

There is a lot that one can say about *kṣānti* — as one can in fact about all the *pāramitās* — but I propose to discuss in this lecture just the three principal aspects of *kṣānti*: firstly, *kṣānti* as forbearance; secondly, *kṣānti* as tolerance; and thirdly, *kṣānti* as spiritual receptivity. I am going to depart from my usual custom by introducing each aspect with a story — the story is not going to come in the middle or at the end, but right at the beginning. This will serve to remind us that *kṣānti* is not something to be theorized about or speculated about, but is essentially something to be practised in our everyday life, as in fact we shall see a little later on with the help of a verse from the *Dhammapada*.

First of all, *kṣānti* as forbearance. *Kṣānti* in this sense is illustrated by a story from the life of the Buddha himself. This story is found in the Sūtra of Forty-two Sections. (This sutra is historically of considerable importance. It was the first Buddhist text ever to be translated into the Chinese language. We now no longer have the Sanskrit — or perhaps the Pali — original of the sutra ; we have only this Chinese translation.) One of the earlier sections relates the following story about the Buddha.

The Buddha, we are told, was going about as usual, preaching or going for alms, when he happened to encounter somebody, probably a brahmin, who for some reason was not happy with him. The Buddha was not universally popular in his day; quite a lot of people did not like what the Buddha was doing — enticing people away from their wives and families, putting them on the spiritual path, making them think about Nirvana instead of about making money. On this occasion, this person who met the Buddha straight away started to abuse him: he started to abuse the Buddha with all the words in his vocabulary. But the Buddha did not say anything at all: he just waited for the man to stop. After five minutes of uninterrupted abuse, the man just stopped — he got out of breath, apparently. So the Buddha very quietly asked him, "Is that all?" The man was a bit taken aback and said, "Yes, that's all." So then the Buddha said, "Let me now ask you a question. Suppose you have a friend, who one day brings you a present. But suppose you don't want to accept that present. If you don't accept it, to whom does it belong?" The man said, "If I don't accept it, it belongs to the person who wanted to give it to me." The Buddha then said, "You have tried to make me a present of this abuse. I decline to accept your present. Take it, it belongs to you."

This is how the Buddha behaved. However, I think you will agree, upon a little reflection, that this is not how we, in similar situations, usually behave. If we are abused we retaliate, either by making a similar retort or in some other way. At best we keep the abuse burning in our mind and take revenge later.

The great teacher, Śāntideva, in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, gives some very useful hints on how we are to emulate the Buddha's example and check the arising of anger. Śāntideva says that if someone comes along and beats you with a stick, though that is indeed a very painful experience, nevertheless you should not straight away fly into a rage. He says that you should reflect on, and try to understand, what has actually happened. If you analyze it, all that has happened, when you are beaten with a stick, is that two things have come together: the stick and your body. The painful experience arises on the coming together of these two things.

Śāntideva goes on to ask who is responsible for this coming together and therefore who also is responsible for this painful experience. The other person, the enemy, has admittedly taken the stick to you and so is partly responsible, but you, Śāntideva argues, have brought the body (the body comes from your previous *saṃskāras*, from your ignorance and activities based upon ignorance of previous lives); the enemy provides the stick but you provide the body. Because you provide the body, you are equally responsible with the enemy for the painful experience. The enemy has put the stick there, it is true, but you have put the body there, so why should you get angry with him for his stick being there and not with yourself for your body being there? Śāntideva has a number of reflections of this sort, which help us to practise forbearance.

There is more however to practising forbearance than practising forbearance towards people expressing harsh words or people with sticks. In Buddhist literature the objects towards which forbearance is to be practised are sometimes classified into three groups.

First of all, there is nature: the material universe that surrounds us. We have to practise forbearance especially towards nature in the form of the weather. We are rarely forbearing towards the weather: it is always either too hot or too cold, or there is too much wind, or too much rain, or not enough sunshine. We also need to practise forbearance towards what are known in law as 'acts of God': natural disasters beyond human control, like fire, flood, earthquake, and lightning.

Then secondly, we are to practise forbearance towards our own body, especially when our body is sick or suffering in any other way. We should not get angry with the body; we should not start beating 'brother ass' — it is not his fault. After all, we have brought the body here; it is our own responsibility. Some people of course find it difficult to practise forbearance towards their body: they get a little headache sometimes, but from the fuss they make — expressing their need for sympathy and so on — one might think that they were undergoing a major operation without anaesthetic.

The fact that we should practise forbearance towards physical suffering does not mean that we should not try to alleviate suffering, whether it is our own suffering or the suffering of other people. But we should at least realize that there is always a residue which cannot be relieved, which we simply have to bear with patience.

Even if there is no sickness, sooner or later come old age and, eventually, death. In the West many people rebel against the thought that old age must come creeping inevitably upon us. They rebel and refuse to grow old gracefully. This is sometimes quite tragic. In the East, especially in the Buddhist countries, it is different: people there very often look forward to old

age. They think, or even say, "How wonderful, in ten years time I'll be sixty." In many parts of the East they think that old age is the happiest time of life. It is the happiest time of life because in old age all the passions of youth have subsided — there is no emotional turbulence; one has gained experience and with that experience perhaps just a little wisdom; one has fewer and fewer responsibilities — one hands over everything to the younger generation; one has little to do; one has plenty of time for reflection, even for meditation. In the East people do very much look forward to their old age; but even in the East it very often is not easy for people to accept the fact of death. Whether in the East or West, the fact of death is, for most people, a very sobering consideration. Nevertheless there is no alternative: whether we like it or not, one day death will come. One is therefore advised to practise forbearance towards the dissolution, or the idea of the dissolution, one day, of the physical body.

Thirdly and lastly, one is advised to practise forbearance towards other people. It is said to be much more difficult to be forbearing towards other people than towards the weather or even towards one's body. Other people can be very difficult indeed. This is perhaps why someone once said that hell is other people — heaven is other people too, but that is another story.

We can perhaps already see that the Buddhist ideal of forbearance is a very sublime one. In Buddhist literature, even in Buddhist life, the ideal is sometimes carried to what we in the West would regard as extremes. For instance, there is the Buddha's parable of the saw. The Buddha one day called all his disciples together and said, "Monks, suppose you were going through the forest, and suppose you were seized by robbers who were highwaymen, and suppose they should take a sharp, two-handed saw and saw you limb from limb, if in your mind there arose the least thought of ill-will, you would not be my disciple."

This is the sort of extreme to which this ideal could — perhaps should — be carried. Practising forbearance is not just a question of stoical endurance; it is not just a question of gritting your teeth and bearing it, while feeling angry and resentful inside. The Buddha's teaching makes it clear that forbearance is essentially a positive mental attitude, essentially an attitude of love. This fact is very well brought out in a passage from the *Majjhima Nikāya* (*The Collection of Middle Length Sayings of the Buddha*). In this passage the Buddha, again addressing his disciples, says, 'When men speak evil of ye, thus must ye train yourselves: "Our heart shall be unwavering, no evil word will we send forth, but compassionate of others' welfare will we abide, of kindly heart without resentment; and that man who thus speaks will we suffuse with thoughts accompanied by love, and so abide: and, making that our standpoint, we will suffuse the whole world with loving thoughts, far-reaching, wide-spreading, boundless, free from hate, free from ill-will, and so abide." Thus, brethren, must ye train yourselves.'

On this same subject there is a highly significant half line in the *Dhammapada*, '*Khantī paramam tapo titikkhā*', which is usually translated as 'patience is the greatest penance', or 'forbearance is the greatest asceticism'. *Tapo* (or *tapa*) means 'penance', 'austerity', 'self-mortification', 'asceticism'. There were lots of these practices in ancient India. If you reduced your food to a few grains of rice a day, that was an asceticism. If you meditated while hanging head downwards from a tree, that was an asceticism. If you stood with one hand in the air and kept it there for months until it withered, that also was an asceticism. There was a famous asceticism called the *pañca agni tāpasya*, 'the asceticism of the five fires'. To practise this, you kindled four fires at the four cardinal points. When they were blazing, you sat and meditated in the middle, with the sun, the fifth fire, directly overhead.

All these forms of asceticism, self-mortification and torture were very popular in the Buddha's day (there are plenty of references to them in the Pali scriptures) and were regarded by many

people as means to salvation. They believed that the more the flesh was mortified, the finer, the purer, the more enlightened the spirit became. But the Buddha did not agree with this; he had tried it all for six years and had found that it did not work. So in this little verse he says that forbearance is the greatest asceticism. It is as though he is saying, "If you want to practise asceticism, there is no need to seek out special opportunities for it (no need, for example, to sit in between five fires). Just go back to ordinary everyday life and practise forbearance in the midst of *that*. You could not have a more difficult asceticism than practising forbearance in the trials of everyday life." So in that sense *kṣānti* is the greatest of all asceticisms.

Secondly, we come to *kṣānti* as tolerance. You may know that the Mongols were converted to Buddhism in the thirteenth century by a great Tibetan spiritual master called 'Phags.pa. 'Phags.pa was the head at that time of the Shakyapa School, one of the four great schools of Tibetan Buddhism (the other schools are the Gelugpa, the Nyingmapa, and the Kagyupa Schools). 'Phags.pa was a man of great ability and great influence. He was the guru, the spiritual teacher, of the great Kubla Khan, who was emperor of China as well as Khan of Mongolia. In gratitude to 'Phags.pa for his teaching, Kubla Khan gave him the secular jurisdiction over the whole of Tibet. At the same time Kubla Khan wanted to pass a law and apply it throughout his domains compelling all Buddhists to follow the Shakyapa teaching. Now you might think that 'Phags.pa would have been very pleased that there was going to be such a law, but that was not the case. 'Phags.pa in fact dissuaded Kubla Khan from passing the law. He told the emperor that everybody should be free to follow their own conscience, to follow that form of Buddhism which they liked best.

This is an example of tolerance. This tolerant attitude is the attitude of all Buddhists everywhere and has been the attitude of all Buddhists at all times. If there have ever been any exceptions, they have been very few indeed. There might have been two or three, at the most four, very minor exceptions in two thousand five hundred years of Buddhist history.

We cannot help reflecting in what striking contrast this all stands with the history, in the West, of Christianity. If one goes through the history of the Church, especially during the Early and Middle Ages, one cannot help being — I will say — revolted, because there are so many instances of intolerance, of fanaticism, of persecution. These things seem to be the rule, not the exception. We have only to think, for example, of the ruthless destruction of practically the whole pagan culture of Western Europe. We have only to think of the wholesale massacre of heretics, like the Cathars, the Albigenses, the Waldenses. We have only to think of the sad and sorry story of the Inquisition and the Crusades and, later on, the witch burnings. We have only to recollect that all these things represented the official, declared policy of the whole body of the Church and that everybody, from the Pope downwards, was involved — even, in some cases, some of those who were considered to be saints. If we go through the history of the Church and attend to this particular aspect of it, we cannot help sometimes getting the impression of something deeply abhorrent, even deeply pathological. Some people do say that all this is an aberration; they say that it does not represent real Christianity. That may be so. However, one may certainly observe that there are quite strong traces of intolerance even in the Gospels themselves. In fact, we may say that Christianity seems to have been intolerant right from the very beginning, and continues so, in the vast majority of cases, right down to the present day, the only difference between the past and the present being that nowadays the Church has very little secular power and therefore cannot do very much harm to its opponents.

It would seem, in fact, that intolerance, exclusiveness, and a tendency towards persecution and fanaticism are characteristics of all forms of monotheism; monotheistic religions tend to be of this nature. Not only Christianity, but Judaism and Islam too are very intolerant. As I

mentioned in last week's lecture, if I wanted to go and preach Buddhism in a Muslim country I simply could not do it. If I attempted it I would probably pay very dearly for it. Muslims do not have a tradition of tolerance of other religions.

Buddhism, on the other hand, is non-theistic: it does not believe in a personal god, it does not believe in a supreme being, it does not believe that religion consists in faith in, or submission to, such a supreme being. According to the Buddhist teaching, each and every individual is responsible for his or her own spiritual destiny. But you cannot be responsible, you cannot be expected to be responsible, without freedom. Therefore in Buddhism everybody is encouraged to choose and to follow, in their own way, their own path. This is why there are many different forms of Buddhism. These different forms are not sects; they are not rival bodies; they do not all claim exclusive possession of Buddhist truth. The different forms of Buddhism represent particular aspects of the one total tradition.

Though Buddhism is tolerant, not only towards all other forms of Buddhism itself but towards all other religions, it is not vague. Sometimes you find that individuals are tolerant, but they are very vague and woolly: they mix everything up and don't distinguish, don't divide, don't analyze. But Buddhism is not like this. In Buddhism there is no pseudo-universalism. The teaching of Buddhism is a clear, precise teaching; at the same time, perfect tolerance is practised.

This combination of certainty on the one hand and tolerance on the other is very difficult for the Western mind to understand. We tend, in the West, to think that the more confident you are that you know, the greater your right to impose your views on other people. We tend to think, "I know that this is right and true, therefore I have to bring other people into it, if necessary I have to force them to accept. Why can't they see it? It's their blindness, their foolishness, their stupidity!" But in Buddhism it is not like this. Buddhists are very clear in their understanding of the Buddhist teaching, say, the 'Four Truths', the 'Eightfold Path', Conditioned Co-production, *sūnyatā* — these make up a clear, precise teaching, which has been well formulated intellectually; and those who do believe the teaching believe it wholeheartedly — they are fully convinced of its truth; but at the same time, perfect freedom is extended to other people to think differently.

Furthermore the Buddhist does not become agitated, worried or upset at the thought that elsewhere in the world, even in his own environment, there are people who do not accept what he accepts — who do not believe that the 'Noble Eightfold Path' leads to Nirvana, for example — and in fact reject what he accepts. The Buddhist recognizes this fact, sees it quite clearly, but is not disturbed; whereas in the West, if someone does not share our belief, we tend to feel threatened, insecure and undermined, and this results in this fanatical desire to make everybody believe what we believe.

There is much more that could be said on this topic of tolerance, but we do not have any time to pursue it this evening, so we will pass on now to the third aspect of *kṣānti*: *kṣānti* as spiritual receptivity. This time our illustration comes from chapter two of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra*. This chapter opens with the Buddha surrounded by his disciples: tens of thousands of Arahants and Bodhisattvas. The Buddha is just sitting there, cross-legged, in the midst of the assembly, with his eyes half closed and his hands folded on his lap; he is immersed in very profound meditation. He sits there a long, long time. As it is an assembly of Arahants and Bodhisattvas, they don't become impatient — they don't start fidgeting and coughing — but just sit there along with him, quietly, calmly, also immersed in meditation. When, eventually, the Buddha comes out of meditation, he announces to the assembly that the Ultimate Truth is

something very, very difficult to understand, that even if, having seen it himself, he were to explain it, very likely nobody would be able to understand it; he says that it is so profound, so vast and so transcends all human capacity, that no-one will be able to fathom it. Naturally his disciples entreat him to at least try to communicate this Truth to them. Eventually the Buddha agrees and says, "I shall now proclaim to you a further, higher teaching, a more profound teaching than anything that you have heard before, something which, because it is so tremendous and goes so far beyond anything that you have heard before, will make your previous understanding and experience seem childish." When he says this, five thousand of the disciples just walk out. As they leave they murmur among themselves, "Something further? Something higher? Something we haven't understood? Something we haven't realized? Impossible! We know it all already. We have realized all there is to realize. We are 'there'!"

So this represents a very universal human tendency; people think that they have nothing more to learn. It is a tendency that is especially strong, and especially dangerous, in the spiritual life. We think that we have nothing more to learn, that we have taken it all in, that we have got it, that it is all under control. When we think like this, however, we close our minds and become no longer receptive. Of course we are not altogether fools and we say, "Oh yes, I've got a lot more to learn; I know I don't know everything." We say that, but we don't really mean it — in fact we don't really know what we mean by those words. We go on thinking in the same old way; we go on behaving in the same old way; we maintain the same old attitudes.

This receptivity is not just a question of acquiring additional information: it does not mean that having learned all about the Mādhyamika School, one should be open-minded about further historical developments — maybe about the arising of sub-schools. Receptivity means that one should be prepared for a radical change in one's whole mode of being, one's whole way of life, one's whole way of looking at things. And it is this that we are not prepared for; it is this which, in fact, we resist; it is against this that — in order to protect ourselves — we set our defences.

We may say that spiritual receptivity is of supreme importance and that without it spiritual progress cannot be maintained. We should hold ourselves open to the truth just as the flower holds itself open to the sun. We should be ready, if necessary, to give up whatever we have learned so far — that is not easy by any means. We should be prepared to give up whatever we have been, whatever we have become, whatever we are so far — that is still more difficult. By spiritual receptivity, we mean holding ourselves open to those higher spiritual influences, which are streaming through the universe, but with which we are not usually in contact, and against which we usually shut ourselves off.

So much then for *kṣānti* in the senses of forbearance, tolerance, and spiritual receptivity. As I indicated earlier, *kṣānti* represents the 'feminine' aspect of the spiritual life. Now we are going to pass on to *vīrya*, or vigour, the fourth pāramitā. This of course represents the 'masculine' aspect of the spiritual life.

The word *vīrya* itself presents us with no difficulties. *Vīrya* means 'masculine potency', 'driving force', 'energy', and 'vigour'. It comes from the same Indo-Aryan root as our own English word, 'virtue', which originally meant 'strength' and also 'virility'. In Buddhist terms, however, *vīrya* has the specific meaning of 'energy in pursuit of the good' (this is how it is defined by Śāntideva). 'Good' here means 'Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings'.

It is important to notice that *vīrya* does not mean just ordinary activity. If you are rushing here and there, being very busy, doing lots of things, you are not necessarily practising *vīrya* *pāramitā*. Vigour as one of the Buddhist virtues is quite a different thing. In fact, in this connection, it is very interesting to refer to sGam.po.pa's definition of laziness. (sGam.po.pa was a great Kagyupa teacher, who lived in Tibet at about the time of the Norman conquest in this country.) In his *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* sGam.po.pa defines laziness as 'being constantly busy and active in subduing enemies and accumulating money'. You can take 'subduing enemies' as representing politics and 'accumulating money' as representing business. So sGam.po.pa is saying that to engage full time, very energetically, in either politics or business — or both — is simply laziness, however apparently busy you may be: this is not *vīrya* in the Buddhistic sense.

This *pāramitā*, *vīrya*, is extremely important, because, in a sense, the practice of all the other *pāramitās* depends upon it: if you want to give, or practise the Precepts, or meditate, you need energy; to practise patience and forbearance you need energy, even if it is negative energy in the form of resistance; if you want to develop Wisdom, you need more energy than ever.

This brings us right up against a very big problem. Let us say that we have a spiritual ideal, an ideal that we want to reach and realize. Let us say that our spiritual ideal is the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. We have of this Ideal a quite clear intellectual understanding: we have read about it, heard about it, understood it in our own minds — we could perhaps give a connected account of it if anybody asked us. We genuinely accept it as our ideal. But, despite our clear intellectual understanding of the Ideal, despite our quite genuine acceptance of it, we do not somehow manage to attain it. In fact, the months and the years, perhaps even the decades, go by, and, though we do still have the Ideal — we are still hanging on to it — we do not seem to have made any perceptible progress towards it: we feel as though we are just where we were. It is as though we stand at the foot of Mt. Kanchenjunga and look up at the snow peak; then, maybe twenty years later, we are still standing at the same spot, with the peak as distant as ever.

I remember a very — in a way — moving example of this, many years ago in India, when I went along to hear a talk by J. Krishnamurti. At the end of the talk there were questions and answers, and a discussion. In the midst of the discussion one woman got up and said to Krishnamurti, with her voice vibrating with emotion (this often happens in Krishnamurti's meetings), "Sir, we've been following you, and accepting this ideal, and trying to put it into practice for forty years, but, we are just where we were forty years ago. What shall we do about it?" (I forget what he said in reply, though he did have quite a lot to say).

This is the sort of thing that happens. The question arises then: why does this happen, why are we not able to make any progress? After all, we *do* have the Ideal: we are quite clear about it, we know what we have to do, we even make an effort. If this question is put to us, we will most likely reply that we have not been able to progress because we have no strength or energy; we will say, "I could not put the energy into it." In other words, there was no *vīrya*.

Why, then, should there be no energy? Why should there be no drive for the living of the spiritual life? Actually we have got plenty of energy; there is no shortage of energy at all. Far from being short of energy, we ourselves are embodiments of energy; we are crystallizations, as it were, of psychophysical, even spiritual, energy. We have a body and a mind: these are made up of energy. We ourselves are energy. There is no shortage of energy, but usually our energy is dissipated. Our energy is like a stream which is divided and led away into thousands of channels, so that it loses its force. Our energy flows out over innumerable objects, is

dissipated in numberless directions. Only a small part of our energy goes into the spiritual life. The rest of our energy goes into all sorts of other activities that contradict the spiritual life. As a result, we sometimes feel pulled apart: part of our energy is going one way — towards the Ideal; another part is going another way — away from the Ideal. We feel pulled apart and very often — for this reason — exhausted.

The central problem of the spiritual life, we may say, is that of the conservation and unification of our energies. Some of you may recollect that I went into this, some months ago, in the course of a lecture on the Sevenfold Puja, 'Poetry and Devotion in Buddhism'. We saw on that occasion that our energies, especially our emotional energies, are not available for the living of the spiritual life, because they are either blocked within us, or are wasted and leak away, or are too coarse.

We find that our energies are blocked within us for various reasons. Very often our emotional energies are blocked because we have been brought up to repress our emotions, to not show them, to not express them — some people say, of course, that the English are particularly good at this. Then again, our energy becomes blocked if we are compelled to engage in mechanical, routine work, work into which we cannot put our energy (we do not want to give our energy to something in which we are not interested). Then again, our energies petrify if we have no real, positive, creative outlet for them. Again, sometimes emotional energies are dammed up on account of emotional frustrations, emotional disappointments, fear of being hurt through the emotions. Again, we find that people's emotional energies become blocked on account of the wrong type of education, such as the orthodox Christian teaching on sex, which must have resulted in the emotional stultification, in the course of history, of tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of people. Above all, perhaps, our energy becomes blocked if there is an absence of any real communication with other people. We find that real communication has an energizing, almost an electrifying effect on people. Most people are out of communication with one another, but when they come into communication it is as though a negative and a positive terminal meet and a spark, energy, is produced. In all these ways our emotional energies are blocked, and because they are blocked they are not available for the living of the spiritual life.

Secondly, emotional energies are wasted: they are allowed to just leak away. This happens in a number of different ways, though mainly it happens on account of indulgence in negative emotions. If you indulge in negative emotions, energy drains away from you. The negative emotions include: fear, hatred, anger, ill-will, antagonism, jealousy (perhaps the most terrifying of all the negative emotions), self-pity, guilt, remorse, anxiety. We in the West tend to regard some of these negative emotions as virtues, but from a Buddhist point of view, they are all negative: if we had the words 'vice' or 'sin' in Buddhism they would certainly apply to all of these. Just cast your mind back over the previous day, over the previous week, and recollect how often you have indulged in fear, or hatred, or jealousy, self-pity, guilt, remorse, anxiety - recollect how often there has been, at the least, a sort of ticking over of the mind about this or that, under the influence of one or other of these emotions. For as long as you have been engaging in these negative emotions, energy has been draining away from you.

Our emotional energies are also wasted through the verbal expressions of negative emotions. In the lecture, 'Poetry and Devotion in Buddhism', I went into these in considerable detail. For instance, there is grumbling. Grumbling just expresses negative emotion, nothing more. Then there is carping criticism — fault finding. And then what I called 'dismal-Jimmyism' — looking on the gloomy side of everything, discouraging people from doing things. And then a rather poisonous expression, gossip, which is usually of course malicious. Then lastly, nagging, which

unfortunately is especially common in the domestic circle. All of these are verbal expressions of negative emotions. Through these verbal expressions too, energy is leaking and draining away, and is therefore not available for spiritual purposes.

Thirdly, emotional energy is not available for the living of the spiritual life because it is simply too coarse. Spiritual life requires spiritual energy. We cannot, for instance, meditate with our muscles. The muscles may be very full of energy, may be very strong, but for meditation we require something finer. Ordinary human energy, even ordinary human *emotional* energy, is not available for the spiritual life just because it is too coarse-grained: before it can be used for and by the spiritual life it has to be refined.

There are various ways of resolving blockages of emotional energy, of stopping the waste of emotional energy, and of refining the more coarse emotional energies. If we can resolve the blockages, stop the waste, and refine the coarse energies, then energy will be conserved, will be unified, will just flow forth.

Blockages are resolved through awareness, through introspection. They are resolved through engaging in genuinely creative, or at least productive, work. They are resolved through the stepping up of human communication, if necessary with the help of what we call the 'communication exercises'. We also find that quite a lot of blockages get resolved, as it were spontaneously, in the course of meditation practice.

Waste also is stopped through awareness: through awareness of the fact that one is indulging in negative emotions. Waste is also stopped by cultivating the opposite emotion: love instead of hate, or confidence instead of fear, and so on. As regards the verbal expressions of negative emotions, these just have to be stopped by an act of will. There is nothing else that one can do about them. They do not deserve any better treatment. As I have observed on more than one occasion, if we can only stop talking, if we can only stop not just verbal expressions of negative emotions but all verbal expressions whatsoever, if we can just be silent for a while — a few minutes, a few hours, maybe a few days — we find that energy is accumulated within us. Probably most of you know that if you can spend a day quietly at home, all by yourself, not talking to anyone, you experience an accession of energy. An enormous amount of energy goes out of us simply because we have to talk. By stopping the verbal expressions of negative emotions we save energy, but by stopping also, for a while, all verbal expressions, we begin to feel more calm, more aware, more mindful; and then, gradually, it is as though a fresh clear spring of energy begins to bubble up inside us, pure, virginal, not touched, not tainted, because it has been kept within us and not expressed outwardly in any form.

The coarser emotional energies are refined in two ways: through practices of faith and devotion, e.g. the 'Sevenfold Puja', and also through the fine arts.

As we resolve blockages of energy, stop the waste of energy, refine energy, energy becomes available for the leading of the spiritual life, for the practice of all the Perfections, which the Bodhisattva must practise to attain Buddhahood. There is no division of energies. The Bodhisattva becomes the embodiment of energy. At the same time, there is no hurry, no fuss, no restlessness, or anything of that sort; there is just smooth, uninterrupted activity for the benefit of all sentient beings. Śāntideva may be quoted again, in this connection. Śāntideva says that the Bodhisattva is like an elephant. (In Indian literature if you are compared with an elephant it is highly complementary. They say, for instance, of a beautiful woman that she walks just like an elephant. This does not mean that she is clumsy or well-built, but that she walks with a slow, graceful, stately movement.) The Bodhisattva is said to be like an elephant,

because the elephant, especially the male elephant, is very playful. The male elephant loves to bathe in lotus ponds: he squirts water over himself; he trumpets gaily; he plucks up great bunches of lotus flowers and washes them carefully before eating them. In this way he passes the day very happily. Śāntideva says that the Bodhisattva is just like an elephant, because just as the elephant, as soon as he has finished playing and sporting in one lotus pond, plunges into another, so, with equal delight, the Bodhisattva, as soon as one period of work is finished, plunges into another. I hardly need to remind you that with us it is not like that: if we finish one period of work we like to have a good rest, perhaps a cup of tea, and so on.

Though the Bodhisattva plunges straight from one period of work to the next, he nevertheless does not really think that he is doing anything; he does not think, "I am working." His manifestation of energy is selfless. It is spontaneous activity: it just comes bubbling up, like a fountain; or, like a flower, it naturally unfolds. Sometimes the Bodhisattva's activity is spoken of in the Indian languages as a '*līla*', which means a 'game', a 'sport', a 'play'. Just as a child plays, spontaneously manifesting energy, in the same way the Bodhisattva plays, manifesting the Perfections. Eventually the Bodhisattva plays the great game of Buddhahood and manifests Enlightenment.

This idea of spiritual life being a sort of playfulness, a bubbling up of spiritual, or Transcendental energy is very prominent in some forms of Indian thought and Indian religious life. In this country we tend to take religion very seriously. We have got 'Sabbath faces' and 'Sabbath gloom'. We think that the more serious you are, the more religious you are, and the more religious, the more serious. You never laugh in church! In the East, spiritual life is compared to a game, because it is — in a way — complete in itself, it is self-contained, it does not look beyond itself for its justification. Also the spiritual life is spontaneous; it is free from egotism; it is natural and enjoyable.

So much then for *vīrya pāramitā*, the Perfection of Vigour. Now we have completed our account of both *kṣānti* and *vīrya*, the third and the fourth *pāramitās*. Our account of them has not been exhaustive, but I hope it has at least been sufficient to indicate the specific quality of each of them, and also sufficient to make it clear why one is described as 'masculine' and the other as 'feminine': vigour is clearly the more active, the more assertive, the more creative, and is therefore said to be 'masculine', while patience is the more passive, the more receptive, the more quiescent, and is therefore said to be 'feminine'.

This distinction represents a very important polarity in the spiritual life. We may even say that there are two radically different approaches to the spiritual life. One approach stresses self-help, do-it-yourself, self-exertion. The other approach stresses reliance upon a power outside yourself — in some systems, reliance upon divine grace. One approach represents the attitude of getting up and doing things; the other approach represents the attitude of just sitting there and letting things happen — letting them do themselves, as it were.

In India they have got two rather charming expressions for these two religious attitudes. They say of one that it is the monkey attitude and of the other that it is the kitten attitude. The baby monkey, when it is born, clings with a very tight grip onto its mother's fur. This therefore represents self-reliance (though, admittedly, the mother is moving about carrying it, the baby monkey has to hold on itself with its own strength). The baby kitten, on the other hand, when it is born, is completely helpless. For a while it has to be picked up by the mother, by the scruff of its neck, and carried everywhere. This therefore represents the approach of dependence on another power, reliance on divine grace, and so on.

In the Indian traditions, the first approach, the monkey type of approach, is associated with *jñāna*, wisdom. The wise man is the self-reliant man: he tries to find things out and understand things for himself. But the second approach, the kitten type of approach, is associated with *bhakti*, the path of devotion, which consists in a feeling of dependence upon some divine power, or divine ideal, superior to oneself.

In Japanese Buddhism, we find that these two different approaches, reliance upon oneself and reliance on some divine power outside oneself, are represented respectively by Zen Buddhism and Shin Buddhism. Zen, as is well known, represents, even stresses, reliance on self-power, *jiriki*, as it is called in Japanese. Whereas the Jōdō Shin Shū represents reliance upon other-power, *tariki*, reliance, in other words, on the spiritual power of Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life.

These two approaches, the approach of the baby monkey and the kitten, of the intellectual and the devotee, of reliance upon self-power and reliance on other-power, are generally held to be mutually exclusive: if you follow one path you cannot follow the other; either you depend on your own efforts, or you depend upon another power to do it for you. In fact, Buddhism itself is usually held to be a religion of self-effort as opposed to a religion of self-surrender. But this is not strictly true. In Buddhist literature, we have a number of references to the helpful spiritual influences which emanate from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and which can be felt by those who are receptive to them. They are sometimes called 'grace waves'. This is not like the 'Grace of God' in Christianity, because in Buddhism, of course, there is no God. These spiritual forces arise essentially within oneself, but not within oneself. In other words, they appear to descend from the heights (if you like to call it 'heights') or arise from the depths (if you like to call it 'depths') of which one is not usually aware, not usually conscious, but to which one's awareness can be extended, and which can in a sense be included within one's greatly enlarged 'self'.

The Bodhisattva combines *both* approaches and for this reason practises patience and vigour. He synthesizes the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' aspects of the spiritual life. In fact we may say that both approaches are necessary. Sometimes in the course of our spiritual life, as in the course of our worldly life, it is necessary to hang on — for grim death. It is necessary to make an effort. It is necessary to strive, to exert, to struggle. But sometimes also it is necessary to let go, to let things look after themselves, to let them even drift, to let them just happen without one's interference. There is no hard-and-fast rule as to which approach is appropriate at any particular time. Sometimes you have to exert, but on other occasions you have to just let things look after themselves (you may think, "Let whatever is going to be done, be done"). Sometimes one has to adopt one attitude, sometimes the other, according to circumstances. Though there is no hard-and-fast rule, it is safe, very broadly speaking, to assume that a lot of self-effort, a reliance upon self-power, is necessary at the beginning, while later on perhaps, after a great initial effort has been made, one can begin to rely more upon the help, the power, the force, which comes apparently from somewhere outside oneself, or at least from outside one's present conscious self. One cannot start relying — or thinking that one is relying — upon that power prematurely, otherwise one will simply drift in a purely negative sense.

Again there is an Indian illustration. When you leave the shore in a little rowing boat, you first, with a great deal of straining of muscle, perhaps against the current, have to row yourself out into the middle of the river. But then, when you have got there, you can hoist your sail and let your boat be carried along by the breeze. In the same way, a great deal of effort is necessary in the early stages of the spiritual life, but a time comes when you contact forces which in a sense

are beyond yourself (in another sense they are a part of your greater self), which begin to carry you along.

Now there is just one more very important point to be made before we close. The active and the passive aspects of the spiritual life have been termed 'masculine' and 'feminine'. I observed at the beginning of this lecture that the use of these terms was more or less metaphorical. At the same time, it must also be said that the use of them is not entirely metaphorical. One may say that there is in fact a real correspondence between biological and psychological masculinity and femininity on the one hand, and spiritual masculinity and femininity on the other. But one must bear in mind that the Bodhisattva combines both. We come therefore to what may appear to some people to be a rather curious statement that the Bodhisattva is what we may describe as psychologically and spiritually bisexual. This means that the Bodhisattva integrates the masculine and the feminine elements at each and every level of his own psychological and spiritual experience.

This fact is reflected very clearly in Buddhist iconography. We find in some representations of the Buddha and of various Bodhisattvas that it is sometimes very hard, from a Western point of view, to distinguish whether the figure is masculine or feminine. I have sometimes had the experience of showing, for instance, an image or a picture of Avalokiteśvara to a friend, who perhaps did not know very much about Buddhism. I would say, "Isn't this a beautiful figure?" and they would say, "Yes, she's lovely". Then I would explain that it was not a female figure but a male figure, and when they looked a little more closely, they would see that it was in fact a male figure, though it seemed to have certain feminine characteristics. This iconographical representation reflects this principle of the psychological and spiritual bisexuality of the Bodhisattva, indeed of the spiritual person in general.

This idea, or even ideal, of psychological and spiritual bisexuality is rather unfamiliar to us in the West. But it was known to the ancient gnostics, one of the heretical sects of early Christianity (the teaching was of course rather quickly stamped out by the Church). There is an interesting passage in a gnostic work known as the Gospel of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas is one of several gnostic works that we have. The text was discovered in Egypt only in 1945. It consists of one hundred and twelve sayings attributed to Jesus after his resurrection. In Saying 23, Jesus is represented as saying,

When you make the two one,
and make the inside like the outside,
and the outside like the inside,
and the upper side like the under side,
and (in such a way) that you make the man
 (with) the woman a single one,
in order that the man is not the man and the
 woman is not the woman;
when you make eyes in place of an eye,
and a hand in place of a hand,
and a foot in place of a foot,
an image in place of an image;
then you will go into [the kingdom].

This is not the sort of teaching that one normally encounters in church, but you can see its obviously profound significance and import.

Within the context of Buddhism, this concept, or even practice, of spiritual bisexuality is dealt with especially by the Tantra. Enlightenment is represented as consisting in a perfect union of Wisdom and Compassion. In this union Wisdom represents the 'feminine' aspect of the spiritual life and Compassion represents the 'masculine' aspect, both at the highest possible pitch of perfection. This is often represented in Tantric Buddhist iconography by male and female Buddha or Bodhisattva figures in sexual union (these representations are called *yab-yum*: *yab* means literally 'father', *yum* means 'mother'). This sort of iconography would in the West be regarded as obscene, perhaps even as blasphemous — you certainly would not encounter this sort of thing in a church; but in the East, especially in Tibet, it is regarded as extremely sacred. One must observe that, though there are two figures, there are not two persons: there is only one Enlightened person, one Enlightened mind, within which are united reason and emotion, Wisdom and Compassion. These representations embody, under the form of sexual symbolism (here of course one has nothing to do with sexuality in the ordinary sense), the Ideal of Wisdom and Compassion united: the highest consummation of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in the spiritual life.



Suggestions for reflection, research, and discussion

1. What do you think Śāntideva is getting at when he says "...he brings the stick, but you bring the body..."? Is this a teaching you can put into effect in your life?
2. *"Forbearance is the greatest asceticism."*
What exactly does this mean?
3. Are there times in your life when you particularly need to practise forbearance? Which form of it?
4. What is tolerance? How does it differ from pseudo-egalitarianism? Are there areas in which you need to be more tolerant?
5. What is 'spiritual receptivity'? How are you working to develop this in your practice?
6. Sangharakshita mentions both the role of prayer and the influence of grace waves in this week's text. What do you make of these terms? And do they have any relevance for your practice of the Dharma?
7. *"To engage in politics or business is simply laziness..." – Gampopa.*
What do you make of this statement? Are you ever lazy in this way? Or in any others, e.g. being endlessly busy but never on anything important?
8. *"The bodhisattva can be described as psychologically and spiritually bisexual, integrating the masculine and the feminine at every level of his or her psychological and spiritual experience."*
What do you think Sangharakshita means by this? How might it be relevant to you?

Looking at the last two of the pāramitās – dhyāna and prajñā – Sangharakshita concludes his exploration of these various pairs of opposites.

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For five weeks now we have allowed ourselves to be carried along by a great stream, the stream of the Bodhisattva Ideal. Each week we have travelled just a little farther. As we have travelled, we have seen the stream, as it were, broaden. When we travel down a stream, and that stream begins to broaden, we know that we will eventually reach a point when the stream — or by this time the river — is so broad that we cannot be quite sure whether we are still in the stream, or whether we have not started entering the great ocean. This is the point we reach today. Today we are, as it were, about to pass out of the estuary of our river into the great ocean of Enlightenment itself.

In order to reach this point, we have had to cover quite a distance. We have seen unfold, week by week, many different aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal. In the first week's lecture we saw how the Bodhisattva is the ideal Buddhist, one who lives for the sake of the Supreme Enlightenment of all sentient beings, and that he is the living embodiment of Wisdom and Compassion.

In our second lecture we saw, in some detail, that one becomes — or is born — a Bodhisattva by virtue of the 'arising of the Bodhicitta'. The Bodhicitta is often translated as 'thought of Enlightenment', but we saw that it is in fact something much greater than that: it is not just a thought, or idea, or concept of Enlightenment in somebody's mind — even in the Bodhisattva's mind — but something Transcendental. The Bodhicitta, we further saw, is only one, but individual Bodhisattvas participate in that one Bodhicitta, each to the measure of his capacity. This Bodhicitta arises in a man or a woman, transforming them into a Bodhisattva, in dependence on certain conditions. In this connection, we examined Śāntideva's 'Supreme Worship', a set of seven conditions in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta arises, as well as Vasubandhu's 'Four Factors'.

In the third week's lecture we saw that though the Bodhicitta itself is universal, the Bodhisattva is an individual being, and the Bodhicitta therefore expresses itself, in the Bodhisattva's life and work, in a thoroughly individual, even in a unique, manner. The individual, unique expression of the Bodhicitta in the life and work of the Bodhisattva is known as the 'Bodhisattva's Vow'. We speak of the Bodhisattva's Vow in the singular, but in reality it is plural — the Bodhisattva makes a number of vows. There are several famous sets of

vows, especially the 'Four Great Vows' of the Bodhisattva. We examined the 'Four Great Vows' in detail.

Even more than all this, we have seen that the Bodhisattva Ideal represents a union of opposites. In general, it represents a union of the mundane and the Transcendental, samsara and Nirvana. More specifically, it represents a union of the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life, as well as the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' approaches to the spiritual life.

In the fourth lecture we saw that the first of these pairs of opposites, the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life, are represented, in the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, by *dāna*, Giving, and *śīla*, Uprightness, which are the first two *pāramitās*, (Perfections), the first two Transcendental virtues to be practised by the Bodhisattva.

In last week's lecture we saw that the second pair of opposites, the 'masculine' and 'feminine' approaches to the spiritual life, are represented by the second pair of *pāramitās*: *kṣānti*, Patience, and *vīrya*, Vigour or Energy.

Today we come to a pair of opposites still more rarefied, and we shall be seeing how the Bodhisattva synthesizes these too in his life, work and spiritual experience. This pair of opposites is represented by *dhyaṇa* on the one hand and *prajñā* on the other, that is to say, by Meditation (in the widest sense) and Wisdom. These two are the last two *pāramitās*, the fifth and the sixth of the Perfections. This lecture is entitled 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment', because that is where we find ourselves when we practise, either separately or together, Wisdom and Meditation, Meditation and Wisdom. These two *pāramitās* between them represent the consummation of the 'establishment aspect' of the Bodhicitta.

We have here, in meditation and wisdom, two vast subjects, and it is very difficult to know where to begin. One could well speak on either of these subjects for a very long time, without saying, in comparison with the enormity of the subject matter, very much at all. There is certainly no question of trying to treat these two subjects exhaustively. All that can be offered in the course of this lecture is a more or less connected account of certain topics of importance.

First of all, *dhyaṇa*. I have translated this as 'meditation', which, for practical purposes, is good enough. However, the term *dhyaṇa*, like so many other Indian Buddhist, Sanskrit and Pali terms, cannot really be translated by any single English word. We shall not go very far wrong, however, if we consider *dhyaṇa* as comprising two things: firstly, higher states of consciousness — states of consciousness above and beyond those of our ordinary everyday waking mind; and secondly, not only the higher states of consciousness themselves but also the various practices which lead to the experience of those higher states of consciousness.

These higher states of consciousness are, broadly speaking, of two kinds. On the one hand, there are those which, though higher than our everyday states of consciousness, are still mundane; on the other hand, there are those which are truly Transcendental. What this distinction really means we shall see a little later on.

In the Buddhist tradition there are quite a number of lists of these higher states of consciousness. These lists represent different levels within, or different dimensions of, the higher consciousness. Today we are going to concern ourselves with three lists: the 'Four *Dhyānas* of the World of Form', the 'Four Formless *Dhyānas*', and the 'Three Gates of Liberation'. As we go through these three lists, we shall get some idea of what *dhyaṇa* in the sense of

higher states of consciousness really means. But we must remember that though we may understand what is said perfectly well, this is no substitute for our own first-hand experience.

First of all, the 'Four *Dhyānas* of the World of Form'. Traditionally there are two ways of describing these: in terms of psychological analysis or in terms of images. These two methods of description correspond to the two principal modes of human communication, or the two principal 'languages' which we may use. We may speak the language of ideas, of concepts, of abstract thought (it is this sort of language which is spoken by science and philosophy), or we may speak the language of images, of mental pictures, even of archetypes (this language comprises such things as metaphor, myth and symbol).

Buddhism uses both of these languages. On some occasions, it speaks the language of concepts; on other occasions, it speaks the language of images. Both of these languages are of equal importance. The language of concepts appeals more to the conscious mind — to our conscious rational intelligence; the language of images, which is much more concrete, vivid, and pictorial — in a way much more deeply moving — appeals to the unconscious depths within us.

Most modern expositions of the Buddha's teaching, fortunately or unfortunately, are given in terms of concepts, and if one reads through the literature which is available (at least in English) on Buddhism, one sometimes gets the impression that Buddhism is one-sidedly, not to say overwhelmingly, intellectual (one is almost led to believe sometimes that to really understand Buddhism one needs to undergo a rigorous course in Buddhist logic, metaphysics and epistemology). This impression needs to be corrected, because traditional Buddhism does use the non-conceptual mode of communication — the communication through images. In fact, traditional Buddhism speaks the language of images at least as frequently, and at least as powerfully, as it speaks the language of concepts. We have to try to redress this imbalance in the presentation of Buddhism in the West by encouraging various methods of communicating non-conceptually — even perhaps non-verbally — the truth and the reality of the Buddha's teaching.

There is a very beautiful example in the life of the Buddha of such non-conceptual communication. This story comes from the Zen tradition. We know that sometimes the Buddha spoke at length, discoursing intellectually upon his spiritual experience. But not always. Sometimes he resorted to more direct methods and spoke the language of images. This is what happened on one very famous occasion. With the assembly sitting silently around him, the Buddha, instead of speaking, simply took from an attendant a golden flower and held it up. He held up this flower in the midst of the assembly and said nothing — nothing at all. He did not even smile. But Mahākāśyapa, one of the greatest of the disciples, he smiled. He smiled because he understood what the Buddha was trying to communicate through holding up this golden flower, through this non-verbal communication.

This action on the part of the Buddha was, we are told, the origin of the Zen transmission. It is worth just reflecting on this, that the great spiritual movement of Zen, which is one of the greatest forms of Buddhism, which has spread all over the Far East, which has produced hundreds of Enlightened masters, did not spring from a system of philosophy, nor from a lengthy discourse by the Buddha, but, according to tradition, from this one simple symbolical action of the Buddha, this holding up of the golden flower. Mahākāśyapa understood what the Buddha meant and so he smiled. He probably thought to himself that the Buddha had never done anything more wonderful than hold up that single golden flower. We may say that that golden flower, even now, all over the Far East, even over those parts of the West which now know about the Zen tradition, is shedding its lustre.

It is easy for us to discuss Buddhist philosophy; speaking the language of concepts, we can talk the hind legs off the proverbial donkey. It is this other language, the language of images, which we need to learn to speak. We have to immerse ourselves in myth and symbol, and learn to experience this comparatively unfamiliar dimension of human communication.

We have digressed, however, so let us return to the 'Four *Dhyānas* of the World of Form'. Usually four *dhyānas*, but sometimes five, are enumerated. This should remind us that we are not to take these classifications too literally: the 'Four *Dhyānas*' represent successively higher states of psychic development, which in reality constitute one continuous ever-unfolding process.

Now for the description of these four higher states of consciousness in terms of psychological analysis. We will speak the language of concepts for a little while, before going on to speak the language of images.

In terms of psychological analysis, the first *dhyāna* is characterized by the absence of all negative emotions. Specifically, in terms of the Buddhist tradition, the first *dhyāna* is characterized by the absence of lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt, which traditionally are called the 'Five Mental Hindrances'. Unless all negative emotions are inhibited, suppressed, suspended, unless the mind is completely free, at least for the time being, not only of the 'Five Mental Hindrances' but of fear, anger, jealousy, anxiety, guilt, there is no entry into higher states of consciousness. It is quite clear, therefore, that if we want to practise meditation seriously, our initial task must be to learn to be able to inhibit, at least temporarily, the gross manifestations (at least) of all these negative emotions.

On the positive side, the first *dhyāna* is characterized by the concentration and unification of all our psychophysical energies. Last week we saw that our energies are usually scattered over a multiplicity of objects; we saw that our energies are blocked and wasted — in the latter case they simply leak away in various directions. When we take up the practice of meditation one of the things that happens is that all our energies are brought together: those energies which are blocked are unblocked, those which are being wasted are checked in the waste. In this way, all our energies come together, flow together, are concentrated, are unified. This flowing together of psychophysical energy, this heightening of energy, this accumulation of energy, is characteristic of the first *dhyāna* and, in fact, is characteristic, in increasing degrees, of all four *dhyānas*.

This concentration and unification of energies is experienced, in the first *dhyāna*, as something intensely pleasurable. When all our energies come together, when there is no dissipation, or division, or conflict of energy, when our energy is naturally concentrated on higher and higher levels, then this is experienced as something intensely pleasurable, even blissful. In this first *dhyāna* the pleasurable sensation experienced is of two kinds: there is a purely mental aspect and also a physical aspect.

The pleasurable physical aspect, which is called *prīti*, or 'rapture', manifests in various ways. It may, for instance, manifest by way of somebody's hair standing on end. It may manifest in the form of tears: some people, when they practise meditation, after a while start weeping violently — this is a very good, healthy, positive manifestation of *prīti*, though it does pass away after some time.

The first *dhyāna* is also characterized by a certain amount of discursive mental activity. One can enter upon the first *dhyāna* having suspended all negative emotions, having unified one's energies, having experienced various pleasurable sensations, mentally and physically, but with some vestige of discursive mental activity still remaining. This discursive mental activity is present, but is not enough to disturb concentration. It is a little flickering mental activity, at least about the meditation experience if not about anything else. After a while, it may seem as though this recedes to the fringes of one's concentration.

In the second *dhyāna* the discursive mental activity disappears: with increased concentration, it fades away. The second *dhyāna* is therefore a state of no thought. When one speaks in terms of 'no thought' people often become a little afraid. They imagine that if there is no thought, one must almost cease to exist; they perhaps think that one goes into a sort of coma or trance. In fact nothing like that happens. It must be emphasized that in the second *dhyāna* there is simply no discursive mental activity. One is fully awake, aware, conscious. In fact, one's whole consciousness is heightened: one is more awake, more aware, more alert than one normally is. Even though the discursive mental activity fades away, even though the mind is no longer active in that sense, a clear, pure, bright state of awareness is experienced. In the second *dhyāna* one's psychophysical energies become still more concentrated, with the result that both the mental and the physical pleasurable sensations of the first *dhyāna* persist.

We noticed that in passing from the first to the second *dhyāna*, discursive mental activity was eliminated. Now in passing from the second *dhyāna* to the third *dhyāna*, it is the pleasurable physical sensations that disappear. Consciousness is increasingly withdrawn from the body, so the pleasurable, even blissful, sensations are no longer experienced in, or with, the body. The mind nevertheless is blissful. In this stage bodily consciousness may be very peripheral indeed: it is as though you are conscious of your body a great way away, right on the edge of your experience, not right at the centre of it, as is usually the case. The other factors remain in the third *dhyāna* as before, except that they are still further intensified.

In the fourth *dhyāna*, even the mental experience of happiness disappears. This does not mean that one in any way becomes unhappy. In this stage the mind passes beyond pleasure and pain. This is something which is rather difficult for us to understand. We cannot help thinking of such a state as being a sort of neutral grey state, rather *lower* than pleasure — perhaps even lower than pain. But it is not like that. In the fourth *dhyāna* the mind passes *beyond* pleasure and pain, beyond even the mental bliss of the previous *dhyānas*, and enters a state of what is called 'equanimity'. To be paradoxical, one may say that the state of equanimity is even more pleasant than the pleasant state itself (one cannot say, of course, that it is more painful than the painful state). The state of equanimity is a state which is even more deeply satisfying than the pleasant state. It is a sort of positive peace, even more blissful than bliss itself. In this stage, the total energies of one's being are fully integrated, so that this *dhyāna* is a state of perfect mental, perfect spiritual, harmony, balance and equilibrium.

These are the 'Four *Dhyānas*', the four states of higher consciousness, in terms of psychological analysis. Now for the description of them in terms of images. Here we find the Buddha using four similes, one for each *dhyāna*. You will notice that the Buddha gives very ordinary, everyday sort of illustrations, but ones which nevertheless are very apposite.

The Buddha's simile for the first *dhyāna*: The Buddha says, "Suppose there is a bath attendant, who is going about his usual work. He takes a handful of soap powder and mixes it with water." (You might be rather surprised to hear that they had soap powder in ancient India two thousand five hundred years ago, and you may be still more surprised to learn that they got it,

and still get it, from a soap tree. If you dry and powder the fruit of this particular tree you get something which works in exactly the same way as soap powder.) The Buddha said, "Suppose this bath attendant mixes and kneads the soap powder and water until the soap powder is a ball, fully saturated with moisture. It is so fully saturated with moisture that it cannot absorb one more drop of water; at the same time, no single speck of soap powder is unpermeated by the water. The experience in the first *dhyāna* is just like that."

The Buddha's simile for the second *dhyāna*: The Buddha says, "One's experience in the second *dhyāna* is like a great lake, full of water. The water in this lake does not come from rainfall, nor from streams flowing into it, but from a subterranean inlet, deep down in the middle of the lake. There is a little inlet where the cool, cold, fresh water bubbles up, gradually extending throughout the waters of the lake."

The Buddha's simile for the third *dhyāna*: Here the Buddha takes not just a lake of water, but a lake of lotuses. He says, "Suppose you see great beds of lotus flowers, red, blue, white and yellow, growing in the midst of the water. What is the condition of those lotuses? They are fully in the water: their roots, stems, leaves, even the petals of their blossoms, are soaked in water. They grow there, permeated by the water. One's experience in the third *dhyāna* is like that."

The Buddha's simile for the fourth *dhyāna*: The Buddha says, "Suppose there is a man who, on a very hot day, takes a bath — in the open air, in a tank. Having bathed, he takes a great length of white cloth, wraps it round himself, and sits down. Now he feels pure, clean, insulated. This is what one feels like when one experiences the fourth *dhyāna*."

These are the four similes which the Buddha uses to describe one's experience in the 'Four *Dhyānas*'. Here the Buddha is speaking the language of images. You may well have got more out of this description than you got out of the description in terms of psychological analysis; it may be that the Buddha's language of images spoke to you more closely, more intimately, perhaps even more truthfully, than his language of concepts.

One can see from these four similes that there is a definite progression as one passes from one *dhyāna* to the next. In the first *dhyāna* there is a unification of the energies of the conscious mind. In the first simile you start with a duality: there are the two things, soap powder and water. But that duality is resolved: the soap powder and water are kneaded together. The first *dhyāna* really represents a unification of all the energies of the conscious mind on the conscious level.

Then, in the second *dhyāna* the energies of the superconscious mind begin to penetrate into the unified conscious mind. This is what is meant by the cool, clear, cold water bubbling up within the innermost recesses of the lake. The superconscious energies bubble up, as it were, in the unified conscious mind as a sort of source of inspiration.

Next, these energies which have started to bubble up within one — or pour down into one — take, as it were, complete possession. They take complete possession just as, in the third simile, the lotuses are completely permeated by the water — their roots, stems, flowers, are soaked by the water. In this third stage the superconscious energies transform the energies of the conscious mind.

Finally, in the fourth *dhyāna* the conscious mind is dominated by, enclosed and enfolded by, the superconscious energies, just as the man who has taken his bath is enclosed and enfolded

by the white sheet in which he swathes himself. You may notice that in the second *dhyāna* the superconscious, in the form of the water flowing in from the inlet, was contained within the unified conscious, the lake, but now, in the fourth *dhyāna* it is the conscious — though the thoroughly transformed conscious — which is contained within the super-conscious: the situation has been completely reversed.

All this could be represented visually. One is painting pictures with words, but it could be done more directly with the brush, with colours, etc. In fact, Lama Govinda has done this. Years ago I saw a series of paintings by him — he called them 'abstract paintings' — which represented the 'Four *Dhyānas*'.

So much then for the 'Four *Dhyānas* of the World of Form'. We have spent rather a long time on them because of their central importance for the practice of meditation and, in fact, for the practice of the spiritual life generally. We are now turning to the 'Four Formless *Dhyānas*', four states of higher consciousness associated with the Formless World. These are often superimposed upon the 'Four *Dhyānas* of the World of Form'. They are rather remote from the experience of most meditators, so we shall be dealing with them only briefly. They consist in the experience of objects of ever increasing degrees of subtlety and refinement.

The first formless *dhyāna* is known as the 'Sphere of Infinite Space'. You may recollect that by the time we reached the fourth *dhyāna* of the World of Form we had left behind the body consciousness. If one abstracts oneself from the senses through which objects in space are perceived, one is left, as it were, with the experience of infinite space — space extending infinitely in all directions, all of which is everywhere. It is not just a sort of visual experience of looking out into infinite space from a certain point in space; it is a feeling of freedom and expansion, an experience of one's whole being expanding indefinitely.

The second formless *dhyāna* is known as the 'Sphere of Infinite Consciousness' (*viñāna*). One reaches this by 'reflecting' that one has experienced infinite space; in that experience there was a consciousness of infinite space. That means that conterminous with the infinity of space, there is an infinity of consciousness: the subjective correlative of that objective state or experience. Abstracting or subtracting from the experience of space and concentrating on the experience of consciousness, one experiences infinite consciousness, once again extending in all directions, but not from any one particular point — consciousness which is all present everywhere.

The third formless *dhyāna* is the 'Sphere of No-thingness', the 'Sphere of Non-particularity'. In this experience one cannot pick out any one thing in particular as distinct from any other thing. In our ordinary everyday consciousness we can pick out, say, a flower as distinct from a tree, or a man as distinct from a house, but in this state, there is no particular 'thingness' of things. One cannot identify this as 'this' and that as 'that'. It is not as though they are confused and mixed up together, but the possibility of picking out does not exist. This is not a state of nothingness but of no-thingness.

The fourth formless *dhyāna* is known as the 'Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception'. This is still more rarefied, though is still within the mundane. In passing from the first to the second formless *dhyāna*, one passed from the infinite object to the infinite subject. Now, one passes beyond subject and object. One is not fully beyond subject and object, but one can no longer think or experience in terms of subject and object. One reaches a state in which one cannot say — because in a sense there is no one to say — whether one is perceiving anything or whether one is not perceiving anything.

The 'Four *Dhyānas* of the World of Form' and the 'Four Formless *Dhyānas*' are all classified in the Buddhist tradition as mundane, or worldly — as opposed to Transcendental. They are not mundane in the ordinary sense: they are super-conscious states, and as such represent a very high degree of unification and refinement of psycho-spiritual energy; they represent spiritual states, spiritual experiences. However, they are still not truly Transcendental; they have no direct contact with Ultimate Reality. In Buddhism, only that is termed 'Transcendental' which is of the nature of Ultimate Reality or which is directly conducive to it. It is this contact with Ultimate Reality from the heights of the mundane, from the heights of the superconscious, which now has to be made. This contact is made when the concentrated mind (i.e. the mind in the *dhyāna* state, whether higher or lower) turns with awareness from the mundane to the Transcendental, when the concentrated mind begins to contemplate Reality. It is then that the *dhyāna* states pass from being mundane to being Transcendental.

There are many different Transcendental *dhyānas*. Sometimes the Transcendental *Dhyānas* are called *samādhis*. They differ according to the particular aspect of Reality which is contemplated. Among the most vital and significant of these Transcendental *Dhyānas* are a set of three, known as the 'Three Gateways to Liberation'. We will go into these briefly.

The first is known as the 'Signless *Samādhi*', or the 'Imageless *Samādhi*'. In this Transcendental *dhyāna*, in this experience with a Transcendental object, Reality is contemplated as devoid of all conceptual constructions. One sees that all thoughts and all concepts about Reality have no reference to, have no bearing upon, Reality itself. One sees that even the word 'Reality' is quite nonsensical (only when one sees that there is 'no word', 'no thought', can one get at that Reality which is not Reality). In this 'Signless *Samādhi*', one contemplates Reality as devoid of all signs which might give the mind some hint of what it 'really' is.

Secondly, there is the 'Unbiased *Samādhi*', or the 'Directionless *Samādhi*'. The mind at this level of superconscious experience does not discriminate between this and that. It does not discriminate between the means and the end, between the here and the there, between the then and the now. There is no time sense — no past, present or future; there is no direction in which to go; there is no bias, no tendency. The mind contemplates Reality under this aspect, that there is no tendency or bias towards this or that, because there is no this or that.

Thirdly and lastly, there is the 'Voidness *Samādhi*'. Here Reality is contemplated as having no self-nature. Reality has no characteristic of its own by which it might be recognized, or distinguished from other things. In this experience one cannot say that a chair is 'this', a human being is 'this' and Reality is 'that'. Reality is not any thing as distinguished from any other thing; Reality does not have a particular self-nature of its own. The 'Voidness *Samādhi*' is the contemplation of Reality under the aspect of having no recognizable, identifiable nature of its own, distinct from the natures of other things.

With these Transcendental *samādhis*, which represent a very lofty peak of spiritual experience indeed, we begin to pass from *dhyāna*, meditation, to *prajñā*, Wisdom. But before we deal with Wisdom, I will say just a few more words about *dhyāna*.

We have dealt with *dhyāna* in the sense of the higher states of consciousness, but we have still to deal with *dhyāna* in the second sense of the practices leading to those higher states of consciousness. Under this heading I could speak of the 'Five Basic Methods of Meditation', or of the preparations for meditation, or of some of the experiences which occur in the course of meditation practice. However, I have dealt at some length with these subjects on other

occasions, and so here I am going to limit myself to just one observation. That observation is that *dhyāna* in the sense of the experience of superconscious states is a natural thing. Ideally, as soon as one sat down to meditate, as soon as one crossed one's legs and closed one's eyes, one would go straight into *dhyāna*. It could be, should be, as natural and easy as that. In fact, we may say that if we led a truly human life, if we had spent the previous day, or week, or month, or year, properly, then this might well happen — there is no reason why it should not. However I need hardly tell you — it seems almost cruel to mention it — that this is not what usually happens. We all have to strive, struggle, and sweat — and sometimes swear under our breath. We feel disappointed; we think that it is not worth the effort, that we are making fools of ourselves and might just as well be at the cinema or watching the television. We have to strive and struggle. However, it is not, in fact, that we strive and struggle to meditate, to get into the *dhyāna* state, but that we strive and struggle to remove the obstacles which prevent us assuming the *dhyāna* state. We have to remove such obstacles as the 'Five Mental Hindrances'. If we could only remove them, then we would go sailing at least into the first *dhyāna*. Most meditation exercises do not lead us directly to higher states of consciousness, but simply help us remove the obstacles to those higher states of consciousness. By practising the Mindfulness of Breathing, we can remove the obstacle of distraction. By practising the Metta Bhavana, we can remove the obstacle of ill will. If we can, with the help of such meditation exercises, just remove the obstacles, then the higher states of consciousness will naturally manifest themselves.

Now the Bodhisattva does not simply practise *dhyāna*, meditation: the Bodhisattva practises *dhyāna* pāramitā, the Perfection of Meditation, Transcendental Meditation. In other words, he practises meditation in order to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all. He does not practise it for the sake of his own peace of mind, though that comes. He does not practise it so that he may go to heaven, though even that may come if he wants. He practises meditation as one aspect of the path which will lead him one day to Supreme Enlightenment for the benefit of all.

Finally, on this subject of *dhyāna*, we may say that the Bodhisattva's practice of meditation does not exclude external activity. In our case, meditation does exclude external activity: if we want to meditate, we have to retire, find a quiet place, sit still, close our eyes, etc. But the Bodhisattva is practising something much higher and is able to do both — practise meditation and perform external activities — simultaneously. The scriptures stress this in a number of places; they say that internally he should be immersed in *dhyāna*, but externally he should be carrying on various activities. This does not mean that he suffers from a sort of partial schizophrenia. What appear to us to be two contradictory things, in the case of the Bodhisattva are one thing. The activity is the external aspect of the meditation; the meditation is the internal dimension of the activity. Inner meditation and external activity are, as it were, the two sides of a single coin.

The Bodhisattva practises meditation as not excluding external activity, and this should be our aim too, eventually. Meanwhile we must not delude ourselves, but recognize that for us, for a very long time to come, meditation will exclude external activity and external activity will exclude meditation, even though we shall certainly try to see that the effects of our meditation persist and carry over into our everyday life and activities. It will be a very long time before we can meditate when we are in the midst of traffic, or when we are washing up, just as we meditate at our best on our meditation cushion; but that should be our ultimate aim.

It is time now that we passed on to *prajñā*, which is the sixth and last pāramitā, the sixth and last Perfection. *Prajñā* is from the Sanskrit root *jna*, 'to know', and *pra*, which is simply an emphatic prefix. *Prajñā* is therefore knowledge in the extreme, or knowledge par excellence,

which means of course knowledge of Reality. The word for Reality in this connection is *śūnyatā*, which literally means 'Voidness', 'Emptiness', though not emptiness as opposed to fullness, as the word *śūnyatā* indicates a state beyond opposites, a state beyond words. *Śūnyatā* is Reality. Knowledge of Reality means knowledge of *śūnyatā*. Knowledge of *śūnyatā* is *prajñā*, or Wisdom.

Śūnyatā is the subject matter of the Perfection of Wisdom' group of sutras, one of the most important of all the groups of Mahayana Buddhist scriptures. There are over thirty Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, some very long — the longest has one hundred thousand verses — and some very short. Among the shorter versions are the well-known *Diamond Sutra* and *Heart Sutra*, both of which present the essentials of the whole Perfection of Wisdom teaching in a highly condensed form.

We find that four main degrees of *śūnyatā* are enumerated (some texts speak of twenty, even thirty-two degrees, but really there are four main degrees). These are not four different kinds of Reality, but rather represent four progressively deeper stages of penetration by Wisdom into Ultimate Reality. By looking at these four, we will get some idea of the nature and content of *prajñā*. As we go through them, however, we should not forget that these are all conceptual presentations, not the real thing, not the experience itself; they are only 'fingers pointing to the moon', and if we can get a glimpse of the moon with their help, then we shall be lucky.

The first degree of *śūnyatā* is *samskrta-śūnyatā*, 'Emptiness of the Conditioned'. This means that conditioned, phenomenal, relative existence is devoid of the characteristics of the Unconditioned, the Absolute, the Truth. The characteristics of the Unconditioned in Buddhism are: firstly, Bliss; secondly, Permanence, that it is beyond time (not that it persists in time, but that it occupies, as it were, a dimension in which time itself does not exist); and thirdly, True Being, Ultimate Reality. Conditioned existence is devoid of these characteristics. It is, on the contrary, unsatisfactory, impermanent and not ultimately real. For this reason, the conditioned is said to be empty of the Unconditioned. This means that we should not expect to find in the flux of relative existence what only the Absolute can give us. So this is the first of the four degrees of *śūnyatā*, that the conditioned is empty — empty of the Unconditioned.

The second degree of *śūnyatā* is *asamskrta-śūnyatā*, or 'Emptiness of the Unconditioned'. Here Wisdom sees that the Unconditioned is devoid of the characteristics of the conditioned. Conditioned existence, as we have noted, is unsatisfactory, even riddled with unhappiness, impermanent and not wholly real, whereas the Unconditioned is the locus of Bliss, of Permanence, of True Being. Therefore we speak in terms of the emptiness of the Unconditioned — that it is empty of the conditioned. Just as in the conditioned one will not find the Unconditioned, in the Unconditioned one will not find the conditioned.

These first two degrees of emptiness are common to all forms of Buddhism and represent, obviously, a comparatively dualistic approach (the conditioned is not the Unconditioned, the Unconditioned is not the conditioned; this world is not that world, that world is not this world; the conditioned is empty of the Unconditioned, the Unconditioned is empty of the conditioned). This approach is necessary as the working basis of our spiritual life in its early stages. To begin with, we have to make this distinction, we have to think, "'Here' is the conditioned and 'there' is the Unconditioned, and I want to get from 'here' to 'there'." In the early stages of our spiritual life we cannot help thinking in these terms, and so we take as our working basis this (mutually exclusive) duality of the conditioned and the Unconditioned.

The third and fourth degrees of *śūnyatā* are peculiar to the Mahayana. The third degree is *mahāśūnyatā*, or 'Great Emptiness'. In the Mahayana *mahā* always means pertaining to *śūnyatā* (the Mahayana is 'the vehicle of *śūnyatā*', the Bodhisattva is also the *mahāsattva*, 'the being born out of the Voidness'). *Mahāśūnyatā* consists in the emptiness of the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. We see that the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned is not ultimately valid, that it is a product of dualistic thinking. We may spend ten, fifteen, twenty years of our spiritual life working on the assumption that the conditioned is the conditioned and the Unconditioned is the Unconditioned — that is necessary — but eventually we have to learn to see the emptiness of the distinction between the two: we have to see that the distinction is not ultimately valid and has ultimately to be transcended. We have to see, to experience — not just intellectually theorize, nor just speculate — that *rūpa* and *śūnyatā* ('form' and 'Voidness') are ultimately of one and the same essence and reality, as are the conditioned and the Unconditioned, samsara and Nirvana, ordinary beings and Buddhas. This is *mahāśūnyatā*, the 'Great Void', in which all distinctions, all dualisms are swallowed up and simply do not exist any more. It is this 'Great Void' into which people, even spiritual people, are so afraid of disappearing. People want to cling on to their dualistic ways of thinking — self and others, this and that — but eventually these must all be swallowed up. The 'Great Void' is the tiger's cave which is remarkable for the fact that many tracks lead into it, but none come out (you get into the 'Great Void', but you never come out, which is why, in fact, you want to get into it).

The fourth and final degree of *śūnyatā* is *śūnyatā-śūnyatā*, 'Emptiness of Emptiness'. Here we see that emptiness itself is only a concept, only a word, only a sound. Even with *mahāśūnyatā*, you are still hanging onto subtle thoughts, subtle dualistic experiences, so ultimately even *mahāśūnyatā* has to be abandoned. When that is abandoned, when you come to *śūnyatā-śūnyatā*, then there is just nothing to be said: all that is left is silence, a significant silence, a thunderous silence.

These are the four degrees of *śūnyatā*, which represent successively more advanced stages of penetration into Reality. What penetrates, what breaks through, is *prajñā*, Wisdom. Earlier I referred to the Heart Sutra, which is so called because it contains the heart, the essence, of the Perfection of Wisdom teachings. The heart of the Heart Sutra is contained in its concluding mantra, *gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*, which literally means (though the literal meaning does not give the real meaning): 'gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond. Enlightenment. Success.' The words of the mantra refer to the four degrees of *śūnyatā*.

Gate gate, 'gone, gone'. This means gone from conditioned existence, gone from relative existence, gone from the world. This is the first degree of *śūnyatā*, *samskrtaśūnyatā*, experience of the 'Emptiness of the Conditioned'. As a result of this experience one leaves the conditioned, one goes forth from it.

Pāragate, 'gone beyond'. When one leaves the conditioned one goes to the Unconditioned — there is nowhere else to go. This represents the second degree of *śūnyatā*, *asamskrtaśūnyatā*, the 'Emptiness of the Unconditioned'. One goes to the Unconditioned, one goes beyond, because the Unconditioned is empty of the conditioned — in the Unconditioned there is no trace of the conditioned — and one does not want to have anything more to do with the conditioned.

Pārasaṃgate, 'gone altogether beyond'. One goes beyond the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. This represents the third degree of *śūnyatā*, *mahāśūnyatā*,

the 'Great Emptiness'. When one goes beyond the very distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned, then one truly does go altogether beyond.

Bodhi, 'Enlightenment'. There is no sentence here; there is just the word, the exclamation, 'Enlightenment!' Here, in Enlightenment, the idea of *śūnyatā* itself is transcended. It is as though when one comes here, having traversed these three degrees of *śūnyatā* and come to the fourth, one can only open one's arms and say, in Alan Watts' phrase, "This is IT" — Enlightenment, Awakening.

Svāhā, 'Success'. *Svāhā* is a word which often comes at the end of a mantra; it indicates 'auspiciousness', 'success', 'achievement'. It means, 'you have done your task, you have achieved success, you have reached your goal, you are Enlightened.' It means that all four degrees of *śūnyatā* have been traversed, that Wisdom has been fully developed and true success has been achieved.

The foregoing account of Wisdom has been progressive; in other words, it has been an account in terms of more and more advanced stages of penetration into Reality. But there is another tradition which unfolds different dimensions of Wisdom simultaneously. This is the teaching of what are known as the 'Five *Jñānas*', the 'Five Knowledges', or the 'Five Wisdoms'. We will conclude with an account of these, which will give us further insight into the nature of *prajñā*.

The first of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'Wisdom of the *Dharmadhātu*'. This is the basic Wisdom, of which the other four are subsidiary, or special, aspects. The term '*Dharmadhātu*' is a difficult one. *Dhātu* means a 'sphere', or 'realm', or 'field', and here represents the whole cosmos. Dharma here means 'Reality', 'Truth', the 'Ultimate'. So the *Dharmadhātu* means the whole cosmos considered as the sphere of the manifestation of Reality, or the whole cosmos conceived of as fully pervaded by Reality. Just as the whole of space is filled by the sun's rays, so the whole of existence, with its galactic systems, its suns, its worlds, its gods and its men, is pervaded by Reality itself. The whole of existence is a field for the manifestation of, the play of, the expression of, the exuberance of Reality. The Wisdom of the *Dharmadhātu* means direct knowledge of the whole cosmos as non-different from Reality. Not that the cosmos is wiped out or obliterated. The cosmos is still there and you see it still. The houses, the trees, the fields, the men and the women, the sun, the moon and the stars are all there, just as they were before, but now they are pervaded by Reality. You see both the cosmos and Reality at the same time — the one does not obstruct the other. You see the cosmos; you see Reality. You see Reality; you see the cosmos. Cosmos is Reality; Reality is cosmos. *Rūpa* is *śūnyatā*; *śūnyatā* is *rūpa*. This Wisdom of the *Dharmadhātu* is symbolized by the figure of Vairocana, the 'Illuminator', the white Buddha (sometimes he is called the 'Sun Buddha').

The second of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'Mirror-like Wisdom'. This Wisdom is like a mirror, because just as a mirror reflects all objects, so the Enlightened mind reflects everything: it sees everything, it understands the true nature of everything. If you look into the depths of the Enlightened mind you see everything. All the objects of the world are reflected in the depths of the Enlightened mind, but the Enlightened mind is not affected by them. If you take a mirror and place an object in front of it, the object is reflected. If you take that object away and put another object in front of it, that second object is now reflected. When you move the object — or when you move the mirror — you do not find the reflection sticking. The Enlightened mind is just like that: it reflects but nothing sticks. Our mind, however, is quite different. To pursue the illustration, one might say that our mind is a sort of mirror to which all the reflections stick. In fact they not only stick, but they congeal and get all jammed up together. Sometimes

the mirror even sticks to the object and they cannot be separated. In other words, in the Enlightened mind there is no subjective reaction, no subjective attachment, there is pure, perfect objectivity. This 'Mirror-like Wisdom' is symbolized by Aksobhya, the 'Imperturbable', the dark blue Buddha.

The third of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'Wisdom of Equality', or the 'Wisdom of Sameness'. The Enlightened mind — we have seen — sees everything with complete objectivity (it sees that a man is a man, a woman is a woman, a flower is a flower, a house is a house, the sun is the sun) and sees the same Reality (*śūnyatā*) in everything. Therefore it has the same attitude towards everything — this is the 'Wisdom of Equality'. The Enlightened mind is equal-minded towards all. The Enlightened mind has the same Love and Compassion for all, without any distinction or discrimination. Sometimes it is said that the Love and Compassion of the Enlightened mind fall without discrimination on all beings, just as the sun's rays fall now on the golden roofs of a palace and now on a dunghill. It is the same sun which is shining on the palace and the dunghill. The Enlightened mind shines with its Love and Compassion on high and low alike, on 'good' and 'bad' alike. This 'Wisdom of Equality', or 'Sameness', is symbolized by Ratnasambhava, the 'Jewel-born', the yellow Buddha.

The fourth of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'All-Distinguishing Wisdom'. A mirror, as we have seen, reflects all things equally but at the same time does not confuse or blur their distinctive features — a mirror will reflect the tiniest detail. Similarly, the Enlightened mind, especially under its aspect of the All-Distinguishing Wisdom, does not only see the unity of things, but at the same time sees the uniqueness of things, and in fact sees both of these together. The Enlightened mind does not see things only in their unity or only in their diversity, but sees both together. It does not reduce the plurality to a unity; it does not reduce the unity to a plurality: it sees the unity and the plurality. Buddhism, on the philosophical level, is neither a monism, in which all differences are cancelled out, nor a pluralism, in which all unity disappears. It is neither monistic nor pluralistic. In the Buddhist vision of existence, unity does not obliterate difference, difference does not obliterate unity. We cannot help perceiving now one, now the other, but the Enlightened mind sees unity and difference at one and the same time. It sees that you are uniquely yourselves, individually blossoming with all your idiosyncrasies; at the same time, it sees that you are all one. These two, the unity and the difference, the monism and the pluralism, are not two different things (we do not say that they are one, but they are not two). This 'All-Distinguishing Wisdom', is symbolized by Amitabha, the 'Buddha of Infinite Light', the red Buddha.

The fifth of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'All-Performing Wisdom'. The Enlightened mind devotes itself to the welfare of all living beings. In doing so it devises many 'skilful means' of helping people. The Enlightened mind helps people naturally and spontaneously. We must not imagine the Bodhisattva sitting down one morning and thinking, "How can I help someone today? Is this person more in need of help or that? Maybe I'll go and help so-and-so today." The Enlightened mind does not function like that: it functions freely, spontaneously, naturally. The helpfulness pours forth in a flood, but quite spontaneously, without any premeditation, without any intellectual working things out. This 'All-Performing Wisdom' is symbolized by Amoghasiddhi, the 'Infallible Success', the green Buddha.

These are the 'Five Wisdoms', which exhibit, on the same level, different aspects of *prajñā*. We have dealt with *dhyāna* and *prajñā* separately, as distinct *pāramitās*. Now it is time to consider them together. This we shall do with the help of Hui-Neng (or Wei-Lang), the Sixth Patriarch of the *Dhyāna* School in China (the *Dhyāna* School is the Ch'an or Zen School). Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch, in the course of his *Platform Scripture* — a series of addresses to a body of people

whom he very politely addresses as 'learned audience' — has this to say on the subject of samādhi (samādhi is the highest form of *dhyāna*) and *prajñā*:

Learned Audience, in my system Samādhi and Prajñā are fundamental. But do not be under the wrong impression that these two are independent of each other, for they are inseparably united and are not two entities. Samādhi is the quintessence of Prajñā, while Prajñā is the activity of Samādhi. At the very moment that we attain Prajñā, Samādhi is therewith; and vice versa. If you understand this principle, you understand the equilibrium of Samādhi and Prajñā. A disciple should not think that there is a distinction between 'Samādhi begets Prajñā' and 'Prajñā begets Samādhi'. To hold such an opinion would imply that there are two characteristics in the Dharma.

Learned Audience, to what are Samādhi and Prajñā analogous? They are analogous to a lamp and its light. With the lamp there is light. Without it, it would be dark. The lamp is the quintessence of the light and the light is the expression of the lamp. In name they are two things, but in substance they are one and the same. It is the same case with Samādhi and Prajñā.

Commenting on this passage, we may say that samādhi, which represents the highest form of *dhyāna*, is the Enlightened mind as it is in itself, whereas *prajñā* is what we may describe as its objective functioning. We could even say that *dhyāna* represents the subjective and *prajñā* the objective aspect of Enlightenment, except that in Enlightenment there is no subject and no object.

We have now completed our journey for this week. We have seen today how the Bodhisattva practises Meditation and Wisdom, the fifth and sixth of the *pāramitās*, which represent respectively the subjective and objective poles of spiritual experience at their very highest level. Now, in imagination at least, we are standing — or maybe sitting in meditation — 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment'.



Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. How can images and symbols communicate Enlightenment? Illustrate your answer with an example of significance to you.
2. Have you had experience of *dhyāna*? If not, what do you think holds you back from such experience?
3. Are there any practical ways you could explore the three gateways to liberation?
4. What is the difference between *prajñā* and knowledge?
5. How might each of the four levels of *śūnyatā* be useful to you at your level of practice?
6. Do any of the five wisdoms particularly strike you as interesting or inspiring? If so, why do you think that is?

After exploring the importance of spiritual hierarchy, Sangharakshita goes on to look at the different kinds of Bodhisattvas and introduces some of the best-known of these archetypal figures.

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In the course of the last few weeks we have been on a journey through the mountainous terrain of the Bodhisattva Ideal. On a journey of any kind we may sometimes look forward, at other times look back. Sometimes we look forward to see how far we still have to go, if we are able rightly to judge that. Sometimes we look forward to encourage ourselves: we fix our eyes on the final snow peak, which is perhaps our goal, as it discloses itself in the midst of the blue sky when the clouds momentarily part. Sometimes we look back to estimate how far as yet we have come. Sometimes we look back to see the appearance of the country through which we have been passing, because often when we look back, especially if we look back from a high altitude, we can see that country more clearly and more definitively than when we were actually struggling through it.

As we look back, perhaps from this higher altitude, we may see certain landmarks. This is particularly true when it is mountainous country through which we are travelling. Certainly the country through which we are even now still travelling is nothing if not mountainous. To me, as I look back in thought over the lectures of the previous weeks, there is one landmark that stands out. It dominates the entire landscape. It is the Bodhicitta, the Will to universal Enlightenment. In retrospect, all the other aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal seem to group themselves quite naturally around the Bodhicitta, just as lesser mountain peaks group themselves around one particularly lofty peak.

We have seen in this series of lectures how the Bodhisattva, one who lives for the sake of the Enlightenment of all sentient beings, becomes a Bodhisattva only by virtue of the arising of the Bodhicitta. We have seen that the Bodhicitta is something Transcendental, cosmic, universal, something which sweeps through the whole of existence. The Bodhicitta, we have also seen, has two great aspects. These are traditionally called a 'vow aspect' and an 'establishment aspect'. The vow aspect consists in the formulation by the Bodhisattva of certain vows, the import of all of which is universal. This vow aspect of the Bodhicitta represents the expression of the one universal Bodhicitta in the life and work of the individual Bodhisattva. The establishment aspect consists in the practice by the Bodhisattva of the 'Six *Pāramitās*', the 'Six Perfections'. These, as we have seen over the last three weeks, are made up of three pairs of opposites: Giving and Uprightness, which represent the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life; Patience and Vigour, which represent respectively the 'feminine' and the 'masculine' approaches to the spiritual life; and Meditation and Wisdom, which

represent the internal and external dimensions of the Enlightened mind. Each of these pairs of opposites is synthesized and balanced by the Bodhisattva. In his spiritual life there is no one-sidedness whatsoever; everything is harmonized and integral.

Today we are still concerned with this same Bodhicitta. In previous lectures we were concerned with it by way of general principles; today we are considering the different concrete embodiments of those principles. Today we are dealing with what has been described as the 'Bodhisattva Hierarchy'.

'Hierarchy' is not a very popular word nowadays — it is not one of those 'in' words which are on everybody's lips. According to the dictionary, it is generally used in the sense of 'a body of ecclesiastical rulers'. You may read in the newspapers, for instance, of the Roman Catholic hierarchy: that the Roman Catholic hierarchy has issued a statement condemning divorce, or condemning birth control, or condemning something else — they usually seem to issue statements condemning something. I am not using the word 'hierarchy' in that sense. The sense I am using it in is nearer to its original and true meaning. I am using it in the sense of an embodiment, in a number of different people, of different degrees — higher and lower degrees — of manifestation of Reality.

Using the word 'hierarchy' in this sense, one can speak of a hierarchy of living forms, from the amoeba up to the unenlightened man. The higher living form manifests a more abundant degree of Reality than the lower form. This hierarchy of living forms is what we call the 'Lower Evolution'.

Now there is another hierarchy of living forms, which people don't usually take into consideration. This is the hierarchy from the un-enlightened man up to the Enlightened man. This hierarchy of living forms corresponds to what, in other contexts, we have described as the 'Higher Evolution'. Just as the un-enlightened man embodies, or manifests, more of Reality, more of truth, than the amoeba, so the Enlightened man embodies, or manifests, more of Reality — in his life, work, in his words even — than the man who is unenlightened. The Enlightened man manifests Reality more clearly than does the un-enlightened man. The Enlightened man is like a window, through which the light of Reality shines without any diminution; the light of Reality shines through the Enlightened man, just as the light of the sun shines through a window that is made not even of glass but of pure, transparent crystal.

In between the un-enlightened man and the Enlightened man (the Buddha) there are a number of people at various stages of spiritual progress. The majority of them are not completely Enlightened — to a greater or a lesser extent they are still short of full and perfect Enlightenment — but at the same time they are not wholly un-enlightened. It is these people who make up the spiritual hierarchy, and it is the higher reaches of this spiritual hierarchy which is known as the 'Bodhisattva Hierarchy'.

This principle of spiritual hierarchy is a very important one for Buddhism. It is important therefore that we try to understand it radically. We can perhaps do this by remembering that we, that human beings, are related to Reality in two different ways: directly and indirectly.

We are related to Reality directly in the sense that in the very depths of our being there is something, a golden thread if you like, which all the time connects us with Reality. In some of us that golden thread may be thin, may be gossamer thin, but it is there. In others that thread has become a little thicker and stronger. In the case of those who are Enlightened, there is no difference at all between the depths of their being and the depths of Reality — the two are

directly continuous. Most of us, though we are directly connected with Reality, do not realize it — we do not even see that thin golden thread shining in the midst of the darkness within ourselves. Nevertheless, however oblivious to the fact we may be, we are related to Reality, directly, in the very depths of our own being, all the time.

We are related indirectly to Reality in two ways. We are related, in the first place, to those things which represent a lower degree of manifestation of Reality than ourselves. We are related to nature: to minerals, to stones, to water, to fire; to the different forms of vegetable life; to the different forms of animal life. In this way we are indirectly related to Reality; we are related to Reality through these forms which manifest a lesser degree of Reality than we manifest ourselves. In the second place, we are indirectly related to Reality also through those forms which represent a higher degree of manifestation of Reality than ourselves.

The first kind of indirect relationship with Reality — through those forms of life which manifest Reality less than we manifest it ourselves — may be compared with the seeing of a light through a very thick veil. Sometimes the veil — especially in the case of material forms — seems to be so thick that we are unable to see the light which is there behind it. The second kind of indirect relationship with Reality — through those forms of life which manifest Reality more than we manifest it ourselves — is like seeing a light through a very thin veil. In this case, the veil seems at times to become diaphanous, or even to have rents in it, through which the light of Reality can be seen directly, as it is, without any intermediation at all. This thin veil, through which we see the light of Reality, is the spiritual hierarchy, especially the Bodhisattva Hierarchy.

It is very important for us to be in contact with those through whom the light of Reality shines a little more clearly than it shines through us, those who are at least a little more spiritually advanced than we are. Such people are known traditionally in Buddhism as our spiritual friends, our Kalyana Mitras. Most of us, undoubtedly, are not ready for contact with a Buddha. For most of us, if not for all of us, the idea of receiving guidance directly from a Buddha is perhaps even ridiculous. Even if we met a Buddha — or even an advanced Bodhisattva — we would not be able to recognize him or her for what in truth they were. Nevertheless we certainly can benefit immensely from contact with those who are just a little more spiritually developed than we are, those whose veil lets through a brighter glimmer of light than does our own.

In this connection there is a very beautiful passage in that great Tibetan spiritual classic by sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Speaking of spiritual friends, Gam.po.pa says:

Since at the beginning of our career it is impossible to be in touch with the Buddhas or with Bodhisattvas living on a high level of spirituality, we have to meet with ordinary human beings as spiritual friends. As soon as the darkness caused by our deeds has lightened, we can find Bodhisattvas on a high level of spirituality. Then when we have risen above the Great Preparatory Path we can find a Nirmānakāya of the Buddha. Finally, as soon as we live on a high spiritual level we can meet with the Sambhogakāya as a spiritual friend.

Should you ask, who among these four is our greatest benefactor, the reply is that in the beginning of our career when we are still living imprisoned by our deeds and emotions, we will not even see so much as the face of a superior spiritual friend. Instead we will have to seek an ordinary human being who can illumine the path we have to follow with the light of his counsel, whereafter we shall meet superior ones.

Therefore the greatest benefactor is a spiritual friend in the form of an ordinary human being.

This association with spiritual friends is what the Indians even today call *satsangh*. *Satsangh* is something to which they attach tremendous importance. *Satsangh* is a Sanskrit word (it is in fact a Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and Bengali word too). It is made up of the two parts, *sat* and *sangh*. *Sat* means 'good', 'true', 'right', 'real', 'genuine', 'holy', and 'spiritual'. *Sangh* means 'association', 'company', 'fellowship', 'community', even 'communion'. So *satsangh* means 'good fellowship', or 'communion with the good', or 'holy association' — all these shades of meaning are included and suggested by the word.

The reason why in India all down the centuries and even today the importance of *satsangh* is stressed is that we all need help from other people in leading the spiritual life: we need at least strong moral support. If we are honest with ourselves we have to admit that we cannot get very far on our own. If there was no meditation class to go to, no lectures to come to; if one never met another person interested in Buddhism week after week, month after month, year after year; if one couldn't even get any books on Buddhism, because even reading books in the right way is a kind of *satsangh*; if one was entirely on one's own; however great one's enthusiasm and sincerity — one would not be able to get very far.

We get encouragement, inspiration, moral support, help, from associating with others who share similar ideals with us and who are following a similar way of life. Especially is this the case when we associate with those who are at least a little more spiritually advanced than we are, or who, putting it even more simply, are just more human than most people usually are.

In our own particular Movement, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, we lay very great stress on this principle of spiritual hierarchy and its corollary, the principle of spiritual fellowship, or spiritual brotherhood. In practice this means that we should try to be receptive to those who are above us in the spiritual hierarchy, those who have greater insight, understanding, sympathy and compassion than we have. We should try to be open to them and ready to receive from them, just like the lotus flower, which opens its petals to receive the light and warmth of the sun. It means that towards those who are below us in the spiritual hierarchy, we should try to be generous, kind and helpful. Then with regard to those on the same level as ourselves, our attitude should be one of mutuality, sharing, reciprocity.

These three attitudes — the attitudes we have towards those who are higher than us, lower than us and on the same level as us — represent the three great spiritual emotions of the Buddhist spiritual life. Firstly, there is the emotion of *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* is often translated as 'faith' or 'belief', but it does not really mean that. *Śraddhā* means a sort of receptivity, or devotion, to the light streaming from above. Secondly, there is compassion. Compassion means a giving out to those below us of what we are receiving from above. Thirdly, there is love, which we share with, which we radiate towards, all those who are on the same level as ourselves. When we speak in terms of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood, we have in mind these three great spiritual emotions: faith and devotion directed upwards; compassion directed downwards; love radiating all around us.

Though I have referred to those who are 'higher up' and those who are 'lower down', I must stress that there is no question here of any sort of official grading. There is certainly no question of anyone saying, "Well, I'm a bit higher than you are". If we start even thinking in those terms, then we have forgotten the whole meaning of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood. The appropriate emotion should flow forth naturally, spontaneously and

unselfconsciously: when we encounter something which we feel is higher we spontaneously feel devotion; when confronted by someone in distress, we respond spontaneously with compassion; when we are surrounded by equals our feelings towards them are those of love and sympathy.

I remember in this connection sometimes going with Tibetan friends, whether lamas or lay people, to visit Tibetan monasteries and temples. It was very interesting to see their responses when they entered the place we were visiting. People in this country when they go to a place of worship, perhaps to a great cathedral, don't quite know what to do, because the tradition in a way no longer appeals to us. But it is quite different with the Tibetans. As soon as they see an image of the Buddha, or a beautiful *thang-ka*, or painted scroll, the feelings of devotion and reverence at once well up within them. They immediately put their hands to their forehead and very often prostrate themselves flat on the ground three times. They do this naturally, spontaneously, and completely unselfconsciously, because this is how they have grown up and learnt to behave.

Devotion, compassion and love should pervade the spiritual community, based as it is upon the twin principles of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood. People in such a community, some of whom are higher and some of whom are lower in the spiritual hierarchy (though none are conscious of being higher or lower), should be like roses that are at different stages of growth and unfoldment, all blooming on a single bush. Or they should be like a family, of which the Buddha is the ultimate head and the great Bodhisattvas are the elder brothers. In a family of this sort everybody gets what they need — the younger members for example are cared for by the older members — and everybody gives what they can. The whole family is filled with a spirit of joy and with a spirit of freedom.

The Bodhisattva Hierarchy concentrates all this into a single focus of dazzling intensity. The Bodhisattva Hierarchy has its own radiant archetypal figures in the higher and ever higher stages of spiritual development, right up to Buddhahood itself. It is at some of these figures that we are now going to look; but as we proceed, we mustn't forget that we are still concerned really with the Bodhicitta.

The Bodhisattva Path is divided, according to the Mahayana, into ten progressive stages, which are known as the 'Ten Bhūmis' (for general purposes *bhūmi* just means a 'stage of progress'). These 'Ten *Bhūmis*' represent increasing degrees of manifestation of the Bodhicitta: the Bodhicitta begins to manifest in the first *bhūmi*, and continues to manifest a little more in each succeeding *bhūmi*, until by the time it reaches the ninth and the tenth *bhūmis* it has, as it were, shaken off all mundane habiliments and stands entire and perfect in itself, identical with complete Enlightenment, the Enlightenment of a Buddha.

In some of the scriptures the process of the progressive manifestation of the Bodhicitta through and up the 'Ten Bhūmis' is compared to the process of smelting and refining a lump of gold that is mixed with dross. The dross is gradually purged away and the gold is finally worked up into a beautiful ornament, a diadem for a prince perhaps. In the simile the gold is of course the Bodhicitta, which all the time is within us but is adulterated, is covered over by all sorts of defilements, foreign elements. The foreign elements have to be separated, so that the gold of the Bodhicitta is allowed to manifest its own incorruptible nature.

I am not going to attempt to describe these 'Ten *Bhūmis*'. I am simply going to use them as points of reference for describing the four principle kinds of Bodhisattva which make up the Bodhisattva Hierarchy: the Novice Bodhisattva; the Bodhisattva of the Path; the Irreversible

Bodhisattva; and the Bodhisattva of the Dharmakāya. I am going to deal with each of these in turn.

Novice Bodhisattvas are sometimes also called 'Bodhisattvas in Precepts'. Novice Bodhisattvas are all those who genuinely accept the Bodhisattva Ideal as the highest possible spiritual ideal. In other words, they aspire to attain the Enlightenment of a Buddha, not just for the sake of their own emancipation but so that they may contribute to the cause of universal Enlightenment, the Enlightenment not just of the human race but of all forms of life. Genuinely accepting the Bodhisattva Ideal is not of course just a matter of intellectual understanding — anyone can read a book about the Mahayana and understand the words that describe the Bodhisattva Ideal, but they don't thereby become a Novice Bodhisattva. Novice Bodhisattvas do not just understand the Bodhisattva Ideal intellectually or just accept it theoretically, they devote themselves deeply to its realization and make a real, tremendous effort to practise it. Such Novice Bodhisattvas may even have taken what is called 'Bodhisattva ordination', which entails formally, publicly pledging oneself to the fulfilment of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

The point to remember about the Novice Bodhisattva is that, despite his genuine, heartfelt acceptance of the Bodhisattva Ideal, despite the real efforts he makes to practise the Bodhisattva Ideal, as yet the Bodhicitta has not actually arisen in him: he has not, as yet, had the direct, dynamic experience of the urge to universal Enlightenment taking possession of his entire being. We may say perhaps — this is not said unkindly — that the Novice Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva in every respect except the one that is most important. This is because it is upon the arising of the Bodhicitta, it is when the breath of the Bodhicitta breathes through one, that one becomes a Bodhisattva. Nevertheless the Novice Bodhisattva, by virtue of his acceptance of the Bodhisattva Ideal and his efforts to practise it, is genuinely a Novice Bodhisattva, he has set his foot on the path. We must admit that most sincere followers of the Mahayana, whether in the East or the West, fall into the category of Novice Bodhisattvas.

The Novice Bodhisattva, among other things, devotes a great deal of time to studying the Mahayana scriptures, those which deal with *śūnyatā*, or Emptiness, with the Ideal of the Bodhisattva, with the *Pāramitās*. He may not read many volumes, may not read commentaries and expositions; he may read just a very few volumes, even just a few pages. But what he does read he reads again and again: he steep himself in the spirit of the texts and tries to make the teaching one with his own mind and heart. In many parts of the Mahayana Buddhist world it is a traditional practice for the Novice Bodhisattva to learn some of these scriptures, like the *Heart Sutra*, by heart and to repeat them from time to time, especially after meditating.

The Novice Bodhisattva should even make copies of the scriptures. Making copies of scriptures is a practice to which the Mahayana attaches very great importance. It is not done with the intention of producing as many copies as possible as quickly as possible, but as a spiritual discipline, as a sort of meditation. You have to concentrate so that you can form the letters beautifully, so that you don't miss any words, so that you don't make any spelling mistakes. You think of the meaning with your conscious mind, but as you concentrate on writing, something of the meaning also percolates through, perhaps drop by drop, into the depths of your unconscious mind, influencing and transforming you.

The Novice Bodhisattva may not just copy texts, he may illuminate them too, just as in the West, in the Middle Ages, the monks spent hours, days, weeks, months, years illuminating manuscripts — burnishing them with gold, decorating them with red and blue, painting all sorts of beautiful pictures and designs. Only the other day — I can't resist this little digression

— I was looking through a volume of French miniature paintings of the Middle Ages, and I was quite astonished to discover one painting which might have come straight out of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It was an illustration to an illuminated manuscript, called *The Hours of the Duke of Rohan*. It was an illustration of a dead man face to face with his judge. It wasn't done in the traditional Renaissance style of Christian art. The corpse of the dead man was drawn very realistically indeed — with gruesome realism. Above the dead man was painted a sort of explosion of blue light, studded with golden stars, and in the midst of that was the face of the judge. Those of you who have read the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* will at once recognize this. You had the impression of a blaze of blue light, then golden stars, then the golden-haloed face of the judge, breaking in upon the inner vision of the dead man. When one speaks of illuminating texts, whether Christian texts or Buddhist texts, this is the sort of thing that one has in mind. This is the sort of care, the sort of devotion, the sort of love, which is traditionally lavished upon them. In fact all these activities that the Novice Bodhisattva engages in — studying, reading, learning by heart, copying, illuminating — are done as labours of love, as *sādhana*s, spiritual disciplines.

The Novice Bodhisattva meditates, and meditates especially upon the 'Four *Brahma-vihāras*': *metta*, love; *karuṇā*, compassion; *muditā*, sympathetic joy; and *upekṣā*, equanimity, or perfect steadiness and evenness of mind. It is said that the Novice Bodhisattva should especially devote himself to the practice of the 'Four *Brahma-vihāras*' because they form the foundation for the development later on of the Great Compassion which characterizes the truly developed Bodhisattva.

The Novice Bodhisattva directs his attention to the practice of the *Pāramitās*, the Perfections though at this stage we cannot strictly speaking call them *Pāramitās* because they have not as yet been conjoined with Wisdom. He also performs, in some cases every day, the 'Sevenfold Puja'. He also cultivates the 'Four Factors' for the arising of the Bodhicitta, as mentioned by the *ācārya* Vasubandhu. The Novice Bodhisattva, of course, tries to be straightforward, helpful, friendly and sympathetic in all the affairs of daily life.

The second kind of Bodhisattva is the Bodhisattva of the Path. I have referred to the 'Ten *Bhūmis*', the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's progress up to supreme Enlightenment. These 'Ten *Bhūmis*' are divided into two sections, consisting of *bhūmis* 1-6 and *bhūmis* 7-10. Those who have attained to any of the first six *bhūmis* are Bodhisattvas of the Path. In the case of Bodhisattvas of the Path the Bodhicitta has arisen. In fact it is upon the arising of the Bodhicitta that one is said to enter upon the first *bhūmi*. The Bodhisattva of the Path has therefore also made his Vow, or Vows, and has embarked upon the really serious practice of the Perfections.

Incidentally, I should also observe that, according to many Mahayana traditions, the Stream-Entrant, the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, and the Arahant of the Hinayana teaching are all regarded as Bodhisattvas of the Path — the Mahayana makes them sort of honorary Bodhisattvas. So far they have all been aiming at individual Enlightenment, but according to the Mahayana one can at any time change over to the Path of the Bodhisattva, the aim of which, of course, is Enlightenment for the sake of all: even if one has progressed along the path of individual emancipation right to the end, there is still the possibility, on the basis of one's previous practice of the individual path, of going on to practise the Bodhisattva Path and rising to supreme Buddhahood.

Moving on now to the Irreversible Bodhisattva, the third kind of Bodhisattva, we are ascending into really rarefied heights. The arising of the Bodhicitta within the individual is in itself a

tremendous experience, but the achievement by the Bodhisattva of this stage of Irreversibility is an experience greater still. We may say that Irreversibility represents, within the context of the Mahayana, an extremely important aspect of the whole spiritual life: the aspect of non-retrogression, not falling back, not falling away.

We all know from our own experience how difficult it is to advance on the spiritual path. Some of us might look back over the last few months, even over the last few years, a little sadly, thinking, "There hasn't been much change. I'm still more or less the same person that I was. What progress have I made?" Progress is very difficult to make on the spiritual path; we measure our progress, we may say, by inches, not by miles. But though it is difficult to advance, it is only too easy to fall back, even a mile or two. We are familiar with this in the sphere of meditation. We may get on quite well for a few weeks or a few months, but then it happens that just for a couple of days we don't meditate. When we next sit down to meditate we find that we are right back where we were those few weeks or few months before. I'm sure everybody has had this experience, once or twice at least, in their spiritual life so far.

This danger of falling back applies at all levels of the spiritual life, so it becomes important for us to reach, from time to time, within a particular context at least, a point upon the attainment of which there is no danger of falling back — it is important to reach firm land where we can stand and from which we don't regress.

In the context of the spiritual life in general, this point is what we call the point of Stream-Entry (we enter the Stream which bears us eventually to Nirvana itself). Once we reach this point, once we enter the Stream, then there is no danger of ever falling permanently back into the round of existence, into mundane life. Those of us who have studied a little of the Hinayana teaching, the basic Buddhist teaching, know that Stream-Entry is achieved by breaking the first three of the 'Ten Fetters' which bind us down to the Wheel of Life, to the round of conditioned existence.

The first fetter is the fetter of belief in self. It is the belief that I am I and that this is fixed and final. It is the belief that my personal, individual existence is something irreducible, ultimate. It is the conviction that there is nothing beyond me: there is no such thing as a universal consciousness, a universal mind, an absolute Reality, outside of me. It is the belief that I am, as it were, the terminus, the point at which all the ends of the earth meet. This is how we feel most of the time. We believe in ourselves as identified with the body, as identified with the lower mind, as identified with the thinking principle, the *viññāna*, the *manas*, and so on; we are blind to any more ultimate selfhood, any more universal consciousness. Sometimes a little chink is made, and through that chink in ourselves we see something greater than ourselves, but usually we believe in ourselves in the narrow, egoistic sense I have described. This belief in the ego-self is a fetter that has to be broken before we can enter the Stream and break through into a higher, wider dimension of being and consciousness.

The second fetter is the fetter of doubt. This is not doubt in the sense of an objective, cool, critical enquiry: that sort of doubt — if you like to call it doubt — Buddhism encourages. Doubt as the second fetter is a sort of soul-corroding scepticism — that won't settle down in anything; that is full of fears, humours, whimsicalities; that won't be satisfied; that doesn't really want to know and then complains that it doesn't know; that shies away from life; that won't really try to find out. This sort of scepticism, this sort of *vicikitsā* as it's called, is also a fetter that must be broken for Stream-Entry to be possible.

The third fetter is what is known as 'attachment to moral rules and religious observances'. If you're too moral you can't get Enlightened — not that you can get Enlightened more easily if you're immoral. If you are so moral, so good, so holy, that you think a lot of yourself on that account (you think that you have really got somewhere, you really are somebody, and you think that that is ultimate) and at the same time you look down on those who don't do what you do, who maybe don't keep the rules that you keep (you think that they're nowhere, they're nothing, they're miserable sinners), if you have this sort of rigid attitude, then you are in the grip of this third fetter of attachment to moral rules and religious observances. An example of this sort of attitude is found in Sabbatarianism, which regards the Sabbath as an end in itself, forgetting the words of Christ: 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'.

You get this sort of attitude, I'm sorry to say, even in some forms of Buddhism. A dispute split the Burmese Sangha as to whether, when a monk went out of the monastery, he should cover his right shoulder or leave it bare. This issue rocked the Sangha in Burma for a whole century. Books, articles and commentaries were written about it. I believe it is now settled only in the sense that the two sides have agreed to differ. Really this is a matter of attachment to moral rules and religious observances.

Some things may be good as means to an end (meditation, a moral life, charity are all good as means to an end); but as soon as you set them up as ends in themselves, they become hindrances. The third fetter therefore really consists in treating moral rules and religious observances — which in themselves, as means to an end, may be good — as ends in themselves. Breaking this fetter does not mean giving up the moral rules and religious observances: one uses them as means to an end, without being attached to them, or dependent on them. This fetter is very difficult to break indeed; but when you break it, you enter the Stream.

In the context of the career of the Bodhisattva, it is only when he achieves Irreversibility that he is no longer in danger of falling away from the Bodhisattva Ideal. The Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible in the eighth *bhūmi*, the eighth stage out of the ten. This gives us an indication what a long way the Bodhisattva has to go before he can be completely sure that he's going to persevere to the end. In the eighth *bhūmi* the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible from full Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Up to that point, till he becomes Irreversible, there's always the danger, not that he'll fall away from the spiritual life itself (he has overcome that danger long before), but that he'll fall back into spiritual individualism: he'll give up trying to become a Buddha for the sake of all and instead seek to gain Enlightenment just for his own sake.

After all, one must recognize that the Bodhisattva Ideal, if one takes it seriously, is a very difficult Ideal to live up to. You are aspiring to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. You are supposed to be feeling compassion *for all living beings*. But sometimes feeling compassion even for the few dozen people that you meet is difficult enough, because people can be very trying, very foolish, very weak, very misguided. So even the Bodhisattva of the Path, who has got up even to the seventh *bhūmi*, may be tempted to give them all up in despair, as a bad lot. He may think, "I can't do anything for them. Never mind. I'll just get on with my own emancipation and let them do what they like." Sometimes he might express it even more strongly than that! Having given up the Goal of universal Enlightenment, he may achieve individual Emancipation, Arahantship, Nirvana. But in relation to his original Goal of supreme Buddhahood for the benefit of all, this represents a falling away. For the Bodhisattva Nirvana represents a failure. One can realize from this how high the Ideal is set for him.

How does the Bodhisattva become Irreversible? This is something that will not really concern us for a long time to come, but we may at least see what the scriptures have to say on the subject. Broadly speaking, the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible by the realization of 'Great Emptiness', *mahā-sūnyatā*. We dealt with this to some extent in last week's lecture. We saw then that *mahā-sūnyatā* is the third of the four principal kinds of *sūnyatā*. The first of these is 'Emptiness of the Conditioned'. This is the fact that the conditioned is empty of the characteristics of the Unconditioned. Secondly, there is 'Emptiness of the Unconditioned'; the Unconditioned is empty of the characteristics of the conditioned. Thirdly, there is 'Great Emptiness', which is the emptiness of the very distinction, the non-ultimate validity of the very distinction, between conditioned and Unconditioned. Here the conditioned and the Unconditioned are both reduced to one non-dual Reality, transcending both Nirvana and samsara. Finally there is 'Emptiness of Emptiness', *sūnyatā-sūnyatā*, in which even the idea, even the conception, of emptiness vanishes away — the finger, however transparent, disappears, and the full moon is left, with nothing pointing to it.

In what way is Irreversibility connected with the realization of 'Great Emptiness'? 'Great Emptiness', as we have seen, is essentially a realization of the emptiness of the distinction between conditioned and Unconditioned. When the experience of 'Great Emptiness' dawns one sees clearly that neither the conditioned nor the Unconditioned is really a separate, independent Reality. One sees that the distinction between the two — 'this' is conditioned and 'that' is Unconditioned — is not ultimately valid. The distinction may be useful provisionally, at the beginning of one's spiritual life, for practical purposes, but ultimately it is not valid. When you go deeply into the conditioned you encounter the Unconditioned; when you go deeply into the Unconditioned you encounter the conditioned. With the experience of 'Great Emptiness', therefore, one gives up the distinction of conditioned and Unconditioned, one reduces them, as it were, to one common, non-dual Reality.

Until the Bodhisattva attains the eighth *bhūmi*, there is always the danger of his falling back into spiritual individualism. Spiritual individualism is based on dualistic thinking. It is based on the idea that there is an Unconditioned 'up there', or 'out there', separate from the conditioned, to which one can aspire, to which one can escape, as it were, by oneself. When the Bodhisattva realizes 'Great Emptiness', he sees that it is not so — the conditioned is not separate from the Unconditioned. He awakens from dualistic thinking as though from a dream. He sees that all this talk of conditioned and Unconditioned, and getting from 'here' to 'there', is unreal. He sees through all this — out of the conditioned into the Unconditioned, whether to go by himself or whether to take others with him, whether to come back or stay there ... He sees that this is all a dream, or a game that he has been playing, a make-believe. He wakes up from this dream of dualistic thinking into the light, into the reality, of the one mind, the non-dual mind, the non-dual Reality, or whatever one likes to call it. He sees that in its ultimate depth the conditioned is the Unconditioned. He sees that there is no line, no division, whatsoever between them. He sees, in the words of the *Heart Sutra*, that *rūpa* is *sūnyatā* and *sūnyatā* is *rūpa*.

There is no difference whatsoever between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. Therefore there is nothing to escape from and nowhere to escape to. Seeing this, the Bodhisattva sees the utter absurdity of the very idea of individual emancipation. By realizing the import of 'Great Emptiness' in this way, the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible. He cannot fall back to individual emancipation because he sees that there is no individual emancipation to fall back to.

The scriptures, especially the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, tell us that there are various signs of a Bodhisattva's Irreversibility — this is how to know whether or not you have become

Irreversible. We are told that the Irreversible Bodhisattva, if asked about the nature of the ultimate Goal, always includes in his reply a reference to the Compassion aspect of that Goal: he does not speak just in terms of individual emancipation, but always includes a reference to other sentient beings. In this way he is known to be Irreversible. The Irreversible Bodhisattva, we are told, has archetypal dream experiences. In a dream he may see himself as a Buddha preaching the Dharma, surrounded by Bodhisattvas. Or he may see himself practising the *Pāramitās*. We are told that he may especially see himself sacrificing his life and feeling quite happy about it, not afraid or upset at all. These are all signs that he has become Irreversible. Finally, it is a sign of his Irreversibility that the Bodhisattva never wonders whether he is Irreversible or not.

The fourth and last principal kind of Bodhisattva is the Bodhisattva of the *Dharmakāya*. The Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya* make up the innermost circle of the Bodhisattva Hierarchy. Here we find ourselves on a wholly Transcendental plane.

In English there are very few words for Ultimate Reality; 'God', 'Reality', 'Truth', maybe 'the Absolute' (people don't usually use that expression in everyday conversation) are practically the only words available to us. But Buddhism is very rich in words for Ultimate Reality. It has many terms, and each term has its own special flavour, its own particular connotation. The word *Dharmakāya* is one of these terms. The scholars — bless their hearts! — translate it literally as 'Body of Truth' and leave it at that. We are told that it is the third of the three bodies of the Buddha, the first two being the Buddha's 'Body of Transformation' and his 'Glorious Body'. We are maybe to imagine these three bodies one on top of another or maybe side by side — it is not very clear. The literal translation of *Dharmakāya* conveys nothing at all. *Dharmakāya* really means Ultimate Reality as the constitutive essence of Buddhahood and Bodhisattvahood. It means Ultimate Reality as the fountainhead as it were of Enlightened being and Enlightened personality, as the fountainhead from which Buddha forms and Bodhisattva forms come welling up inexhaustibly.

Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya* are of two kinds, though at this Transcendental level one cannot really speak in terms of differences of kind at all. The first kind consists of those who, after gaining Enlightenment, though being in Reality Buddhas, retain their Bodhisattva forms, so that they can continue working in the world. The second kind consists of those who are aspects, or direct emanations, of the *Dharmakāya* and have got no previous human history. These two kinds make up the Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya*. They are all archetypal forms of Buddhahood, each revealing, manifesting, incarnating one or another aspect of the one Buddhahood. There are vast numbers of these forms. In some meditations you imagine an infinite blue sky, free of cloud, filled with mandalas containing tens, hundreds, even thousands of these Bodhisattva forms. The majority of these forms are represented as very young men, of slender, graceful appearance, with long flowing hair, and decorated with ornaments of gold and silver. This represents the beauty and richness of the *Dharmakāya*, its superabundant efflorescence.

Amongst the most prominent of all the figures is Avalokiteśvara. The name Avalokiteśvara means 'the Lord who looks down'; he looks down in compassion, and thus represents the Compassion aspect of Enlightenment. Suppose you imagine a great blue sky, completely empty; and suppose you see appearing in that sky, not even a face, but just the features of a face, features which are just sufficient to express a smile, a smile of compassion — this is the Compassion aspect of Reality, this is Avalokiteśvara.

Iconographically Avalokiteśvara is depicted as pure white. He carries a lotus flower, which symbolizes spiritual rebirth. His face is usually alive with a very sweet, compassionate smile. One foot is tucked under in the posture of meditation, showing that internally he is deep in meditation; the other hangs loose, representing his readiness to step down at any moment into the turmoil of the world to help other living beings. As I explained in last week's lecture, in the Bodhisattva these two aspects of inner recollection and external activity are not contradictory, rather are different aspects of the same thing.

There are altogether one hundred and eight different forms of Avalokiteśvara. One of the most famous of these is the eleven-headed and thousand-armed form. To us it perhaps seems a little grotesque, but the symbolism is very interesting. It is said that once the great Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was contemplating the miseries that sentient beings suffer — death, sickness, separation, bereavement, flood, famine, war, and so on. He was overwhelmed by Compassion, we are told, to such an extent that he was weeping. He wept in fact so violently that his head shivered into eleven pieces, each of which itself became a head. There were eleven of them because there are eleven directions of space (north, south, east, west, the four intermediate points, up, down, and in the centre). This means that Compassion looks in all directions simultaneously — while it is looking here it is also looking there, while it is looking on this side it is also looking on that side. Avalokiteśvara also has a thousand arms — I think they stopped at a thousand only because the artists couldn't represent any more. At the end of every arm there's a hand stretched out to help. With the help of this symbol, Buddhism tries to express the nature of Compassion, that it is looking in all directions and trying to help in all conceivable ways.

Mañjuśrī represents the Wisdom aspect of Enlightenment. He is depicted as a beautiful golden, or orange, or tawny colour. In his right hand he carries a flaming sword. He whirls it above his head. It is a sword of Wisdom, which he uses to cut through the bonds of ignorance and the knots of karma — what we are tangled up in and tripped up by all the time. In his left hand he carries a book. He holds it close to his heart. It is a little book of the Perfection of Wisdom (it is left to our imagination whether it is the *Diamond Sutra* or the *Heart Sutra*). His legs are crossed in the lotus posture, the posture of meditation, because Wisdom, as the Dhammapada also teaches us, springs from meditation. Mañjuśrī is the patron of all the arts and sciences. In traditional Buddhism, if you want to write a book, or paint a picture, or compose a piece of music, you invoke Mañjuśrī. His mantra, the *arapachana* mantra, is repeated for retentive memory, for understanding of the Dharma, for eloquence, and so on.

Vajrapāṇi represents the Power aspect of Enlightenment. He does not represent power in the usual sense of political power, power over other people, but power in the sense of spiritual Power or simply Power in itself. Though he has a peaceful form, Vajrapāṇi is usually depicted in a wrathful form, because he is engaged in an act of destruction: he is destroying the dark forces of ignorance which separate us from the light of the truth. He is usually depicted, appropriately, in a dark blue colour. He is not slender or graceful; he has a stout, thick body, a very protuberant belly, and very short, heavy limbs. His countenance expresses extreme anger. He has long white teeth. Usually he is represented as naked except for ornaments of human bone. Sometimes he is depicted wearing a tiger skin. He carries in one hand a vajra, a thunderbolt, and if he has a number of hands he carries other weapons too. This terrifying figure is crowned with five skulls, representing the 'Five Wisdoms'. One foot is uplifted, as if about to trample on all the forces of ignorance. He is surrounded by a roaring halo of flames, which consume whatever of conditioned existence is near.

By way of contrast, there is Tārā. She represents the essence, indeed the quintessence, of Compassion. She is a Bodhisattva appearing in female form. (It is not strictly correct to say that she is a female Bodhisattva, because Bodhisattvas have gone far beyond the distinction of male and female. Some Bodhisattvas may appear in male form, others in female form; sometimes a Bodhisattva may appear at one time in male form and at another in female form - it does not really make any difference.) Tārā is the spiritual daughter of Avalokiteśvara. According to a very beautiful legend, she was born of his tears as he wept over the sorrows of the world. It is said that one day he was weeping so much that his tears formed a great pool. In the midst of the pool a white lotus emerged, which opened to reveal Tārā at its heart.

Tārā is usually depicted as either green or white in colour. Very often she bears a white lotus flower, sometimes a blue lotus flower, depending on the particular form. In her white form she has seven beautiful eyes, which just look at you from different parts of her body (there are two ordinary eyes, a third one in her forehead, one in each of her two palms, and one in each of the two soles of her feet). What this means is that the compassion which Tārā represents is not foolish, sentimental compassion, it is not in any way blind, it sees. True Compassion, even in its remotest operations, is informed by awareness. That is more than can be said of some people's compassion, or rather pity, which sometimes just makes things worse. That is why there is the little saying, that it takes all the wisdom of the wise to undo the harm which is done by the merely good, or the merely pitiful.

The last great Bodhisattva that we are concerned with is Vajrasattva. He represents the aspect of Purity. This is not physical purity, nor moral purity, nor even spiritual purity. It is not any purity that can be attained. Vajrasattva represents primeval Purity, the Purity of the mind from beginningless ages. We may, through our spiritual practice, purify the lower mind, because the lower mind can become impure, but we never purify the Ultimate Mind, because the Ultimate Mind never becomes impure. We purify ourselves truly by waking up to the fact that we've never become impure, that we were pure all the time. This primeval purity of the mind, which Vajrasattva represents, is a Purity above and beyond time and a Purity above and beyond the possibility of impurity.

Vajrasattva is usually depicted as dazzling white, like the sunlight reflected from fresh snow. He is usually completely naked — he does not even have any Bodhisattva ornaments. The one hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva is recited and meditated upon for the purification of one's faults, or for purification from the impurity of thinking that one is not — primevally — pure. Many important practices are connected with Vajrasattva, all of which are included in what is called the 'Vajrasattva Yoga', which makes up one of the 'Four Foundation Yogas' of the Tibetan Buddhist Tantra.

As I mentioned, there are very many Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya* — these few must suffice by way of illustration. They are all, we are told, in the last analysis, which is not an intellectual analysis, simply different aspects of our own fundamentally Enlightened mind, our own immanent Buddha mind.

Finally a few words about the Bodhisattva ordination. The Bodhisattva ordination is not just a ceremony; it is the natural expression of the arising of the Bodhicitta. As such it usually occurs in the first *bhūmi*, which is when the Bodhicitta itself arises. But as a ceremony, as something undergone externally, it may be taken at any time, even by the Novice Bodhisattva. In the case of the Novice Bodhisattva, he takes the Bodhisattva ordination in anticipation of the arising of the Bodhicitta. The taking of the Bodhisattva ordination in this way is therefore included among the conditions in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta arises.

The Bodhisattva ordination consists of two parts. First of all there is the taking of the Bodhisattva Vow, usually in the form of the 'Four Great Vows'. Secondly there is the acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts, which are principles governing the behaviour of the Bodhisattva. There are different lists of these precepts in different branches of the Mahayana. They have all been extracted from the Mahayana scriptures and constitute a more detailed application of the Great Vows themselves. The taking of the Bodhisattva Vow as a part of the Bodhisattva ordination corresponds, on its own higher level, to the Going for Refuge. The acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts corresponds to the acceptance of the five, or the ten, ordinary precepts.

The Bodhisattva ordination is the third of the four degrees of ordination which we have in the Western Buddhist Order. The first degree is that of lay brother or lay sister; the second is that of senior lay brother or senior lay sister; the fourth is that of the full time bhikshu, or lama, or master. It must be emphasized that the Bodhisattva ordination, which comes third, does not represent the conferring of any spiritual status. Spiritual status in fact cannot be conferred. Bodhisattva ordination does not even imply a *recognition* of spiritual status. Bodhisattva ordination represents a public pledge by the person concerned that he or she will do their best to live up to the Bodhisattva Ideal ('public' here means 'in the presence of the Buddhist spiritual community', especially in the presence of other members of the Order). It is a quite different matter whether or not the Bodhicitta arises at the same time. It is obviously very difficult for other people to know, in the case of any given person, whether or not the Bodhicitta has arisen.

For most of us, even for those who are interested, the Bodhisattva ordination lies a long way ahead; for most of us, our immediate objective is the first or the second degree ordination. For the time being, therefore, we have to be content to contemplate from afar the glories of the Bodhisattva Hierarchy.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. In seminar materials on this lecture, Sangharakshita says that “the spiritual life itself is inseparable from the hierarchical principle”. Do you agree with this statement? If not, why not?
2. Can the principle of spiritual hierarchy be reconciled with contemporary notions of ‘equality’?
3. What is the value of spiritual friends? If possible, draw examples from your own experience.
4. Are the “three attitudes” – śraddhā towards that which is higher than you, compassion towards those ‘lower’ than you and mettā for those on roughly the same level as you – active forces in your life? Is there one in particular you need to work on?
5. Is there any of the three fetters which you feel particularly strongly? How might you lessen its hold on you?
6. Does the path of practice of the novice Bodhisattva appeal to you? Could you call yourself a novice Bodhisattva?

7. Why is it so easy to fall back in the spiritual life? In answering this, base it in what has happened in your own Dharma practice.
8. Reflect on your responses to one of the bodhisattva figures e.g. Tārā. What is their significance for you?

In this lecture, we are approaching the furthest reaches of spiritual life which it can be difficult to imagine or think about. So don't worry if you find this a little beyond your experience!

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Last week we began our lecture by permitting ourselves, for a few moments, a backward glance over the mountainous terrain of the Bodhisattva Ideal, terrain through which we have been travelling in the course of the last two months. As we looked back, we saw that one mountain peak stood out and dominated the landscape. This was the mountain peak of the Bodhicitta, the Will to universal Enlightenment. In retrospect we saw that all other aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal, some of which we had touched upon and even explored, seemed to group themselves around this particular aspect, just as lesser mountain peaks seem to cluster around one great peak that towers above them all.

This evening we are still concerned with the Bodhicitta, but whereas so far in the course of this series of lectures we have dealt only with the relative Bodhicitta, today we are going to deal with the Absolute Bodhicitta. Quite early in the series the distinction between the Absolute Bodhicitta and the relative Bodhicitta was introduced, but the Absolute Bodhicitta was mentioned just briefly (we also slightly anticipated this subject of the Absolute Bodhicitta last week in speaking of the Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya*).

It is not easy to approach this subject of the Absolute Bodhicitta. It is difficult enough to deal with the relative Bodhicitta. If it is difficult to get a glimpse, even from far off, of the relative Bodhicitta, it is difficult even to get a glimpse of a glimpse of the Absolute Bodhicitta. So perhaps we should work our way into the subject gradually, little by little, until perhaps we have some perception, however remote or indirect, of the nature of the Absolute Bodhicitta.

In the course of listening to the previous lectures, you cannot but have received certain impressions. You may not remember very much of the lectures in detail, but some broad general impressions will have remained with you. You will surely think of the Bodhisattva as following a certain way of life: performing the 'Sevenfold Puja', making the 'Four Great Vows', practising the *Pāramitās*, and so on. In other words, you will think of him as treading a certain path. In the same way, you will undoubtedly think of him as aiming at a certain goal: Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, supreme Buddhahood. These at least are the sort of impressions with which you will be left after listening to this course of lectures. These impressions, though very general (not to say vague), are, as far as they go, perfectly correct — it is true that the Bodhisattva aims at the goal of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. But though these impressions are correct, there is a danger. The danger consists in the

fact that these expressions, as when we speak of the Bodhisattva following a path or arriving at a goal, are in fact metaphorical.

We do not always realize how much of our thought and speech is metaphorical. It is not to be taken literally; it is suggestive. It is not meant to communicate in a clear-cut, scientific, quasi-mathematical fashion; it is meant to stimulate, even inspire. So there is the danger that we may forget this. We may start taking these metaphors — with the help of which we try to make clear what is going on in the spiritual life — somewhat too literally and may try to press them to logical conclusions.

Let us look into this a little more closely. Suppose that we're walking along a road. In due course, having covered a certain distance, we arrive at our destination, which is perhaps a house. This is a simple enough situation. But what are the facts of the situation? The facts are that we have changed our position, but we have changed it on the same plane, or level. The house therefore is, in a sense, a continuation of the road, because it is on the same plane as the road.

Now it is only too easy to think that the path of the Bodhisattva leads up to Buddhahood as though to the door of a house. We think of the Bodhisattva as going along step by step, until one day he comes to the door of Nirvana — perhaps we imagine a great gateway, glistening, pearly and golden — and he goes in. This is the way in which we think of these experiences; we cannot perhaps help thinking in this way. But it isn't really like that at all. When you come to the end of the Bodhisattva path, when you come in fact to the end of the spiritual path, you don't find a door or a gateway — there is no celestial mansion waiting for you. What do you find? When you reach the end of the path, you don't find anything at all. There is nothing there. The path just ends. You find yourself at the edge of a precipice (this is another metaphor, so again it should not be taken too literally). You have walked along the path for mile after mile — you have counted all the milestones. You're expecting to arrive in comfort at the door of a great house. But instead you find that the path ends right at the edge of a precipice. And when you look down, you see that the precipice does not drop just a few feet, nor even a few miles: it drops down to infinity. So what are you to do?

In the Zen tradition leading the spiritual life is compared to climbing up a flagpole. This particular flagpole is rather slippery, if not deliberately greased — by fate or circumstances. It is also very high indeed. Eventually, with a lot of effort, you struggle to the top of it. Then, however, you cannot go any further up — obviously. It is also impossible for you to come down. Why is this? This is because the Zen master is standing below with a big stick! Worst of all, at the top of the flagpole there is no cosy little platform on which, like St Simeon Stylites, you can settle down — there is just empty space. Finally, of course, you're afraid to jump off. You can't go up, you can't go down, you can't stay there, and you can't jump off. So what are you to do? Well, it's quite impossible to say. No statement is possible. So I'm afraid I shall have to leave you on top of the flagpole!

Here we are not concerned with that particular predicament directly, only inasmuch as it illustrates the point that 'path' and 'goal' are discontinuous. Contrary to what we usually think, contrary to our usual metaphorical mode of description, Enlightenment is not reached by following a path — at the end of the path Enlightenment is not there staring you in the face. At the same time this does not mean that the path should not be followed. Paradoxically, one follows the path knowing that it doesn't lead anywhere. However, we're not concerned here with that either. The point I am trying to make clear is that the path and the goal occupy different dimensions, the dimension of time and the dimension of eternity, and therefore you

will not arrive at the goal by the indefinite prolongation of the path; you do not reach eternity by the indefinite prolongation of time (it would be like trying to arrive at a two-dimensional figure by the prolongation of a one-dimensional line: however far you may go in that dimension, protracting the line, you never will arrive at a two-dimensional figure). Eternity, the goal, on the one hand; time, the path, on the other hand — these are discontinuous, discrete.

Now the Bodhisattva, about whom we've been speaking over the last few weeks, represents the dimension of time. This is because — obviously — the Bodhisattva path is followed in time; it has a past, a present and a future; it doesn't go beyond time. But the Buddha represents the dimension of eternity. The Buddha represents the goal, and the goal is gained out of time. One reaches the end of the path in time, but one does not attain the goal in time: one can say either that one attains the goal out of time or that the goal is eternally attained.

We usually — and up to a point quite justifiably — think of the Buddha as an historical figure. We think of his attainment of Enlightenment as an historical event. We say, for instance, that it took place two thousand five hundred years ago — we might name the year, or even the day. So we look upon the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment as something occurring in time, within the dimension of time. Now so long as we make it clear that we're speaking popularly, conventionally, then this is not altogether wrong. But only too often we go on to think of Buddhahood itself as existing in time. This is quite wrong. Though the Buddha, the historical person, may exist within time, Buddhahood itself exists outside time: it exists in the dimension of eternity. We can in fact think of the Buddha as existing simultaneously on two different levels: on the level of time, as a human, historical figure, and on the level of eternity, as Reality. We can think of him existing also on a further level, in an intermediate, archetypal realm. This brings us, as some of you may have perceived, to what is known in Buddhism as the *trikāya* doctrine, the doctrine which some scholars are pleased to call 'the Buddha's three bodies'.

This doctrine has been, and still is, much misunderstood. *Trikāya* does literally mean 'three bodies', or 'three personalities', or 'three individualities', but the literal meaning of the term is not to be taken too seriously. It is a doctrine not about three bodies, much less still about three Buddhas, but rather about one Buddha, or one Buddha-nature, functioning on three different levels.

The first of the so-called 'three bodies' is the *nirmāṇakāya*. This term literally means 'created body', or 'body of transformation'. It represents the Buddha as functioning on the human, historical level, as subject to birth, old age and death. The *nirmāṇakāya* therefore obviously corresponds to Gautama the Buddha, Śākyamuni, whom we know as an historical figure.

Secondly, there is the *sambhogakāya*, which literally means 'body of mutual enjoyment'. It is sometimes rendered more poetically (less accurately, but more truthfully) as the 'glorious body' of the Buddha, or as the Buddha's 'body of glory'. This is the archetypal Buddha form. This is the form under which the Buddha is perceived by advanced Bodhisattvas dwelling on a much higher level of consciousness, a much higher meditative (*dhyāna* or *samādhi*) state, than that on which we usually function and operate. This archetypal form is the form of the Buddha under which the Bodhisattvas are said to 'enjoy' the vision of him.

The *sambhogakāya* has a number of different aspects. The principle aspects are five in number and are known as the 'Five *Jinas*', or 'Five Conquerors', or, more simply, the 'Five Buddhas'. They appear often in Buddhist art: sometimes individually, sometimes collectively. It is important to

remember that they don't represent the human historical Buddha, but different aspects, or facets, of this glorified Buddha, this archetypal Buddha, existing on this higher, archetypal plane, in between the plane we usually experience and the plane of Absolute Reality. I will say just a few words about each of these 'Five Buddhas' in turn.

First there is Vairocana. The name Vairocana means 'The Illuminator'. He is sometimes called 'The Great Sun Buddha', because just as the sun illumines the physical cosmos, so the archetypal Buddha, Vairocana, illumines (as it were) the spiritual cosmos. He is represented in Buddhist art as being of a dazzling white colour. His hands are in the teaching *mudrā* (more technically, the *dharmacakrapravartana mudrā*, which means the *mudrā* of turning the wheel of the law). He holds in his hands an eight-spoked golden wheel — obviously a sort of solar symbol. When Vairocana is represented in a mandala (a circle of archetypal forms), he usually occupies the central position.

Secondly, Aksobhya. His name means 'The Imperturbable' — one who cannot be moved. He is represented as being of a rich, dark blue colour, the blue of the midnight sky on a clear night in the tropics. His right hand is in the earth-touching *mudrā* (the *bhūmisparśa mudrā*), or the *mudrā* of calling the earth to witness. His emblem is the vajra, the thunderbolt. It is a symbol of indestructible strength and power. It represents Wisdom, the Wisdom which smashes everything that opposes it, which destroys all error and illusion. Aksobhya is associated with the East.

Thirdly, Amitabha, which means 'The Infinite Light'. Amitabha is red in colour, usually a beautiful, deep, rich red, very much like the colour of the setting sun when, just before it actually sets, it is seen through a little mist. The *mudrā* of Amitabha is the meditation *mudrā*, in which one hand rests simply upon the other. His emblem is the lotus, which is a symbol of spiritual rebirth. He is associated with the West.

Fourthly, Ratnasambhava, 'The Jewel Born', or 'The Jewel Producing'. He is golden-yellow in colour. His right hand exhibits the *mudrā* of giving (the *varada mudrā* is the *mudrā* of the supreme gift, which is especially the gift of the Dharma itself). His emblem is the jewel. He is associated with the South.

Fifthly, Amoghasiddhi, which means 'Unobstructed Success', or 'Infallible Success'. Amoghasiddhi is a dark green colour. His right hand exhibits the *mudrā* of fearlessness: he says, as it were, "Fear not! Be free from fear!" His emblem is the double vajra (two *vajras* crossed). He is associated with the North.

These 'Five Buddhas' are different aspects of the *sambhogakāya*, the archetypal Buddha form. They are the five chief aspects, but are not the only ones. There are scores of other aspects, far too numerous to mention. All of them are archetypal: they all exist on this archetypal plane, intermediate between ordinary earthbound human consciousness and the level of Absolute Reality.

All of them are out of time as we usually experience it, but are not out of time altogether: they occupy (as it were) a time scale different from that of our normal waking consciousness. We ourselves are not altogether out of touch with this archetypal world of the *sambhogakāya*. We sometimes touch the fringes of it in very deep meditation, in some archetypal dreams, and perhaps in aesthetic experience of a more truly visionary nature.

Thirdly and lastly, we come to the *dharmakāya*. This is usually translated as 'body of truth', though it is not indeed a very satisfactory translation. A more accurate rendering would be 'the aspect of Absolute Reality'. The *dharmakāya* represents Buddhahood as it is in itself, or the Buddha as he is in himself. The *dharmakāya* therefore represents the real, the true, the genuine, the ultimate, Buddha. This is not the human, historical Buddha, nor even the archetypal Buddha. Therefore we find the Buddha saying in the Diamond Sutra, in a verse which is very famous in the Buddhist world and often recited:

Those who by my form [the human, historical form] did see me,
And those who followed me by voice
Wrong the efforts they engaged in,
Me those people will not see.

From the Dharma should one see the Buddhas,
From the Dharmabodies comes their guidance.
Yet Dharma's true nature cannot be discerned,
And no one can be conscious of it as an object.

So here the Buddha is saying that the Buddha is not really his physical body, nor even his archetypal form, but is the *dharmakāya*, is (as it were) Reality.

The message of another great Mahayana text, the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, or 'White Lotus of the True Dharma', is similar, in fact in a way is even more explicit. It's worth pointing out that this sutra employs the non-conceptual mode of communication. There are two modes of communication: conceptual and non-conceptual. In the former one speaks the language of abstract ideas, of concepts; in the latter the language of parable and myth etc. It is this language of parable and myth which the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* speaks predominantly.

I have in mind a particular episode, when suddenly, according to the text, millions of Bodhisattvas appear from the earth. You can imagine how staggered everybody was! There they were, somewhere in northern India, sitting round the Buddha on the top of a mountain, — monks, nuns, male and female lay devotees and so on, — when suddenly, out of the fissures of the earth, there came millions of Bodhisattvas — quite an extraordinary thing to happen, even during the lifetime of the Buddha.

The Buddha, when he saw all these Bodhisattvas, said, addressing the other ordinary human disciples, "Oh yes, these are all my disciples. I've taught and trained them all." The ordinary human disciples expressed their astonishment at this and said, "But you were Enlightened only forty years ago. We admit that you've been working pretty hard. You haven't wasted any time, and you have been teaching all sorts of beings. But these millions of Bodhisattvas? That is a bit too much to ask us to believe. How could you possibly have trained so many of them? What's more, some of them are not just ordinary novice Bodhisattvas, they've been following the Bodhisattva path for hundreds of lives, for *kalpas*, so how can they possibly be your disciples?" They said, "It's just like a young man of twenty-five pointing out a collection of centenarians and saying, 'They're all my sons.' It's just impossible."

So at this point, according to the sutra, the Buddha makes his great revelation, the one towards which the whole sutra has been building up, a revelation which is the keynote of the sutra. The Buddha says, "Don't think that I was Enlightened forty years ago. That is just your way of looking at it. I am eternally Enlightened." When the Buddha makes that statement it obviously isn't the *nirmāṇakāya* speaking, nor the *sambhogakāya*: it's the *dharmakāya*

speaking. In other words it's the real Buddha, the eternal Buddha, Buddhahood itself, speaking, not any particular individual, however great.

So when the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* speaks in terms of the eternal Buddha, one is not to understand the word 'eternal' in the sense of indefinitely prolonged in time, but rather in the sense of being outside time altogether. This means therefore that for the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, as for the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha symbolizes the dimension of eternity, or symbolizes Reality as existing outside time. This is why also we speak, in the title of this lecture, of 'The Buddha and the Bodhisattva: Eternity and Time'. The Buddha here represents the dimension of eternity, the dimension above and beyond, or outside, time.

Similarly therefore the Bodhisattva represents the dimension of time, or represents Reality — even Buddhahood — as manifesting in time (this again is metaphorical). It is not difficult to understand how the Bodhisattva should represent the dimension of time, because, as we have seen, the Bodhisattva follows the path, engages in certain activities, originates a certain sequence of thoughts, words and deeds. This sequence is progressive (the Bodhisattva manifests the relative Bodhicitta to an ever increasing degree), and the whole process takes place in time. This process is the process of the Higher Evolution — at least in its upper reaches.

We can take a view even broader than this. We can regard the Bodhisattva as symbolizing the whole evolutionary process, the *whole* process of life going on to higher and ever higher forms, the Higher Evolution (the evolution of man from the unenlightened to the Enlightened state) *and* the Lower Evolution (evolution from the very beginnings of life up to man in his unenlightened state). We can regard the Lower and the Higher Evolution as being, in a way, one continuous process; or at least we can regard the process of the Higher Evolution as arising in dependence upon the process of the Lower Evolution.

This view is supported by the *Jātaka* stories. *Jātaka* are one particular branch of Buddhist canonical literature (there are also many non-canonical *Jātaka*; in fact whereas there are only about thirty canonical *Jātaka*, there are well over five hundred and fifty non-canonical *Jātaka*). Traditionally the *Jātaka* are stories of some of the previous lives of Gautama the Buddha (Buddhism traditionally teaches rebirth, and this of course applies to the Buddha himself). They show how, from life to life, the Bodhisattva, or the future Buddha, advanced in the direction of Enlightenment.

Scholars have had a look at these *Jātaka* stories — you know what scholars are like, they probe, turn over, ask awkward questions — and have discovered that quite a number of them are old Indian folk tales, which have been turned into *Jātaka* by the simple process of identifying the Buddha with the hero of the tale (this applies particularly to the non-canonical *Jātaka*; it doesn't apply in quite the same way to the canonical *Jātaka*). It is rather as though we in the West had taken *Aesop's Fables*, had identified Christ, five hundred years later, with the principal character in each fable, and had regarded the fable as telling the story of one of the previous lives of Christ. This is what the early Buddhists did, apparently, with a vast mass of Indian folk lore: they turned folk stories into *Jātaka* simply by identifying the Buddha with the story's hero.

Some of the folk tales are in fact animal fables, and in these the Buddha is identified as having been the particular animal who is the hero of the story. Some scholars ask of course whether Buddhists take all this quite literally, and whether we are in fact to think that the particular hero, who might have been a hare, or a deer, or a lion, really represented the Buddha as he was in his own previous life. In some parts of the Buddhist East they are literal-minded and do

quite honestly regard the *Jātaka* as really and truly depicting the actual previous lives of the Buddha. So, for instance, they often think that the hare *Jātaka*, in the course of which the Buddha is born as a hare and sacrifices his life, represents a real historical previous life of the Buddha. Simple-minded people everywhere take things in this way, but we need not be quite so simple-minded as that. We can say, adopting a more intelligent point of view perhaps, that the *Jātaka* quite clearly depict an evolutionary process. In each *Jātaka* there is a story involving a number of characters, one of whom is a hero. In other words there's someone, a man or an animal, who stands out from the rest, who stands above the rest, who is more advanced than the rest, and who therefore may be said to represent, in comparison with the rest, a more advanced stage of evolution. It is significant that this hero figure is identified with the Buddha. This means that this figure represents at that particular stage that same — in this context 'lower' — evolutionary urge which ultimately resulted in the 'production' of a (*nirmāṇakāya*) Buddha in the future. Just as the end result is symbolized by the Buddha, so this evolutionary urge itself is symbolized by the Bodhisattva, and therefore in the *Jātaka* the hero of the story is the Bodhisattva, in other words the Buddha-to-be.

To return to our main subject, we have therefore two principles: a principle of Buddhahood in the dimension of eternity and a principle of Bodhisattvahood in the dimension of time. In the principle of Buddhahood eternity is transcendent; in the principle of Bodhisattvahood the principle of growth, evolution, development, is immanent. The principle of Buddhahood represents perfection eternally complete, eternally achieved; the principle of Bodhisattvahood represents perfection everlastingly in the process of achievement, in the world order, through the evolutionary process. The two principles are discontinuous, discrete.

Now is this the last word that can be said on the subject, that on the one hand there is the Buddha, eternity, and on the other the Bodhisattva, time, and the two are discrete? According to the Mahayana, and especially according to the Tantra, it is certainly not. There's no question though of merging one into the other. The solution is not as easy as that. The solution does not consist in saying, "Time is illusory, merge it in eternity," or, "Eternity is illusory, merge it in time." No. They are both irreducibly there — Buddhahood *and* Bodhisattvahood, eternity *and* time — and they can't be merged, the one into the other.

The solution consists rather, according to the Mahayana and again especially according to the Tantra, in realizing both of them simultaneously: Buddha and Bodhisattva simultaneously, eternity and time simultaneously. It consists in seeing everything as eternally achieved and everything at the same time in process of achievement, and in seeing that these two do not contradict each other. One may say one has to see that everything moves but nothing moves. Sometimes, when one is walking perhaps or even running, one may have the feeling that one is moving but nothing moves. The two are both there and are (in a sense) contradictory — movement and no movement — but one can deny neither of them.

In the same way, one may say that the Buddha sits eternally beneath the Bodhi tree (the Buddha has always sat and always will sit beneath the Bodhi tree), that at the same time the Bodhisattva is eternally, life after life to infinity, practising the Perfections, and that these two, Buddha and Bodhisattva, represent different aspects of one, even the same, Reality. It is the realization of this — Buddha together with Bodhisattva, eternity together with time, no movement together with movement — that constitutes the arising of the Absolute Bodhicitta, though at the same time there's no question of 'arising'.

The essence of this Absolute Bodhicitta is very beautifully expressed, as far as it can be expressed, in certain Tibetan verses. These verses have never been published; they were

privately translated in 1959 in Kalimpong. They are to be recited and meditated upon in a *sādhana*, which is known as 'The Confounder of Hell'. The Confounder of Hell is one of the titles of Vajrasattva, and this *sādhana* is part of a form of the Vajrasattva Yoga. These verses juxtapose in a single vision two different aspects of Reality: Reality existing out of time, in eternity, and Reality as progressively revealed in time.

Each of the verses starts with a mantra-like exclamation, E MA O (it is sometimes pronounced quickly as a single word). In the Tibetan tradition this comes at the beginning of certain things to be recited and is meant to express extreme wonder. Plato said that philosophy begins with a sense of wonder, so one might say that the spiritual life begins with a sense of wonder. When you come across anything numinous, transcendent, your reaction is one of wonder and astonishment, you're impressed, almost overwhelmed, by it. So each of the verses starts with this exclamation of wonder and astonishment at the vision of the Absolute Bodhicitta which is about to dawn on one.

E MA O
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
Within the birthless all things take their birth,
Yet in what's born there is no birth.

E MA O
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
Within the ceaseless all things cease to be,
Yet in that ceasing nothing ceases.

E MA O
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
Within the non-abiding all abides,
Yet thus abiding there abideth nought.

E MA O
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
In non-perception everything's perceived,
Yet this perception's quite perceptionless.

E MA O
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
In the unmoving all things come and go,
Yet in that movement nothing ever moves.

It's very difficult for the mind to go beyond this point. But this doesn't mean that the Absolute Bodhicitta is too remote for us to practise, at least to some extent. To begin with, we have to realize that however long time goes on, time never reaches eternity; time does not go beyond time. There's no question of getting nearer and nearer to eternity as time goes on, nearer to the Absolute, to Buddhahood, which is in the dimension of eternity. In a million years we'll be no nearer to eternity than we are now, no nearer to Buddhahood — no nearer at all.

This sounds pretty hopeless. But it is not really as hopeless as it sounds, because you can turn it the other way round and say that at this very moment we're as near to Enlightenment, to eternity, as we shall ever be. We might even say that even a Bodhisattva, on the very threshold of Enlightenment, just a minute before he gets it, is no nearer *really* than we are at this moment. This is really something to meditate upon, to ponder. Every moment is the last moment, whether it's this moment, or the next, or a moment occurring after a million years. Every moment is the last moment, and beyond the last moment there's only Buddhahood. There's only *this* moment, and after this moment there's only Buddhahood. So every moment in fact, only we don't know it (if we did know it what a terrible reaction there would be), we find ourselves at the top of the flagpole, and all that we have to do is ... well, what?

We've gone quite a long way tonight; at the same time we haven't gone anywhere. We've completed our journey along the Bodhisattva path; at the same time we've realized that the goal of the journey is eternally achieved and eternally in process of being achieved. The Buddha and the Bodhisattva, eternity and time, are one, or are not two. With that insight achieved, we bring to an end our exploration of aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Do you feel that at times the spiritual life is like climbing a greasy pole?
2. What does the Zen image of being atop the flagpole suggest to you?
3. What does it mean to say that the path and goal are discontinuous?
4. *"Buddhahood itself exists outside of time."*
What are we to make of this statement?
5. *"We ourselves are not altogether out of touch with this archetypal world of the sambhogakāya."*
How might this be so?
6. *"The Buddha ... is reality."*
What are the implications of this statement?
7. In what way does the bodhisattva symbolise the "evolutionary urge"?
8. Reflect on your own preferred model/metaphor for the spiritual life. How does it compare with the models presented in this unit?

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.

Background reading for the whole series

Mahāyāna Buddhism, Paul Williams. Routledge, ISBN 780415356534. This is one of the best surveys of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Chapters 9 and 10 particularly look at the Bodhisattva Path and some of the more important Bodhisattva figures.

<https://www.routledge.com/products/9780415356534>

Wisdom Beyond Words, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766772. This particularly explores the Perfection of Wisdom teachings so central to Mahāyāna Buddhism. This is also available as a community audio book read by Subhadra on Free Buddhist Audio.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/wisdom-beyond-words-the-buddhist-vision-of-ultimate-reality/>

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC866>

The Bodhicaryāvatāra, Śāntideva, trans. Crosby and Skilton, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579494. The source of the Sevenfold Pūjā, the title of this famous text is most often translated as *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. It includes very good chapters on the perfections of *kṣānti*, *vīrya* and *samādhi* (and a not very easy one on *prajñā*!). It's also the subject of *Module 7 on Year Four*.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-bodhicaryavatara-a-guide-to-the-buddhist-path-of-awakening/>

A Survey of Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766934. Chapter 2 explores the transition from the Hīnayāna the Mahāyāna whilst chapter 3 looks at some of the different schools of the Mahāyāna. Chapter 4 explores the Bodhisattva Ideal in some depth.

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

A Concise History of Buddhism, Andrew Skilton, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766926.

Chapters 11 to 13 are very good on the historical origins of the Mahāyāna.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-concise-history-of-buddhism/>

Unit 1

For the complete version of the ‘Siṅsapā Leaves’ story see *Access to Insight*:
<http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn56/sn56.031.than.html>

For a detailed re-telling of the ‘Kisāgotamī’ story, see chapter 2 of *Tales of Freedom* by Vessantara. This book is now out of print, but you may find a copy in your centre library or online secondhand. It is also available as an audio book, read by Subhadra.
<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13405674-tales-of-freedom>
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC861>

Unit 2

Subhuti’s and Sangharakshita’s paper *Revering and Relying Upon the Dharma* contains a much further development in Sangharakshita’s thinking on the Bodhicitta and the Dharma Niyama. This is presented in *Year Two, Module 2 - Pratitya-Samutpada - The Nature of Existence*.
<http://www.sangharakshita.org/pdfs/revering-and-relying-upon-the-dharma.pdf>

A translation of Vasubandhu’s *Bodhicittotpāda-sūtra-śāstra* by Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton can be found in volume 4 of the *Western Buddhist Review*.
http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol4/giving_rise_to_the_bodhicitta.html

Unit 7

Who is the Buddha?, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579516. Chapter 5 explores more fully the incident of the Buddha worshipping the Dharma.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/who-is-the-buddha-ebook-2/>

Vessantara’s books *A Guide to the Buddhas*, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 978189957983, and *A Guide to the Bodhisattvas*, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 9781899579846, are very good resources for information on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-guide-to-the-buddhas/>
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-guide-to-the-bodhisattvas/>

Unit 8

Enlightenment as Experience and as non-Experience, Sangharakshita, available as an audio talk or in the PDF of his book *The Taste of Freedom*.
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=119>
<http://www.sangharakshita.org/bookshelf/taste-freedom.pdf>

The Bodhisattva Principle, Sangharakshita, from the PDF of his book *The Priceless Jewel*. This places the Bodhisattva Ideal in the wider context of what Sangharakshita has called the ‘Higher Evolution’. An audio version is also available.
<http://www.sangharakshita.org/books/The%20Priceless%20Jewel.pdf>
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=159>

3.6

The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment: The White Lotus Sutra



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Module compiled by Vadanya

Reading

The reading for this course will be *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. You can also listen to the original lectures online.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-drama-of-cosmic-enlightenment-ebook/>

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X12>

For this week, read Chapter 1 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*. The 'Questions and Answers' that follow this and every other chapter in the book are optional extra reading.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. According to Sangharakshita, "the Mahayana simply – but profoundly – realizes that concern for the welfare and spiritual development of other people is an integral part of one's own spiritual development. Indeed, to be concerned with one's own development but completely uninterested in that of other people is self-defeating in the long run." Do you agree? Why, or why not?
2. To what extent is acting "for the welfare and spiritual development of other people" a part of your spiritual practice? Could you strengthen this aspect of your practice – and if so, how?
3. "Generosity is certainly a quality that any practising Buddhist ... needs to cultivate... You can at least give. If you don't do that, you're not on the path to Enlightenment." Why is generosity so central to our spiritual development?
4. In your experience, is there a greater atmosphere of generosity in the Triratna Buddhist Community than in the non-Buddhist world that surrounds us? Could you make a greater contribution to the atmosphere of generosity around your Triratna centre?
5. "*The Mahayana ... continued to speak both the language of concepts and the language of images.*" Which language do you feel most at home with? How could you improve your receptivity to the other language? Where does the language of myth and story fit in?
6. If you have read any Mahayana texts, be prepared to briefly tell the group about your response, perhaps comparing this to your response to the Pali suttas.

Reading

1. Chapter 2 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*.
2. The following condensed version of the first two chapters of the sutra.
3. Optional reading – see the appendix for an overview of the entire *White Lotus Sutra*.

The White Lotus Sutra – Chapters 1 and 2

Abridged and slightly adapted by Vadanya, from the translation of Bunno, Kato et al, 1975.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was dwelling on Vulture's Peak with a great assembly of monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, arhats, bodhisattvas, gods, nagas, and all sorts of beings. All this assembly sat with hands folded in reverence looking up at the Buddha with one mind of joy. Then the Buddha sent forth a ray of light from between his eyebrows, which illuminated all the many thousand worlds, so that there was nowhere that it did not reach, downward to the deepest hell, and upward to the highest heaven. The six realms of living creatures were seen, and all the Buddhas in those realms were seen, and all the Dharmas that those Buddhas were teaching were heard.

All the assembly were filled with wonder and awe. Then Manjusri spoke, saying, 'All you sons and daughters of good family! The Buddha is now intending to speak the Great Truth, to pour down the rain of the Great Truth, to blow the conch of the Great Truth, to beat the drum of the Great Truth. Whenever I have seen this sign from any former Buddha, after emitting such a ray, they have taught the Great Truth. The Buddha now intends for all beings to hear and know the final Truth, which the beings of all the worlds will find it hard to believe and accept.

The Buddha now sends forth a ray to reveal the Truth of Reality.

Be mindful, all of you!

Put your hands together in reverence

And with all your mind, wait.'

Chapter 2 – 'Skilful Means'

Then the World-honoured One spoke thus:

'The mind of the Buddhas is immeasurable.

Among all the living creatures,

None can understand the Buddhas.

The Buddha's powers and higher states of consciousness,

Their state of utter liberation,

And the Truth that they perceive,
No one is able to fathom.

I and other Buddhas of the universe
Know the meaning of every nature and form.
But only the Buddhas can know these things.
This Truth is inexpressible,
It is beyond the realm of language and concepts.
Among all the other living beings
None can apprehend it
Except the Bodhisattvas
Who are firm in the power of faith.

Indeed though the universe were full of my disciples
Filling the world in every quarter,
Who with utmost thought combined to measure its depth,
They could not understand.

Though Pratyekabuddhas of keen intelligence,
In their last faultless incarnation
Filled every region of the universe,
If these with united mind
Through infinite numbers of ages
Meditated on the Buddha's wisdom,
They could not know the least part.

Though trainee Bodhisattvas
Who have worshipped countless Buddhas,
Have penetrated the meaning of the teaching,
And can ably preach the Dharma,
Filled the world in every quarter,
If with one mind by mystic wisdom,
Through as many ages as there are grains of sand in the Ganges,
All these were to ponder together,
They could not know the Buddha-wisdom.

Though advanced irreversible Bodhisattvas,
Numerous as the sands of the Ganges,
With one mind investigated together,
They too could not understand.

The spotless and inscrutable
Profound and mysterious Truth
I have wholly attained.
Only I see this Truth –
I and the other Buddhas of the universe.

You should beget great strength of faith,
For now, after the Buddha's preparatory teaching
He is proclaiming the final Truth.
My Dharma is subtle and beyond the rational mind.

Those who are haughty
On hearing will not believe it respectfully.'

When he had spoken, some five thousand monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, straightway rose from their seats and withdrew. Why? Because their proud spirit was so enlarged that they imagined they had attained what they had not attained, and that they knew what they did not know. The Buddha was silent and did not stop them.

'Now this gathering is free from useless twigs and leaves, and is left with those that are true and real. It is good that such extremely proud ones as those are gone away. Now carefully listen and I will explain the matter further for you.'

The Buddhas dwelling in innumerable Buddha-lands throughout the universe, who are so greatly benefiting and rejoicing all living beings, knowing that beings have many kinds of desires deeply embedded in their minds, expound the Dharma by infinite numbers of skilful means, using various reasonings and parabolic expressions. But all these teachings are the One Buddha-vehicle, taught so that all beings can finally obtain perfect knowledge. In the whole universe there are not two vehicles, how much less a third.

Monks and nuns
Obsessed by arrogance,
Laymen filled with self-conceit,
Laywomen filled with lack of faith,
Not seeing their own faults
Carefully guarding their own flaws,
Such small wit they showed.
These dregs of the assembly
Cannot hear the Truth.

Listen carefully
To the teachings of the Buddhas,
Which by infinite numbers of skilful means,
They expound appropriately for all creatures,
Knowing the minds of all of them,
Knowing how they live and act,
Knowing their different desires,
Knowing their past karmas, good and evil,
They teach with various reasonings and parables,
By analytic arguments and precise terms,
By metaphors and analogies,
Causing them all to make progress joyfully,
Teaching some through discourses,
Or poems, or tales of former times,
By miracles and wonders,
And also by close reasoning,
By parables and fables,
And by intellectual commentaries.

The Buddhas know that nothing has an independent existence.
Having seen this from the Wisdom Throne,
They proclaim it through skilful means.

I, sitting on the Wisdom Throne,
Seeing with the Buddha Eye,
Saw the creatures in the six states of existence,
Unhappy and deluded,
In the dangerous path of death,
Afflicted and maddened by suffering,
Fettered by the five defilements
Smothered by desire and dislike,
Blinded and seeing nothing,
Not seeking the Buddha, the mighty,
Or the Dharma to end their sufferings,
But while blindly trying to escape suffering
Blundering into unskilful action,
Creating ever more suffering.
For the sake of all these creatures,
My heart was moved with great compassion.

When I first sat on the Wisdom Throne, I thought:
'The wisdom I have obtained
Is wonderful and transcendental.
But beings are dull in mind,
Attached to pleasure and blind with ignorance.
Such beings as these,
How can they be saved?'

Then I thought to myself:
If I teach the one true Buddha-vehicle,
These beings, sunk in suffering,
Will not be able to hear or accept this Truth,
And will fall into the evil paths.
I had rather not teach the Dharma,
But instantly enter Nirvana.'

Then the great god Brahma
And all the other heavenly beings,
With hundreds of thousands of myriads of followers,
Respectfully saluted with folded hands,
Begging me to roll the wheel of the Dharma.

And I remembered what former buddhas
Had done for beings by their skilful means,
I thought: 'The Way that I have now attained
I must teach as the three-vehicle teaching.'

As I thought this,
All the Buddhas in the universe appeared to me
And, with their one sacred voice, cheered me to the echo
Saying 'Excellent! Excellent! Sakyamuni!
Having attained this transcendental Truth,
You are following all the Buddhas before you.'

Those of little wisdom take delight
In petty rules and narrow teachings
Not believing that they can become buddhas,
Hence we use skilful means
To help deluded ones develop.'

Hearing the voices of the Holy Lions,
Profoundly clear and transcendental,
I saluted them, and thought:
'Having manifested in this disturbed and evil world,
I will obey and follow the Buddhas before me.'

I instantly went to Varanasi,
And used skilful means to teach the five ascetics
About the inexpressible mystery –
The nirvana-nature of all existence.
This was the first rolling of the wheel of the Dharma,
From which arose the separate names
Of Nirvana, of Arhat, and of Dharma and Sangha.

The self-sufficient and self-inflated,
Suspicious, crooked, and faithless in mind,
Those of little wit,
Those tied to externals
And the proud
They cannot hear the real Truth.
Folk such as these are hard to save.

For this reason
I set up a skilful means for them,
Teaching the way to end sufferings,
And attain to Nirvana.
But Nirvana is not real.
All existence, from the beginning,
Has always been of the Nirvana-nature.
Now let all in this great assembly
Be free from doubts and perplexities.
The diverse Dharmas taught by the Buddhas
Seem different, but contain no contradictions:
There is only One, and no second vehicle.

In the past countless ages
Innumerable past Buddhas,
Whose numbers cannot be counted,
With various reasonings and parables
And innumerable skilful means
Have proclaimed the various Dharmas.
But all taught the One vehicle, the Ekayana,
Causing numberless creatures
To enter the Buddha-way.

And though the Buddhas in future ages
Proclaim countless schools of doctrine,
In reality they are but the One vehicle,
The Ekayana, the Buddhayana.

I, with my shining body,
Illuminate the world,
And am worshipped by countless multitudes,
For whom I teach the seal of reality.

Long ago I made a vow,
To cause all creatures
To rank equally with me.
Now the conditions have been fulfilled
For me to convert all living beings
And lead them to enter the Buddha-way.

Any beings who, after hearing the Dharma,
Have lived generously,
Have kept the precepts, and practised patience,
Been energetic, steeped themselves in meditation
And developed wisdom,
Having kept to these paths of happiness and virtue,
Such beings as these
Have all attained the Buddha-way.

Those who have built stupas or shrines,
Those who have erected or painted images
Or paid for others to do so,
Those who have decorated them with precious things,
All beings such as these
Have attained the Buddha-way.

Even children in their play
Who with reed, twig, or pen
Have drawn Buddha images,
All these, gradually accumulating merit
And perfecting hearts of compassion,
Have attained the Buddha-way.

If folk have paid homage with respectful hearts
To the stupas and shrines,
To the precious images and paintings,
With flowers, incense, and flags,
Beaten drums or blown horns
Or with joyful hearts
Sung of the Buddhas' merits
Even in just a low voice,
These too have attained the Buddha-way.

Even anyone who, with distracted mind,
Has offered just a single flower
Or shown faith and respect
By folding their hands in reverence
Or just by slightly bowing their head
Or even just once
Chanted 'Namo Buddhaya'
They in good time
Shall see countless Buddhas
Enter the Great Way
Bring countless beings to liberation
And pass into the Perfect Nirvana.

Of those who hear the Dharma
Not one fails to become a Buddha.
This is the original vow of the Buddhas:
'By the Buddha-way which I walk,
I will cause all creatures
To walk the Way beside me.'

Know that all who are in my lineage
Seeking the Buddha-way with reverent hearts,
They have already heard the Dharma
From the Buddhas of the past.

You bodhisattvas hearing this Dharma,
Having untangled yourselves from the net of doubt,
You twelve hundred Arhats
Will all become Buddhas.

So those who, hearing the Dharma,
Respond with delight and joy
Know that this response of faith
Shows that you are in my lineage
And have already paid homage
To Buddhas in former lives.

So have no further doubts,
Rejoice greatly in your hearts,
Knowing that you will become buddhas.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. According to the sutra, only the Buddhas can see the truth about the nature of reality, so that no description of reality can ever be completely true, and we must always be ready to let go of our present understanding. Do you find this idea inspiring, or depressing?
2. Have you ever been tempted to walk out – speaking metaphorically – when your current understanding of the Dharma was challenged by a new perspective?
3. Has your understanding of the essential goal and nature of the Dharma changed since the time you first got involved? Can you look back at any ‘skilful means’ that were helpful at the time, but which you have now left behind?
4. The sutra tells us that if we respond to hearing the Dharma with “delight and joy” this faith response shows that we have practised the Dharma in former lives, and that we are destined for Buddhahood. What was your response when you first came across the Dharma? Do you ever still experience a similar response?
5. The parable of the magic city seems to imply that we need to have goals in the spiritual life which we can imagine achieving within a reasonable time-span. Do you have such an intermediate goal? If so, what is it? If not, can you think of an achievable goal that would give cutting edge to your practice?

Reading

Chapter 3 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Which “toys” keep you in the burning house?
2. Sangharakshita refers to “the call of the divine”. What form has that call taken for you?
3. When do you hear this call most clearly?
4. What circumstances most drown out this call?
5. What sort of “vehicle” might attract you out of the burning house? Which aspects of the Dharma fascinate you enough to compete with worldly concerns?

Alternatively, how might you connect what fascinates you with your practice of the Dharma?

6. What forms of escapism – as opposed to genuine escape – do you indulge in?

Reading

Chapter 4 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*.

Preparation

Be prepared to re-tell the parable of the rich man and his son in your own words.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Does *The Hymn of the Pearl* have any resonance for you? Do you ever have a sense that you need to wake up from a drugged sleep and remember what you are really here for? Do you ever have a sense that your true home is elsewhere?
2. Have you come across any other variants of the myth of the return journey?
3. Do you have a sense of having a “higher self”, from which you are usually alienated? Are there any dangers in thinking we have such a “higher self”?
4. Why might the son have been frightened when he first saw his father? Have you ever wanted to run away from the spiritual life? Why?
5. The son’s first task is to shift piles of dirt. What might this represent for you? Are there habits or patterns that might correspond to these piles of dirt?
6. Do you feel that you just visit “the palace” – states of beauty and richness – while living somewhere else? How much of your time is spent “in the palace”, and how much outside it? How could you spend more time in the palace?

Reading

Chapter 5 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. In the verse version of the Parable of the Herbs included in Sangharakshita's commentary, we hear the Buddha say, "Ever to all beings/I preach the Law [Dharma] equally". What might this mean, and how can it be true?
2. Which metaphor for the spiritual life do you most relate to: the growth of a plant, the path or journey, or some other? Why?
3. Can you see a down-side to your chosen metaphor?
4. *"The Buddha's teaching is not to be identified with any one formulation."*
Might this statement be dangerous if taken in the wrong way? Why?
5. Sangharakshita tells us that "we each become more different from one another as we grow and develop, at the same time we also become more like one another: more aware, more sensitive, more compassionate; in a word, more alive". Does this fit with your experience? Think of two Order members you know: in what ways are they different, and in what ways are they similar?
6. *"It might be better ... to present the higher evolution of man not in conventional religious terms at all, but in secular terms."*
What might be the down-side of presenting the Dharma in secular terms?

Exercise

Find images of stupas (including variants such as pagodas) from as many different traditions of Buddhism as you can, and bring these to share with the group.

Reading

1. Chapter 6 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*.
2. The following abridged selection from the *White Lotus Sutra*.

The White Lotus Sutra – ‘The Central Revelation’, Part 1

Abridged and slightly adapted by Vadanya, from the translation of Bunno, Kato et al, 1975.

Chapter 11 – Beholding the Precious Stupa

At that time in front of the Buddha a stupa of the seven precious things, five hundred yojanas in height and two hundred and fifty yojanas in length and breadth, sprang up from the earth and appeared in the sky. It was decorated with countless streamers and all kinds of precious things, splendidly adorned with five thousand parapets, with thousands of myriads of recesses, and countless banners and flags; hung with jewel garlands, with myriads of kotis of gem bells suspended on it; on every side exhaling the fragrance of sandalwood, so that this filled the whole world. The thirty-three gods, raining celestial mandarava flowers, paid homage to the precious stupa. Other gods, nagas, yakshas, gandharvas, asuras, garudas, human and nonhuman beings, all these thousand myriad kotis of beings, paid homage to the stupa with flowers, perfumes, garlands, streamers, canopies, and music, revering and honouring it. Then from inside the precious stupa there came a loud voice, saying: ‘Excellent! Excellent! World-honoured Sakyamuni! This wonderful Sutra of the flower of universal great wisdom is the way bodhisattvas are instructed, and is guarded and minded by all the Buddhas. So is it, so is it, World-honoured, Sakyamuni! All that you say is true.’

Then the Buddha told the assembly: Long in the past, innumerable thousands of myriads of kotis of worlds away in the east, there was a world system named Jewel Clear, and in that world system there was a Buddha called Abundant Treasures. When that Buddha was treading the bodhisattva-way, he made a great vow, saying, ‘After I become a Buddha and enter final Nirvana, if in any country in the universe there is a place where the Lotus of the True Dharma is taught, my stupa shall arise and appear there, so that I may listen to that sutra, bear testimony to it, and praise it, saying: ‘Excellent!’ It is because just now the Tathagata Abundant Treasures heard the Lotus of the True Dharma that his stupa sprang up from the earth.’

Then the Buddha announced, I must now assemble the buddhas who have emanated from me and are teaching the Dharma in the ten directions. Then he sent forth a ray of light from the

circle of white hair between his eyebrows, whereupon eastward there became visible all the buddhas in five hundred myriad of kotis of world systems, numerous as the sands of the Ganges. All those domains had crystal for earth, and jewel trees and precious cloth for adornment, were filled with countless thousand myriad kotis of bodhisattvas, had jewelled canopies stretched above them, and were covered with networks of jewels. All the buddhas in those domains were preaching the Dharma with ravishing voices. And innumerable thousand myriad kotis of bodhisattvas were also seen, filling those domains, and teaching the multitude. So too was it in the southern, western, and northern quarters, in the four intermediate directions, in the zenith and the nadir, wherever shone the ray from between the Buddha's eyebrows. Then the buddhas in all directions each addressed the host of his bodhisattvas, saying: 'Good sons! We must now go to Sakyamuni Buddha in the Saha-world and pay homage to the Precious Stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures.'

Thereupon this Saha-world instantly became pure, with lapis lazuli for earth, adorned with jewel trees, with cords made of gold marking the boundaries of its eight divisions, smoking with precious incense, its ground strewn with mandarava flowers, spread with precious nets and drapes, and hung with bells. Then those buddhas, each bringing a great bodhisattva as his attendant, arrived at the Saha-world, and each went to the foot of a jewel tree. Each of the jewel trees was five hundred yojanas high, adorned with boughs, leaves, blossoms, and fruit; under all those jewel trees there were lion thrones five yojanas high, decorated with magnificent jewels. Then each of those buddhas sat cross-legged on those thrones.

Thus all around him the three-thousand-great-thousandfold world was filled with buddhas, though as yet the bodies which had emanated from Sakyamuni Buddha had not finished arriving. Then Sakyamuni Buddha, desiring to make room for the buddhas who were still arriving, in each of the eight directions of space transformed two hundred myriad kotis of world systems, all of them pure, without hells, hungry ghosts, animals, and asuras. The domains thus transformed also were ornate with jewel trees five hundred yojanas high; under every tree was a jewelled lion throne five yojanas high, decorated with all kinds of gems; the jewelled ground was even and smooth, made of lapis lazuli; everywhere jewel-decked awnings were spread and streamers and canopies hung, while most precious incense was burning, and precious celestial flowers everywhere covered the ground.

Then the bodies which had emanated eastward from Sakyamuni, the buddhas who were each teaching the Dharma in a hundred thousand myriad kotis of world systems to the East, numerous as the sands of the Ganges, arrived and assembled. In the same way in turn the buddhas from all the ten directions all arrived and assembled and took their seats in the eight directions, so that each direction was filled with buddhas.

Then Sakyamuni Buddha, beholding all the buddhas who had emanated from him assembled together, all seated on lion thrones, and hearing that those buddhas all desired the Precious Stupa to be opened, straightway rose up from his throne and abode in the sky.

Then all the assembly stood up, folded their hands, and with all their mind gazed at the Buddha. Thereupon Sakyamuni Buddha opened the door of the Stupa, so that there went forth a great sound, like the withdrawing of the bolt on opening a great city gate. Thereupon all the congregation saw the Buddha Abundant Treasures sitting on the lion throne in the Precious Stupa, with his uncorrupted body whole and as if he were in meditation. And they heard him saying: 'Excellent! Excellent! Sakyamuni Buddha! Teach this Dharma-Flower Sutra. I have come here in order to hear this sutra.'

Then the four groups, seeing the buddha who had passed away and entered final Nirvana immeasurable thousands of myriad of kotis of kalpas ago, praised this unprecedented marvel and strewed heaps of celestial jewel flowers on the Buddha Abundant Treasures and on Sakyamuni Buddha. Thereupon the Buddha Abundant Treasures within the Precious Stupa shared half his throne with Sakyamuni Buddha, saying: 'Sakyamuni Buddha! Take this seat!' Whereon Sakyamuni Buddha entered the stupa and, sitting down on that half throne, folded his legs. Then Sakyamuni Buddha, by his transcendent powers, raised all the great assembly up into the sky, and with a great voice universally addressed the four groups, saying: 'Who here is able to spread abroad the Wonderful Lotus of the True Dharma in this Saha-world? Now indeed is the time. The Buddha desires to bequeath this Wonderful Dharma-Flower Sutra so that it may exist forever.'

Chapter 15 – Springing up out of the Earth

When the Buddha had thus spoken, all the earth of the three-thousand-great-thousandfold land of the Saha-world trembled and quaked, and from its midst there issued innumerable thousands of myriads of kotis of bodhisattva-mahasattvas. All these bodhisattvas with their golden-hued bodies and boundless radiance had all before been dwelling in infinite space below this Saha-world. Each one of these bodhisattvas was the leader of a great host, leading a retinue as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges rivers. The number of these bodhisattvas was immeasurable, illimitable, beyond the powers of comprehension by calculation or comparison.

When these infinite numbers of bodhisattvas had emerged from the earth, each went to the wonderful Stupa of the Precious Seven in the sky, where the Buddha Abundant Treasures and Sakyamuni Buddha were seated, and made obeisance, with faces to the ground, to the two Buddhas. Then they also saluted all the buddhas seated on lion thrones under the jewel trees, three times making procession round them on their right, with folded hands revering them, and praising them with all kinds of bodhisattva songs. Then they stood to one side, with delight gazing upon both the two Buddhas in the stupa.

As these bodhisattva-mahasattvas issued from the earth and extolled the buddhas with all kinds of bodhisattva songs, fifty minor ages passed. During all this time Sakyamuni Buddha sat in silence, and silent also was the assembly; but the fifty kalpas, through the divine power of the Buddha, seemed to the great multitude like just half a day.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is your response to the cosmic imagery of the sutra? What effect does it have (if any)?
2. *"The stupa is sometimes considered to be the most important of Buddhist symbols."*
Does the stupa have symbolic resonance for you? If so, what does it evoke? Do the different forms that the stupa takes in different traditions evoke different responses? (See the exercise suggested earlier.)
3. Are there other Buddhist symbols that you particularly relate to?
4. Setting aside Sangharakshita's symbolic association of the different elements with different levels of spiritual development, which element evokes the strongest response in you? (You

could ask yourself, which do I find most beautiful and evocative: the natural forms of the earth, the sea and other bodies of water, the atmosphere and weather, the blue sky of space, or the light and heat of fire.)

5. *“When Sakyamuni, the Buddha of the present, takes his seat by the side of the eternal Buddha, Abundant Treasures, the dimensions of time and eternity coalesce.”*

What does this mean? Can you express it in your own words?

Reading

Chapter 7 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Does mantra form part of your practice? If so, can you describe the effects that it has?
2. Sangharakshita says both: “Mantras are phrases used to invoke dormant spiritual forces within our own minds” and “When you recite a mantra, you set up vibrations to which Reality starts responding.” The first of these statements tells us that the “forces” invoked are within us, while the second implies they are outside us, and part of a greater “Reality”. Do you believe that mantras invoke such “forces”? If so, which of these two ways of explaining the effects of mantra do you incline towards? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
3. In what ways is the parable of the drunkard and the jewel similar to the story of the rich man and his son we explored in week 4 of this module? In what ways do the two stories differ? Which seems to you to give a more accurate description of the spiritual life?
4. What would *your* idea of a Pure Land be?
5. In talking about the parable of the drunkard and the jewel, Sangharakshita talks about two different ways of practising the Dharma, the sudden method and the gradual method. From your experience of practice within the Triratna Buddhist Community, do you think he sees these two methods as equally valid? Do you?
6. Sangharakshita tells us that “in its depth the universe is based on a principle that is ultimately spiritual”. Has your education and conditioning inclined you to see the universe in this way? If not, how does this influence your approach to practice?

Reading

1. Chapter 8 of *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*.
2. The following abridged selection from *The White Lotus Sutra*. This follows on from the extract looked at in week 5, which culminated in an inconceivable host of Bodhisattvas appearing in our Saha-world from all over the universe.

The White Lotus Sutra – ‘The Central Revelation’, Part 2

Abridged and slightly adapted by Vadanya, from the translation of Bunno, Kato et al, 1975.

Chapter 15 – Springing up out of the Earth (continued)

Then Maitreya Bodhisattva, being aware of the thoughts in the minds of the assembly, folded his hands toward the Buddha and asked him thus in verse:

This great host of bodhisattvas,
Are such as we have never seen before.
Be pleased to explain, Honoured of Men,
From what places they have come,
For what reason they have assembled.

Then the World-honoured One spoke thus in verse:

Be zealous and of one mind.
Have no doubts or unquiet thoughts.
Inconceivable is the Buddha-wisdom.
So exert your faith;
Be steadfast in the virtue of patience;
For the Dharma never heard before,
Now you all are about to hear.
Have no doubt or fear,
The Buddha has no words but the true;
His wisdom is beyond measure.
The supreme Dharma he has realised
Is deep and beyond the discursive mind.
Let me now teach this Dharma,
And all of you, with one mind, listen.

You should know
That all these great bodhisattvas,

From numberless past ages,
 Are all my converts and disciples,
 Who I have caused to want the Great Way.
 These are my sons
 Ever practising the deeds of those who spread the Dharma,
 They dwell in space
 Beneath the Saha-world.
 Firm in their power of will,
 Firm in their purpose,
 Ever diligently seeking wisdom,
 They teach all kinds of wonderful Dharmas.
 I, sitting beneath the Bodhi tree,
 And rolling the Wheel of the Dharma
 I converted and taught them all,
 And caused them first to aspire to the Way.
 I from the long distant past
 Have instructed all this host.

Then the host were seized with doubt and perplexity, wondering at this rare thing, and reflected thus: 'How has the World-honoured One, in so short a time, instructed such innumerable, countless great bodhisattvas?' Then, addressing the Buddha, they said: 'World-honoured One! The Tathagata, when he was a prince, left the Sakya palace and not far from the city of Gaya took his seat on the throne of wisdom, and attained to Perfect Enlightenment. From that time but forty years have passed. World-honoured One! In so short a time how have you taught such an innumerable host of great bodhisattvas to attain Perfect Enlightenment? World-honoured One! All these from the far past under innumerable and countless buddhas have planted their roots of merit and accomplished the bodhisattva-way, constantly living the noble life. World-honoured one! Such a matter as this the world will find it hard to believe. It is just as if there were a man of fine complexion and black hair, twenty-five years old, who pointed to centenarians and said, "These are my sons." This is hard of belief. Be pleased to explain it, removing our doubts.'

Chapter 16 – Revelation of the Eternal Life of the Tathagata

Then the World-Honoured One spoke thus in verse

Since I attained buddhahood,
 The kalpas through which I have passed
 Are infinite thousands of myriads
 Of countless kotis of years.
 Ceaselessly I spread the Dharma
 And teach countless kotis of creatures
 To enter the Way of the Buddha.

In order to save all beings,
 As a skilful means I talk about nirvana,
 But I never enter final nirvana
 I remain forever in this world,
 Forever teaching the Dharma,
 Using all my spiritual powers,
 To communicate to beings,
 Although the unskilful among them,

Though I am near, yet cannot to see me.

When beings have faith,
In character upright,
In mind gentle,
Wholeheartedly wishing to see the Buddha,
Then I with all the Sangha
Appear on Vulture's Peak

If in other regions there are other beings
Reverent and with aspiring faith,
Then I am also with them
To teach the supreme Dharma.

You, not knowing this,
Think I am dead and vanished.
But I see all living beings
Sunk in the sea of suffering,
I set them all aspiring,
Till, when their hearts are filled with longing,
I appear to them to teach the Dharma.

With my supernaturally pervading power,
Throughout countless ages
I am always on Vulture's Peak
And in every other place.

When all the living see, at the kalpa's end,
The conflagration burning,
My Pure Land is eternal and tranquil,
Filled with heavenly beings,
With many parks and palaces,
With precious trees full of blossom and fruits,
Where beings take their pleasure;
And gods evermore make music,
Showering mandarava flowers
On the Buddha and his great assembly.

My Pure Land will never be destroyed,
Yet beings see it as burning,
And grief and horror and distress
Fill them all.
All those creatures,
By reason of their evil karma,
Throughout countless ages,
Do not even hear the name of the Three Jewels.

But those who do virtuous deeds
Who are gentle and upright,
These all see that I exist
And am always here

Chapter 21 – The Divine Power of the Tathagata

Then the World-honoured one, by his great divine power, put forth his broad and far-stretched tongue till it reached upward to the Brahma world, every pore radiating light of infinite colours, shining everywhere throughout all directions of the universe. Under all the jewel trees the buddhas, each seated on a lion throne, also in like manner put forth their broad and far-stretched tongues, radiating infinite light.

Meanwhile hundreds of thousands of years passed. Then they drew back their tongues, coughed simultaneously, and snapped their fingers in unison. These sounds reached through every direction to all their buddha worlds, and all their lands were shaken in six ways. Then all living beings in all the worlds of the universe, by reason of the divine power of the Buddha, all saw the infinite, boundless buddhas, seated on lion thrones under jewel trees, and saw Sakyamuni Buddha and the Buddha Abundant Treasures seated in the stupa, saw the infinite numbers of bodhisattva-mahasattvas, saw the four groups who reverently surrounded Sakyamuni Buddha. Beholding this they were all greatly delighted, experiencing what they had never experienced before. At the same time all the gods in the sky sang with exalted voices: 'Beyond these infinite, boundless hundreds of thousands of myriads of worlds, there is a realm named Saha. In its midst is a buddha, whose name is Sakyamuni. Now, for the sake of all bodhisattvas, he preaches the Great-vehicle Sutra called the Lotus Flower of the True Dharma, the Dharma by which bodhisattvas are instructed, and which the buddhas watch over and keep in mind. You should with all your utmost heart joyfully follow it, and pay homage and make offerings to Sakyamuni Buddha.'

All those beings, after hearing this voice in the sky, folded their hands toward the Saha-world and thus exclaimed: 'Namo Sakyamuni Buddha! Namo Sakyamuni Buddha!' Then they all from afar strewed the Saha-world with flowers, incense, garlands, canopies, ornaments, and gems, so that the things so strewn from every quarter towered up like great gathering storm clouds, and then transformed into a jewelled canopy, which covered the whole world and all world systems, so that all the worlds of the universe were united into one buddha-land.

Chapter 22 – The Final Commission

Then Sakyamuni Buddha rose from his Dharma seat and laid his right hand on the heads of the infinite numbers of bodhisattva-mahasattvas, and said, 'I, for incalculable hundreds of thousands of myriads of kotis of ages, have practised this rare Dharma of Perfect Enlightenment. Now I entrust it to you. Wholeheartedly spread this Dharma, and make it increase and prosper far and wide.'

In the same way three times he laid his hand upon the heads of the bodhisattva-mahasattvas, saying, 'Now I entrust this Dharma to you. Receive and keep it, read and recite it, and proclaim this Dharma abroad so that all living beings universally may hear and know it. Why? The Buddha is most benevolent and compassionate, not mean and stingy, and is able fearlessly to give the Buddha-wisdom, the Tathagata-wisdom, the Self-existent wisdom, to all living beings. The Tathagata is the great lord of giving, he is the great generous donor to all living beings. You also should follow and learn the Buddha's example, not being mean and stingy. If good sons or good daughters in ages to come believe in the Buddha-wisdom, then proclaim this Dharma-Flower Sutra to them, so that they may hear and know it, so that that they may obtain the Buddha-wisdom. If there be living beings who do not have the faith to receive the teaching of this sutra, then show, teach, help, and gladden them with the other skilful teachings of the Buddha. If you are able to act like this, then you will have repaid the grace of the buddhas.'

Then all the bodhisattva-mahasattvas, having heard the Buddha give this address, were all filled with great joy, and paid him added reverence, bowing themselves, bending their heads, and with folded hands saluting the Buddha, crying with one voice, 'Yes! We will do all as the World-honoured One has commanded. Three times in this way the whole host of bodhisattva-mahasattvas cried with one voice, 'We will do as the World-honoured One has commanded. Yes! World-honoured One!'

Then Sakyamuni Buddha caused all the emanated buddhas who had come from all directions each to return to his own land saying, 'Let the stupa of the Buddha Abundant Treasures go back to where it came from.' Then all the assembly, and all the worlds of gods, men, and asuras, all rejoiced greatly.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Do you relate to the idea of the Dharma as medicine for our psychological and spiritual sickness? Might there be limitations of this approach? Might there be dangers?
2. In the Sutra we hear the Buddha say, "I remain forever in this world/Forever teaching the Dharma". Setting aside any question of whether you can explain this statement according to your present mental model of the world, can you relate it to your actual experience?
3. Do you relate more to the Buddha as a historical figure limited in time and space, or as an eternal principle that we can still have contact with, here and now?
4. What are the advantages of each of these two ways of seeing the Buddha? What are the disadvantages?
5. In his commentary, Sangharakshita tells us that the meaning of the parable of the good physician is that "we are most likely to develop when we realise that we are on our own". Yet in the sutra extract, the Buddha makes a point of telling the assembly that he is always present – in effect, that we are not alone. What do you make of this apparent paradox? Do you think we are most likely to develop when we think we are on our own, or when we think that there are higher powers that can help us?

PART 1: SKILFUL MEANS (CHAPTERS 1 THROUGH 10)

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This chapter sets the scene. The Buddha is on Vulture's Peak in the midst of a great assembly of all sorts of beings, including humans, advanced bodhisattvas, nagas, gods, and mythical beings. He sends out a beam of light from between his eyebrows which illuminates the entire universe in all directions, revealing countless other world systems. Manjusri says that this is a momentous sign, meaning that he is now ready to reveal the true, final, perfect truth.

Chapter 2 – Skilful Means

This is the big chapter of the first part of the Sutra. It introduces the main ideas in conceptual form; these are then developed and expanded in the next 7 chapters, mainly through parables. The main themes introduced are:

- Skilful means (upaya – called 'tactfulness' in Bunno): All teachings are skilful means. All the teachings of all schools of Buddhism are provisional truths, designed to help beings progress; they must not be understood as revealing ultimate truth. The real truth is quite beyond us, and only the Buddhas can know it.
- One Vehicle (ekayana): The apparent differences between the teachings of the different vehicles come from their provisional nature. Actually all the teachings lead in the same direction, towards Buddhahood. All other goals, like becoming an arhat or a bodhisattva, are illusory, belonging to the realm of provisional truth.
- Primacy of faith: Because nobody but the buddhas can experience the real truth, the closest we can get to it is faith. On the other hand, if we think we understand the truth intellectually, we come unstuck – the spiritual arrogance that thinks it already knows the truth is the worst hindrance.

While the Buddha is revealing all this, 5,000 Hinayanists walk out, because they will not accept that the teachings they follow are not the ultimate truth, but a skilful means.

Chapters 3–10

Parables

The most memorable parts of these chapters are the parables, which illustrate the themes introduced in Chapter 2, and also take us into some new territory

- Chapter 3: The Parable of the Burning House
- Chapter 4: The Parable of the Lost Son (or Return Journey)
- Chapter 5: The Parable of the Herbs

- Chapter 7: The Parable of the Magic City
- Chapter 8: The Parable of the Drunkard and the Jewel

Predictions

Over and over again in these chapters, and also in Part 2, the Buddha predicts that people will become buddhas in the future Enlightenment: dried-up Hinayana monks will become buddhas; women (of whom dried-up Hinayana monks take a dim view) will become buddhas, even evildoers like Devadatta will become buddhas.

Chapter 10 – ‘A Teacher of the Dharma’

This chapter introduces a new theme that carries on into Part 2: spreading the Dharma as an important part of spiritual practice. The chapter touches on the importance of teaching, how to teach, and the benefits of teaching.

PART 2 – THE ETERNAL BUDDHA

Chapters 11 through 22

The Central Revelation

Six chapters make up the central sequence of Part 2. These are:

- Chapter 11: Beholding the Precious Stupa
- Chapter 15: Springing up out of the Earth
- Chapter 16: Revelation of the Eternal Life of the Tathagata
- Chapter 17: Discrimination of Merits
- Chapter 21: The Divine Power of the Tathagata
- Chapter 22: The Final Commission

These present what Sangharakshita calls the ‘Central Revelation’: ‘Herein Sakyamuni reveals himself as being, *sub specie aeternitas*, the Eternal Buddha; or rather the Eternal Buddha reveals himself as Sakyamuni and all the other Buddhas, who are not independent entities, but the various guises under which the Supreme Reality appears in different places and in different ages.’ (*The Eternal Legacy*, p.123).

Briefly, the action unfolds as follows. A huge and glorious stupa appears containing the Buddha Abundant Treasures, who passed away many ages ago. From within his stupa he praises Sakyamuni and the teaching of the White Lotus Sutra. He has sworn that wherever the Sutra is being taught his stupa will appear. He will reveal his unchanged body if Sakyamuni gathers all his emanations. Sakyamuni illuminates myriad Buddha lands in all directions, each with its Buddha. These Buddhas all respond to Sakyamuni’s summons, and he turns our world into a Pure Land, and also creates a host of other Pure Lands to accommodate them. Sakyamuni then ascends into the air to the height at which Abundant Treasures sits in his stupa, opens it, and joins him on his throne. (Ch. 11)

Then innumerable Bodhisattvas appear out of the ground. They say they have been following the path for vast ages, and Sakyamuni was their teacher (Ch. 15). The doubters wonder how this is possible, considering that Sakyamuni only became Enlightened forty years ago. At which point Sakyamuni reveals that he has existed for countless ages, and he did not really pass away. In reality he is constantly teaching the Dharma, in all times and all places, and he appears wherever and whenever anyone has faith in him.

All the assembled Buddhas and Bodhisattvas then together vow to spread this Truth throughout the universe. Sakyamuni illuminates the universe, and all the Buddhas perform a number of actions in unison, indicating their indivisible nature, and their commitment to the same goal of developing all beings (Ch. 21). Finally Sakyamuni puts his hand on the heads of all the Bodhisattvas at once, and tells them to join him in his work of spreading the Dharma to all beings, using either the Lotus of the Real Truth, or whatever other skilful means they need. They all cry 'Yeah' with a united voice, and vanish back to where they came from, leaving the original assembly astounded and overwhelmed with joy. This is the logical end of the Sutra.

Other Chapters of Part 2

The other chapters of Part 2 seem to interrupt the main sequence of events. They mainly deal with a set of related themes: the merits of hearing the Sutra, the merits of a faith-response to it, and spreading the Dharma as a spiritual practice, which aligns us with the action of the Eternal Buddha, and therefore transforms us. Chapters dealing with these themes are Chapter 13: 'Exhortation to Hold Firm', Chapter 14: 'A Happy Life', Chapter 18: 'The Merits of Joyful Acceptance', and Chapter 19: 'The Merits of the Preacher'.

Other chapters in Part 2 dealing with different themes are as follows.

Chapter 12 – Devadatta

The Buddha reveals that the evil Devadatta was his teacher in a former life, without whom he could not have become Enlightened. Devadatta too will become a Buddha. There then follows an episode involving a Naga Princess, which symbolises the power of faith.

Chapter 20 – The Bodhisattva Never Despise

The Buddha in a former life was the Bodhisattva Never Despise, who took as his main practice revering others because they would all become Buddhas in the future, and never looking down on them even when they were very nasty to him because of his reverential pestering.

PART 3 – EXTRANEOUS MATERIAL

In *The Eternal Legacy* Sangharakshita describes the six chapters that follow Chapter 22 as 'patently extraneous' (although he devotes two of his lectures to them.) They are interesting but they do not form part of the structure of the Sutra.

Note

All chapter numbers and most headings in this summary are from Bunno, Kato, et al's translation, which is from Kumarajiva's translation from the Chinese.

Reference Materials

The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. You can also listen to the original lectures online.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-drama-of-cosmic-enlightenment-ebook/>

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X12>

Seminar on *The White Lotus Sutra*, Sangharakshita.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/read?num=SEM141&at=text&q=white+lotus+sutra>

The Threefold Lotus Sutra, Translated by Bunno Kato.

<http://www.rk-world.org/publications/ThreefoldLotusSutra.pdf>

The Eternal Legacy by Sangharakshita, ISBN 1899579583, gives a thorough and coherent overview of all the different types of Buddhist texts, including the White Lotus Sutra.

http://windhorsepublications.com/the_eternal_legacy

3.7

Faith, Symbols and the Imagination



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Module compiled by Vadanya

In this module of the Dharma Training Course we will be entering a very different world from the everyday realm of our commonsense ideas and our surface sensory experience of the world. We will be exploring the world of *śraddhā*, imagination, archetypal symbols, and myth – related topics that open up a deeper vision of reality, and a different approach to our search for truth and meaning. In the words of Sangharakshita:

We may say that there are two kinds of truth. There's first of all what we call scientific truth – the truth of concepts, the truth of reasoning - but in addition to this, and some would say even above this, there is what we may call poetic truth, or truth of the imagination, and this is the truth of images, truth of the intuition. And both are at least equally important. And the second, the latter kind of truth, the truth of the image, the truth of poetry, truth of the imagination, the intuition, this is manifested or revealed in what we call myths and legends, as well as in works of art, in symbolic ritual, and also quite importantly, in dreams.

- *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, p.40.

Approach

To enter this world of symbols, images, poetry and myth, and to hear the quiet voice of our *śraddhā*, we sometimes need to give our wordy, critical mind a holiday. We will sometimes be requiring our intellect to work hard in this module, but we are entering a world where language is strained to its limits. You need to approach everything that will be said in this module as metaphor, as allusion to something which cannot be fully explained or worked out with the intellect. You will be approaching this material in the wrong spirit if you take it literally, if you try to turn it into a metaphysical system, or if – having done either of these things – you use the wordy intellect to look for logical inconsistencies, rather than relying on your own actual experience. In this world, experience is king, and what is important is what you feel when you do a *pūjā*, hear a story, or quietly contemplate the image of a Buddha or Bodhisattva - and not what you think you logically should experience.

Much of this module will consist of practical exercises that you need to actually do, and not just think about or talk about. If you do not do the practices, but just read and think about the words of the material, you will be missing the point. (Of course the whole spiritual life is like that.) In order to do the practices you are asked to take on in this module, you will need to read the material for each week with plenty of time to spare before the session, ideally giving yourself at least a week to think about what you are asked to think about, and to do what you are asked to do.

Structure of the module

The course is structured as follows over eight week (with an optional ninth week):

1. *The life and qualities of the Buddha.*
Discussion referring back to two texts from *Year 1*, plus an optional pūjā depending on time.
2. *Mindfulness of the Buddha and his qualities.*
A session based on experiential exercises done over the preceding week, plus an optional pūjā depending on time.
3. *The language of images.*
Experiential exercises based on an image of Śākyamuni, plus presentations about images that have meaning to the members of the group.
4. *Śraddhā.*
Discussion of a purpose-written text.
5. *Exploring lucid faith.*
A session based on experiential exercises done over the preceding week, plus pūjā with purpose-created offerings.
6. *The place of faith in the Buddhist tradition.*
Discussion of a purpose-written text, plus *śraddhā-bhāvanā* meditation.
7. *Imagination and the spiritual life.*
Discussion of a purpose-written text.
8. *Imagination in practice, plus final pūjā.*
A session based on experiential practices done over the preceding week, plus final pūjā.
9. *Mythic context (Optional).*
Discussion of a purpose-written text which is included in the study leaders' notes.

We have already started to look at some of the topics we will be dealing with over the coming weeks in *Week 5* and *Week 6, Part 1*, of *Year One* of this course. These texts look at some archetypal elements in the life of the Buddha, and at how using our imagination to keep the figure of the Buddha present in our mind can have remarkable benefits for our spiritual life. The Buddha is the central image, symbol and archetype in Buddhism, and his life is its central myth, so the Buddha is the place we need to start our exploration. *Start this module by re-reading these two texts from Year 1* of the course, and then reflect on the following questions before the first week of the module.

Questions for reflection, discussion, and research

1. Write a list of the qualities of the historical Buddha that you most admire or would like to have yourself. If possible think of events in the life of the Buddha (for example in the Pāli Canon) that illustrate these qualities. (You could bring along some readings from the Pāli Canon or elsewhere where these events are described, to share with the group.)
2. Can you think of any other archetypal or mythic elements in the Buddha's life, apart from those described in the texts? What qualities of an Enlightened being do these illustrate? (Again you could bring along some readings to share if you want.)
3. Which aspects of the life of the Buddha have a personal meaning for you?



Before the first week you should also read the instructions for *Week 2*, to give yourself plenty of time to do the exercises you are asked to take on.

Introduction

Last week we reminded ourselves of the story of Piṅgiya in the Pāli Canon, and of the positive effects on our mental and emotional states of keeping the Buddha in mind. We also called to mind some of the positive qualities of the Buddha that we most admire and aspire to. Make mindfulness of the Buddha and his qualities a part of your practice for the coming week by doing the following exercises, and be prepared to tell your group about your experience.

Practices for the week

1. Use your imagination to keep the Buddha in mind as much as possible this week:
 - Begin each day by calling the Buddha to mind, and reminding yourself of the qualities you admire in him which you identified last week, maybe imagining incidents from the Buddha's life that illustrate these. Then chant the refuges and precepts, imagining that you are 'taking' the refuges from the Buddha, and undertaking to practice the precepts in loyalty to his teaching. There may also be some personal precepts that you wish to undertake.
 - Set some convenient times each day when you will take a few moments to call the Buddha to mind. (Obvious times are during breaks at work, before or after meals, and just before bed.) Use reminders to help you remember to do this – for example, keep a small image of the Buddha where you will see it, or leave post-it notes for yourself. Again, briefly connect with some of the qualities of the Buddha that you admire.
 - Whenever difficult or trying situations arise, call the Buddha to mind and imagine how he would have responded. Let his example affect you.
 - Tell your group about what you did and any effects you noticed. You may wish to share any personal precepts you took on.
2. Build a shrine to the historical Buddha. Take into account:
 - The qualities that you most admire in him, and how you can express these qualities with images, colour, form, objects, etc.
 - The teachings of the historical Buddha that mean most to you – you might want to place a text on the shrine, or copy out some verses.
 - The way the Buddha's influence manifests here and now in your life; for example you might include a picture of a spiritual friend, a practitioner you look up to, or a place associated with the Buddhist tradition that has a positive effect on you.

You could build your shrine at home, in the country or other public place, or you could co-operate with a friend or friends to build a shrine at the Buddhist Centre. Note that the point here is to build a *new* shrine, as a way of exploring your feelings for the Buddha and his

qualities, even if you feel happy with your existing shrine. If you do not yet have a personal shrine at home, this is an opportunity to create one.

Make a drawing or take a photo of your shrine, and bring it along next week. Be ready to tell the group about your shrine and what it means.



Introduction

Over the last two weeks we have been exploring the qualities of the Buddha, and the way we can bring an awareness of these qualities into our practice. To a large extent we have been using words in our attempt to get some idea of the nature of a Buddha, but words are not the only – or the best - way we can do this. Enlightenment is beyond the realm of words, and images can often give us a clearer glimpse of what it might be like than language could ever hope to do. But to open ourselves to this channel of communication we need to learn to speak the language of images, a language which for many of us was ignored in our formal education.

This week we will be getting some practice in using the language of images, starting by exploring an image of the Buddha as fully as we can. A good Buddha image is an attempt on the part of the artist to convey something of the nature of Enlightenment through the language of images. It is an attempt to communicate a state of being, not an attempt to portray a likeness of the Buddha's physical body.

Exercise 1

A digital version of an image of the Buddha is included as part of this session; this is a painting of Śākyamuni by Aloka, which is the centrepiece of the shrine at Padmaloka. Download this image and print it out in colour, in as high a definition as you can, and as large as you can – in A4 at the minimum. If this poses a problem for you, be sure to discuss this with your study leader and the other members of your group the week before this session. Someone in your group will be able to help you, and it may be that someone is able to print out a copy larger than A4.

We've included a version above. For the better quality image, please download:

https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/study/reference_materials/year3/Shakyamuni.zip

Then spend some time simply looking at this image - not thinking discursively *about* it, but allowing it to affect you on another level. Do this when you are free of all other input (i.e. not with the radio or TV on, while listening to music, or while talking.) If possible spend some time looking at it after you have meditated, when your mind is in a quiet receptive state. Devote a considerable amount of time to this over the coming week, allowing yourself to dwell on the image, and returning to it again and again. There is no set reading for this week, so this is a large part of your preparation – you are going to study a communication in the language of images rather than in the language of words, and you should be prepared to spend as long doing this as you would in studying a text. Of course you will want to reflect on the image and turn your conclusions into words, but try also to spend some time looking at the image without theorising about it or talking about it to yourself.

When you have steeped yourself in this image and reflected upon it, write down anything that occurs to you about it, and what it communicates to you. In particular make a note of what this image communicates to you about the nature of Enlightenment. *Bring your notes to the session, and be prepared to share them with the group.*

You will also be exploring this image in a more guided way with the help of your study leader during the session.

Please note that the image of Śākyamuni used in this session is copyrighted to Aloka, and is the property of Padmaloka Retreat Centre, who have granted permission for it to be used in this context. Outside of this context any copy made needs permission from Padmaloka.

You can purchase a copy of this and some other of Aloka's paintings from the Padmaloka website.

<http://www.padmalo.org.uk/resources/shop>

Exercise 2

Spend some time this week reflecting on any other images you have come across that communicate some aspect of spiritual truth to you, and choose one to talk about to the group. You may wish to focus on images of the Buddha in particular, but feel free to choose an image of another figure, or from another tradition, or an image (such as a painting) which has no formal spiritual connections. You may also wish to do some research, looking at books of Buddhist art, or art from other traditions, or exploring images on the internet.

Choose an image, and write down what it communicates to you, and how it does this. Bring a reproduction of the image to the session, and tell the group what it means to you.

Introduction

This week we are going to change gear. Until now our exploration of faith, symbols and the imagination has been largely through our own experience, rather than through thinking about them with the rational mind. But this week we will be studying a text about śraddhā, we will be thinking about śraddhā. There is a reason for this. In contemporary Western culture faith has been devalued to such an extent that many of us cannot open up to it without our conditioning getting in the way. So before we can fully use our faculty of faith, many of us first need to convince our rational intellects that this is a good idea, and not just a way of deluding ourselves. We need to use the tools of the rational mind to convince the rational mind that logic and reason are not the only ways we have of perceiving the truth, especially in the spiritual realm.

What gets in the way?

In contemporary Western culture faith has a bad name. There are a number of reasons for this, and if we can become aware of these we can begin to free ourselves from their effects, so that we no longer respond automatically to our conditioning. Below are some of the cultural factors that may cause us to see faith in a negative light – there may be others that you can think of.

Traditional Western religions

The Western theistic religions tend to mix up mythic truth with historical, factual truth. Myths can communicate important spiritual truths, and some Christian myths, such as the resurrection of Christ, do this – in this case the human potential for spiritual death and rebirth as a higher being. Other Christian myths, such as the creation of the world in seven days, seem to be just ways of explaining the unexplained. But in both cases Christianity has presented these myths as factual, historical truth, and religious faith has come to be associated with believing that these myths actually happened in the material world. Because such ‘faith’ involves blindly abandoning the rational thinking faculty, it has a justifiably bad name. For this reason many Buddhists prefer not to use the word ‘faith’, preferring the Sanskrit term *śraddhā* (Pāli *saddhā*), which does not have the same connotations of blind belief.

Hurry and excessive input

Śraddhā could be likened to a quiet voice that speaks from our depths, which we hear best when our mind is quiet. When we are distracted, anxious, over-stimulated, scattered, hurried, or in the grip of negative emotion, we are cut off from our depths, and cannot hear the voice of śraddhā. So we are most likely to experience śraddhā under conditions such as those we get on retreat, while the conditions of modern city life encourage a speedy, scattered way of being in which any hint of śraddhā is usually drowned out by the superficial surface chatter of our minds. For this reason many people seldom have a strong experience of śraddhā, and it remains an undeveloped faculty in them.

Science and pseudo-science

The scientific method has proved itself an excellent way of finding out about the material world, and as a result many of us take its assumptions for granted, without really thinking about them.

One core assumption behind the scientific method is that the only valid way of knowing anything is through the evidence of our physical senses, whether directly or through some form of measuring instrument. Any conclusion reached without tangible evidence from the physical senses is seen as invalid. This makes for a rigorous approach to finding out about the material world, but unfortunately the same assumption is often applied to the spiritual field, where the object of interest – consciousness – lies in a different realm from the material, and very little about it can be perceived by the senses or measured. Ultimately we know spiritual truths by direct perception while in a heightened state of awareness, so ‘science’ often assumes that this way of knowing is not valid, or even that consciousness does not really exist, because it cannot be detected by the methods of science. Phenomena like śraddhā, Insight, or beauty, are then seen as mere fictions. This is a clear case of applying ideas that work well in one area to an area where they are not appropriate, but often we are not aware of this.

A second assumption behind the scientific method is that the experimenter must be emotionally neutral, and that if your emotional attitude affects the results of a trial it is not valid. But in the spiritual sphere this assumption breaks down completely, because we cannot know whether a spiritual practice works unless we are emotionally committed to it. In the case of meditation for example, the results depend on the mental state with which we engage in the practice, and an element of faith is essential for success. If we practice the Dharma with the sceptical, neutral attitude recommended by science we have not given it a fair chance.

Post-modern irony

We live in a world in which the very ideas of objective truth, beauty and value have been undermined, and in which it is unfashionable to take any ideals too seriously. The fashionable stance is one of ironic detachment, but this is essentially a cynical attitude which destroys our capacity for śraddhā, and prevents us from engaging creatively with life. If we want to get anywhere with the spiritual life we need to take cynicism, and wring its neck.

What is śraddhā?

According to Sangharakshita the word śraddhā derives from a root meaning ‘to place the heart upon.’ Śraddhā is our response to the values that we place our heart on, and to the symbols, teachings, and people that represent these values to us:

...and this response, this heartfelt response when we come up against something higher, something beyond, some symbol of something higher, this response is what in Buddhism we call śraddhā, or faith...

- *The Psychology of Spiritual Development*⁶¹

Our first glimmers of śraddhā may be a vague intimation of something mysterious, of something higher than ourselves as we currently are, along with an equally vague sense of awe and longing. In the words of Sangharakshita:

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...faith is inherent in any positive mental state; it doesn't have to be faith in the Three Jewels as such. It can manifest as simply a vague but powerful inkling of something higher, a conviction that there is something more. Wordsworth describes this sort of feeling:

'...a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.'

- *Know your Mind*, p.125.

Many of us have this sort of experience from time to time, but all too often it makes little difference to the way we live our lives. When śraddhā is more developed it becomes more specific, and begins to have a more powerful effect on our behaviour, until – if we are fortunate - it becomes the force that guides our actions and gives meaning to our lives. Sangharakshita again:

...faith, we may say, is the response, the real living response of the whole being, and especially the emotional part of our being, to something, we may not be able to have a very clear idea of it conceptually, intellectually, but something which we intuitively perceive, which we feel, if you like, is greater, and higher, and nobler, and more sublime, and more worthwhile, of higher value than ourselves as we are now. Something to which we ought, as it were, to dedicate ourselves, if you like surrender ourselves. Something for the sake of which we ought to live, even sacrifice ourselves to. So without faith in this sense, there's no spiritual life, there's no development.

- *The New Man Speaks*⁶²

So śraddhā is our response to the truths and ideals that we admire and love, that we wish to live by, and that we put at the centre of our lives when we are being true to what is highest in us. It is the faculty by which we perceive spiritual value and beauty, and are drawn towards them. It is:

...the response of ...what is ultimate in us, to what is ultimate in the universe.

- *The Psychology of Spiritual Development*

“...the response of our total being”

Now śraddhā... is not just belief, not believing something to be true. It's not even an emotional state. We may say that śraddhā... is the response of our total being.

- *The Psychology of Spiritual Development*

In this quote Sangharakshita makes it clear that śraddhā is not just an emotional response, nor is it just intellectual confidence that the Dharma is true and the practices work. Śraddhā is 'the response of our total being'. So śraddhā involves all aspects of our being, including our thinking faculty, our emotions, and our will. These three aspects are explored in a traditional analysis of śraddhā that is discussed in Sangharakshita's book, *Know Your Mind*.

62 <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=113>

In this analysis śraddhā is defined as:

(1) Deep conviction, (2) lucidity, and (3) longing, for those things which (1) are real, (2) have value, and (3) are possible.

1. ‘Deep conviction’ about ‘things which are real’ implies knowing certain things to be true, so it involves the intellectual faculty. (Another translation says ‘deep understanding.’)
2. ‘Lucidity’ about ‘things which have value’ refers to our *emotional* response to ideals and values; when our heart response to spiritual values gives us a deep sense of what really matters to us, this produces a state of serenity and clarity, without conflict or indecision, which is described as a lucid mind.
3. ‘Longing’ for things that ‘are possible’ implies a strong desire to move towards spiritual qualities that we can see in others, or sense are possible in ourselves; this is the volitional aspect of faith, which makes us want to grow, evolve, and live by our ideals.

We will look at each of these aspects of faith, as a way of exploring the multi-dimensional nature of śraddhā.

Confident Faith (*abhisampratyaya śraddhā*) – knowing about Truths

“Profound conviction about, and understanding of, truths and principles.”

Confident faith – which Sangharakshita translates as ‘trusting faith’ in *Know Your Mind* – is the cognitive, knowing, ‘head’ aspect of śraddhā. It is the sort of faith that leads us to have a deep sense of rightness and importance when we come across certain Dharma teachings. We *know* that a teaching is right and important, and we may have a sense that we have somehow always known it. This usually includes a rational assessment that the words make sense at the intellectual level, but it can also go beyond this, and include an intuitive response that is deeper than logic. We may even have this response to teachings we don’t fully understand – many people have something of this response when they first hear the *Heart Sutra* in a pūjā.

At the most down-to earth level, confident faith simply involves knowing that the teachings make sense, that they seem to be true in our experience, and that the practices work. For example we may understand that the law of karma makes sense, that the way we act must shape our character and our future experience, and we may have seen this in operation in our own lives and those of others. We may understand clearly that the Three Lakṣaṇas say something true and important about the things and people we come into contact with in our life. We may know that the mindfulness of breathing and the mettā bhāvanā improve our mental states, because we have experienced this as a fact.

Clear thinking about truths such as these is an important aspect of śraddhā, which keeps our faith grounded in reason and reality. Without this we are likely to be wide open to all sorts of deluded ideas and false paths, simply because we like the sound of them, or from wishful thinking – a point we will return to later in this session.

Lucid Faith (*cetasāḥ prasāda śraddhā*) – feeling for qualities or values

“Intense fondness for all the pure qualities of the Three Jewels. Its special activity consists in... loving that which is good.”

Lucid faith is the feeling, ‘heart’ aspect of śraddhā – it involves ‘intense fondness’. It is our emotional response of love and admiration for positive values, and for positive qualities in

people and other more spiritually developed beings. This aspect of śraddhā might logically be called ‘admiring faith’, but the Sanskrit prasāda means lucid, serene, pure, happy, and bright; so *cetasah prasāda śraddhā* literally means something like ‘the faith which gives a lucid, serene, bright mind’, and is usually translated as lucid faith.

Faith is said to have, “The essential nature of the purification of the mind... It dispels mental defilements, and makes the mind clear.” It is traditionally likened to the mythical water-purifying gem, which instantly makes muddy water clear and sparkling, because as soon as lucid faith arises in our mind it has the same effect, dispelling all dirt and murkiness. When we love and admire spiritual ideals and positive qualities, or when we feel love and devotion for those who embody these ideals and qualities, the dirt of defiled mental states cannot stay in our mind, and we see how we should live and act with crystal clarity. We are no longer plagued by doubt, or by the anxiety that comes from uncertainty, so that our mind becomes serene, happy and bright.

Lucid faith could be described as our response to spiritual beauty – the beauty of higher values, and beauty of character in people or higher beings. It is strongly related to the aesthetic sense by which we perceive beauty in art, music and nature – some would say that they are different aspects of the same faculty.

- Both faculties have elements that are beyond the scope of our logical, reasoning mind. We cannot fully explain in words why something is beautiful. We just *know* beauty, by direct perception. Likewise we cannot fully explain in words why mettā is beautiful, and hatred is ugly, independent of any social utility these two states may have. (A Darwinist or a Marxist might both argue that hatred is necessary and socially useful.) We just know, by direct perception, in the same way that we know that grass is green.
- Both faculties are stronger when we are in a positive state. We can go for a walk in beautiful countryside when we are distracted, scattered, or in the grip of negative emotions, and be completely blind to the beauty around us; whereas on another day, when we are in a good state, we might be delighted and uplifted by the same scene. Śraddhā is just the same – when we are in a good state we experience it far more strongly than when we are scattered or distracted. (Of course śraddhā arises on the basis of suffering, but while we are actually suffering because of negative mental states we seldom experience it strongly.)
- Both faculties can be developed by practice. If we are not used to looking at paintings, listening to music, or experiencing the beauty of nature, we may find these activities difficult at first. We may not know how to look, listen or concentrate in an appropriate way, and our tastes may tend towards the coarse, the conventional, or the sentimental. With more practice we learn the art of seeing beauty, and our judgement becomes more refined and accurate. Śraddhā is just the same – with more practice we become more skilled in perceiving spiritual beauty, and our faculty of śraddhā becomes a more accurate instrument for detecting spiritual truth.

Sangharakshita has called lucid faith a ‘lifting of the heart’. In the same way that compassion is what happens when mettā encounters suffering, lucid faith begins when mettā encounters something higher than ourselves as we currently are. There is a lifting of the heart, which can have elements not only of love and admiration, but also of delight, devotion, wonder, and awe.

To experience this aspect of faith strongly can be like falling in love with the ideal, or being bedazzled by spiritual ‘glamour’. But as with the worldly experience of being in love, we cannot expect to feel this lifting of the heart all the time, and to be faithful to it we must often live by the memory of the experience. If we find it difficult to do this, it is likely that what we

experience is not really śraddhā. As Sangharakshita has pointed out, the heart response of lucid faith is easily confused with mere pleasure. We may have a cheap counterfeit version of faith in something or someone simply because it makes us feel good, or panders to our wishful thinking. People will often say, “I like that idea,” as though their liking it made it true, and therefore worthy of faith. We might like a spiritual theory because it flatters us about our spiritual level, because it is exotic, or because it promises results with no effort, and no change in our lives. Or we might just like the warm glow of devotional feeling we get when we do a pūjā or chant a mantra. The acid test comes when we start to put our faith into action, and to guide our lives by it. In Sangharakshita’s words:

The test of faith is whether one is able to act on it in the absence of any kind of gratification whatsoever, any kind of pleasurable feeling or emotion associated with the object of one’s faith.

- *Know Your Mind*, p.122.

In other words, the test of faith is whether it affects our actions by involving our will – the aspect of ‘longing faith’, which we will discuss next.

Longing Faith (*abhilasa śraddhā*) – willing a positive future into existence

“The profound desire and aspiration to attain and realise what is good, and the confidence in one’s ability to do so.”

Longing faith is the volitional, ‘gut’ aspect of śraddhā, the aspect which is to do with the will. It has two elements. The first is our desire and longing to move towards the qualities we admire, to close the gap between ourselves and our ideals, to have closer communication with the beings we admire, and to become more like what we have the potential to be. The second aspect is confidence that we can actually do this.

Both of these elements are necessary. If we just admired and longed for the spiritual ideal from a distance, but saw it as something so sublime and profound as to be beyond us, this would not do us much good. (Many people make little progress in the spiritual life because they don’t really believe they can.) On the other hand there is a sort of arrogant confidence that has no trouble thinking it can attain the ideal, because it brings the ideal down to its own level. This sort of arrogant attitude involves no recognition that the spiritual ideal is vast, mysterious, sublime and profound - way ahead of where we are now - so it brings no sense of longing for something quite beyond the present self. In contrast, true longing faith both acknowledges the distance between us and the ideal, opening the way for a devotional response, and also acknowledges our connection with the ideal, which means that it is not alien to us, and we can become more and more like it.

The practical outcome of longing faith is to actually do something – to commit to the path, to take some risks, to act, to practice. In the words of Edward Conze:

It combines the steadfast resolution that one will do a thing with the self-confidence that one can do it...The opposites of this aspect of faith are timidity, cowardice, fear, wavering, and a shabby, mean and calculating mentality. Faith is closely connected with determination, which consists in acting with resolute confidence, after one has judged, decided, and definitely and unshakeably chosen an object, and is opposed to slinking along like an irresolute child who thinks, ‘Shall I do it, shall I not do it?’

- *Buddhist Thought in India*, p.48.

This aspect of faith is the way we bring positive futures into existence, by somehow sensing that they are ‘trying to happen’, and then burning our bridges, and committing ourselves to making this future a reality. We need this sort of faith to create anything significant – a work of art, a friendship, a new project, a Sangha – or an Enlightened being.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Before you came into contact with the Dharma, what did you connect with the word ‘faith’? Did you see it as something positive or negative? What conditioned your reaction?
2. Do you remember any experience of ‘confident faith’ when you first came across the teachings of the Dharma? Can you describe what this felt like? Have you forgotten it?
3. Think of a Buddhist teaching that you are confident is true. Be ready to tell the group why you have this sense of certainty.
4. What quality of the Enlightened Mind do you particularly admire and resonate with at the moment – serenity, mettā, compassion, generosity, integrity, energy, courage, creativity, freedom, wisdom, or whatever? Are there any figures in the Buddhist tradition which particularly embody this quality for you?
5. What do you long for – if all practical constraints were removed, how would you most like to live? Can you relate your longing to some aspect of the goal of the spiritual life?
6. Do you see the goal as something sublime and mysterious, or do you tend to bring Enlightenment down to where you are now? What are the advantages and disadvantages of both approaches?
7. How does your śraddhā make your life different from that of a non-Buddhist?
8. Do you think the three aspects of faith discussed in the text are completely separate? How are they connected?
9. Which aspect of faith are you strongest in? Which do you find most difficult?



Next week’s session involves some exercises that you need to think about well before the session. So please also read the next section before Week 4 of the module.

This week will involve a sevenfold pūjā as the culmination of a week of practical exploration of the qualities of a figure in the Buddhist tradition. We have already discussed our feeling for the qualities of the historical Buddha in some detail, so you will probably want to choose a different figure to focus on this week. This exercise is most suited to the exploration of our response to archetypal figures. (Incidentally, Padmasambhava definitely counts as one of these.) If you do not relate to any of these figures, this exercise may help you to do so. If you really think this is a lost cause, then you might be best to return to the historical Buddha for inspiration, at the risk of some repetition.

Exercises

Think of a figure from the Buddhist tradition that has a strong appeal for you, and in the coming week:

1. Find out more or refresh your memory about the figure.
2. Look for images of your chosen figure. Spend some time looking at an image, and reflect on what it communicates to you. Note what is communicated by the facial expression, the body language, and the other attributes of the figure.
3. Explore the colour associated with the figure, and the effect it has on your feelings.
4. Keep an eye out in the world around you this week for anything that evokes the figure for you or might be connected with it in any way. Notice the colour associated with the figure in the environment, and look for the objects associated with it, like swords and Dharma books for Mañjuṣa, jewels for Avalokiteśvara, and so on. Notice your response.
5. Be prepared to tell the group about your figure and your experience of exploring its significance over the past week. Do not assume that others already know about the figure, but explain its features and main qualities, at least briefly, as well as focusing on what has a special significance for you. Bring at least one image of the figure to illustrate your presentation. (According to the number of people in your group, the leader may need to suggest an upper time limit for these presentations, but you should aim to talk for a minimum of 5 minutes, and probably more.)
6. Make, write, paint, compose, or find something to give as an offering to your chosen figure in the pūjā.

Introduction

This week we will be returning to the language of words and concepts once more to explore the role of faith in the Buddhist tradition. Western Buddhists often underestimate the importance of faith in the Buddhist path, and while it is true that Buddhism does not recommend the sort of blind belief demanded by Christianity and Islam, even a quick look at the reality of the tradition makes it clear that faith has always been seen as having an essential role. The lack of importance given to faith by some Western Buddhists seems to owe more to conditioning by our sceptical culture than it does to the Dharma. And if we allow ourselves to be misled into thinking that this represents the real attitude of practitioners down the ages, then we are likely to take a serious wrong turn, into a dead end on the spiritual path – so it is well worth spending some time on a quick review of the place of faith in some of the main strands of Buddhism from the past, and of its place in our practice in the present.

Faith in Pāli Buddhism

In Pāli Buddhism faith is one of the Five Spiritual Faculties that are essential for progress on the path. So it is seen as a crucial quality, absolutely necessary for the spiritual life, and on an equal footing with the other spiritual faculties such as meditation and wisdom. Sometimes modern Theravādin texts translate *saddhā* as ‘confidence’, but the Pāli Canon makes it clear that *saddhā* means much more than just confident faith, and can even be a path to liberation in its own right.

Those who would like to see the Buddha as recommending an attitude of scepticism rather than faith often cite the *Kalama Sutta* as evidence for their point of view. In this discourse the people of the Kalama clan come to see the Buddha because they are confused by the many competing spiritual teachers and teachings they have heard. The Buddha tells them not to base their judgment on tradition, popularity, prestige, charisma, or even logic, but to assess each teaching on the basis of their own experience of what is beneficial, and on the opinion of the wise. The Buddha here is telling the Kalamas how to decide between different teachers and teachings; he is not telling them how to practice when they have chosen a teacher and path. In his advice to his own disciples the Buddha does not recommend an attitude of constant questioning of the teachings and practices, and instead recommends that they trust in his vision and experience. If we regard ourselves as disciples of the Buddha rather than as confused ‘seekers’, then the advice given to the Kalamas is not aimed at people like us, and we would do better to focus on the teachings that the Buddha gave to his committed followers.

Faith and the Spiral Path

In the teaching of the Spiral Path – one of the key features of Sangharakshita’s presentation of the Dharma – faith is the first essential step on the path, and the crucial gateway from the Wheel to the Spiral. In this formulation of the spiritual path the crucial factor that decides

whether we make progress, or just circle around the Wheel of Life, is the way we respond to *duḥkha* – suffering or ‘unsatisfactoriness’. In our undeveloped state there is an inescapable element of *duḥkha* in our experience. Usually we try to distract ourselves from this by seeking sensory pleasures, entertainment, and so on. But if, instead of craving to be distracted from our state, we respond with faith that there is something higher and more fulfilling than our present state that we can access by practicing the Dharma, we can step off the Wheel, and onto the Spiral Path. Instead of hiding from *duḥkha*, we turn and face it. Instead of dulling our awareness to escape from reality, we sharpen it, and use this heightened mindfulness to cultivate better and more positive states, and knowledge of a higher reality.

Sangharakshita describes the place of faith on the spiral path in more general terms in the following passage:

Now faith... is the ethically wholesome counterpart of *tṛṣṇā*, craving or thirst. In dependence upon *vedanā*, feeling, in this case of the unsatisfactoriness of the world, there arises not thirst, not craving, but faith – faith in something above, beyond, the world, higher than the world. In dependence upon *duḥkha*, one's experience of the unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence, of one's ordinary life, there arises *śraddhā*, confidence or faith, in the sense of sensitivity to, if you like even belief in, awareness of, a whole higher dimension of truth and reality - that is to say, the spiritual. One has reacted not in a cyclical order, but... in a progressive order. And the spiral of the spiritual life has begun to unwind...

And then secondly, dependent upon Faith arises Joy... Our hearts have... been lifted up to something higher, have touched something higher, have experienced, even if only for a moment, something higher.

- *Lecture, Stages of the Spiritual Path*⁶³

Although faith is presented as the first stage of the Spiral Path, this does not mean that it is a preliminary, elementary practice, to be left behind when we get to the more advanced stages. Rather faith is the essential foundation which is needed for all higher states of mind, and which must be there all the time as an aspect of these higher states. In Sangharakshita's words:

Faith is inherent in any positive mental state.

- *Know Your Mind*, p.125

And:

Faith is the indispensable emotional element of any experience of insight into the nature of reality.

- *Ibid*, p.123

Faith and Stream Entry

In Pāli Buddhism one of the important landmarks on the spiritual path is seen as ‘Stream Entry’, the point at which we become irreversibly bound for Enlightenment. Stream entry is achieved when we break the first three of the ten fetters that currently bind us. These three fetters are:

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1. Self-view, in the sense of our perception of ourselves as a fixed, separate, unchanging entity.
2. Doubt and indecision, in the sense of an unwillingness to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the spiritual path.
3. Attachment to rites and rituals, which Sangharakshita explains as the sort of superficiality that is happy to just go through the motions of the spiritual life, without really tackling our fundamental problem.

Insight into non-selfhood breaks the first of these fetters, self-view, while faith breaks the second, doubt. But Sangharakshita has made it clear that if we break any of these fetters it is equivalent to breaking all of them – they are three aspects of the same thing. So if we break the fetter of doubt we also break the fetter of self-view. This implies that if we develop our faith to a certain point it becomes Insight, and that cultivating our śraddhā can be a path in its own right, that can lead us to the highest goal.

The Path of Faith in the Pāli Canon

This idea that cultivating faith can be a path in its own rite is confirmed in the passage about Piṅgiya in the *Sutta Nipāta*, which we re-read at the beginning of this module. In this passage the Buddha tells Piṅgiya that his faith will take him all the way to Enlightenment:

Piṅgiya, other people have been freed by the power of saddhā. Vakkali, Bhadravudha and Alavi-Gotama have all done this. You too should let this power release you; you too will go to the other shore, beyond the reach of death.

To which Piṅgiya replies:

Yes, I shall go there. I shall go beyond change, I shall go beyond formations; I shall go beyond comparison. There are no more doubts. You may consider this as mind released.

- *Sutta Nipāta*, 5.16

Faith in later Buddhism

As with many other features of the ‘basic Buddhism’ of the Pāli Canon, the idea that fully developed faith is equivalent to Insight, and that cultivating faith is a path that can lead us to the highest goal is taken up, developed, and expanded by the Mahāyāna, until it becomes the basis for long and involved scriptures, and the foundation for whole schools of practice.

‘Mainstream’ Mahāyāna

In Chapter 2 of the *White Lotus Sutra*, one of the earliest Mahāyāna scriptures, the Buddha shocks his more literalistic followers by telling them that all his teachings are only skilful means, adapted to beings’ present level of understanding, and designed to help them according to their present state of development. He then goes on to say that none of his teachings can be taken as absolute truth, which is beyond the comprehension of anyone but an Enlightened Being, and that the closest we non-Enlightened beings can get to understanding the Insight of a Buddha is through the faculty of faith:

The meaning of every nature and form, I and other buddhas in the universe alone can understand these things. This Truth is inexpressible, it is beyond the realm of words; among all living beings none can apprehend it, except the bodhisattvas, who are firm in the power of faith.

In other words, short of Enlightenment it is only those who are 'firm in the power of faith' who can experience a glimpse of the incomprehensible vision of a Buddha, through the heart connection that śraddhā gives them to the higher realm from which the Dharma emanates.

The idea that faith is the whole basis of the path and the most valuable of spiritual qualities is also expressed in many other Mahāyāna scriptures, such as this passage from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*:

Faith can joyfully enter the Buddha's teaching;
Faith can increase knowledge and virtue;
Faith can ensure arrival at enlightenment...
Faith is the unspoiled seed of virtue,
Faith can grow the seed of enlightenment.
Faith can increase supreme knowledge,
Faith can reveal all Buddhas...
Faith is most powerful, very difficult to have;
It's like in all worlds having
the wondrous wish-fulfilling pearl.

Pure Land Buddhism

Of all forms of Buddhism it is in the Pure Land schools of China and Japan that faith is given most importance. The more mainstream of these schools use the widespread Buddhist practice of meditating on a Buddha, and keeping a Buddha in mind as much as possible, as a way of developing the qualities of a Buddha in oneself. So the form of practice they recommend has much in common with the way Piṅgiya practiced, and with the way you have been getting more experience of practicing during this module.

However some later forms of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism exalt reliance on the archetypal Buddha Amitābha to such an extent that they even frown on meditation, or any other type of formal practice except repeating the name of Amitābha, on the grounds that to do anything by 'self-power' is to doubt the 'other-power' of Amitābha. This is perhaps not quite as silly as it sounds – Sangharakshita has pointed out that the complete trust in the saving power of the Absolute as embodied in Amitābha that this type of practice aims at is equivalent to egolessness and Insight. But he also stresses that by discouraging all practices based on so-called self-power, for the vast majority of people this extreme type of Pure Land Buddhism runs a great risk of encouraging complacency, laziness, lack of effort, and ethical laxity; so that in this case perhaps the reliance on faith alone goes too far and becomes too one-sided.

Vajrayāna Buddhism

The Tantric Buddhism of the Vajrayāna makes great use of visualisation and mantras as ways to connect with archetypal Buddha forms, and to keep them in mind as vividly as possible. In this sense Vajrayāna practice is just an extension of Piṅgiya's practice of mindfulness of the Buddha, although at a more archetypal, ritual, and even magical level, which is aided by mantras and elaborate visualisations. As with Piṅgiya's practice it is based on faith and devotion to the Buddha, who in this case is represented by the yidam, the personal deity, who symbolises some aspects of the qualities of the Enlightened Mind.

Śraddhā and Insight

One of the themes to emerge from this brief summary of the place of faith in the Buddhist tradition is the relationship between śraddhā and Insight. Śraddhā is not only an essential aspect of any experience of Insight, it is our connection to the higher realm from which the

Dharma emanates, so that our śraddhā is a precursor of Insight, or the form that Insight takes at our present stage of development. It follows from this that we could make the main aim of our practice to cultivate faith, rather than trying to approach Insight directly.

For many people this will be an unfamiliar way of looking at the Dharma. Many Buddhists in the West see the ultimate goal of the spiritual life almost exclusively in terms of Insight, and seldom think of it in terms of śraddhā. We tend to think of faith as something quite different from Insight, and far less ‘advanced’. But in fact śraddhā and Insight are not so very different, as the following points may make clear:

- Insight is not just about ‘knowing’, and it is not achieved by the rational mind alone. Insight is trans-rational – it is a vision that springs from a highly developed intuition, and it involves the emotions and the will as well as the cognitive faculty. As we have seen, śraddhā also has these three elements – it involves the head, the heart, and the will.
- Śraddhā is not just a feeling – it involves a strong element of knowing. The aspect of śraddhā we have called confident faith involves knowing the truth of the Dharma, while lucid faith is a sort of heart-knowledge that certain values and qualities are beautiful, and therefore ‘true’, and in accord with reality in a different but no less important way.

Perhaps the main difference between śraddhā and Insight is one of degree – full Insight is śraddhā taken to a new level, and it springs from a unification of our faculties, so that we no longer experience a split between what we think, feel and will – the three aspects of śraddhā have become fused into one indivisible faculty, and our reason is united with the deeper levels of our being.

We have seen that many strands of the Buddhist tradition see the main aim of practice as cultivating śraddhā rather than Insight. This approach has some obvious advantages for Western practitioners, with our frequent tendency to individualism and one-sided rationalism. For example:

- Śraddhā very obviously involves the emotions and the will, as well as the intellect. Seeing practice in this way therefore reduces the danger that we will see the goal in purely cognitive terms, or imagine we have reached it when in fact we have just understood the teachings at an intellectual level – a real danger for us western practitioners.
- Śraddhā is a relational quality – it focuses on something outside ourselves. This reduces the danger that we will see the spiritual life in an individualistic way, and appropriate any attainment, thinking of it as *my* attainment. If we do think in this way there is a real danger that the spiritual life, far from allowing us to transcend our limited selfhood, traps us more deeply in individualism and arrogance.
- Because śraddhā is obviously a multidimensional quality, thinking of our practice in terms of śraddhā makes it more obvious that the spiritual life involves working on a broad front, which might include friendship, working with others, serving the Sangha, and so on – and not just meditation or reflection in solitude, valuable as this is in its place.

Cultivating śraddhā

Luckily there is no real conflict between a spiritual life that takes Insight as its goal and one that aims at cultivating śraddhā – the difference is mainly one of attitude and emphasis. The practices that develop the one are largely the same as those that develop the other – which is not surprising, given that the two are so closely related.

Clearly there are some practices – pūjā is the obvious example – that cultivate śraddhā in a direct way. But there are other practices which we probably do not think of in terms of śraddhā which have the same effect. For example we may think that we go on retreat, live a simple life for a while, and spend our time in meditation in order to develop a clear, focused, positive mind, which will eventually be able to experience Insight into the nature of reality. But a clear, focused, positive mind is also precisely what will allow us to experience śraddhā, and these are precisely the circumstances in which we will begin to experience śraddhā more strongly. As was pointed out earlier, śraddhā is like a small voice from our depths (or from the heights, depending on your preferred metaphor). This voice is drowned out by too much distraction and surface chatter, it cannot be heard when we are scattered or in the grip of negative emotions, and it is clearest when we are in a positive, calm, focused state. Retreat conditions and the practice of meditation are excellent ways of developing śraddhā. We may meditate to move towards Insight, but find that what actually happens is that we experience a strengthening of our śraddhā. This śraddhā will in fact be the way that we get a deeper sense of the nature of reality – it will be the equivalent of Insight, at our level.

To take another example, we probably think mainly of Dharma study as a way to cultivate wisdom. But clearly studying the Dharma is an important way of cultivating confident faith – if we do not know the Dharma we can hardly have confidence in it. And the role of study in cultivating śraddhā goes beyond this - it can also help us to develop both lucid faith and longing faith. When we study a Dharma text that has its origin in the mind of someone more advanced than ourselves, we in a sense enter a higher realm. We dwell for a while in the mind of someone who lives on a higher plane than ourselves, and experience the beauty and mystery of this higher realm. So when we study a Dharma text like, for example, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, we do not just acquire knowledge about the Dharma, we also get a feel for the beauty of higher states, we deepen our admiration for higher qualities, and we strengthen our emotional connection with the higher realms of experience from which the Dharma emanates. Such study therefore nurtures lucid faith, and is likely to deepen our longing faith.

Of course as we have said there are specific practices that are obviously directed to the development of śraddhā, such as pūjā, as well as the visualisation practices undertaken by Order members. If we see the main goal of our spiritual life as the development of faith, we will give an important place to such practices. On the other hand if we see our practice in terms of a narrow understanding of Insight we are likely to miss the point of practices such as pūjā and sādhanā, and our spiritual life is likely to remain on a superficial, one-sidedly rational level.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Which of the five spiritual faculties do you think is most important? Why?
2. What do you see as the main goal of your practice – Insight, or some other quality?
3. How would your practice be different if you saw it as mainly aimed at cultivating śraddhā?
4. What do you think is the relationship between śraddhā and Insight?

5. Which practices and conditions most increase your śraddhā? How could you make these a bigger part of your spiritual life?



As well as discussing these questions arising from the text, this week you will also be led through a meditation practice aimed at cultivating śraddhā, which is based on the threefold classification of the aspects of śraddhā that we discussed in the session before last. The instructions for this are given below, but you may want to wait until you are led through the practice before you experiment with it. If you don't remember the three aspects of śraddhā clearly, you need to refresh your memory before doing the practice.

A śraddhā bhāvanā

Stage 1

Begin the practice with a short period of the *mettā bhāvanā* or mindfulness of breathing, whichever you feel makes you most receptive to the voice of śraddhā.

Stage 2

Call to mind the Buddha or another figure from the Buddhist tradition that you have a feeling for – this may well be the figure you chose to explore for last week. See the figure as clearly as you can, and/or feel their presence.

Become aware of what you most admire and love about this being. See it in their eyes. See it in their face. See it in their body language. Hear it in their voice. Feel it in their presence.

Rest your attention on your love and admiration for this quality, in the same way that you rest your attention on mettā in the mettā bhāvanā, allowing it to grow and pervade your being. Allow yourself to rejoice and delight in this quality.

Stage 3

Without letting go of the figure you imagined in the last stage, think of a Dharma teaching that you have confident faith in. Reflect on this teaching, and on why you know it to be true. Sit with your sense of confidence in this teaching. Allow it to grow into a confidence that the Dharma works, and that you can unfailingly evolve beyond your present self by practicing it.

Stage 4

Call the figure you imagined in Stage 2 back to mind. Sharpen up your image of them, and your sense of their presence, and once more become aware of what it is about them that you most love and admire. Become aware of your longing to move towards this figure, to experience more of this quality, and to express it yourself. Try to imagine what it would be like to have this quality yourself, and how wonderful this would be. Sit with your longing, your aspiration.

Reconnect with your confident faith that the Dharma works, that you can evolve by practicing it. Bring this confidence together with your longing and aspiration. Imagine how wonderful the future will be when you embody this quality yourself. At the end of the meditation, ask yourself what you can do now to bring this future about.

Imagination is necessary for the spiritual life

Imagination, like faith, is a faculty that is often undervalued by Buddhists in the West. However Sangharakshita has stressed that imagination is crucial part of the spiritual life, because it is closely related to śraddhā, it allows us to escape from the prison of our immediate experience, it gives us access to higher states of meditation, and it is an indispensable component of Insight into the nature of reality.

We all have a strong imagination

People who find it difficult to relate to symbol and myth often say they do not have a good imagination. But we all have an excellent imagination. We are highly skilled at imagining the objects of our craving, in sexual fantasies, or when creating alluring images of the things we desire, such as food or other sensory pleasures, or possessions we would like to own, ranging from the latest gadgets and designer clothes to beautiful and expensive houses, according to our taste and situation. We are also skilled at creating images of what we dislike, hate, or fear. We imagine scenes that make us resentful, envious or jealous. And many of us play endless film clips in our heads of all the terrible things that might happen in the future, and experience a great deal of unnecessary anxiety as a result.

Our problem is not that we lack imagination, it is that we use our imagination in ways that are linked to our worldly cravings and anxieties, rather than to anything more refined and elevated. The way we use our imagination is related to what matters to us, and all too often what really matters to us is quite mundane. This means that our imagination remains trapped in the lower realms, rather than becoming a vehicle that can transport us to higher dimensions of being. The task of raising our imagination to a higher level is therefore an integral part of the task of raising our level of being. Gradually learning to focus our imagination on more refined, subtle and beautiful objects is an essential part of the spiritual life. In the rest of this session we will look at a number of ways we can use the imagination to help our spiritual progress, culminating in a discussion of what Sangharakshita has called the 'Imaginal Faculty', the faculty which allows us to enter the higher visionary levels of experience, and to perceive truths that are beyond the realm of space and time.

Imagination and the boundaries of our being

Without imagination, our limited experience of the world is all that there is for us. We have no way of experiencing anything except what the chance occurrences of our life have sent our way. There is a well-known parable about a frog who lives in a well, and another who lives in the ocean. The ocean frog visits the well frog, and describes the ocean to him, saying that it is vast in all directions, that its colour varies from bright blue to almost black, that it is sometimes whipped into terrifying storms, and that all sorts of strange creatures live in it. The well frog –

who stands for the person who does not use their imagination, and thinks that what they have experienced themselves is all that there is – does not believe a word of it.

Imagination is a faculty by which we can have experiences that the chance accidents of our life have not given us, and which can therefore expand the boundaries of our being. We may not be the ocean frog – yet – but we can use our imagination to get a glimpse of states of being that are far beyond our present experience, and so avoid being quite as stupid as the well frog in the story.

The uses of fiction

One way in which imagination can extend our boundaries is by allowing us to engage with characters in novels and plays, vicariously extending the breadth of our experience of the world. By using the imagination in this way we can experience what it is like to be someone from a different culture, of a different gender, living in a different age, facing quite different experiences to the ones we face in our daily life.

Imagination and empathy

We can also apply the same principle to developing empathy for the real people we come across in our daily life, particularly our spiritual friends. If we do not use our imagination to get some sense of what they are experiencing, we will have no real sense of them as living human beings with their own desires and fears, and their own inner world which is just as vivid as our own. They will seem like cardboard cut-outs to us, and we will not relate to them with the respect we owe to beings who are just as deep, and real, and important as we are. Using our imagination to develop empathy for others by imaginatively seeing the world through their eyes is an essential aspect of the development of mettā, and this in turn is essential if we are going to break out of the prison of our limited, egocentric view of the world. In the words of the poet Shelley:

‘The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his own species must become his own.’

- Quoted in *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, p.50.

This principle of using the imagination to experience what others experience can be extended even further - to experiencing what others who are more developed than we are might experience, and to experiencing positive states that are not usually part of our mental repertoire – a topic we will explore in the next section.

Imagination and the Four Right Efforts

The Four Right Efforts are a fundamental Dharmic formulation that points to the fact that we need to actively manage our mental states, actively creating and nurturing skilful states, while weakening and preventing the arising of unskilful states. This should be our constant activity as spiritual practitioners, both in meditation and outside it, and the imagination is one of the most powerful tools we can use in this basic work of the spiritual life.

In practicing the Right Efforts we cannot simply summon a positive mental state into existence by an act of will – both positive and negative states arise in dependence on conditions. Changing our outer conditions can put us into a more positive state, so that there are many actions we can take to improve our states of mind when necessary. But we also need to be able to change our mental states without changing our outer conditions – for example when we are meditating - and we can use the imagination to do this, bringing skilful mental states into existence, and in the process ridding our minds of what is unskilful.

For example, if we are not feeling calm and serene, we can begin to experience serenity by using the imagination. Perhaps we can imagine the state of serenity directly. We are likely to find it easier to imagine an image that gives rise to a sense of serenity, such as a sunset over a calm ocean, or a pool of still, lucid water. If we can focus our mind, experiencing such a scene clearly in our imagination, we can create inner conditions that give rise to an experience of serenity, just as surely as an outer experience of a similar kind might do – but with the advantage that we are not dependent on chance experiences in the outer world for this positive stimulus, but can carry it around with us wherever we go, and use it whenever we need it.

We are likely to find it even easier – and probably more powerful – to give birth to a sense of serenity by imagining, not an impersonal scene of this sort, but a serene person, or an archetypal figure who communicates serenity to us. Serenity, mettā, strength, energy, courage, and other positive states are attributes of beings rather than of inanimate matter, so we naturally find them easier to imagine embodied in the form of a being.

When we imagine a serene being, or a strong being, or a compassionate being, our state of mind is automatically influenced by the figure we conjure up in our mind. As we imagine the expression on their face, the look in their eyes, and the way they hold their body, our powers of empathy allow us to experience at least an echo of what it would be like to have that expression, to look through those eyes, and to hold our body in that way. We begin to experience what it would be like to be such a being. By using our imagination we begin to experience for ourselves the qualities that this figure represents for us. This of course is one aspect of the almost universal Buddhist practice of mindfulness of the Buddha, which we have been exploring in this module. If we regularly call to mind the Buddha or some other archetypal symbol of Enlightenment as an aspect of our practice, we strengthen our connection with the qualities of Enlightenment, and our mind moves gradually towards a higher plane. This is one important way that we can use our imagination creatively to help our practice.

Acting ‘as if’

Imagination is an essential part of the way we bring anything new and creative into existence – whether a formal work of art, a better friendship or relationship, a more healthy atmosphere in our workplace, a new project, a new quality in ourselves, a spiritual community where people relate on the basis of generosity, or a better world around us. As the Nineteenth Century American writer Henry Thoreau has pointed out, all castles on the ground start life as castles in the air. Imagination is the way we perceive what could be in the future, and then bring it into existence. We do this by using our imagination to perceive that something creative is a possibility, and then acting ‘as if’ the possibility was a reality. We can see this clearly with children’s play. The way children develop a quality in themselves is to imagine it, probably with the help of TV, films, fiction and various other role models, and then to act *as if* they possessed this quality. For example a child might connect imaginatively with a

particularly brave character in a film; then by acting as if they were this character in their play they begin to make this quality a reality in themselves.

Acting ‘as if’ in a similar way is an important principle of the spiritual life, which underlies for example our practice of the precepts – by acting ‘as if’ we were an Enlightened being, we become more like an Enlightened being. And by using our imagination we can apply this principle much more widely. If we can imagine ourselves having any of the qualities of a more spiritually developed person, we can begin to act more ‘as if’ we possessed these qualities – and this will gradually become the reality. We can apply the same principle not only to fulfilling our own potential, but also to helping others to fulfil theirs – if we can relate imaginatively to someone as a potential Bodhisattva, and then treat them as if this were the reality, very often they will respond, and live up to what is best in themselves. (Conversely, if we cynically expect another to behave in a negative or unskilful way, and act accordingly, this is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.) By helping others to live up to their potential in this way we can create a highly positive atmosphere, in which we in turn are inspired to express more of what is highest in us, creating a virtuous spiral of mutual inspiration. When we imagine what could be, and then act ‘as if’, we create a new world.

The Imagination as a way to perceive Truth

Imagination is also the faculty that gives us access to the symbolic and mythic dimension of life, without which the world remains flat, shallow, and ultimately boring. We live in a miraculous and mysterious universe, which is pregnant with meaning; but if we do not develop the faculty of imagination we become bogged down in the superficial routine of our lives. The grey surface of things becomes all that we see, while the magic, mystery and mythic dimension of our existence remain hidden from us.

Our education and culture often do not help. Many of us have been indoctrinated to see the surface of things as the whole of reality, while the realms of symbol and myth that the imagination opens up are dismissed as make-believe. We need to reverse this assumption if we want to live a life of real meaning. We need to learn to see the world in the way that the great spiritual geniuses have seen it, as a living, multilayered reality, where the surface appearance of things hides deeper dimensions of symbolic and mythic truth.

To those with such a vision, the symbolic and mythic aspects of the world *are* the reality – or to put it another way, reality is itself symbolic and mythic. The imagination, which allows us to perceive this deeper dimension of things, is the faculty which allows us to experience the truth. This is Sangharakshita’s view of imagination at its highest, which he calls the Imaginal Faculty. His ideas in this area build on those of the Nineteenth Century English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who saw the Imagination (with a capital I) as the faculty with which we can connect to a higher realm of truth and beauty, distinguishing it from what he called ‘fancy’ – which we might describe as mere make-believe.

Coleridge’s idea of the Imagination

Coleridge felt that in his creative process he was sometimes inspired by something quite outside his normal personality, as though he was in communication with a higher realm, and that when this occurred he could intuitively perceive a poem as a whole entity, as though it existed in its own right outside of time. His task as a poet was then was to translate this timeless inspiration into a linear sequence of words, which the reader would experience as unfolding in time. A (far from perfect) analogy for this process, taken from the world of contemporary information technology, might be something like a zip file, or any other form of compressed and encrypted file format which needs to be expanded before it can be

understood. Coleridge's Imagination could be compared to a faculty that allowed him to download a highly compressed form of his poems from a source of wisdom beyond his usual self, which he then decompressed into a form that other people could understand.

Many other gifted artists, musicians and even scientists have spoken in a similar way about the process of creation. As just one of many examples, Mozart felt that he perceived his musical works initially as an integral whole, which he then translated into a sequence of notes. In a completely different field, Albert Einstein has said that he intuitively grasped the theory of relativity as a whole, and that it was only afterwards that he sat down to work out the detailed mathematics to support it. These are just a few of the large number of similar examples that could be quoted, where gifted people working in many different fields have spoken of the creative process in a similar way.

The Imaginal faculty

At this point it would be well to remind ourselves of some advice given in the first week of this module:

You need to approach everything that will be said in this module as metaphor, as allusion to something which cannot be fully explained or worked out with the intellect. You will be approaching this material in the wrong spirit if you take it literally, if you try to turn it into a metaphysical system, or if – having done either of these things – you use the wordy intellect to look for logical inconsistencies, rather than relying on your own actual experience.

With this still in mind, and hopefully safeguarded against literalism, we can say that what Sangharakshita calls the Imaginal faculty, which is closely related to Coleridge's Imagination, is a faculty by which we can perceive objects that exist on a higher level of reality, which are a reflection of something both true and beautiful that exists outside of time and space. This has also been called the 'spiritual faculty', because it is the faculty by which we know spiritual truths. This faculty comes into existence as we heal the split between our head and our heart, so that we combine the thinking faculty, by which we know what is true, with the feeling faculty, by which we respond to what is beautiful. To quote Sangharakshita:

The conflict between head and heart, reason and emotion, conscious and unconscious mind, can be resolved only by the emergence of a higher faculty, wherein the light of reason and the warmth of emotion are not only fused but raised to the highest possible level of intensity.

- *The Essence of Zen*, p.73.⁶⁴

Ultimately, in the spiritual sphere, the truth we know with our head and the beauty we feel with our heart are closely related – they are aspects of the same thing. (Note that here we are talking about spiritual truths, not matters of mundane fact. There is nothing particularly beautiful about the figures for the gross national product of France in 1998, for example, although these figures may be 'true' in a mundane sense. The truths behind the words of the Dharma, or an image of a Bodhisattva, or even an elegant physical theory like the law of relativity, are true in a different way altogether, a way which is beautiful because it reflects the nature of reality.)

64 <http://www.sangharakshita.org/books/essence-of-zen.pdf>

We could perhaps describe the Imaginal faculty as intuition on the highest level - not in the sense of mere hunch or vague feelings, but as a perception of the truth of something in its entirety, independent of its various details. The Imaginal faculty is closely related to śraddhā. It is also closely related to Insight – as the faculty by which we see the deep truth behind the world, we could say that it is the Imaginal faculty what allows Insight to arise.

Higher planes of being

If, as we have said, this Imaginal faculty perceives ‘objects’ that exist on a higher level of reality, then where are these higher levels, and what are these objects? In talking about this area, we again need to remind ourselves that words and concepts are stretched beyond their limit, and to be wary of literalism. We must resist the temptation to turn any of this into a metaphysical system, and remember that everything that is said is metaphor, and more like poetry than geography. With that warning in our ears, one way to look at this question is in terms of the traditional Buddhist idea that reality has many levels, corresponding to different planes of being. In our normal state we inhabit what is called the *kāmaloka*, the realm of desire. Above this there exist various ever more refined and beautiful dimensions of being, called the *rūpalokas*, or ‘realms of subtle form’, and the *arūpalokas*, or ‘formless realms’.

Sangharakshita describes these *rūpalokas* and *arūpalokas* as the planes of ‘archetypal form’ and ‘extremely subtle archetypal form.’ The ‘objects’ that we might encounter in these realms are the archetypes, which may communicate themselves to us in terms of images, symbols, or myths. (‘Object’ is a very unsatisfactory word here – the forms we meet on these levels are not dead and inert, but full of life and being.) We do not experience the forms of these realms with our normal physical senses, but with subtle inner or visionary senses. We can access these higher dimensions in meditation, in visionary experience, in highly focused and imaginative states, and sometimes in dreams.

Archetypes

The word ‘archetype’, which Sangharakshita uses to describe the forms we might encounter in these higher planes of being, was initially used by the psychologist C. G. Jung to describe fundamental forces which seem to exist deep in the psyche of all humanity, and which express themselves in a various forms in the myths, religions, visions, dreams, and art of human beings, no matter what their cultural background. One example of such an archetype might be the feminine figure of the compassionate guide and saviouress, which manifests as the Bodhisattva Tara in the Buddhist tradition, and as the Virgin Mary, Ishtar, and in a host of other forms in other traditions. Other important archetypes that Jung and his followers drew attention to include the Wise Old Man (or Woman), the Magician, the King, the Warrior, the Golden Youth, and the Hero. Such archetypes have a powerful appeal for us even when we are completely unaware that they are archetypes, so that they crop up again and again in popular culture, for example in films, and in the images we project onto celebrities and well-known people. For example many people projected the archetype of the compassionate saviouress onto Princess Diana (the Queen of Hearts!) and onto Eva Peron, the wife of the Argentine dictator, who was worshipped during her life, and then embalmed and virtually deified after her death – even though these people expressed the archetype very imperfectly.

Archetypes like that of the gentle saviouress may communicate themselves to us through visual images, but they are not just inanimate patterns of shapes and colour. Archetypes exist in the deep levels of the collective psyche, which Jung called the collective unconscious, so they are patterns of being rather than patterns of shape and colour – they are more like powerful personalities than inanimate images. Each archetype carries a strong emotional tone, as well as a pattern of thought and volition. We can experience these archetypes as powerful external

forces, and we can also open up to their influence, drawing strength from them, experiencing them in our own being, and acting out their myths in our lives. If our conditioning would allow us, it might be simpler and more descriptive to stop using the pseudo-scientific language of archetypes, and instead to relate to these forces in the psyche in the way that people have done throughout human history – as gods and goddesses which we can revere, draw strength from, serve, and allow to work through us in the world of everyday reality.

Sangharakshita's view of the archetypes

By making it respectable to talk about these forces in the psyche in an age that had tried to banish this aspect of reality, Jung's concept of the archetype has served a valuable function in Western thought. However Jung was shackled by the need to stay within the bounds of the materialist worldview of the medical profession from which his discipline of psychiatry emerged. Sangharakshita has used Jung's idea of the archetype and taken it further, pointing out what Jung sometimes seemed to hint at, but could never say – that the archetypes are not just aspects of the hard-wiring of the human brain, but are aspects of reality, so that when we encounter them we are encountering an aspect of the truth. As Subhuti says in his book, *Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition* (pp.279-280):

In Sangharakshita's thinking, the archetypes ultimately exist on the transcendental level, only fully realized at Enlightenment. They express themselves at lower and lower levels within the planes of archetypal form, manifesting as the subtle sensuous experience of visions and some dreams. These visionary dimensions of archetypal experience are the worlds of the gods. The archetypes finally emerge within our world of sensuous experience as the myths and symbols of human culture...

Though we are usually largely unconscious of these other dimensions, nonetheless they are acting upon us, helping to shape our experience, just as last night's dreams leave a lingering impression that persists throughout the day... While we are unconscious of these other dimensions acting upon us, we can only function in a divided way: reason split from emotion, conscious mind separated from unconscious.

In Sangharakshita's view the imagination is not just one faculty among many, but it is central to who we are, and crucial for the spiritual life. It is the way we connect to higher levels of being, and therefore the way we perceive the truth. It is also what allows us to become whole integrated beings; to quote Subhuti again:

Our spiritual life, from this point of view, consists in awakening the imaginal faculty... Once we have begun to awaken the faculty, we will begin to unify all our energies within it – and we will be able to live out our true meaning and purpose. By uniting at higher and higher levels with the images by which the archetypes express themselves, we will be led ultimately to perceive the truth. At this point imagination becomes identical with *prajñā*, or Wisdom.

- *Sangharakshita: A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*, p.281



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How do you use your imagination in everyday life? (Be honest!)
2. What inspires you?
3. Think of a book or play that has expanded the boundaries of your experience. Tell the group about it.
4. How do you use your imagination in your mettā bhāvanā practice? Pass on anything you do that others in the group might find useful.
5. To what extent do you use your imagination in your practice of the mindfulness of breathing, to help you cultivate positive states? Again, pass on any techniques that might help others.
6. Have you ever had the experience of acting “as if”, and then seeing positive results? If so, tell the group about it.
7. Do you ever have what seem like inspired ideas, especially in meditation? Can you relate your experience to Coleridge’s idea of the Imagination?
8. Do you think that what Sangharakshita calls the “imaginal faculty” is really an aspect of the imagination, or not? What can be said for the idea that it is, and what can be said against it?
9. Tell the group about an archetype that has an effect on you.

There is no text to read for this final week. Instead practice the exercises below over the coming week, and be prepared to describe your experience of doing so. After discussing these exercises the module will conclude with a sevenfold pūjā, during which you may wish to make an offering that symbolizes something you feel you have gained from this course.

Exercises

1. Try to be mindful this week of how you use your imagination in negative ways. When you spot yourself doing this, imagine a Buddhist image instead, and perhaps chant their mantra. What effect does this have? Tell the group about your experience.
2. Experiment with using your imagination to develop positive mental states in your meditation this week, either by conjuring up scenes that induce them, by calling to mind beings who embody them, or – if you can – by imagining them directly. You could draw on some of the ways other people spoke about doing this in Week 7. Tell the group how you got on.
3. Make pūjā a part of your practice this week. Do at least three sevenfold pūjās, on your own or with others. Use your imagination to visualize the images in the pūjā as clearly as possible, and to evoke the spiritual moods of the seven stages. Tell the group about your experience of doing this.
4. Experiment with acting ‘as if’ this week. Do one of the following:
 - Try to imagine that everyone you meet is a Bodhisattva (perhaps doing a very good job of hiding it!), and treat them accordingly.
 - Imagine that you are a Bodhisattva having a bad life, who has temporarily forgotten the fact, and act accordingly.

Whichever you choose, act out this imaginative exercise in your daily life to the extent that your mindfulness and continuity of purpose allows. Describe any effects this had to the group.

5. Find ways to stimulate your imagination this week. Go to an art gallery, listen to some good music while doing nothing else, read a book with a strong archetypal dimension – for example a Mahāyāna Sutra - or do something creative. Tell the group what you did and the effect it had.
6. Think of a personal precept or practice you would like to take forward from this part of the course. Create or find something that represents this for you, and bring it to the session, placing it on the shrine as an offering in the pūjā that will conclude this module. Take it away after the pūjā and put it on your personal shrine as a reminder.

Mythic Context

This module also includes an optional extra session on Mythic Context, which your study leader may wish to add either before or after the suggested Week 8.

Suggested Resources

Ritual and Devotion, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. The audio series that the book is based upon is also available.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/ritual-and-devotion-in-buddhism/>
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X05>

Mind in Harmony: The Psychology of Buddhist Ethics, Subhuti, Windhorse Publications. See especially chapter 7, 'Faith and shame'.

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

Buddhophany, Sangharakshita.

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/pdfs/buddhophany.pdf>

Reimagining the Buddha, Subhuti.

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/pdfs/imagining-the-buddha.pdf>

Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. The audio series that the book is based upon is also available.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/creative-symbols-of-tantric-buddhism-ebook/>
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X13>

The Religion of Art, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications.

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

Know Your Mind, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. See especially pages 119-125 on śraddhā.

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

The Mythic Context, Subhuti

What is Myth?, Aloka

The Life and Death of the Imagination, Aloka

The Refuge Tree as Mythic Context, Aloka

All available from Padmaloka Books: <http://www.padmalo.org.uk/resources/shop>

Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition, Subhuti, Windhorse Publications. See especially pages 212-214 on the 'three grounds of faith'.

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

The Way of the White Clouds by Lama Anagarika Govinda. Available free online.

<https://alaya.thebuddhistcentre.com/index.php/s/d1vGbsLkFNxpuLq>

Wisdom Beyond Words, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. See especially pages 184–194 on the 'Greater Mandala'.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/wisdom-beyond-words-the-buddhist-vision-of-ultimate-reality/>

Great Faith, Great Wisdom, Ratnaguna and Śraddhāpa, Windhorse Publications. Ratnaguna presents a commentary on the three Pure Land Sutras – the archetypal 'land of bliss' presided over by the Buddha Amitābha. These Buddhist texts put forward a path of faith and grace, as well as effort and practice.

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/stories/books/great-faith-great-wisdom/>

3.8

Dr Ambedkar and Buddhism



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Introduction

Module compiled by Dharmacharini Vajratara, with help from Dharmachari Subhuti and Dharmachari Maitriveer-Nagarjun.

Introduction

This module of the Dharma Training Course for Mitras explores both the teaching and the life example of Dr Ambedkar, as well as why both are important to the whole Movement. We will have already come across Triratna in India in *Year Two, Part 7*, which offers a basic introduction and perhaps a feel for what the Indian situation is like. This module aims, however, to go much deeper into the significance of Dr Ambedkar and his place within Triratna, both in India and world-wide.

At the time of writing, about half the total Triratna Buddhist Community (Friends and Mitras) and a third of the Triratna Buddhist Order is in India. There is much that is shared throughout the whole Movement, including our basic teachings and practices, but one noticeable difference is the emphasis on Dr Ambedkar. At every class and on every retreat in India you will find on the shrine with the Buddha a picture of Sangharakshita and a picture of Dr Ambedkar. His book *The Buddha and His Dhamma* and Sangharakshita's book *Ambedkar and Buddhism* is studied by all Mitras. As the Movement becomes increasingly international, and Indians get to know other Triratna Buddhists all over the world, many are wanting to know more about Dr Ambedkar and why he should be so significant to so many people.

Dr Ambedkar is becoming increasingly well known outside of India because of his work to transform Indian society and uplift the most marginalised. He did this through political, legal and economic means, including drafting the Indian constitution after Indian independence. The Indian constitution is based on the values of 'liberty, equality and fraternity', values Dr Ambedkar said he derived not from the French Revolution, but from 'my master the Buddha'.⁶⁵ What is also of significance to Buddhists is that as a man with a real feel for the spiritual life, he provides an inspiring example of someone who believed that Buddhism itself can provide a positive force for good in society. He followed through this belief despite great obstacles, and in 1956 publicly embraced Buddhism with 400,000 of his followers. It is clear from the Indian census in 2011 that the communities that became Buddhist in the footsteps of Ambedkar have done better in literacy (including female literacy), education, finding jobs and abandoning female infanticide than other disadvantaged communities. This has been the inspiration for other communities, such as the Triratna Mitras from the 'Roma' community in Hungary who have used Ambedkar's example as a basis for their own work in the 'Jai Bhim Network' and 'Dr Ambedkar Highschool'.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Dr Ambedkar: Speech on All-India Radio, 3 October 1954.

⁶⁶ For more information go to www.jaibhim.hu

Some commentators have suggested that Dr Ambedkar converted to Buddhism for political reasons. For example, on a recent *BBC Radio 4* series, Ambedkar's relationship to the Buddha was said to be 'recycling historical figures who could be endowed with new life in order to solve the problems of Indian society'.⁶⁷ However, Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was a lot more profound than that. Dr Ambedkar was not primarily a social reformer who later became a Buddhist purely in an effort to solve social problems. From an early age he had a 'fascination' with the Buddha⁶⁸ and studied the Buddha's teachings. It was his depth of understanding of Buddhism, particularly of the Buddha's emphasis on ethics and *mettā* rooted in transformation of mind, that enabled Ambedkar to come to the conclusion that the Buddhist teaching is 'a necessity today'. 'The world needs a compassionate outlook.'⁶⁹ Through studying Ambedkar a picture emerges of a Buddhist who saw the social message of Buddhism and how it could be applied to India and the world. He was in spirit a Buddhist who wanted to change society, even if he formally converted only later in life.

As a Buddhist, Dr Ambedkar is also of special interest for Buddhism outside of India. Buddhism spread outside of Asia, for example to Australasia, Europe and North America, just after Dr Ambedkar's Buddhist revival in India. This form of modern Buddhism had a tendency to be imbued with a certain individualism, a tendency to be overly pre-occupied with one's own growth to the exclusion of others, and was traditionally seen as part of the 'self-help' movement. This was been partly to do with religion being identified with the personal sphere, and mistrust of allowing one's personal beliefs to impinge on society. However, certain leading Buddhists are no longer satisfied with Buddhism taking that narrow role⁷⁰. They want to see Buddhist values as having a positive impact on social, economic and political issues throughout the world. These values are under threat from the rise of nationalism, populism and authoritarianism, the far right and white supremacy, which is becoming increasingly evident all over the world.

Dr Ambedkar is also becoming of interest to Buddhists in the East, such as the Dalai Lama, who come from traditionally Buddhist countries. For Buddhists all over the world, Indian Buddhism helps us in understanding the potential of Buddhism to help relieve inequality, greed, hatred and ignorance in all its forms, both in the individual and in society. Studying Dr Ambedkar helps us broaden our understanding of Buddhism to include its impact on societies all over the world. As Sangharakshita explained:

After my contact with Dr Ambedkar ... I became much more aware of the social dimension of Buddhism, in fact the social dimension of existence itself.⁷¹

It is hoped that this course will help you develop an understanding of the significance of Dr Ambedkar for Indian Buddhism, for the Triratna Buddhist Community and for the practice of Buddhism within your own society. The module is six weeks long, and draws from a few different sources: Sangharakshita, Subhuti and other Order Members, and Dr Ambedkar himself. It is laid out as follows:

⁶⁷ Sunil Khilnani *Incarnations, A History of India in 50 Lives*, Penguin Books, 2017, p7.

⁶⁸ Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi 2004, p108.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See Bhikkhu Bodhi, David Loy and Sangharakshita.

⁷¹ Sangharakshita, interview with Saddhanandi, 2015.

- Week one, *The Life of Dr Ambedkar*, is extracted from a talk by Sangharakshita called *Great Buddhists of the Twentieth Century*, as well as an extract from Dr Ambedkar's own life story as he related it in the talk *Conversion is Necessary for your Emancipation and Advancement*.
- Week two goes into the fundamental teachings of Dr Ambedkar in regards to Buddhism as a force for social transformation. It is an extract from Sangharakshita's lecture *The Buddha's Religion is Morality* which he gave in India.
- Weeks three and four look at two key texts by Dr Ambedkar: *Annihilation of Caste* which deals with his vision of an ideal society and how to reform an unjust system. In *Buddha and the Future of His Religion* he explains in detail why he chose Buddhism as the best religion for society, and his vision for the future spread of the Dhamma. Both these weeks are based on edited papers by Dr Ambedkar, with a purpose written commentary by Vajratara based on Sangharakshita and Subhuti.
- Week five is purpose written by Vajratara, with extracts from Sangharakshita, and draws on Lokamitra and Subhuti's writings and lectures. It looks at the influence Dr Ambedkar had on Sangharakshita and similarities between Dr Ambedkar and Sangharakshita's approach to Buddhism.
- In week six we will study a talk by Subhuti called *The Dhamma Revolution East and West* that looks at the impact Dr Ambedkar has had in present day India, and how his life example and teaching can transform the way we practise Buddhism in our own society.

After week six you may have an opportunity to present a project based on the course.

The core text for the module is *Ambedkar and Buddhism* by Sangharakshita. This can be found in *Complete Works: Volume 9, Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I*, published by Windhorse Publications and available in your local Triratna Bookshop or online at

<https://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-complete-works-of-sangharakshita-volume-9-dr-ambedkar-and-the-revival-of-buddhism-i/>

It can also be downloaded for free from www.sangharakshita.org. It is expected that you will read this book in advance of the module.



Introduction

You can read more about the life of Dr Ambedkar in *Complete Works: Volume 9, Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I*, which includes Sangharakshita's book *Ambedkar and Buddhism*. It is recommended you read at least *Ambedkar and Buddhism* in preparation for this course.

You could also watch the movie about Dr Ambedkar's life made in 2000 (3 hours long), which can be found at the following address:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yv6aU-9xQ0>

Extract from *Great Buddhists of the Twentieth Century*

*The following is an extract from a talk Sangharakshita gave called Great Buddhists of the Twentieth Century.*⁷²

So far we have looked at individuals from wealthy, middle-class families. By contrast, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar came from the very bottom of the social heap. He was born in 1891 at Mhow in central India into an 'untouchable'⁷³ Hindu family, and this background to his life is very much what his career was about. To have any idea of what Ambedkar achieved one has to be clear about what this term 'untouchable' really means.

Hindu society is divided into castes, with the Brahmins, the priestly caste, at the top, and the Shudras, or labouring caste, at the bottom, and others, with all sorts of subdivisions, in between. Having been born into a particular caste you can't get out of it – it is regarded as very wrong even to try. As for 'untouchables', they are even lower than Shudras, and in a sense they are outside the caste system altogether. They are called 'untouchables' because any contact with them pollutes so-called 'caste Hindus'. Even their shadow pollutes.

Traditionally, 'untouchables' lived in ghettos of their own, outside the main community. They could engage only in very menial occupations such as removing night-soil, and they would

⁷² <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=186>

⁷³ Sangharakshita gave this talk in 1995. He used the term 'ex-untouchable' to refer to the community that Dr Ambedkar came from. This community was known by the caste Hindus as 'untouchable' because their touch was deemed polluting to any of the higher castes. This term is regarded as offensive because in reality no one's touch is polluting to anyone else. Sangharakshita also uses the term 'ex-untouchable', but this term can also be considered as unacceptable because it assumes people were untouchable to be now no longer untouchable. The preferred term is 'Scheduled Caste' which is the term Dr Ambedkar used. The term 'Dalit' which means 'oppressed' is also sometimes used. 'Scheduled Caste' refers to an official designated group within the Indian constitution. It goes without saying that Sangharakshita would never want to cause offence in his use of terms, but was using the terms he had available to him at the time.

serve the caste Hindu villagers in this way in return for a few scraps of food. They weren't allowed to enter Hindu temples or attend Hindu schools. They had no economic or political rights – they could not even own property. They were not allowed to better themselves in any way. Once an 'untouchable', always an 'untouchable' – at least, so far as this life was concerned.

This system had been rigidly in force for a thousand years (and to all intents and purposes it still is in many areas). But when Ambedkar was born there were already faint signs that it was beginning to weaken. The rule of the British over India was no doubt unfortunate in many ways, but for the 'untouchables' it did have its advantages, because the British army accepted 'untouchables' into its ranks. In fact it had 'untouchable' regiments, and Ambedkar's father belonged to one of these. Members of these regiments were given a certain amount of education, and some, including Ambedkar's father, even became army schoolmasters.

With help and encouragement from his father, Ambedkar became a brilliant student, and at the age of seventeen was the first 'untouchable' to matriculate. He was given a scholarship by a liberal Indian prince, and eventually graduated in politics and economics. He studied further at Columbia University and then at the London School of Economics, and also qualified as a barrister. He returned to India in 1923, aged thirty-two, and took his place as one of the most highly gifted and qualified men in Indian public life.

However, he had not equipped himself so comprehensively for a political career out of self-interest. He never forgot that he himself was a 'untouchable' – nor was he allowed to. Many Indians continued to treat him as an untouchable, and this was a source of great disappointment and bitterness to him; but it only hardened his resolve to devote his life to the uplift of his people. He founded newspapers, he started schools and colleges, he entered politics, he fought legal battles; and we may say that from 1923 until his death in 1956, the story of his life is inseparable from the history of modern India.

In 1927 Dr Ambedkar focused attention on the problems faced by his people by provoking the 'Chowdar Tank case'. In the town of Mahad in what is now Maharashtra state, 'untouchables' were not allowed to take water from this tank until 1927, when it was opened to them by the local municipality. Whether or not the Chowdar tank actually belonged to the municipality would be later contested. But meanwhile, Ambedkar held a conference of 3,000 'untouchables' at Mahad, and at its conclusion led them to the edge of the tank to drink from it.

This may all seem a very tame business to us – a local dispute over who is allowed to use a water tank, and 3,000 people gathering together in order to dare to make use of what has been made available to them. But in India in those days it was a terrific, extraordinary, revolutionary thing to do. There was a furious reaction from the caste Hindus, and some of Ambedkar's followers were assaulted in one way or another for their impious – in the eyes of the caste Hindus – temerity. The 'untouchables' had, by drawing water from the tank, polluted it.

The question now was how to purify the tank again. Brahmins were called together, and they took 108 earthenware pots of water from the tank and mixed the water with curds, with milk, with cow-dung, and with cow's urine. Then the pots, with the water and the aforementioned 'purifying' elements, were put back in the tank and Vedic mantras were recited. In this way the tank was purified.

Naturally, a response to this insulting procedure was called for on the part of the 'untouchables' under Ambedkar, and it had to be an appropriate response, one that would get to the heart of the issue. In the same year, 1927, they burned the *Manusmṛiti*, or the 'Laws of Manu'. The significance of this book as a symbol resided in the fact that it is the source of all the laws regarding caste. It lays down who can eat with whom, who can marry whom, who can touch whom; and it also lays down how those who infringe those laws should be punished. Thus, for example, it is decreed that any Shudra who presumes to teach Brahmins their duty should have boiling oil poured into his mouth and into his ears. The burning of the *Manusmṛiti* had the desired effect. It shocked orthodox Hindus all over India, and it symbolized the repudiation by the 'untouchables' of the authority of the Hindu scriptures.

The man generally lauded nowadays as the great hero of this period in India, during the drive towards independence, is of course Mahatma Gandhi. But the 'untouchables' cannot see him in quite this idealized light. Gandhi was himself a caste Hindu who claimed to represent the 'untouchables' as well as caste Hindus, but the 'untouchables' did not recognize him in this role. They believed that only an 'untouchable' could safeguard their interests.

Gandhi had already agreed that Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs should have separate electorates, and Ambedkar argued that in a democratic India there should be separate electorates for 'untouchables' as well. This was because 'untouchables' did not want to be governed by caste Hindus. However, in 1932 Gandhi resisted Ambedkar's demands by going on one of his 'fasts to death', and during the period of the fast Ambedkar described himself as the most hated man in India. Gandhi did indeed come close to death, and in the end Ambedkar was forced to compromise. If Gandhi had fasted to death Ambedkar would have faced the prospect of the wholesale murder of 'untouchables' by caste Hindus.

In 1935 Ambedkar's wife died. He had married her very young, when he was sixteen and she just nine; only one of their five children had survived. By this time his political position was hardening. He no longer believed in the possibility of reform within Hinduism. He was convinced that the caste Hindus were not going to change their ways; they weren't going to treat the 'untouchables' as human beings. And in 1935 he made his famous declaration that though he had been born a Hindu, he would not die one.

In 1947 Ambedkar became Law Minister in the first government of the independent state of India, but he resigned from the Cabinet four years later because of fierce opposition from caste Hindus – even in the Cabinet – to his attempts to reform Hindu law. It was at about this time that I myself had some correspondence and then a series of meetings with him.

At the end of 1954 Ambedkar announced that he would devote the remainder of his life to the propagation of Buddhism in India. This was not a sudden decision. He had been a student of Buddhism for some time, and had known something about it ever since he was sixteen, when he had been given a copy of the Marathi translation of Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*,⁷⁴ a life of the Buddha in English verse (which had also been an early discovery and favourite of Dharmapala's).

Over the years Ambedkar had gradually become convinced that Buddhism was the best religion for himself and for the 'untouchable' community as a whole. There were various reasons for his choice, but the main ones were: firstly, that Buddhism did not conflict with the

74 It is unclear what Sangharakshita's source is to say that Dr Ambedkar was given *The Light of Asia* as a teenager.

dictates of reason; secondly, that it did not condone man's inhumanity to man, and it certainly did not condone the caste system; and thirdly, that it was of Indian origin, it was not the product of a foreign culture.

So in 1956, in a ceremony at Nagpur in central India, Dr Ambedkar became a Buddhist – along with 380,000 of his followers. The conversions in Nagpur sparked off others all over India. It was the greatest event for Buddhism in India for many hundreds of years. Though these were 'mass conversions' the effect on the individuals who took part, who became Buddhists at that time, was profound. I used to ask people, months or even years afterwards, 'What difference has becoming a Buddhist meant for you?' And nine times out of ten they would reply, 'Now that I'm a Buddhist I feel free.' That seems to have been the most important aspect of the experience: a sense of freedom. They felt socially, psychologically, spiritually free.

Six weeks later, Ambedkar was dead, at the age of 64. I was in Nagpur at the time and I well remember the reaction of shock and grief that swept through the ex-untouchable community. There were fears that the conversion movement would simply collapse. But happily it didn't collapse, and it continues to this day.

The significance of Dr Ambedkar's life and work is exceptionally profound and far-reaching. The problem he faced was how to lift up his people, socially, economically, educationally – in every respect. And he felt that the only overall solution to this problem was a change in religion. It wasn't enough just to reject Hinduism, just to leave the religion that generally condoned the caste system. Ambedkar himself was a deeply religious man; he believed that religion was essential to human life, that we cannot really live without it. So for him there was no question of pursuing, for instance, the communist option. He believed that a real social and economic revolution was possible only on the basis of a spiritual revolution.

It was for this reason that he inaugurated what we now call the 'Dhamma revolution'. This is not just a nominal change of religion, but a transformation of one's whole life in every aspect. It is not just individual transformation, but even collective transformation as well. This is the movement that Ambedkar set in motion. He showed that a change in religion, even in the midst of the twentieth century, could bring about a change for the better in the lives of millions of people.

The conversion movement in India is also of profound significance for Buddhism itself. Ambedkar was well aware that Buddhism had already disappeared once from India, and having revived it he didn't want it to disappear again. So he looked at why it had disappeared. He saw that one of the principal factors leading to its decline was the separation which had developed between the monks and the laity.

The monks lived together in monasteries, and in the course of centuries these monasteries became bigger and bigger, each in the end housing thousands of monks leading self-contained lives apart from the laity. So without much contact with the monks and without any lay ordination, the lay-people began to feel less and less like they themselves were Buddhists at all, and they came more and more under the influence of the Hindu brahmins. And this process was accelerated after the great monasteries were destroyed by Muslim invaders in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries. Thus eventually, the lay Buddhists were simply absorbed into the Hindu community. Buddhism disappeared from India, and only ruins marked what it once had been.

On the basis of this analysis of the decline and fall of Indian Buddhism, Ambedkar decided that there had to be ordination for lay-people corresponding to monastic ordination for monks. He called this lay ordination 'Dhammadiksha', and it consisted of two parts: first, taking the traditional Three Refuges and five precepts; and secondly – and this was quite new – taking twenty-two vows.

These twenty-two vows were devised by Ambedkar himself, and their purpose was to clearly and completely separate the new Buddhists from their old Hindu religion. They constituted an explicit renunciation of every vestige of Hinduism, of every Hindu practice, like, for example, offering animal sacrifices to gods and goddesses. These vows made it clear what it was to be a Hindu and what it was to be a Buddhist, and that it was not possible to be both. They helped to root out a very commonly held belief in India at this time that if you were a Buddhist you were necessarily also a Hindu, that Buddhism was an accretion on the main body of Hinduism. I myself remember a Hindu swami asking me after my ordination why I had not done the job properly and become a Hindu monk. 'Hinduism is like the great ocean,' he said, 'Buddhism is just a little stream.' In fact, any idea that Buddhism might be combined with another faith, whether Hinduism or Christianity, represents a serious confusion of thought. Dr Ambedkar thought that this principle was so important that it needed to be embodied in vows taken as part of the ordination ceremony.

The way it was done at Nagpur on 14 October 1956 was as follows: Dr Ambedkar took the Three Refuges and five precepts from U Chandramani, a very senior bhikkhu. After this, Ambedkar publicly recited his twenty-two vows. He then proceeded to administer the Refuges and precepts and the twenty-two vows himself to the 380,000 of his followers who were assembled there at Nagpur. In this way he established a very significant principle.

Ambedkar was initiated into Buddhism by a monk, but his followers were initiated into Buddhism by a layman. Thus the monk and the layman were placed, in a sense, on an equal footing. Dr Ambedkar was asserting the fact that it is Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels – the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha – which makes one a Buddhist, not one's lifestyle. Going for Refuge is the primary act of a Buddhist; lifestyle – whether one is monk or lay – is secondary.

Extract from *Conversion is Necessary for your Emancipation and Advancement*

The second extract is from a talk Dr Ambedkar gave in which he laid out the reasons why he thought the Scheduled Castes should convert to a religion other than Hinduism. He described three key incidents from his own life, incidents which, Sangharakshita said, 'wounded Dr Ambedkar's heart'.⁷⁵ These experiences led Dr Ambedkar to believe that, for the Scheduled Castes, 'if you continue to remain within the fold of Hinduism, you cannot attain a status higher than that of slave'.⁷⁶

You have assembled here to hear my views about conversion. I, therefore, feel it is necessary to talk to you in detail about the subject. Some people often raise the question, 'Why should we change our religion?' Then I feel an impulse to ask a counter-question, 'Why should we not change our religion?'

⁷⁵ Sangharakshita, *Complete Works: Volume 9, Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016, p180.

⁷⁶ Dr Ambedkar, *Conversion is Necessary for your Emancipation and Advancement*. Lecture 17 May 1936, Kalyan. Translation from Marathi by Vasant Moon.

I would like to relate some instances in my life to explain why conversion is necessary and then it would be easy for you to understand why I chose conversion. You, too, must have had similar experiences in your life. There are some four or five incidents in my life which have left deep impressions on my mind, and led me to decide in favour of renunciation of Hinduism and conversion to some other religion. I would like to relate today only two or three of these incidents.

I was born in Mhow, Indore, where my father was employed in the army. He held the rank of a Subedar at that time. Since we lived in the cantonment we had little to do with the world outside the military area. I had no experience of 'Untouchability'. When my father retired from service on pension, we shifted to Satara to live there. My mother had passed away when I was barely five years old. Famine broke out in Goregaon, in the District of Satara, and to combat this the Government started 'Famine Relief Employment'. They started digging a water tank and my father was appointed as a pay-master to disburse wages to the workers in the labour camp. He had to join the labour camp at Goregaon and we, the four children, were left behind at Satara. For nearly four to five years in Satara, we had to live only on rice. It was only after coming to Satara that we began to experience what Untouchability was. The first thing which struck me most was that no barber was prepared to cut our hair. This disturbed us. My elder sister who is still alive, used to cut my hair sitting on the platform outside our house. I could not understand why in spite of the presence of so many barbers, no barber was prepared to cut our hair.

The second incident also relates to that period. Whilst my father was at Goregaon, he used to send us letters. In one letter he invited us to visit Goregaon. The idea that we could be travelling by train to Goregaon thrilled me very much because I had never seen a train before. With the money sent by my father we got new clothes stitched and my brother, my sister's daughter, and I, set off for Goregaon. We had sent a letter beforehand but, unfortunately, due to the carelessness or mistake on the part of our servant, it had not reached my father. We were certain that my father would send a servant to receive us at the railway station. On our alighting from the train we were distressed to find the servant nowhere in sight. Soon everybody departed and there were no passengers, excepting us, left on the platform. We waited in vain for some three quarters of an hour. The station master enquired who we were meeting, what caste we belonged to, and where we wanted to go. We told him that we belonged to the Mahar caste. This gave him a shock and he retreated some five steps backwards. But seeing us well dressed, he presumed that we belonged to some well-to-do family. He assured us that he would try to get a cart for us, but owing to our being members of the Mahar caste, no bullock-cart driver was willing to drive us. Evening was approaching and till 6 or 7pm, we did not succeed in getting a cart. Finally a cart-man agreed to take us in his cart. But he made it clear at the outset that he would not drive the cart for us. I had been living in the military area and driving a cart was not difficult for me. As soon as we agreed to this condition, he came with his cart and we, all of us children, started for Goregaon. At a short distance outside the village we came across a brook. The cart driver asked us to eat our food there, for no water was available elsewhere on the way. Accordingly, we got down from the cart and ate our food. The water was murky and mixed with dung. In the meantime, the cart-driver also returned after having his dinner. As the evening grew darker, the driver quietly boarded the cart and sat beside us. It became so dark soon, that, neither any flickering lamp nor any human being was visible for miles. Fear, darkness and loneliness made us cry. It was well past midnight and we were frightened. So scared were we that we thought we should never reach Goregaon. When we reached 'Naka' (toll post) we jumped out of the cart. We made enquiries from the toll-collector (Nakadar) whether we could get anything to eat in the vicinity. I spoke to him in Persian. I knew how to speak in Persian and had no difficulty in

speaking to him. Somehow, we spent the night near the ravine and early in the morning, we set off again on our journey to Goregaon. At last we reached Goregaon on the following day in the afternoon, utterly exhausted and almost half-dead.

The third incident relates to the period when I served in Baroda State. With a scholarship granted by Baroda State, I had gone for education abroad. After returning from England, in accord with the terms of the agreement, I came to serve under the Baroda Durbar. I could not get a house to live at Baroda. Neither a Hindu nor any Muslim was prepared to rent out a house to me in the city of Baroda. Failing to get a house in any locality, I decided to get accommodation in a Parsi Dharamsala. After having stayed in America and England, I had developed a fair complexion and an impressive personality. Giving myself a Parsi name, 'Adalji Sorabji' I began to live in the Parsi Dharamsala. The Parsi manager agreed to accommodate me at Rs.2 per diem. But soon the people got wind of the fact that His Highness the Maharaja Gaikwad of Baroda had appointed a Mahar boy as an officer in his Durbar, my living in the Parsi Dharamsala under an assumed name gave rise to suspicion and my secret was soon out. On the second day of my stay, when I was just leaving for my office after taking breakfast, a mob of some fifteen or twenty Parsis, armed with lathis accosted me, threatening to kill me and demanded who I was. I replied, 'I am a Hindu'. But they were not to be satisfied with this answer. Exasperated, they began to shower abuses on me and bade me vacate the room immediately. My presence of mind and knowledge gave me the strength to face the situation boldly. Politely I asked for permission to stay for eight hours more. Throughout the day I searched for a house to live in, but miserably failed to get any place to hide my head. I approached my friends but all turned me down on some plea or other, expressing their inability to accommodate me. I was utterly disappointed and exhausted. What is to be done next? I just could not decide. Frustrated and exhausted, I quietly sat down at one place, with tears flowing out of my eyes. Seeing no hope of getting a house, and no alternative but to quit, I tendered my resignation and left for Bombay by the night train.



Suggestions for reflection, research and discussion

8. What are examples of social injustice that 'have made a deep impression on your mind' and inspire you to work for a better world?
9. Who are your heroes or heroines that inspire you to have a positive impact on the world?
10. Dr Ambedkar is very clear that he thinks that Hinduism contains injustice and inequality, and therefore he encourages his followers to leave it behind. How can we practise tolerance of other religions, whilst acknowledging their failings?
11. Have you left another religion in order to embrace Buddhism? If so, why?
12. From these extracts and your own studies, is there any incident from the life of Dr Ambedkar that has particularly moved or inspired you? If so, why?

Introduction

This week's study is taken from a lecture Sangharakshita gave in Pune, India, in 1981.⁷⁷ He gave it in a school in central Pune run by people from the Scheduled Castes. In his lecture he lays out the essence of why Dr Ambedkar thought Buddhism was so important for the world and why conversion to Buddhism is the basis for social reform. This lecture provides the background of Dr Ambedkar's thinking that will help us understand his writings.

Extract from *The Buddha's Religion is Morality*

This evening I want to begin by talking about man – that is to say, about human beings. In Buddhism man occupies a very important place. It is man, in fact, who occupies the centre of the picture, not God, because in Buddhism there is no God, but only man, in various stages of development. Buddhism therefore directs all its attention to man.

According to modern evolutionary science, human beings have existed for only about 500,000 years, and of that period he has lived as a social being only for about 10,000 or 12,000 years, which is about as far back as recorded history goes. About the period before that we have only myths and legends – we don't know very much about those earlier, prehistoric times. We are, however, gradually learning more and more about them. Sometimes archaeologists dig up the ruins of ancient buried cities, and in that way we learn how people in those far-off days lived. But though we don't know much about those prehistoric times, there is one thing that we do know. We know that changes were taking place, both in man himself and in the society to which he belonged. And here there is an interesting fact to be observed. The further back we go in history, the slower is the rate at which the change takes place. The closer we come to the present, on the other hand, the faster the rate of change. During the last 500 years, especially, the rate of social change has been tremendous – particularly during the last thirty or forty years, and in the West more than the East.

But what is the reason for this? Why do changes in society take place? They take place for the very definite reason that the people belonging to that society become dissatisfied with it, and start wanting a new kind of society. Twenty five years ago a great social change took place here in India, one of the greatest social changes that the world has ever seen. I am referring of course to the mass conversion to Buddhism (*Dhammanta*) which took place in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. Why did this great social change take place? It took place because of many, many people's deep dissatisfaction with the old Hindu society.

⁷⁷ Sangharakshita, *Complete Works: Volume 9, Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016, p178.

For the caste Hindus that old society may have been very pleasant, but for millions of people who were not caste Hindus (*savarna*) it was simply hell. It was a hell of injustice, misery, and oppression, a hell of poverty and ignorance.

[Dr Ambedkar] became more and more dissatisfied with the old Hindu society, and eventually decided to give up Hinduism and adopt Buddhism. So on 14 October 1956 the great mass conversion took place in Nagpur. But why did Dr Ambedkar adopt Buddhism? Why did he not just give up Hinduism without adopting some other religion? After all, many people in the world today live without religion, especially in the communist countries. In these countries they are, in fact, very much against religion. So why did Dr Ambedkar adopt another religion? Why did he not just give up Hinduism and leave it at that? There are three reasons.

First of all, Dr Ambedkar himself was a deeply religious man. He had very strong feelings of faith and devotion, especially towards Bhagavan Buddha. When he was only a schoolboy someone gave him a copy of *The Light of Asia*, which tells the life of the Buddha in beautiful poetry, and this book had a strong influence on him.

Secondly, Dr Ambedkar was convinced that man could not, in fact, live without religion. He believed that man is essentially a religious being, and cannot be happy or truly successful without religion. Here he did not agree with Marxist communism. Dr Ambedkar believed that if one gives up one religion, one has to adopt another.

Thirdly, according to Dr Ambedkar, religion in the sense of morality is the governing principle of every society. In his article on 'Buddha and the Future of his Religion', written in 1950, he wrote:

Society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either, society must go to pieces.

In other words, in his view it is the law that keeps the anti-social minority within bounds, while the majority are governed by morality. Here an interesting question arises. This is not a question that Dr Ambedkar himself raises, but it occurs to me to ask what happens when there is a widespread breakdown of morality in a society? What happens when a lot of people in a society lose faith in religion? This is beginning to happen in the West. Millions of people have lost faith in Christianity, and it was of course the Christian religion that for hundreds of years held society together in the West. Now it is no longer able to hold society together, and there are signs, here and there, that society is beginning to fall to pieces.

These, then, are the three reasons why when Dr Ambedkar decided to give up Hinduism, he also decided to adopt another religion. Now here there is a point to be emphasized. Dr Ambedkar did not want simply to escape from the old Hindu society. He wanted to create a new society. Because he wanted to create a new society, and because in his view a new religion was necessary in order to do this, he had to adopt another religion. But which religion? Eventually, as you know, he chose Buddhism because of the importance that Buddhism gives to morality. In this connection I shall quote again from his article 'Buddha and the Future of his Religion':

Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has, it is not an integral part of it. It is not embedded in religion. It (i.e. morality) is a separate force which is sustained by social necessities and not by injunction of Hindu religion. The religion of the Buddha is morality. It is imbedded in

religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if not morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions, morality is to Buddhism.

Dr Ambedkar wanted to bring into existence a new society, and this new society had to be founded on morality. This is why Dr Ambedkar chose Buddhism.

We usually think of Buddhist morality in terms of the five or the ten *sīlas*. These are indeed very important, and we cannot emphasize them too much. But it is possible to go into this matter of Buddhist morality from a somewhat different point of view, and Dr Ambedkar does this in this same article on 'Buddha and the Future of his Religion'. You might be thinking that I'm quoting a lot from Dr Ambedkar's writings, but the reason for that is that it is necessary to know what Dr Ambedkar really said. People say, 'Dr Ambedkar said this' or 'Dr Ambedkar said that', just as they say, 'The Buddha said this' or 'The Buddha said that'. Some people even say that the Buddha said there is a God! When people say such things you have to ask, 'Where did the Buddha say that? Show me the *sūtra*.' In the same way, when people say, 'Dr Ambedkar said this' or 'Dr Ambedkar said that' you must ask where Dr Ambedkar said it, and when, because it's important to know what Dr Ambedkar really did say. Unless you know what he really said, you cannot follow his path. So let us look at this article again and see what Dr Ambedkar has to say on the subject of Buddhist morality. He says:

Religion as a code of social morality ... must recognize the fundamental tenets of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Unless a religion recognizes these three fundamental principles of social life, religion will be doomed.

Let us, therefore, look at these fundamental principles in terms of Buddhism. First of all, the principle of liberty. I don't know whether it is the same in Marathi, but in English we distinguish between liberty and freedom. 'Liberty' is more external, and 'freedom' more internal, pertaining more to the mind and the heart than to the body. We enjoy liberty when the society to which we belong is organized on proper principles. We enjoy freedom when the mind reaches a higher state of consciousness, when the mind becomes free from greed, hatred, and delusion. We enjoy freedom when *maitrī*, *karuṇā*, and *prajñā* are fully developed. Buddhism attaches the greatest importance to freedom. Freedom is in fact the ultimate goal of the whole Buddhist path. In Pāli, the language of the Theravāda Buddhist scriptures, the word for freedom is *vimutti*, and in the Pāli scriptures the Buddha has quite a number of things to say about *vimutti*. On one occasion he said, 'My Dhamma is just like the great ocean. Just as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt (*loṇa-rasa*), so my Dhamma has one taste, the taste of freedom (*vimutti-rasa*).'

Whether you take water from the Indian Ocean or the Atlantic Ocean, it will taste of salt. In the same way, whatever aspect of the Buddha's teaching you take up, it has just one taste, the taste of freedom – that is, it is concerned only with freedom, leads only to freedom.

Even though we can distinguish between liberty and freedom, they are still very closely connected. Almost without exception, people have to experience liberty before they experience freedom. It is very difficult to develop the mind, to raise the level of consciousness, if one does not enjoy liberty. Political liberty, social liberty, economic liberty, intellectual liberty, and of course religious liberty, are therefore all important, and Buddhism has always recognized the importance of all these different kinds of liberty. This is one of the reasons why it is so tolerant. It has always recognized the liberty of the individual to follow the religion of his own choice. Some religions do not recognize this liberty. Only years ago the Pope, the head of the Roman

Catholic Church, declared officially that it is wrong to believe that a man should follow the religion of his own choice. All through its history the Roman Catholic Church has persecuted the followers of other religions, even the followers of other forms of Christianity, whenever it has had the political power to do so. In Europe thousands of people have been killed in wars of religion. In the past – now several hundreds of years ago – thousands of people were burnt alive for believing differently from the established Church. So Christianity, especially the Roman Catholic Church, has not recognized the liberty of the individual to follow the religion of his own choice. It is the same with Islam. Only a few weeks ago I was reading about what is happening in Iran. In Iran there are a few thousand followers of the Baha'i religion, and according to the newspapers, many of them have been murdered by the orthodox Muslims. In Buddhism we don't find anything like that. Buddhism has existed for 2,500 years but there has never been a religious war in the name of Buddhism. Buddhism has spread only by peaceful means, and one of the reasons for this is that Buddhism believes in liberty.

Secondly, there is the principle of equality. There are some misunderstandings about this principle. Equality does not mean that everybody is exactly the same. Equality means that everybody has the same right to develop as a human being. Hinduism does not recognize this right. Therefore Dr Ambedkar says that Hinduism is not founded on morality. He says that the official gospel of Hinduism is inequality. Hinduism says that if you are born as a Brahmin, you have the right to study the Vedas. If you are born as a Kshatriya, you have the right to fight. If you are born as a Vaishya, you have the right to do business and make money. It does not matter if as a businessman you cheat a little, because that is all part of your *dharma*. If you are born a Shudra, you have the right to serve everybody else, i.e. all the members of the three higher castes. And what about the 'Untouchable'?⁷⁸ Well, he is not even a Shudra. The 'Untouchables' have no rights at all. They don't even have the right to exist. In fact, of course, the Hindu caste system is much more complicated than that. There are many, many more castes, not just the original four. It is said that there are 2,000 different castes in modern Hinduism. There is even a caste of thieves, and if you are born into that caste, you have the right to steal. In fact, it is your *dharma* to steal. If you don't steal you are committing a sin. So Hinduism does not really believe in morality. It believes in caste *dharma*. It believes that it is sinful to give up your own caste *dharma* and follow the *dharma* of some other caste. For this reason someone who is a Shudra by birth is not allowed to study the Vedas, however intelligent he may be.

An orthodox Hindu writer called Kumāṛila Bhaṭṭa, who lived more than 1000 years ago, even criticized the Buddha on this score. In the *Ślokavārttika* he wrote that although the Buddha was born into a Kshatriya family he dared to act as a teacher. Teaching, however, is the duty of the Brahmin, not the duty of the Kshatriya. The Buddha, therefore, was in Kumāṛila Bhaṭṭa's view a very wicked person because he gave up his own Kshatriya *dharma* and tried to take up the *dharma* of a Brahmin. For this reason, Kumāṛila Bhaṭṭa says, the teaching of the Buddha should not be accepted, just as milk should not be accepted when it comes in the skin of a dog. There is nothing wrong with the teaching, but it comes from the wrong source, so it should not be accepted. This is the orthodox Hindu view.

Buddhism takes quite a different view. It believes in equality, not in caste *dharma*. It doesn't see people as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya etc. It sees people just as human beings, and because it sees them just as human beings, it wants them all to grow. It sees them all as developing. This is the vision that the Buddha had shortly after his Enlightenment. He saw all the people of the world like a great bed of lotuses, all growing, and all in different stages of

⁷⁸ See note 9.

development. When, some time later, he sent out his first sixty disciples to teach his *saddhamma*, he sent them out to teach it for the happiness and welfare of all. He did not send them out to teach it to this caste or to that caste only. He sent out his disciples to teach all human beings, whether old or young, rich or poor, male or female. Thus we find that Buddhism believes in equality in the sense of equality of opportunity – opportunity to grow and develop as a human being.

Thirdly, there's the principle of fraternity. The English word comes from the Latin word for 'brother'. Fraternity is the sort of feeling that you have towards your own brother – in fact, it is an even stronger feeling than that. It's natural to have this sort of feeling towards your own brother. You have the same parents, you've been brought up together, you've played together, so naturally you have a good, warm, friendly feeling towards one another. The feeling of fraternity is like that, only much deeper, much broader, because it is not limited to your blood relatives. According to Buddhism all men and women are brothers and sisters, because we are all human beings. Human beings do not belong to different biological species in the way that other kinds of animals do. The proof of this is that animals belonging to different species cannot interbreed and produce offspring. The lion and the monkey, for instance, cannot interbreed to produce an animal which is half lion and half monkey. It is the same with the elephant and the horse, the cat and the dog, and so on. But human beings, men and women, can all interbreed, whatever caste or country they are from. Even the Brahmin and the Chandala can produce offspring – the Hindu *śāstras* recognize that, because they have kept a separate caste for the offspring of such unions. All men and women are brothers and sisters because we all belong to one and the same human race, so it is natural that we should all love one another. Buddhism was the first religion in the world to recognize this principle of fraternity.

In Buddhism, fraternity is called *mettā* or *maitrī*. (*Mettā* is the Pāli word and *maitrī* is the Sanskrit word.) *Mettā* or *maitrī* is the feeling of unselfish love, the heartfelt desire for the happiness and well-being of other people. Buddhism teaches that this feeling should be directed towards all human beings, not just to the members of one's own family or caste. Indeed, it should be directed towards all living beings whatsoever. What we may call the motto of Buddhism is *sabbe sattā sukhi hontu*, which means 'May all living beings be happy'. What a wonderful ideal this is! And in Buddhism it is not just an ideal. Buddhism teaches us how to develop this feeling of *mettā* through the practice of what is called *mettā bhāvanā*, about which I shall be saying something in the second talk in this series.

These, then, are the three fundamental principles of social life: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Buddhism recognizes all three principles because it gives importance to morality. Buddhism can therefore be the foundation of the new society. As Dr Ambedkar said, morality is the governing principle of every society, and it was for this reason that he chose Buddhism. He didn't simply give up the old religion. He chose a new religion, a religion that was capable of giving a solid foundation to the new society – a foundation of *śīla*, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

So far I have spoken about *śīla* as the foundation of the new society, but there is much more that could be said about it. I will now make just a few comments about *śīla* in relation to the individual Buddhist. First of all, *śīla* is something that you have to practise yourself. No one else can practise it for you. You yourself have to observe the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity in your dealings with other people. You yourself have to practise the five, or the eight, or the ten precepts. It is good to recite them, but that is not enough. You must practise them too.

Secondly, you have to practise *śīla* regularly. Ideally you have to practise it all the time. It is not enough to practise it just once or twice a month, or just on Buddha Jayanti day. You have to practise it all the time. In Buddhist literature *śīla* is defined as habitual skilful action of body, speech, and mind. But what do we mean by skilful? Skilful means dissociated from mental states of greed, hatred, and delusion and associated with mental states of generosity, love or *maitrī*, and wisdom or *prajñā*. *Śīla* is thus the habitual performance of such skilful actions of body, speech, and mind. Here the emphasis is on 'habitual'. *Śīla* is not something you do from time to time, but something you do all the time. The individual Buddhist should be the living embodiment of *śīla*, the living embodiment of skilful mental states.

Thirdly, *śīla* makes you a true human being. Without it you are not really human. *Śīla* helps you to grow, helps you to develop. That is why it is the first stage of the threefold path taught by the Buddha, the other two stages being *samādhi* and *prajñā*. *Śīla* comes first, which is why after reciting the Three Refuges in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, we take the five or the eight or the ten precepts. We go for Refuge, we commit ourselves to the spiritual ideal, and when we take the precepts we actually start moving in the direction of that ideal. Therefore it is important for us to practise these precepts.

My last few comments have been about *śīla* in relation to the individual Buddhist, and before that, I spoke about *śīla* as the foundation of the new society. These two things are connected. *Śīla* is indeed the foundation of the new society, but it is not something that exists by itself. It exists only when people actually practise it. So when we say that *śīla* is the foundation of the new society, what we really mean is that people who are practising *śīla* are the foundation of the new society. If there are no people practising *śīla*, then there will be no new society. If there are no Buddhists there will be no Buddhism. Buddhism does not exist in books. Buddhism exists in the lives of people. So we must practise *śīla*. We must observe the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. We must practise the five or the eight or the ten precepts all the time. If we do that, then Dr Ambedkar's purpose in giving up Hinduism and choosing Buddhism will be fulfilled. And not only that. We will lead happy, useful, and progressive lives, and in this way the foundations of the new society will be truly laid.



Suggestions for reflection, research and discussion

8. What is religion? How are humans essentially religious?
9. If we are dissatisfied with our religion, is it necessary to replace the old religion with another religion, or would it be better to leave religion behind altogether?
10. Do you agree with Sangharakshita's assertion that 'Now [religion] is no longer able to hold society together, and there are signs, here and there, that society is beginning to fall to pieces.' If so, what are the signs?
11. Sangharakshita asserts that 'Buddhism has existed for 2,500 years but there has never been a religious war in the name of Buddhism.' However, we know that there has been violence in Buddhist countries against members of other religions: for example recently the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, Muslims in Southern Thailand, and the Tamil Hindus and Muslims in

Sri Lanka. What do these, and other examples, mean for Buddhism's commitment to liberty, equality and fraternity?

12. 'You yourself have to observe the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity in your dealings with other people.' How can we embody the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity in our own lives?
13. How does *śīla* make you a true human being?
14. How does *śīla* form the foundation of a new society? How does morality hold a society together?

Introduction

This famous essay from Dr Ambedkar is the text for a speech he prepared, but did not give. He was invited to give it in Lahore, which was still part of India at the time, for the 1936 Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak-Mandal, an organisation of caste Hindu social reformers concerned to eradicate the caste system. They wanted to eradicate caste within Hinduism itself through inter-caste activity. Within the caste system, there are very strict rules about every aspect of behaviour such as who you can share a meal with and who you can marry, keeping marriage and dining within caste boundaries. The Jat-Pat-Todak-Mandal thought that by marrying outside one's caste and dining freely together, the caste system would slowly become obsolete. Ambedkar thought that only by 'destroying the religious notions on which caste was founded' could caste be destroyed. This amounts to abandoning Hinduism and doubting the Hindu sacred books. After sending in advance a draft of his speech, his organisers told him that unless he changed the nature of his speech, the invitation would be rescinded. He refused to change his speech and instead of delivering it at the conference, he published it. It proved very popular among the Scheduled Castes and provoked criticism from leading Hindus such as Gandhi.

You can find the original text, along with Gandhi and Ambedkar's correspondence online at:

http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/web/readings/aoc_print_2004.pdf

or search for 'Annihilation of Caste PDF'. It is also available in an audio version at:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=IND69>

Arundhati Roy has written a foreword to *Annihilation of Caste* in a recent critical edition with extensive footnotes. She examines the relationship between Gandhi and Ambedkar as well as offering an illuminating description of modern caste practices. You can listen to her talks on YouTube, or read the abridged version of her foreword called *The Doctor and the Saint* online at:

<http://www.caravanmagazine.in/essay/doctor-and-saint>

We will look at an abridged and summarised version of *Annihilation of Caste* edited by Vajratara with a commentary also by Vajratara to help clarify some points. The original text is abridged both for length and to extract the key points that those without a background in

Hinduism will find most relevant. The commentary refers to Sangharakshita's talk *Blueprint for a New World*.⁷⁹

Abridged and Summarised Version of *Annihilation of Caste*

Introduction – Why Dr Ambedkar is an unlikely President

In the opening of the proposed speech, Dr Ambedkar apologises for the trouble he knows the organisers will face from caste Hindus who will object to having an 'untouchable' preside over the annual conference. As he points out:

I have criticised the Hindus. I have questioned the authority of the Mahatma⁸⁰ whom they revere. They hate me. To them I am a snake in their garden. The Mandal will no doubt be asked by the politically-minded Hindus to explain why it has called me to fill this place of honour. It is an act of great daring. I shall not be surprised if some political Hindus regard it as an insult.

This reflects Dr Ambedkar's opinion that he was 'the most hated man in India'. However, it also is testimony to his belief that in order to transform society, one has to be willing to have the conviction to stand by one's beliefs and principles in the face of opposition. It might mean being willing to be unpopular. Sangharakshita also talks about this as one of the qualities of 'the true individual'. In order to be a Buddhist, Sangharakshita says, we need to be prepared to stand alone.⁸¹

I have no desire to ascend the platform of the Hindus, to do within their sight what I have been doing within their hearing. If I am here it is because of your choice and not because of my wish. Yours is a cause of social reform. That cause has always made an appeal to me, and it is because of this that I felt I ought not to refuse an opportunity of helping the cause—especially when you think that I can help it. Whether what I am going to say today will help you in any way to solve the problem you are grappling with, is for you to judge. All I hope to do is to place before you my views on the problem.

How to Change Society: The precedence of the emancipation of the mind and soul

Dr Ambedkar goes on to outline the debate on how to change society. What is the priority: social or political change? Which one precedes the other? In order to understand the conflict perhaps it is helpful to use an example. If we are living in a society which is divided between races and practising apartheid against the minority race, one option is to change the political system to include political safeguards for the minority. This would enable the minority to have representation in government. However, it may be argued that even with political safeguards, the minority do not want to be ruled by the majority. The other option would be to address the underlying cause of the problem which is the separating of society into different religions and groups, and the tensions that arise from that. Once those tensions are dealt with, a fairer political system can emerge.

In India the opinion gained the majority that Indian society would best be transformed beginning with the political system. The reasoning behind this is summed up in a speech by Mr W. C. Bonnerji in 1892 that Dr Ambedkar quotes:

⁷⁹ <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=134>

⁸⁰ i.e. Gandhi.

⁸¹ Sangharakshita, *The Nucleus of a New Society*, lecture 1976.

I for one have no patience with those who say we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I fail to see any connection between the two... Are we not fit (for political reform) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries? Because our wives and daughters do not drive about with us visiting our friends, because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge? (Cheers [from the audience])

Dr Ambedkar counters this argument by putting forward the case for the priority of social reform in the style of Mr Bonnerji:

Let me now state the case for social reform. In doing this, I will follow Mr Bonnerji as nearly as I can, and ask the political-minded Hindus, 'Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow a class of your own countrymen like the untouchables to use public schools? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public wells? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public streets? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to wear what apparel or ornaments they like? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to eat any food they like?' I can ask a string of such questions. But these will suffice. I wonder what would have been the reply of Mr Bonnerji. I am sure no sensible man will have the courage to give an affirmative answer.

Dr Ambedkar then asks why it is that those advocating for social reform 'lost the battle' to those advocating political reform. He answers by distinguishing between social reform in the sense of reconstructing Hindu custom or family life: laws on marriage, rights of women etc, and abolishing the underlying basis of Hindu society which is the caste system. He said that those who sought to change society first concentrated too heavily on changing Hindu custom, particularly concerning themselves with reforming the high caste Hindu family. They didn't want to look at the deeper problem of caste:

The Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high-caste Hindu family. It consisted mostly of enlightened high-caste Hindus who did not feel the necessity for agitating for the abolition of Caste, or had not the courage to agitate for it. They felt quite naturally a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages, etc. — evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them.

This emphasis on changing custom rather than the deeper roots of the problems in society weakened their argument. Political reform and reform of family life cannot take place without reconstructing the basis of society. Deeper social reform therefore takes precedence over political reform and the reformation of Hindu family custom. This is worth considering in more depth. In 'Blueprint for a New World', Sangharakshita makes the point that we are often dissatisfied with the way we lead our lives, but are we dissatisfied enough? Do we look deep enough into the real roots of problems in society? For example, we might be dissatisfied with our car: its electrics, the mileage, the power of the engine, its fuel consumption etc, but are we dissatisfied with the fact that we need a car to cover large distances quickly, a way of life that leads us to spend hours sitting behind a wheel instead of walking, polluting the air in the process? In India, people were clearly dissatisfied with inhumane customs particularly for women, but were they looking at the deeper divisions in society that gave rise to those

customs in the first place? It is only when we start looking for the roots of the problem that we can make a truly fundamental change. Ambedkar goes on to say that

One can say that generally speaking, history bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. The religious Reformation started by Luther was the precursor of the political emancipation of the European people. In England, Puritanism led to the establishment of political liberty. Puritanism founded the new world. It was Puritanism that won the war of American Independence, and Puritanism was a religious movement.

The same is true of the Muslim Empire. Before the Arabs became a political power, they had undergone a thorough religious revolution started by the Prophet Mohammad. Even Indian History supports the same conclusion. The political revolution led by Chandragupta⁸² was preceded by the religious and social revolution of Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by the religious and social reform brought about by the saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikhs was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nanak. It is unnecessary to add more illustrations. These will suffice to show that the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people.

Dr Ambedkar goes on to tackle the view that economic equality will challenge social inequalities in society. In this school of thought, to change society we must change the economic system into a fair distribution of property and wealth. 'Man is an economic creature, that his activities and aspirations are bound by economic facts, that property is the only source of power.' However, Dr Ambedkar argues that economic power is not the only source of power:

That the social status of an individual by itself often becomes a source of power and authority is made clear by the sway which the Mahatmas have held over the common man... That religion is the source of power is illustrated by the history of India where the priest holds a sway over the common man often greater than the magistrate and where everything, even such things as strikes and elections, so easily takes a religious turn and can so easily be given a religious twist... Religion, social status and property are all sources of power and authority, which one man has, to control the liberty of another. One is predominant at one stage, the other is predominant at another stage.

Dr Ambedkar asks 'can you have economic reform without first bringing about a reform of the social order?' He discusses this question by exploring the possibility of a socialist revolution. If there was, by some chance, a socialist revolution, what would happen after the socialists came into power? Marxism does not take account of caste. Despite having equal wealth and property, those divisions would still be there. There would still be the problems created by distinctions in society: people dividing society into high and low, clean or unclean. Without assurances in place from the higher castes that caste divisions would be abolished, there would be nothing to encourage the proletariat to rise up against their oppressors.⁸³

82 Chandragupta Maurya, Emperor Ashoka's grandfather.

83 Ambedkar's concern about Marxism has been borne out in reality. Caste has still been practised within communist groups. For example, in 1928 a major strike in the textile mills in Mumbai failed because the

The assurance must be the assurance proceeding from a much deeper foundation—namely, the mental attitude of the compatriots towards one another in their spirit of personal equality and fraternity.... Turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster.

That the emancipation of ‘mind and soul’ is a necessary preliminary for the political transformation of society is Dr Ambedkar’s key point in *Annihilation of Caste*, and the basis for his belief that the only thing that can really eradicate injustice is the spread of the Buddha Dhamma. It is this point that makes *Annihilation of Caste* in Sangharakshita’s words ‘one of the Dr Ambedkar’s most Buddhist works’.

The Dhamma is concerned with transformation of mind, and it is only by transforming the mind that we can challenge the deeper divisions in society and create something new from a foundation of ethics, love and wisdom. Dr Ambedkar said of the Buddha, ‘The greatest thing that the Buddha has done is to tell the world that the world cannot be reformed except by the reformation of the mind of man and of the mind of the world.’⁸⁴

Perhaps this is why with many political and economic reforms we find the old problems resurfacing. Without the deeper transformation of mind, we might have a positive democratic system and find that system is used to recreate old divisions, there is always a ‘monster crossing your path’. For example the rise of white supremacism taking place within Europe and North America. Ambedkar himself certainly found this. Although he was the main architect of the Indian Constitution, and he based the Constitution on the values of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’, values he said he derived from the Buddha, he knew that without a change in the people themselves, the Indian political system would be open to recreating problems already existent in society. Later he called the Constitution ‘a palace on a dungheap’. It is worth reading the speech in which he presented the Constitution in 1949:

However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot. However bad a Constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it, happen to be a good lot. The working of a Constitution does not depend wholly upon the nature of the Constitution. The Constitution can provide only the organs of State such as the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary. The factors on which the working of those organs of the State depend are the people and the political parties they will set up as their instruments to carry out their wishes and their politics.⁸⁵

The Nature of Caste

Of course, there are some arguments in favour of the caste system, as well as other divisions in society. It can be argued that the caste system is simply based on division of labour with different castes representing different occupations. Thus we have the ‘priest caste’, the

workers were divided along caste lines. Dr Ambedkar argued that the Scheduled Castes had the most to lose and nothing to gain, encouraging the Scheduled Castes to cross the picket line. If the union had fought for the rights of the Scheduled Castes from the beginning, the strike may have been successful. See Gidla, Sumatra, *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2017.

84 Dr Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2010, p28.

85 Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, p148.

‘warrior caste’, the ‘merchant caste’, the ‘servant caste’ and more specifically, the caste that deals with human waste, the brick manufacturing caste, the weaver caste etc. The argument is that civilised society relies on division of labour to run efficiently and caste is a way to ensure this. Ambedkar responds to this argument by pointing that although society needs division of labour, it does not need division of labourers into a hierarchy of ‘watertight compartments’ that have no basis in natural ability or inclination. The caste system is hereditary, it leaves no room for movement and individual ambition. Nor does it leave room for the changing needs of society as new occupations emerge and old occupations become obsolete. He once compared it to a four storey house (the four main castes) with no stairs and no possibility of movement between the floors. This leads to an inefficient and unjust society.

Social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career.

Dr Ambedkar believed in the economic and social potential of the individual. He saw it as economically problematic to not let people live out their natural enthusiasms and abilities:

The greatest evil in the industrial system is not so much poverty and the suffering that it involves, as the fact that so many persons have callings [=occupations] which make no appeal to those who are engaged in them. Such callings constantly provoke one to aversion, ill will, and the desire to evade... What efficiency can there be in a system under which neither men’s hearts nor their minds are in their work? As an economic organization Caste is therefore a harmful institution, inasmuch as it involves the subordination of man’s natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.

However, for Dr Ambedkar the problem was deeper than that. For Ambedkar, the individual’s growth and development is paramount and a structure where the individual is forced to work in a particular job undermines their individual potential. ‘Man’s life is independent. He is born not for the service of the society but for his self-development.’ He saw the aim of society as ‘the growth of the individual and the development of his personality’.⁸⁶ Society should therefore leave the individual free to choose their own work, work that best supports their individual growth.

This is an interesting idea, and we might ask the question, what is the purpose of society? Do we see society as serving the growth of the individual, or the individual as serving the growth of society? What would society look like if the needs of each individual in that society were prioritised?

For example, a large proportion of those working today do not expect to be actively engaged with their work,⁸⁷ but does it have to be that way? Should we expect individuals to work in unsatisfying jobs, or should we expect employers to provide conditions to sustain those who work for them? Should the world of work be defined by growth of GDP, or by the growth of the individual? If the needs of the workers are not prioritised, we will naturally expect to see more days taken off sick and inefficiency in the workplace, as well as many people leading unhappy and unfulfilled lives.

⁸⁶ Dr Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches, Volume 3*. Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003.

⁸⁷ See Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*. Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2015. Ch 4.

The Buddha talked about 'right livelihood' as an important part of the path. He could see that with most of our waking hours spent on work, it is hard to progress on the path if we don't make our work a spiritual practice. He ruled out certain professions as being obstacles to spiritual progress⁸⁸. However 'right livelihood' isn't only about what work we do, it is also concerned with how we make our work conducive to our spiritual growth. This has been interpreted in different ways as Buddhism has spread to different cultures. Experiments with different ways of working have taken place all over the world to ensure that the needs of the workers are prioritised over profit.⁸⁹

Caste can also be justified on the basis of purity of race. However, in *Annihilation of Caste* Ambedkar argues that the caste system in India came into existence long after the races were mixed. It is clear they don't have any basis in race, common castes being spread over the whole of India and sub-divisions of castes found among the same communities. Even if they were racially distinct 'what harm could there be if a mixture of races and of blood was permitted?' Difference of caste and race is not a difference of species so there is no biological reason why they should not mix.

The Effect of Caste in Society

Ambedkar goes on to argue that caste undermines a sense of a unified society. Society is divided into a plethora of distinct societies, castes, that have no sense of belonging to a greater society beyond their caste. These castes protect their own interests in opposition to other castes. One might expect that each caste would have a sense of belonging to a society of 'Hindus' that can cooperate or defend each other, but for Hindus, caste identity comes before religious identity, and serves to create a division within even sharing the same religion. Historical grievances between the castes are specifically nursed which has the effect of preventing any sense of solidarity in the future. Even though the opportunity is there for helping different groups such as the tribal or Scheduled Castes to get an education, medical aid or livelihood, the effort is not made to share intellectual and social inheritance because it means 'adopting them as your own, living in their midst and cultivating fellow feeling, in short loving them.' Dr Ambedkar adds it is not even possible to convert people to Hinduism, because which caste would they join?

Though the different castes may share certain customs, beliefs and thoughts, that is not enough to bind them into one society:

Men constitute a society because they have things they possess in common... And the only way by which men can come to possess things in common with one another is by being in communication with one another... Society continues to exist by communication, indeed in communication... Making the individual a sharer or partner in the associated activity so that he feels its success as his success, its failure as his failure is the real thing that binds men and makes a society of them.

We could reflect on this principle in our own society. Since the time Ambedkar was writing, there are many more means of communication, but do we really communicate with each other? Do we feel each other's successes and failures as our own? How could we communicate more effectively across divisions in society?

⁸⁸ For example dealing in arms, slavery, meat and poison.

⁸⁹ In the Triratna Buddhist Community, some have engaged in a new way of working on the basis of Buddhist principles, working together in 'Team Based Right Livelihoods' which aim at giving to society at the same time as being a positive context for the development of the individual.

Dr Ambedkar goes on to talk about the place of the individual in society. He says ‘The assertion by the individual of his own opinions and beliefs, his own independence and interest—as over against group standards, group authority, and group interests—is the beginning of all reform.’

If the group values the individual in society, the individual will transform the society itself. They will introduce new ideas, new ways of living, a fresh perspective in the way things are done that can give rise to growth and change. However, when society is dominated by caste identity, the ideas and innovations of the individual are not valued and if they act against the overall caste’s norms and rules, the caste has the right to excommunicate that individual. ‘It is true that man cannot get on with his fellows. But it is also true that he cannot do without them.’ Without social interaction within one’s caste, life is made extraordinarily difficult. The threat of rejection from the group is enough to kill any new ideas of reforms.

For Dr Ambedkar, valuing the contributions of the individual is the basis of society itself. There is a positive cycle: the growth of the individual supports the growth of society and the growth of society supports the growth of the individual.

The Ideal Society: Liberty, Equality and Fraternity

This forms the crux of Dr Ambedkar’s thinking. He said an ideal society is based on ‘Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity’. As we have seen, these are qualities he understood not from the French Revolution, but from ‘my master The Buddha.’⁹⁰ What Dr Ambedkar meant by that, or what attitudes derived from the Buddha he sees as expressed by liberty, equality and fraternity, he never fully explains. However he does go into these qualities at some length, and we can draw parallels to the Buddha’s teachings. We have explored what Dr Ambedkar means by these qualities in week two, but let’s look at what he says about them in *Annihilation of Caste*.

He starts with Fraternity, which he saw as the basis of equality and liberty:

An 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. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there must be social osmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards one’s fellow men.

Dr Ambedkar shows that the basis of a positive, democratic society is communication and fellow feeling. By democracy Dr Ambedkar wasn’t referring to a specific process of electing a government. Democracy for Dr Ambedkar was an ideal, a vision of what the democratic system is aiming to create, the ultimate aim of that electoral process.⁹¹ Democracy in this ideal sense is built on the foundation of fraternity, which he equated with *maitrī* / *mettā* (love). ‘Democracy is more than a political machine. It is even more than a social system. It is an attitude of mind or a philosophy of life. Some equate democracy with equality and liberty.

90 Dr Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches, Volume 7 (3)*. Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003. p503. Also in Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi 2004. p117.

91 In his views of democracy Ambedkar was very much influenced by the ideas of one of his tutors at the University of Chicago, John Dewey, who he studied with from 1913-1916.

Equality and liberty are no doubt the deepest concern of democracy. But the more important question is what sustains equality and liberty? Some would say that it is the law of the state, which sustains equality and liberty. This is not a true answer. What sustains equality and liberty is fellow feeling. What the French Revolutionists called fraternity. The word fraternity is not an adequate expression. The proper term is what the Buddha called *maitrī* [or *mettā*].⁹² 'Fraternity is the name for the disposition of an individual to treat men as the object of reverence and love and the desire to be in unity with his fellow beings.'⁹³

This gives a new significance to our practice of the *mettā bhāvanā* meditation. The *mettā bhāvanā* not only transforms our personal relationships, it forms the basis for fraternity and democracy itself. Without communication and *mettā*, there is no basis for democracy. One might say in modern terms that the *mettā bhāvanā* is the practice of developing a genuine democratic mind. Looking at the political situation all over the world, this becomes more important than ever.

Liberty, he says, goes further than having a right to life and the ability to earn one's own living. It also means being able to make full use of one's powers and choose one's own profession and occupation – a right which caste denies. By extension, it also means the liberty to choose one's own friends, marriage and religion.

Equality is a little more complex. Dr Ambedkar saw that not everyone is the same in terms of their physical capability, social inheritance such as education and the social standing of their family, and their abilities. However, though equality is a 'fiction', 'none the less one must accept it as the governing principle'.

From the standpoint of the individualist, it may be just to treat men unequally so far as their efforts are unequal. It may be desirable to give as much incentive as possible to the full development of everyone's powers. But what would happen if men were treated as unequally as they are unequal [in physical capability and social inheritance]? It is obvious that those individuals also in whose favour there is birth, education, family name, business connections, and inherited wealth, would be selected in the race. But selection under such circumstances would not be a selection of the able. It would be the selection of the privileged. The reason, therefore, which requires that in [respect of ability] we should treat men unequally, demands that in [respect of physical capability and social inheritance] we should treat men as equally as possible.

The governing principle is that everyone should have the same opportunities whatever circumstances they are born into, their physical capability and social inheritance. They may not make use of those opportunities in the same way, but without the opportunity for an equal starting point, selection will be based on 'selection of the privileged' rather than 'selection of the able'. Ability will not be the determining factor of who you are in society: privilege will be.

But there is another reason why we must accept equality. A statesman is concerned with vast numbers of people. He has neither the time nor the knowledge to draw fine

92 Dr Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches, Volume 4*, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003, p283-284. Also in Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi 2004, p129.

93 Dr Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches, Volume 3*, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003, p97. Also in Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi 2004, p126.

distinctions and to treat each one equitably, i.e. according to need or according to capacity. However desirable or reasonable an equitable treatment of men may be, humanity is not capable of assortment and classification. The statesman, therefore, must follow some rough and ready rule, and that rough and ready rule is to treat all men alike, not because they are alike but because classification and assortment is impossible. The doctrine of equality is glaringly fallacious but, taking all in all, it is the only way a statesman can proceed in politics—which is a severely practical affair and which demands a severely practical test.

Even though Dr Ambedkar did not believe that everyone is identical or interchangeable, or equal in all respects, he thought that equality must be the starting point in the practical terms of governance.

Chatuvarna System and the Justification of Caste

A system was advocated at the time of Dr Ambedkar to replace the 4000 or so castes in India with four *varnas* (*chatuvarna*): *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (merchants), and *Shudras* (servants). These *varnas* would be different from the classifications of the past because instead of being hereditary, they could be based on people's natural abilities and affinities, their 'worth' rather than their 'birth'. However, Dr Ambedkar asks, why do you need those labels at all? They are already associated with the caste system which is based on birth, and it would be too much to change them. The old notions would stick.

There are more practical considerations too. How would you compel someone to be reassigned a lower status based on worth if they had a higher status based on birth? On what basis would you decide people's status? Is it even possible to classify people in this way once and for all? Human beings are complex and unique. Whether it is based on ability or birth, the *varna* system does not take into account people's unique natures: 'the infinite diversity of active tendencies and combination of tendencies of which an individual is capable'. Even if you could establish the *chatuvarna* system, how would you enforce it? Lastly, where would be the place of women? If they joined their husbands, the system would no longer be based on worth. If it was based on worth, they would be able to become priests and warriors, which Hindu caste society could not accept. It is too unwieldy and complex to divide people in this way. Ultimately it would mean dismantling the caste system and building it up on a different basis, but why would you want to rebuild it at all?

In the *chatuvarna* system, the four classes support each other, with the higher three become guardians of the Shudras. However, Ambedkar asks, what happens when they fail in their duties? Why should one class be reliant on the other classes for their basic needs? Everyone has a right to education, means of defence and wealth. History has shown that the three higher castes use their privilege to beat down the Shudras, denying them the education and arms they would need to escape their position. History has also shown that the *chatuvarna* system has led to rivalry and enmity between the different castes.

It can be pointed out that there are similar systems to the caste system within other religions. Firstly Islam, Sikhism and Christianity have imported caste divisions as they established themselves in India. Secondly, 'nowhere is human society one single whole. It is always plural. In the realm of action, the individual is one limit and society the other. Between them lie all sorts of associative arrangements of lesser and larger scope, families, friendships, cooperative associations, business combines, politics parties, bands of thieves and robbers. These small groups are usually firmly welded together and are often as exclusive as castes.' However, Ambedkar asks when determining an ideal society:

How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared by the groups? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of associations? Are the forces that separate groups and classes more numerous than the forces that unite them? What social significance is attached to this group life? Is its exclusiveness a matter of custom and convenience, or is it a matter of religion?

In other words, to what extent does the religion or society support the notion of caste, and does the religion or society have more in it to unify communities than to divide them?

He points out that while there is no integrating force greater than caste within Hinduism, other religions and societies have plenty in common to bind them together beyond social distinctions. Moreover, caste has a special social significance in Hinduism that it does not have in other religions. It is sanctified in Hinduism in a way it is not in other religions due to its basis in religious texts and its association with religious purity. Due to its special significance, there are also greater penalties of breaking out of caste than in other religions that have imported caste and which identify themselves primarily in terms of their religion rather than their caste. This is what makes caste in Hinduism unique among all cultures. Though there may be divisions within society, they are not associated with religious and ritual purity, nor do they entail the same punishment if one breaks with one's caste, or by extension the norms of any sub-group.

Caste is also justified on the basis that it is old, and that the Hindu religion has survived over 4,000 years and throughout the changes in India. As Ambedkar points out this is 'a vicious argument that the fact of survival is proof of fitness to survive ... the question is not whether a community lives or dies; the question is on what plane does it live?' Hinduism has survived, but that is no guarantee of the quality of its survival.

How to Abolish Caste

Dr Ambedkar recommended inter-marriage as the only thing that would create the feeling of kinship sufficient to overcome the separation of different castes. In this he congratulates the Jat-Pak-Todak Mandal for taking a similar stance and therefore standing against society's norms: 'Political tyranny is nothing compared to social tyranny, and a reformer who defies society is a much more courageous man than a politician who defies the government.' However, he also saw that the majority of Hindus would not do it because their religious beliefs abhor such behaviour.

Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from commingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion, it is a state of the mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a *notional* change.

The fact that caste is found in the mind suggests the solution: that it is only with a change of mind that caste can be destroyed. What is required is, in Ambedkar's words, a notional change: 'what mind creates, mind can undo'. This is perhaps the most profound and far reaching of Ambedkar's assertions in *Annihilation of Caste* and provides the basis of his public conversion to Buddhism. To annihilate social divisions, we have to annihilate the mental framework that gave rise to them in the first place. In Buddhism these are called *ditt̥hi* or underlying views: the deeply held beliefs and opinions, charged by emotion, that govern our behaviour. All our experiences are interpreted by our mind through the lens of our views, and our views govern all our thoughts and actions. We act out our views. Religious beliefs

themselves, such as caste, are also views. If we believe that society is divided into a hierarchy based on hereditary status, we will interpret all our experience through that division, seeing some of the people we interact with as 'higher' than others simply because of their birth, while seeing others as 'lower'. This will inform our actions, meaning we can treat some in society better, and correspondingly some worse. What Dr Ambedkar saw is that we treat others unjustly because our views and attitudes make injustice possible. These views condition mental states such as hatred and love, and inform behaviour. Hinduism inevitably leads to unjust treatment of others because it is based on unjust views. In Dr Ambedkar's understanding, 'notional change' will only come about by changing religion, thereby changing the core beliefs, the views, of the mind itself. This will shape our mental states and actions accordingly. By abolishing the roots of caste in the mind, caste attitude and caste practice will be abolished.

By identifying the root of injustice in society as attitudes in the mind, Dr Ambedkar opens the way to understanding how Buddhism can transform society. Buddhism teaches us how to change our views to 'right view' or *samma-ditthi*, views or attitudes based in love, wisdom and contentment, or in Dr Ambedkar's language, fraternity. These will affect the way we act towards others in society, removing inequality and unjust actions and creating a society based in morality. However, there is another level on which changing views changes society. If enough people transform their attitudes, this will affect who they vote for, encouraging governance that is based on moral principles. If Buddhist views are in line with 'liberty, equality and fraternity', they will vote for a government that reflect those values.

Changing core beliefs means questioning the authority of beliefs in society. To remove caste, the texts that form the religious basis of the religion and teach caste itself, the *Shastras*, must be questioned.

The acts of the people are merely the results of their beliefs inculcated in their minds by the *Shastras*, and that people will not change their conduct until they cease to believe in the sanctity of the *Shastras* on which their conduct is founded.

Reforming views can be undertaken by secular or religious reformation. If it is to be religious reform, it can either be in line with the principles of the religion, or entail a complete departure from it. It is not possible to reform Hinduism while rejecting the *Shastras*, as rejecting the *Shastras* is tantamount to rejecting Hinduism itself, so Dr Ambedkar proposes a complete departure from Hinduism. 'You must destroy the sacredness and divinity with which caste has become invested.'

We can apply this principle beyond Hindu religious texts. In questioning the divinity of the Hindu religious texts, Dr Ambedkar is pointing to a deeper principle: that society's behaviour is governed by views, collectively held and sanctified, and given more authority if they are written down. If we want to change society and challenge the views on which it is governed, we will have to have the ability to challenge collective and sanctified views backed by authority. This applies to all societies at all times, and was something the Buddha did again and again throughout his life. In fact, in the first conversation he had after his Enlightenment, he challenged the view that one's birth governed one's social status in the world – the foundation of Brahminism.⁹⁴

94 *Huhuṅka Sutta*, Udāna 1.4.

However, to question views themselves, particularly religiously sanctified views, is problematic. Who will lead the revolt? One might expect the intellectual class to lead the way as the most influential class whose ideas others follow.

There is no exaggeration in saying that the entire destiny of a country depends upon its intellectual class. If the intellectual class is honest, independent, and disinterested, it can be trusted to take the initiative and give a proper lead.

However, the intellectuals in India at that time were most commonly Brahmins. If the intellectuals destroy the religious basis of caste, it would also mean destroying the power and prestige of the Brahmins, so the intellectual Brahmins are unlikely to do it.

One might then expect the lower castes, the downtrodden, to revolt. However, caste in India is a system of 'graded inequality'. This means that society is not just separated into the four main castes, but each caste is divided into many subdivisions. Each subdivision of caste is rated higher or lower than other subdivisions, with corresponding social and religious rights. They cannot organise a common front against the caste system: 'Castes form a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do.' This means that the castes fight between themselves and will not unite together to challenge caste itself. We can see this in modern India, where even within the Scheduled Castes there can be caste prejudice and oppression, one sub-caste being higher or lower than the other.

Would it be possible to destroy caste by showing it as contrary to reason? Hinduism calls for the absolute authority of the religious texts as opposed to verification by reason. The only time the texts allow caste rules not to be followed is where they cannot, when there is some crisis or unusual situation. For example, if one were dying of starvation or thirst, presumably it would be permitted to weigh up the advisability of keeping to caste protocol and whether to accept food or drink from the Scheduled Castes.

Man's life is generally habitual and unreflective. Reflective thought—in the sense of active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge, in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends—is quite rare, and arises only in a situation which presents a dilemma or a crisis.

This could lead to the question, why should one maintain caste on all occasions when one cannot maintain it in unusual or crisis situations? If it is possible to forgo caste rules in some situations, why keep to it in others? The reason lies in the justification of the texts on which it is founded.

Reason and morality are the two most powerful weapons in the armoury of a reformer. To deprive him of the use of these weapons is to disable him for action. How are you going to break up Caste, if people are not free to consider whether it accords with reason? How are you going to break up Caste, if people are not free to consider whether it accords with morality?

Again, we can apply this principle more broadly than caste. How much do we examine our views in the light of reason and a common standard of morality? What prompts us to do so? Are we 'generally habitual and unreflective' unless presented with a crisis or unusual

situation? Who is going to lead the way in intelligence and reflection, in upholding a universal moral standard? As we shall see, Dr Ambedkar thought it is the Sangha who can lead the way in this regard. Buddhism asks us to examine our views in the light of our own standards of morality and testament of who we consider wise, considering whether our views lead to harm or liberation. The Buddha asked us to question our views and our social attitudes even if they were part of a long tradition or affirmed by scripture.⁹⁵

The Nature of True Religion and Evolving Traditions

Dr Ambedkar thought that in order to change our deeply held views, we need to apply universal principles, not blindly follow rules. It is 'true religion' that can provide those principles. It is worth quoting his argument in full. Firstly he makes the distinction between principles and rules:

Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things according to prescription. But principles are intellectual; they are useful methods of judging things. Rules seek to tell an agent just what course of action to pursue. Principles do not prescribe a specific course of action. Rules, like cooking recipes, do tell just what to do and how to do it. A principle, such as that of justice, supplies a main heading by reference to which he is to consider the bearings of his desires and purposes; it guides him in his thinking by suggesting to him the important consideration which he should bear in mind.

He makes an interesting point about acting on the basis of principles and on the basis of rules. The principle may be wrong, but the action taken on the basis of it is conscious and responsible. This gives it a different quality than an action based on a rule, which, even if the rule is right, is necessarily mechanical. He said if an act is truly religious, it must be conscious and responsible, that is to say it must be taken on the basis of a principle:

Religion must mainly be a matter of principles only. It cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules, it ceases to be Religion, as it kills the responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act.

Hinduism is formed on the basis of 'sacrificial, social, political, and sanitary rules and regulations, all mixed up ... Religion, in the sense of spiritual principles, truly universal, applicable to all races, to all countries, to all times, is not to be found in them; and if it is, it does not form the governing part of a Hindu's life.' It cannot be a religion in the true sense, but is a law. If people could see it as an 'old and archaic' law, rather than a religion, they will be ready for a change.

Dr Ambedkar's criteria is something we could reflect on in all religions, including Buddhism. To what extent have we made the Dhamma a set of rules that we blindly follow, and to what extent have we really understood the principles? The Buddha saw 'attachment to rites and rituals as ends in themselves' as a hindrance, a fetter to liberation. In calling this a fetter, he was highlighting the human tendency to make the Dhamma into a set of rules and behaviours, and think that simply by following them, we are making spiritual progress. Sangharakshita calls this fetter 'superficiality' and says that in order to make real changes, we need clarity on how the 'rites and rituals' help us to deepen our Dhamma practice and to look for the principles underneath the rules.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Kālāma Sutta*, Aṅguttara Nikāya 3.65.

⁹⁶ Sangharakshita, *The Taste of Freedom*, lecture, 1979.

Dr Ambedkar was clear, however, that he thought religion is necessary for society. He quotes Burke as saying:

True religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true Civil Government rests, and both their sanction.

As Sangharakshita said, Dr Ambedkar was a deeply religious man. However, he thought that there needed to be a new doctrinal basis to religion that 'will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; in short, with Democracy'. Religion will need reformation, or 'new life'. 'But a new life cannot enter a body that is dead. New life can enter only into a new body. The old body must die before a new body can come into existence and a new life can enter into it.'

The old that needs to be discarded from Hinduism is the body of teachings on which caste is based (the *Vedas*, *Shastras* and *Puranas*), and Brahminism. Dr Ambedkar had understandably strong feelings against Brahminism. He called it 'a pest which divinity seems to have let loose on the masses for their mental and moral degradation'. This might seem quite shocking, but it is worth reflecting on the sufferings of the Scheduled Castes inflicted by Brahmins. If Brahminism cannot be abolished, he suggested reform of Brahminism by making the priesthood open to all rather than hereditary. He suggested exams and training to make someone a priest rather than birth. He suggested that those priests should be regulated by the State and answerable to the State, subject to the same laws of the State as other members of society. In this, he was making priesthood a legally accountable profession such as an engineer or doctor.

As we shall see, Dr Ambedkar took these ideas into how he thought Buddhism also needed to be revitalised. He saw the importance of examining the Buddhist scriptures in the light of reason and principles. He also thought there needed to be a radical reorganisation of the Sangha.

He finishes his paper by asking the audience to consider their relationship to their religion. Firstly he asks them to go beyond 'cultural relativism' which holds that each society has its own belief, habits, morals and outlooks on life and none better than others. He says that a culture's morality and religion will dictate whether that society survives or dies, whether or not it is liked by the people in that culture. We might like a moral and religious system purely because it is familiar, even though that system will lead to the downfall of that society. Likewise we may dislike a moral system because it is unfamiliar even though that system would make a society strong long into the future.

Secondly he asks the audience to consider their relationship to their past. He argues that it is best for a society not to conserve the whole of their social heritage, but to select what is helpful to the society and transmit that to future generations. Change is necessary to conserve the deeper values that underpin society. This means that the past cannot be made more important than the present, or as the main material for education. This would make the present empty and futile, rather than living and growing. 'Such a principle is inimical to progress, and is a hindrance to a strong and a steady current of life.'

Lastly he says that we must understand that 'nothing is fixed, nothing eternal, nothing *sanatan* (eternal); that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society. In a changing society, there must be a constant revolution of old values; and

the Hindus must realize that if there must be standards to measure the acts of men, there must also be a readiness to revise those standards.'

Having given his audience some questions to consider, he affirms that he is not motivated to say these things by power or being flattered by greatness. Indeed, Dr Ambedkar is regarded as a Bodhisattva by his followers because he selflessly devoted his life to the well-being of others without regard for his own interests. He could have been a successful academic, politician or lawyer. He could have become very wealthy and respected and lived abroad. Instead, he chose a life of hardship and struggle in order to serve the interests of others.

He declared that he would not be with the Hindus in transforming their tradition, that he had decided to change, to leave the Hindu fold. This should have been no surprise. A year before he had declared that

Though I was born a Hindu, I solemnly assure you that I will not die as a Hindu.⁹⁷

It was this declared decision, along with the recommendation to 'convert' the Hindu religion and abandon the sacred books, that led to the Jat-Pat-Todak-Mandal to cancel the Conference.



Suggestions for reflection, research and discussion

8. What are we dissatisfied about in society, and how could we take that dissatisfaction deeper?
9. Dr Ambedkar was particularly concerned to 'annihilate caste' in Indian society. What are the divisions in your own society – conscious and unconscious, and what are the views or attitudes that underlie them?
10. What does 'emancipation of mind and soul' mean in *Annihilation of Caste* and how could we achieve it?
11. Do we see a positive society as serving the growth of the individual, or should the individual serve the growth of society? What difference would that make in the way society is run?
12. How could we communicate more effectively across divisions in society?
13. What is your motivation for practising the *mettā bhāvanā*? Can you imagine it being the basis of a truly democratic society?
14. What are the differences between principles and rules? Can we give any examples?
15. What is the 'old body' or 'old wood' in our society that we think needs to be removed? What are the most pressing changes we think need to take place in our society?

97 Dr Ambedkar, Yeola Conference, Nasik, 1935.

Introduction

The study for this week is an examination of the article *Buddha and the Future of His Religion* that Dr Ambedkar wrote for the *Maha Bodhi Journal* in 1950.⁹⁸ It was this article that prompted Sangharakshita, who was living in Kalimpong at the time, to write to Dr Ambedkar, letting him know about the work he himself was doing. The letter that Dr Ambedkar sent to Sangharakshita in response is included in next week's study. Sangharakshita has written a commentary on Dr Ambedkar's article in Chapter 6 of his book *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, which is included in *Complete Works: Volume 9, Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I*. This will provide the background for the study, and it is recommended that you read it.

The main study for this week is an extract from the article itself with a few explanatory notes written by Vajratara.

You can find the original text online at a number of sites, including

www.drambedkarbooks.com

You can find Sangharakshita's seminar on the same subject on freebuddhistaudio

[https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminartexts/SEM053 Buddha and the Future of His Religion by Dr Ambedkar - Questions and Answers.pdf](https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminartexts/SEM053_Buddha_and_the_Future_of_His_Religion_by_Dr_Ambedkar_-_Questions_and_Answers.pdf)

and also a talk by Subhuti:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC484>

Dr Ambedkar also talks about the relationship between Buddhism and the transformation of society in his essay *The Buddha or Karl Marx*, which can be found online.⁹⁹ This is not essential reading for this week, but you may find it helpful.

The Buddha and the Future of His Religion

Sangharakshita introduces the article by saying

Ambedkar's 6,500-word article was the work of a man who was in deadly earnest. It was the work of a man who was as yet only 'on his way to embrace Buddhism' and

98 *Maha Bodhi*: Maha Bodhi Society Journal, Calcutta; Vaishak Number, Vol. 58, May 1950. Also published in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar *Writings and Speeches Vol.17*. Part 2, Section-I, Article 17. Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003.

99 E.g. <http://velivada.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/buddha-or-karl-marx-book-in-english.pdf>

who knew that, when he did finally take that momentous step, it would bring about a radical change in the lives of millions of his fellow countrymen and alter, perhaps, the entire course of Indian history. It was the work of a man who was not afraid to think for himself and who was not afraid to say what he thought. At the same time, the article was the work of a man who was in a hurry and had no time to revise and polish. From a literary point of view *Buddha and the Future of His Religion* is therefore distinctly rough in texture, reminding one of a stream of lava that, issuing white-hot from the depths of a volcano, has set in bold and jagged shapes, or of a lump of gold that has come from the furnace with fragments of rock still adhering to it and which has yet to be wrought into ornaments.

The article starts by comparing Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Modern Buddhists may find it difficult to read a paper that compares various religions and that makes a choice about which one is best, not only for ourselves, but for our community and for the world. It is worth remembering what situation Dr Ambedkar was in when he was writing the paper. He knew he could not stay in Hinduism as he did not believe it could be reformed to abolish the caste system. A number of choices were open to him – whether or not to follow a religion, and if he did, what religion to follow.

As we have seen, Dr Ambedkar was, by his own account, a very religious man and thought that all human beings are essentially religious in spirit.¹⁰⁰ He thought, therefore, that human beings need a religion to follow for their own individual spiritual growth and he naturally wanted to find a spiritual path for himself. Furthermore, along with one's own personal development, he also thought religion is essential for the well-being of society. For Dr Ambedkar, religion is a system of beliefs that governs behaviour. It is that rather than law that determines how people act in society, creating a just or unjust way of living¹⁰¹. Society needs religion to maintain a moral code.

This left him with the question of what religion to follow. This decision was not just a matter of his own interests and wishes. It was a decision that would affect not only his own personal life, but the direction his whole community would be encouraged to follow by his example. This does not mean that Dr Ambedkar planned to insist that his followers converted to the religion he had chosen for himself. He placed great emphasis on every individual taking responsibility for their own choices. However, he suggested that his followers convert from Hinduism,¹⁰² and he knew that when making the choice about which religion to follow, they would look to him.

In deciding which religion to follow, he necessarily had to compare religions. This he did very carefully, meeting representatives from different religions and reading widely. Whether or not we agree with what Dr Ambedkar says about other religions, we can still consider what he said about Buddhism itself. This is what the commentary to his essay will focus on, and I would suggest that this is what you focus on in your discussion group. However, perhaps we shouldn't be afraid of making comparisons between Buddhism and other religions. We will have all had to make a choice to become Buddhists, and for some of us that will have entailed making a choice between the religion of our parents and Buddhism. In comparing Buddhism to other religions, even atheism, we are making that choice conscious.

100 See Dr Ambedkar, *What Path to Salvation?* Lecture, Dadar, 31 May 1936.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

The essay itself is divided into five sections, the main points of each are discussed below:

1. The Buddha and the founder of other religions

Out of the many founders of Religion, there are four whose religions have not only moved the world in the past, but are still having a sway over the vast masses of people. They are Buddha, Jesus, Mahommed and Krishna. A comparison of the personalities of these four and the poses they assumed in propagating their religions reveals certain points of contrast between the Buddha on the one hand and the rest on the other, which are not without significance.

The first point which marks off Buddha from the rest is his self -abnegation... He was born as a son of man and was content to remain a common man and preached his gospel as a common man. He never claimed any supernatural origin or supernatural powers nor did he perform miracles to prove his supernatural powers. The Buddha made a clear distinction between a Margadata [giver of the path] and a Mokshadata [giver of liberation]. Jesus, Mahommed and Krishna claimed for themselves the Mokshadata. The Buddha was satisfied with playing the role of a Margadata.

The first point that Dr Ambedkar is making here is that the Buddha made no claims to divine status. When questioned about what kind of a being he was, The Buddha said of himself that he was 'neither man nor god'.¹⁰³ The Buddha was born a human being, but in attaining Enlightenment, he transcended the limited consciousness that we identify as 'human', characterised by greed, hatred and delusion, and became something more: an Enlightened being. At the same time, he never regarded himself as a god. He regarded gods as still subject to subtle craving, aversion and delusion, and therefore not Enlightened. Because he did not regard himself as a god, his aim was to show his followers a path to their own liberation, rather than giving them liberation as an expression of divine grace (an impossibility in the Buddhist tradition). He compared his Enlightenment to discovering an ancient pathway through the forest leading to an ancient city. His life after Enlightenment was concerned with restoring that pathway and city, enabling others to follow him. The responsibility is left with us, as his followers, to tread that path ourselves. 'By you must the zealous effort be made. The Tathāgatās are only the proclaimers (of the Way).'¹⁰⁴

Dr Ambedkar compares the Buddha with Jesus, who is known as the son of God; Mohammed, who is the last messenger of God; and Krishna who is an *avatar*, or incarnation, of God. They all have a distinct status which we as followers cannot emulate. With effort, anyone can become a Buddha, but no effort is enough to become the son of God, the last messenger of God or an incarnation of God. These statuses are given by God, not attained by spiritual practice.

Likewise, though the Buddhist tradition is clear that supernormal powers or *iddhi*, can be achieved by practising certain disciplines, the Buddha did not use such powers to convince his followers. 'It is because I see danger in the practice of these mystic wonders that I loathe and abhor and am ashamed thereof'.¹⁰⁵ It was an offence in the Sangha to display supernormal powers beyond the reach of ordinary people.¹⁰⁶ These supernormal powers arise as a result of the higher *jhānas*, or higher states of consciousness, reached through meditation and are not

103 *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 4.36.

104 *Dhammapada* 276.

105 *Dīgha Nikāya* i.213.

106 *Vinaya* ii.112.

related to powers bestowed by a divine being or 'supernatural' powers. The Buddha placed his emphasis on spiritual practice and individual effort, the *iddhipādā*, which entailed concentration on purpose, will, thoughts and investigation.¹⁰⁷ Again, the responsibility is with the practitioner themselves to make their own effort.

Neither did the Buddha claim any supernatural authority for his teaching, but instead 'preached his gospel as a common man', advising and inspiring his followers through his teaching, not impressing them with his powers. Ambedkar himself spoke out against the tendency to make people into divinities, a common practice in India, including making the Buddha into an incarnation of Vishnu. This would lead people to worship the Buddha as an incarnation of a god, waiting to be saved by him, rather than actually practising his teaching.¹⁰⁸

There is also another distinction between the four religious teachers. Both Jesus and Mohammed claimed that what they taught was the word of God and as a word of God what they taught was infallible and beyond question. Krishna was according to his own assumption a God of Gods and therefore what he taught being a word God, uttered by God, they were original and final and the question of infallibility did not even arise. The Buddha claimed no such infallibility for what he taught. In the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* He told Ananda that His religion was based on reason and experience and that his followers should not accept his teaching as correct and binding merely because they emanated from Him. Being based on reason and experience they were free to modify or even to abandon any of his teachings if it was found that at a given time and in given circumstances they do not apply. He wished, His religion not to be encumbered with the dead wood of the past. He wanted that it should remain evergreen and serviceable at all times. That is why He gave liberty to his followers to chip and chop as the necessities of the case required. No other religious teacher has shown such courage. They were afraid of permitting repair. As the liberty to repair may be used to demolish the structure they had reared Buddha had no such fear. He was sure of his foundation. He knew that even the most violent iconoclast will not be able to destroy the core of His religion.

Because the teaching of the Buddha does not have divine sanction or supernatural authority, the Buddha did not claim the infallibility of his teaching. Infallibility could only come from God, either through his son, his messenger or his incarnation. Without infallibility, it becomes possible to accept or reject, or even modify, the Buddha's teaching. The only stipulation is that questioning the Buddha's teaching should be based on reason and experience. The episode that Dr Ambedkar refers to in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, is thought to be the moment the Buddha allows the Sangha to abolish the minor rules,¹⁰⁹ but this episode is quite brief and the Buddha does not go into detail about why he permitted the Sangha to do so. We could also look to the *Kalama Sutta*¹¹⁰, where the Buddha tells the Kalamas not to be misled by tradition or theory, but to place confidence on what we know will lead to harm or to benefit, and on the advice of the wise.

This was very important to Dr Ambedkar. He could see the 'dead wood' weighing down the monastic Sangha and traditional Buddhism as practised in Asia. He knew that if Buddhism

107 *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.213.

108 See Sangharakshita, *Buddha and the Future of His Religion*. Seminar, 1986, p10.

109 *Dīgha Nikāya* ii,16.154.

110 *Aṅguttara Nikāya* 3.65.

was to spread in India, it would have to be reformed, the dead wood removed to make way for new growth. This he called a *Navayāna* or new Buddhism based on principles derived directly from the Buddha himself.¹¹¹

The fact that it is possible to ‘chip and chop’ at Buddhism, Dr Ambedkar saw as a testament to the Buddha’s confidence and courage that his teaching has at its basis reason and experience, not simply tradition or divine authority. This brings us back to the importance of personal responsibility. For Ambedkar, for a religion to be worth following, the follower must be able to consider for themselves, and not just accept any teaching because it comes from an existing tradition. The religion should be able to stand the scrutiny of reason and experience without relying on divine authority.

2. Buddhism and Hinduism

Such is the unique position of Buddha. What about his religion? How does it compare with those founded by his rivals?

Let us first compare Buddhism with Hinduism. In the short space available the comparison must be limited to a few important points indeed only to two.

Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has it is not an integral part of it. It is not imbedded in religion. It is a separate force which is sustained by social necessities and not by injunction of Hindu religion. The religion of Buddha is morality. It is imbedded in religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if no morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God. In place of God there is morality. What God is to other religions morality is to Buddhism.

The main difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, Dr Ambedkar goes on to say, is symbolised by the differences in the use of the term *Dharma* or *Dhamma*. In Hinduism, *Dharma* means rituals and observances, particularly religious rites associated with one’s caste. In other words, caste duty. There is no universal moral system as such in Hinduism, rather a system of behaviour that varies according to the caste you are born into. These actions are divinely sanctioned, so that morality is a relationship between humans and their responsibilities to the gods, including sacrifice, animal or otherwise. There is no obligation to treat others ethically if it is not caste duty to do so, and if by chance people do act ethically towards another, that is due to their own personal ethics, rather than the teaching of Hinduism.

In contrast, Buddhism has a different understanding of *Dhamma* as, in this context, acting in line with the way things are, the universal truth of reality.¹¹² Out of this comes a very clear universal system of morality that is based on the Buddha’s Enlightened understanding of reality. The term ‘morality’ is used by Ambedkar not in a narrow legalistic sense, but as representing ‘the whole ethical and spiritual dimension of human existence’.¹¹³ The way Buddhism explains how morality arises out of understanding reality is by making the distinction between natural morality, *pakati-sīla*, and conventional morality, *paññatti-sīla*. Natural morality refers to behaviour directly related to the mental states of contentment, love

111 See Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I*, Complete Works, volume 9. Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016, p123.

112 For a fuller discussion of the word *Dharma*, see Sangharakshita, *Survey of Buddhism*, Ch1.12.

113 Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I*, Complete Works, vol. 9, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016.

and wisdom. These states are the mental states that arise when you see directly the way things are: that all beings are governed by conditioned arising, they are not separate or fixed, and they can all progress along the spiritual path. Because it is related to the way things are, natural morality is universal, it applies to all cultures at all times. In Dr Ambedkar's words, it is 'sacred and universal'¹¹⁴. It is a relationship between humans and the world they live in, particularly other humans, but also other beings and the environment.¹¹⁵

Conventional morality is a matter of custom and tradition and varies from culture to culture. It is a relationship between humans and the law of the society, the prevailing social norms. Natural morality is one of the stages of the threefold path. When it is practiced, natural morality provides the conditions for concentration and wisdom to arise. Natural morality is, therefore, essential to Buddhist practice. It cannot be abandoned because someone is from a different caste, race or culture. Even if someone disrespects Buddhism itself or causes us harm or even violence, morality is still paramount. It cannot be taken out of Buddhism, or applied in some circumstances and not others. Dr Ambedkar goes on to say that if religious texts or divine authority should conflict with natural morality, it is the duty of the Buddhist to reject them as the Buddha did with the *Vedas* because they involve animal sacrifice.

Again, Dr Ambedkar is emphasising here the need for a universal, natural morality, where everyone is treated with the same standards of kindness and dignity.

This is one point of contrast between Hinduism and Buddhism. The second point of contrast lies in the fact that the official gospel of Hinduism is inequality. The doctrine of Chaturvarna is the concrete embodiment of this gospel of inequality. On the other hand Buddha stood for equality. He was the greatest opponent of Chaturvarna. He not only preached against it, fought against it, but did everything to uproot it. According to Hinduism neither a Shudra nor a woman could become a teacher of religion nor could they take Sannyasa and reach God. Buddha on the other hand admitted Shudras to the Bhikkhu Sangha. He also admitted women to become Bhikkhunis. Why did he do so? Few people seem to realise the importance of this step. The answer is that Buddha wanted to take concrete steps to destroy the gospel of inequality.

At this point Dr Ambedkar goes into the reason he felt Hinduism can never be reformed to abolish the caste system. Inequality is not something added on to the Hindu system, the Hindu system arises on the basis of inequality. The concrete embodiment of this inequality is the *chaturvarna* system, which means, as we have seen, the four *varnas*, or castes. The *chaturvarna* is sanctified by religious texts. These castes were traditionally treated very differently. Neither the Shudras, the lowest caste, nor the Scheduled Castes, which were regarded as even lower, were permitted to renounce worldly concerns such as home and family, and practice religion full time (taking *sannyasa*), nor were they allowed to become religious teachers. The same is true for women.

The question then arises, what is the condition of Hinduism now, is it still based on inequality? In the West we may be familiar with a different image of Hinduism which is without unequal foundations. There are some Hindu gurus who became popular in the West, such as Rajneesh, who were against caste and welcomed men and women from all different backgrounds as his followers. In India itself there are many movements within Hinduism all with different ideas

114 Dr Ambedkar, *Buddha and His Dhamma*, Book 5, Part 1.6.

115 For a fuller discussion of Buddhist morality, see Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Ch1.16.

about caste and inequality. Some Hindus vigorously maintain caste distinctions, often with the threat of violence. One still hears stories of violent enforcement caste divisions within Hinduism, for example of a man from the Scheduled Castes being stoned because he wanted to become a *sannyasin*.¹¹⁶ It can also be argued that a form of Hinduism without caste is no longer, strictly speaking, Hinduism. As we saw in 'Annihilation of Caste', to remove the *chaturvarna* system would involve dismissing the religious texts which, one could argue, are central to Hindu belief. What is known as 'Hinduism' encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices, and the definition of how we define Hinduism is a matter of some debate!

On the other hand, the Buddha did accept *Shudras* and those from the Scheduled Castes to his Sangha. He accepted women as well as men. Much has been written about his admitting women into the Bhikkhuni Sangha. It appears in the Pāli canon that the Buddha was initially reluctant to do so,¹¹⁷ however recent scholarship has shown that some of that reluctance was perhaps more the reluctance of the later monastic traditions.¹¹⁸ Whether the Buddha was reluctant or not, he categorically stated that women could achieve Enlightenment just as men can, and he followed that belief through by ordaining women into the Sangha, where they flourished and reached the highest spiritual goal.¹¹⁹ Likewise did he accept all castes and backgrounds to the monastic Sangha, saying that 'Just as whatever great rivers there are ... on reaching the great ocean lose their former names and identities and are just called "the great ocean", so also (those of) the four castes ... having gone forth from home to the homeless state in the Dhamma and Discipline made known by the Tathāgata, abandon their former names and identities and are just called "recluses, the followers of the Sakyan son"'.¹²⁰

3. The Revival of Buddhism in India

Some of those, who believe that only the acceptance of the Gospel of Buddha can save the Hindus are filled with sorrow, because they do not see much prospect of the return or revival of Buddhism in India. I do not share this pessimism.

In the matter of their attitude to their religion, Hindus today fall in to two classes. There are those who hold that, 'all religions are true including Hindu' and the leaders of other religions seem to join them in this slogan. There cannot be a thesis more false than the thesis that all religions are true. However this slogan gives the Hindus, who have raised it the support of the followers of other religions. There are Hindus who have come to realize that there is something wrong with their religion, the only thing is that they are not ready to denounce it openly. This attitude is understandable. Religion is a part of one's social inheritance. One's life and dignity and pride are bound up with it. It is not [easy] to abandon one's religion. Patriotism comes in 'My country' right or wrong. 'My religion' right or wrong. Instead of abandoning it the Hindus are finding escape in other ways. Some are consoling themselves with the thought that all religions are wrong, so why bother about religion at all. The same

116 This is a story related in a conversation to my mother by the narrator, Dominic West, of a documentary, 'West meets East'. The documentary is about Sir James Mallinson who became a Hindu mahant, a commander of his sect of sadhus (or sannyasin), one of the only Westerners to ever do so.

117 See *Vinaya* ii.253 and Sangharakshita's lecture, *A Wreath of Blue Lotus*, 1983.

118 See Ven. Anālayo, *Mahāpajāpati's Going Forth in the Madhyama-āgama*. Center for Buddhist Studies, University of Hamburg, <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/mahapajapati.pdf>

119 See Collett, Alice, *Women in Early Indian Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014 and *The Therīgāthā, Songs of the early Buddhist Nuns*: Susan Murcott, *First Buddhist Women: Songs and Stories from the Therīgāthā*. Parallax Press, Berkeley, 2006.

120 Udāna 5.5, translated by John D. Ireland.

feeling of patriotism prevents them from openly embracing Buddhism. Such an attitude can have only one result. Hinduism will lapse and cease to be a force of governing life. There will be void, which will have the effect of disintegrating the Hindu society. Hindus then will be forced to take a more positive attitude. When they do so, they can turn to nothing except Buddhism.

This is not the only ray of hope, there are hopes coming from other quarters also.

There is one question which every religion must answer. What mental and moral relief does it bring to the suppressed and the downtrodden? If it does not, then it is doomed. Does Hinduism give any mental and moral relief to the millions of Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes? It does not. Do Hindus expect these Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes to live under Hinduism which gives them no promise of mental and moral relief? Such an expectation would be an utter futility. Hinduism is floating on a volcano. To-day it appears to be extinct. But it is not. It will become active once these mighty millions have become conscious of their degradation and know that it is largely due to the social philosophy of the Hindu religion... The Hindu masses when they are enlightened are sure to turn to Buddhism.

Here Dr Ambedkar is countering the argument that though Buddhism has a beneficial effect on society, it will not be adopted in India. He thinks that Buddhism offers a real alternative to Hinduism for two groups of people in India: the liberal Hindu and the oppressed. Though there are some liberal Hindus who think that all religions are true (a thesis that Dr Ambedkar thinks cannot be more false), there are some who see that there is something wrong in their religion. For those that do see there is something wrong in their religion, they may not be ready to give it up and embrace Buddhism from a sense of patriotism and familiar identity. They may console themselves with an underlying sense that all religions have faults and there is no point in following any. If Hinduism is no longer practised by them, Hinduism will no longer be a governing force of life. Dr Ambedkar believed that society needs a religion in order to govern life, so that if Hinduism is no longer that governing force it will leave a void which has to be fulfilled. A new force will be needed. That force will be Buddhism.

In the second place, Hinduism gives no 'mental and moral relief' to the millions of people in the Scheduled Castes. Once these people realise the true cause of their suffering, they are sure to rise up and abandon Hinduism. When the people rise up, the divisions inherent in Hinduism are likely to make it explode apart, which could (and does) lead to violence. One could say that Buddhism, in that instance, can provide an alternative to violence, helping people both proactively leave Hinduism and embrace an alternative, peaceful path. This is why 'The Dhamma Revolution' in India is sometimes called 'The Peaceful Revolution'.

4. The criteria for choosing Buddhism

So much by way of comparison between Hinduism and Buddhism, how does Buddhism stand in comparison with other non-Hindu Religions? It is impossible to take each of these non-Hindu Religions and compare with Buddhism, in detail. All I can do is to put my conclusions in a summary form. I maintain that:-

I. That society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either, society is sure to go to pieces. In all societies, law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the

postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality, must therefore, remain the governing principle in every society.

This is Dr Ambedkar's main conclusion of why religion is necessary for society. Society needs something to hold it together in the sense of enabling members of society to cooperate and giving them a sense of shared responsibility for the functioning of society. This will either be an external force: the rule of law, or an internal force: a comprehensive system of personal ethics. The rule of law will only work in correcting a small number of antisocial elements and stop them from disrupting the social order. One can see this in countries like India today where there are large areas outside of government control. The majority has to be governed by their own sense of ethical standards in order for social order to be maintained. Religion provides people with a standard of personal ethics, and thus provides the necessary internal governing principle to society.

If religion is to provide the standard of ethics for the majority to follow to ensure a harmonious society, it follows that religion must be taken up by the majority. It cannot be taken up only by a minority, such as the Scheduled Castes. This is why Dr Ambedkar's vision was that not only the Scheduled Castes should take up Buddhism as a religion, but all the people of India, and eventually all the people of the world. He never envisioned that it would be a religion only for the Scheduled Castes.

II. That religion as defined in the first proposition must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose its respect and therefore becomes the subject of ridicule and thereby not merely loses its force as a governing principle of life, but might in course of time disintegrate and lapse, if it is not in accord with science. In other words, religion if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science.

Having established that religion is necessary to society, Ambedkar goes into three requirements which a religion must fulfil. The first is that it must accord with science, which in this case also means reason. If a religion contradicts the findings of science, or is shown to be unreasonable, it sets up a conflict between one's own rational understanding and religious belief. It leaves people having to make a choice between what they know and what they believe. It also leaves the religion without the test of reason, leaving it open to any kind of misuse or fantasy. This is perhaps why Sangharakshita talks about the three grounds of faith: intuition, reason and experience.¹²¹ Religion cannot go against reason because if it does, we can't really believe it. We will be shutting off an important part of ourselves. We need a wholehearted response to religion that includes our emotions and our intellect in order for it to be the governing force in our life.

However, this is not to say that religion has to be proved by science or that the Buddha himself made any scientific claims. It is still possible for a religion to have claims that are beyond the scope of scientific verification without it actually being disproved by science. For Buddhism, the Dhamma is said to be *atakkāvacara* or beyond the scope of reason, not in the sense of it being in opposition to reason, but enabling us to see beyond the limitations of our rational faculties and a literal interpretations of our sensory data. As the Buddha said on his

121 See Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels: The Central Ideals of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications, Birmingham, 1998.

Enlightenment, 'This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realise, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of reasoning, subtle, to-be-experienced only by the wise'.¹²²

III. That religion as a code of social morality, must also stand together another test. It is not enough for religion to consist of a moral code, but its moral code must recognise the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Unless a religion recognises these three fundamental principles of social life, religion will be doomed.

Having put forward his conclusion that society needs religion, as religion provides a moral system to hold society together, he now explains what moral system that religion should have. These are the 'fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity'. We have looked at these tenets in the preceding weeks. In this context what stands out is that Dr Ambedkar calls them the 'fundamental principles of social life', without recognition of which 'religion will be doomed'. Sangharakshita interprets this as meaning that 'unless religion can show that it has a social conscience and that it is actively involved in the struggle for social justice it will not be taken seriously by thinking men and women'.¹²³

What Dr Ambedkar is drawing out is that these three tenets are essential to the well-being of society, and religion provides the incentive to sustain them. Without all three being encouraged by religion, societies will fail, along with the religion that has failed them. Moreover, the three tenets are mutually supportive 'Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things. It would require a constable to enforce them'.¹²⁴ In this way, religion must uphold and encourage the 'fundamental principles' of liberty, equality and fraternity to benefit society naturally without recourse to the law.

IV. That religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty. Renunciation of riches by those who have it, may be a blessed state, but poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion, to perpetuate vice and crime, to consent to make earth a living hell.

Dr Ambedkar distinguishes between voluntary renunciation for spiritual reasons, and what Sangharakshita calls the 'bitter, grinding poverty that is imposed on people against their will either by force of circumstances or by the greed and selfishness of their so-called fellow men'.¹²⁵ This type of poverty Dr Ambedkar had himself witnessed, and knew it for the hell it is. His point was that religion should also know it as a hell, not sanctify involuntary poverty for religious reasons.

Dr Ambedkar had seen how religion can sanctify poverty. Hinduism sees poverty as a result of action undertaken in a previous life that determines one's caste in this life. Under the caste system, for a lower caste to economically progress is an affront to the caste they were born into and the consequences they must pay in this life because of previous actions. In some cases economic progression by a lower caste justifies punishment. The best thing the lower castes

122 *Majjhima Nikāya* 26

123 Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I, Complete Works*, vol. 9, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016. p105

124 Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi 2004. p142. Or Dr Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 13, p1215, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003

125 Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I, Complete Works* vol. 9. Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016. p107

can do is to live content with the conditions in which they were born and fulfil their caste duty – whether that be stealing, manual scavenging or other dirty and menial jobs, traditionally without payment. It is this justification of poverty from a religious basis that Dr Ambedkar was arguing against.

Which religion fulfils these requirements? In considering this question it must be remembered that the days of the Mahatmas are gone and the world cannot have a new Religion. It will have to make its choice from those that exist. The question must therefore be confined to existing religions.

It may be that one of the existing religions satisfies one of these tests, some two. Question is - Is there any religion which satisfies all these tests? So far I know, the religion which satisfies all these tests is Buddhism. In other words Buddhism is the only religion which world can have. If the new world – which be it realised is very different from the old – must have a religion – and the new world needs religion far more than the old world did – then it can only be religion of the Buddha.

All this may sound very strange. This is because most of those who have written about Buddha have propagated the idea that the only thing Buddha taught was Ahimsa [non-violence]. This is a great mistake. It is true Buddha taught Ahimsa. I do not want to minimise its importance. For it is a great doctrine. The world cannot be saved unless it follows it. What I wish to emphasize is that Buddha taught many other things besides Ahimsa. He taught as part of his religion, social freedom, intellectual freedom, economic freedom and political freedom. He taught equality, equality not between man and man only, but between man and woman. It would be difficult to find a religious teacher to compare with Buddha, whose teachings embrace so many aspects of the social life of people, whose doctrines are so modern and with main concern to give salvation to man in his life on earth and not to promise it in heaven after he is dead!

Having set out his criteria for choosing a religion, Dr Ambedkar declares that it is only Buddhism that satisfies them all. He thought that there cannot be a new religion because there were no ‘great men’ or *Mahatmas* to start them. It is worth noting that Ambedkar did not regard Gandhi as a *Mahatma*.

In India at that time Buddhism was understood in terms of its teaching of non-violence. People did not see Buddhism as a force of social transformation that could hold together society and encourage a fully functioning democracy. Today we tend to limit our understanding of Buddhism to being primarily a private concern. We have a mistrust of what we regard as ‘triumphalism’ when it comes to religion being extended to the social sphere. There is a well-placed fear of religious intolerance, extremism, and of forced conversion. However, one has to understand Dr Ambedkar’s vision of the social value of Buddhism in current society; a Buddhism that is founded in, and encourages, reason, social justice and respect for others.

5. Steps to spread Buddhism

How could this ideal of spreading Buddhism be realised? Three steps appear to be quite necessary: first, to produce a Buddhist Bible; second, to make changes in the organisation, aims and objects of the Bhikkhu Sangha; third, to set up a world

The production of a Bible of Buddhism is the first and foremost need. The Buddhist literature is a vast literature. It is impossible to expect a person who wants to know the essence of Buddhism to wade through the sea of literature. The greatest advantage which the other religions have over Buddhism is that each has a gospel which everyone can carry with him and read wherever he goes. It is a handy thing. Buddhism suffers for not having such a handy gospel. The Indian Dhammapada has failed to perform the function which a gospel is expected to. Every great religion has been built on faith. But faith cannot be assimilated if presented in the form of creeds and abstract dogmas. It needs something on which the imagination can fasten – some myth or epic or gospel – what is called in journalism, a story. The Dhammapada is not fastened around a story. It seeks to build faith on abstract dogmas.

The proposed gospel of Buddhism should contain (i) a short life of Buddha (ii) The Chinese Dhammapada (iii) Some of the important Dialogues of Buddha and (iv) Buddhist Ceremonies, birth, initiation, marriage and death. In preparing such a gospel the linguistic side of it must not be neglected. It must make the language in which it is produced live. It must become an incantation instead of being read as narrative or an ethical exposition. Its style must be lucid, moving and must produce an hypnotic effect.

Dr Ambedkar then goes into his ideas of how to spread Buddhism. The first thing he says Buddhism needs is the essence of Buddhism presented in an imaginative text that its followers can carry with them to read and reflect on. It is easy to sympathise with Ambedkar on this point, the Pāli canon alone takes up a few shelves, let alone if you add the Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan texts, as well as works in other languages. Even the most experienced Buddhist is unlikely to have read them all. If someone is to take up Buddhism, where do they start? Dr Ambedkar suggests the teachings could be collected in a shorter work, much like a 'Buddhist Bible'.

If the works are to be collected, however, they should not simply be abstract theories or ethical discourse, but should appeal to the emotions, containing stories and myth. It should also be in beautiful language, 'lucid and moving', to evoke feeling, which is what he means by producing 'a hypnotic effect'. Here Dr Ambedkar is making an important point, 'Every great religion is built on faith', by which he means both reason and emotion, the head and the heart. He clearly saw the need for both, seeing that if Buddhism is to spread, it must appeal to both reason, not contradicting science, and imagination. Dr Ambedkar himself was not purely a scholarly man. He was also a man of deep feeling, a lifelong learner who learnt to play the violin at a later age, who loved poetry, and who painted and sculpted the Buddha. After his death, notes were found for a book he was to write on myth. His own attraction to Buddhism began when he read a life of the Buddha published in Marathi.¹²⁶ This, he says, is why the Indian (based on the Pāli) *Dhammapada* cannot be the key Buddhist text, because it lacks stories, and why he recommends instead the Chinese *Dharmapada* which in some translations includes the stories behind the verses.

Many attempts at anthologies have been made, including *A Buddhist Bible* by Dwight Goddard. Though they are very helpful, they cannot be regarded with the same central significance as

126 Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I, Complete Works vol. 9*. Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016. p45

the Bible is by Christians as they are not the 'revealed word of God'. As Dr Ambedkar points out, as Buddhist literature is not the revealed word of the Divine, it is capable of being questioned, 'chipped and chopped' due to the needs of the time. Different schools of Buddhism emphasise different teachings. This means that, however valuable, no one anthology can be viewed as authoritative by all Buddhist schools.

Sangharakshita makes the point that the spread of Buddhism does not seem to have been hampered by the lack of an authoritative anthology that is easy for everyone to read and reflect on. However, the advantage of having different texts is that they can appeal to those with different temperaments. What is also notable in Buddhism is that practitioners have followed different texts throughout history without any schism occurring due to the texts they follow. What, perhaps, we do need is a translator to point out the key texts and help us navigate our way through the sea of literature. Dr Ambedkar went on to write *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, an anthology of Pāli texts and commentary, which was published after his death. For Indian Buddhists, this provides an entry into the world of Buddhist literature, without limiting their exploration.

...There is a world's difference between a Hindu Sannyasi and a Buddhist Bhikkhu. A Hindu Sannyasi has nothing to do with the world. He is dead to the world. A Bhikkhu has everything to do with the world. That being so the question arises, what was the purpose for which the Buddha thought of establishing the Bhikkhu Sangha? What was the necessity for creating a separate society of Bhikkhus? One purpose was to set up a society which would live up to the Buddhist idea embodied in the principles of Buddhism and serve as a model to the laymen. Buddha knew that it was not possible for a common man to realize the Buddhist ideal. But He also wanted that the common man should know what the ideal was and also wanted there should be placed before the common man a society of men who were bound to practise His ideals. That is why He created the Bhikkhu Sangha and bound it down by the rules of Vinaya. But there were other purposes which He had in his mind when He thought of founding the Sangha. One such purpose was to create a body of intellectuals to give the laymen true and impartial guidance. That is the reason why He prohibited the Bhikkhus from owning property. Ownership of property is one of the greatest obstacles in free thinking and application of free thought. The other purpose of Buddha in founding the Bhikkhu Sangha was to create a society the member of which would be free to do service to the people. That is why He did not want the Bhikkhus to marry.

Here Ambedkar moves on to his second step to ensure the spread of Buddhism: to make changes in the organisation, aims and objects of the Bhikkhu Sangha. He lays out the ideal Bhikkhu by going back to what we may call the Buddha's original 'sūtra style monasticism',¹²⁷ a life of simplicity and service, following the ideals of the Buddha's teaching. His main point is that the Bhikkhu Sangha was set up to be involved with the world, in terms of being concerned about the spiritual welfare of others, not to distance themselves from the world. This goes against a popular view of a calm monk isolated in his monastery, a view Dr Ambedkar was keen to reject. There are three purposes of a Bhikkhu Sangha, three ways in which they can be involved in the world.

The first is to serve as a model society for others. Dr Ambedkar recognised that most people aren't able to follow the Buddhist path full time, both in terms of the difficulty of the path and

127 See Subhuti, *A Buddhist Manifesto*, https://www.sangharakshita.org/pdfs/a_buddhist_manifesto.pdf, 2012; and Sangharakshita, *Forty-Three Years Ago*, Windhorse Publications, Birmingham, 1993.

in terms of time. He says it is 'not possible' for the common man to realise the Buddhist ideal. Having previously called the Buddha a common man, it is clear that he is not using the term pejoratively, but simply pointing out that it is difficult for everyone to realise the Buddhist ideal. The Bhikkhu Sangha ideally is able to embody the principles of Buddhism fully and inspire and motivate others in their Buddhist practice and to show them that it is possible to lead a fully Buddhist life. One could say that the Bhikkhu Sangha functions as a vision of a different way of living, showing what it is to live in line with Buddhist principles.

The second purpose of the Bhikkhu Sangha is to cultivate the conditions for giving 'true and impartial guidance', this being, in his view, education and not having worldly investments such as property. Dr Ambedkar talks of cultivating a 'body of intellectuals', but perhaps we can relate to this more as meaning something more like trained, skilled or learned, particularly in Buddhism itself, but also in the arts and sciences. The impression he gives is of people you can rely on: upright individuals who are ethically responsible, aware, intelligent and who know the Dharma and the nuances of the Buddhist path. These people should be free from anything that might present a conflict to their pursuit of truth. The main conflict here is property, property meaning the amassing of material possessions in general. Whether or not material possessions present a conflict to free thinking is a matter of some reflection. What is certainly true is that it is easier to think freely if we do not have material investment in thinking and advising others in a particular way. For example, in the days of the Buddha, the monks and nuns did not amass any property, all they had were their robes and bowls. They were under instruction to beg for alms from any household, rich or poor. This left them without any personal agenda, any self interest in trying to gain anything from anyone. They were free to think things through and guide others regardless of the implications for themselves. 'True men give up everything; the righteous do not speak wishing for sensuous pleasures.'¹²⁸

The third purpose is to be 'free to do service to the people'. Without marriage and family responsibilities, the Bhikkhus can be free to help others and to spread the Dharma. It is a matter of debate as to how marriage and family responsibilities limit our freedom to serve the people, or how not marrying or having a family enables us to be free. After all, Dr Ambedkar himself was married with a family while being able to serve the people. However, we do have to be realistic about what taking up family, or other, responsibilities really means in terms of time, if not in terms of emotional investment. It seems that Buddhism has always had a core of practitioners without family responsibilities who maintain the institutions such as monasteries. These institutions support, and are supported by, practitioners with families and wealth.¹²⁹

Is the Bhikkhu Sangha of today living up to these ideals? The answer is emphatically in the negative. It neither guides the people nor does it serve them.

The Bhikkhu Sangha in its present condition can therefore be of no use for the spread of Buddhism. In the first place there are too many Bhikkhus. Of these a very large majority are merely Sadhus and Sannyasis spending their time in meditation or idleness. There is in them neither learning nor service. When the idea of service to suffering humanity comes to one's mind everyone thinks of the Ramakrishna Mission. No one thinks of the Buddhist Sangha. Who should regard service as its pious duty the Sangha or the Mission? There can be no doubt about the answer. Yet the Sangha is a huge army of idlers. We want fewer Bhikkhus and we want Bhikkhus

¹²⁸ *Dhammapada* 83

¹²⁹ See Ray, Reginald A, *Buddhist Saints in India*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

highly educated, Bhikkhu Sangha must borrow some of the features of the Christian priest-hood particularly the Jesuits. Christianity has spread in Asia through service – educational and medical. This is possible because the Christian priest is not merely versed in religious lore but because he is also versed in Arts and Science. This was really the ideal of the Bhikkhus of olden times. As is well known the Universities of Nalanda and Taxila were run and manned by Bhikkhus. Evidently they must have been very learned men and knew that social service was essential for the propagation of their faith. The Bhikkhus of today must return to the old ideal. The Sangha as is composed cannot render this service to the laity and cannot therefore attract people to itself.

Though these statements of Dr Ambedkar may seem quite shocking to us, what he is saying is that his overall experience of Bhikkhus is that their path is primarily individualistic. The fact that there are so many Bhikkhus demonstrates to Dr Ambedkar that the standards of becoming a Bhikkhu have slipped, not that there are more people to serve the needs of others. The Bhikkhus that there are spend their time in ‘meditation or idleness’. Perhaps it is worth saying that Dr Ambedkar was not against meditation itself. His assistant Shakarananad Shashtri, when reminiscing about Ambedkar, said that ‘Buddhist meditation was the foundation of Babasaheb’s life’.¹³⁰ What Dr Ambedkar was against was the use of meditation to enjoy higher states of consciousness for their own sake regardless of the sufferings of others. This does seem to be the danger of Buddhist practice: if Buddhism has a fault, Sangharakshita has said, that it would be a tendency towards indifference and laziness.¹³¹

Dr Ambedkar compares the Bhikkhu Sangha to the Ramakrishna Mission and the Jesuits. The Ramakrishna Mission was set up in 1897 by Swami Vivekananda and was well known in India for its social work. Ironically, though a Hindu organisation, it was modelled on the ancient Bhikkhu Sangha. What drew Ambedkar to the Jesuits was the rigorous training in ‘religious lore’, arts and sciences, that supported their missionary activities. The Jesuits not only brought Christianity, but also medical support and education. The reality of the Jesuit’s missionary activities is complex, but here we are concerned with what features of the Jesuits Dr Ambedkar was recommending the Bhikkhu Sangha remodelled itself on.

Without a Mission Buddhism can hardly spread. As education requires to be given, religion requires to be propagated. Propagation cannot be undertaken without men and money. Who can supply these? Obviously the countries where Buddhism is a living religion. It is these countries which must find the men and money at least in its initial stages. Will these? There does not seem to be much enthusiasm in these countries for the spread of Buddhism.

Dr Ambedkar states the need for people and money to propagate Buddhism. At his time he did not see much help available from Buddhist countries. So where was the money to be sourced? Dr Ambedkar advocated that his followers give 5% of their income to help the spread of the Dhamma. Though in its initial stages he saw that outside help was needed, he did not want Indian Buddhism to be dependent on foreign support.¹³² In terms of people, he envisioned Dharma training institutes to educate young people in Buddhism and help them spread it all

130 From Shakarananad Shashtri, *Yugapurush Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar-Jivan Sangharsh evam Rashtra Sevayin*, Amrit Book Company, 1990. Translated by Maitriveer-Nagarjun.

131 ‘The besetting sin of organized Christianity is intolerance, that of Islam fanaticism, of Hinduism inhumanity, and of Buddhism laziness and indifference.’ Sangharakshita, *Peace is a Fire*, Windhorse Publications, 1995.

132 Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi 2004, p246.

over India.¹³³ This vision of Dr Ambedkar's did not materialise as quickly as he hoped, however there are some very positive initiatives in India.¹³⁴

On the other hand time seems quite propitious for the spread of Buddhism. There was a time when religion was part of one's own inheritance. At one time a boy or a girl inherited the religion of his or her parent along with the property of the parent. There was no question of examining the merit and virtues of religion. Sometimes the heir did question, whether the property left by the parents was worth taking. But no heir was there to question whether the religion of his or her parents was worth having. Time seems to have changed. Many person throughout the world have exhibited an unprecedented piece of courage with regard to inheritance of their religion. Many have, as a result of the influence of scientific enquiry, come to the conclusion that religion is an error, which ought to be given up. There are others who, as a result of the Marxian teaching, have come to the conclusion that religion is opium which induces the poor people to submit to the domination of the rich and should be discarded. Whatever be the causes, the fact remains, that people have developed an inquiring mind in respect of religion. And the question whether religion is at all worth having and if so which religion is worth having, are questions which are uppermost in the minds of those who dare to think about this subject. Time has come, what is wanted is will. If the countries which are Buddhist can develop the will to spread Buddhism the task of spreading Buddhism will not be difficult. They must realize that the duty of a Buddhist is not merely to be a good Buddhist, his duty is to spread Buddhism. They must believe that to spread Buddhism is to serve mankind.

In this way Ambedkar ends his paper with an appraisal of the current opportunities for Buddhism. As is true today, people are free to question the religion of their families and choose whether or not to follow any religion at all. Those who are free to question their old religion, are free to take up another, and this leaves open the possibility for them to take up Buddhism. This is indeed what we have seen in, for example, Europe, the Americas and in India. In such an auspicious time, the thing that holds back the spread of Buddhism is the lack of will of Buddhists themselves to share their religion. Here he is pointing to the reticence on the part of Buddhists to go beyond being 'a good Buddhist' in a personal sphere: a somewhat individualistic conception of the Buddhist path which may include a positive effect on the people around us, but not much more than that. What is needed is a conviction on the part of Buddhists that their religion is of benefit to the world. If they have that conviction, then they will be energised and inspired to spread the Buddha Dhamma in whatever way they can.



Suggestions for reflection, research and discussion

9. To what extent do you think we can 'chip and chop' Buddhism? What do you think might be the 'dead wood', and if we remove it, what lies beneath?

¹³³ Ibid p252.

¹³⁴ For example, Nagaloka in Nagpur is a training institute run by members of the Triratna Buddhist Order. It teaches young people from all over India about Buddhism and the work of Dr Ambedkar. It has raised money and awareness in Asian Buddhist countries. The India Dhamma Trust is also working in this area to train Indian teams in fundraising. At the time of writing, half the money raised for the ordination teams in India is raised in India itself.

10. What is the effect of Buddhism having morality in place of God?
11. Dr Ambedkar says that there cannot be a thesis more false than all religions are true. Why might he have said that in such strong terms, and do you agree?
12. What mental and moral relief does Buddhism, or more specifically, Triratna give to the suppressed and downtrodden? Who are the suppressed and downtrodden in the modern world, and how could they receive mental and moral (notice that he does not say social and economic) relief?
13. Why does religion have to be in accord with science? What is the relationship between science and Buddhism?
14. Does the world need religion, and is Buddhism the best religion to have?
15. What texts do we need to deepen our practice of the Dharma? Do you feel that you have to 'wade through a sea of literature'? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having one text? What would that text be?
16. To what extent is today's world the right time for spreading Buddhism? Has the time come for a 'Dhamma Revolution'?
17. Is the duty of a Buddhist to be a good Buddhist or to spread Buddhism? Is spreading Buddhism a service to mankind? Are you inspired or cautious about such a statement?

Introduction

So far we have looked at the core thoughts of Dr Ambedkar. This week we will explore how Dr Ambedkar inspired and influenced Sangharakshita and the movement Sangharakshita founded. We will also compare the teachings of Sangharakshita with those of Dr Ambedkar, looking for similarities in their understanding, particularly about spreading the Dhamma and creating a Sangha. It is these similarities that enable the followers of Dr Ambedkar to join the Triratna Buddhist Community and feel that in doing so they are continuing Dr Ambedkar's work: transforming society and removing inequality.

This week is purpose written by Vajratara.

There are a few talks that deal with this topic online which you may want to listen to:

Suvajra gave a series of talks called *The Buddha, Bhante and Babasaheb*, that can be found on the India Dhamma Trust page of thebuddhistcentre.com:

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/IDT/buddha-bhante-and-babasaheb-talk-one-part-one>

Lokamitra gave a talk in 2009 about the history of the Movement in India comparing the approach of Dr Ambedkar and Sangharakshita in spreading the Dhamma:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=IND68>

Vajratara gave a talk as part of a series of talks on *The Lineage of Inspiration* called *Inspired by Ambedkar: Sangharakshita's Perspective*. It can be found on Vimeo and also on the India Dhamma Trust page of thebuddhistcentre.com:

<https://vimeo.com/148739003>

It is also recommended you watch an extract from an interview Sangharakshita gave to one of our Order Members from India, Maitriveer-Nagarjun, called 'United for Dhamma'. It can be found on the India Dhamma Trust page of thebuddhistcentre.com:

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/IDT/interview-bhante-ambedkar>

On the same page can be found some interviews with Maitriveer-Nagarjun explaining why Triratna in India is important for Triratna in the West, and vice versa.

Three Meetings

Sangharakshita first heard about Dr Ambedkar in 1949, forming an impression of him as a very controversial politician who was often in the news. However, Sangharakshita only heard about Dr Ambedkar's views on Buddhism when he read his article *Buddha and the Future of His Religion* in the May 1950 edition of the *Maha Bodhi Journal*. Sangharakshita was at the time 25 years old, living in Kalimpong and running the *Young Men's Buddhist Association*. He wrote to Dr Ambedkar about the article and received a reply that was both encouraging and challenging:

Dear Rev. Sangharakshita,

Thank you very much for your letter of the 23 June. I am glad you liked my article on the Buddha and the future of his Religion. You have my permission to translate it and print in any language you please.

I have seen the article in the *Verant Kesari*. In fact they sent me an off print of it. It is not very difficult to refute the points made therein. Unfortunately I am too busy to find time for it. I propose to give a full and complete reply to all the critics of Buddhism in my new book. In the meantime some of the Bhikkhus should deal with the replies as they come and keep the flag flying. I am glad someone is replying to it.

Great responsibility lies on the shoulders of the Bhikkhus if this attempt at the revival of Buddhism is to be a success. They must be more active than they have been. They must come out of their shell and be in the first rank of the fighting forces. I am glad that you have started the YMBA at Kalimpong. You should be more active than that.

With kind regards
Yours sincerely
B R Ambedkar

After that opening correspondence, they met three times. Sangharakshita has written about these meetings fully in *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, and also recounted them in his talk *Remembering Ambedkar*. Their meetings were characterised by Dr Ambedkar's uncompromising dedication to the future of Buddhism in India. As Sangharakshita recounts, 'Our three meetings may not have been very important to him, but they were certainly important to me, and after his death they were to be of considerable importance for the movement of conversion to Buddhism which he had inaugurated.'¹³⁵ Sangharakshita felt at their final meeting that Dr Ambedkar, 'somehow knew we would not be meeting again and that he wanted to transfer to my shoulders some of the weight that he was no longer able to bear himself'.¹³⁶ That weight was transferred in ways neither of them could have anticipated, and it was transferred not all at once, but in many stages. Perhaps the word weight sounds onerous, but the weight was not a dead weight, it was alive and vibrant, a responsibility that grew into a network of friendships, inspiration and shared Dhamma work.

Understanding the social dimension of Buddhism

¹³⁵ Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I, Complete Works, vol. 9*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016

¹³⁶ Ibid

Why was Sangharakshita's encounter with Ambedkar so important to him? How did it influence his thought and shape the development of his new Buddhist movement? It is not easy to give a definite answer to this question, but we can get some idea of Ambedkar's importance to Sangharakshita by examining some of Sangharakshita's talks and writings, seeing the similarities in the way they both envisioned the future of Buddhism in the modern world.

Dr Ambedkar's importance to Sangharakshita can be thought of in terms of ideas, but perhaps it is best to start with emotions. Sangharakshita has said that, 'perhaps among my strongest feelings are the feelings that I have for these [Scheduled Castes].'¹³⁷ He was moved very deeply by the sufferings they had undergone, 'a lifetime of systematic harassment and humiliation'.¹³⁸ At the same time, he recognised the 'sincerity, zeal and fervour' with which they went for Refuge to the Three Jewels. The enthusiasm with which they expressed their Going for Refuge resonated with his own experience of Going for Refuge. 'It did not matter that I was English and they were Indian, or that I was a monk and they were laymen and laywomen. For them as for me there could be refuge only at the feet of the Buddha.'¹³⁹

Sangharakshita has also said that it was through Ambedkar and his followers that he began to understand fully the altruistic aspect of Going for Refuge. As a young monk it was easy for Sangharakshita to believe that Buddhism involves separating yourself off from society. Through his meetings with Dr Ambedkar, he realised that Buddhism itself could have a transformative effect on society, in fact it could not *but* have an effect on society, just as society has an effect on individuals practising Buddhism. The individual and society are not separate. 'After my contact with Dr Ambedkar ... I became much more aware of the social dimension of Buddhism, in fact the social dimension of existence itself.'¹⁴⁰

Sangharakshita has spoken of the effect of seeing what Dr Ambedkar achieved for the Scheduled Castes. Those that have converted to Buddhism through the inspiration of Dr Ambedkar have developed economically, socially, and politically in more ways than those who did not convert.¹⁴¹

I remember in the very early days ... I used to ask men and women, even children, what difference has this conversion to Buddhism made for you? Do you feel different? And they all gave me the same answer, wherever I went, wherever I asked. They said that now we are Buddhists we feel free... And because they feel that they are free a tremendous amount of energy has been liberated. When you feel free you can do anything, if you're a free human being with self respect and with dignity and with a proper position in society you feel that you can do anything, so there's been a tremendous movement of uplift on all fronts among these [Scheduled Castes], especially among the Mahars who are in the forefront of things. There's been great economic improvement, educational improvement, cultural improvement, they look different, they speak differently, they bear themselves differently, they can look even the Brahmin in the eye. Before they could hardly look at the Brahmin, even from a distance, couldn't even allow themselves to be seen.¹⁴²

137 Sangharakshita, *The Ex-Untouchable Indian Buddhists*. Lecture, 1983

138 Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going For Refuge*. Windhorse Publications, Glasgow, 1998. p53

139 Ibid

140 Sangharakshita, interview with Saddhanandi, 2015

141 Census of India, 2001, see <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-common/censusdataonline.html>

142 Sangharakshita, *The Ex-Untouchable Indian Buddhists*. Lecture, 1983

Witnessing the effect of conversion to Buddhism on the Scheduled Castes taught Sangharakshita the potential of Buddhism beyond changing the individual's state of mind. Practising Buddhism changes people's view of themselves, giving people a sense of dignity, freedom, and self responsibility. This influences how they interact in society, and through that influences society itself: 'so one can see from this that change is possible, not only individual change, but change of a whole society by as it were religious, by spiritual means, spiritual ideals, a spiritual vision. I think this is the important thing, this is the lesson that we can learn.'¹⁴³

When asked who his inspirations have been,¹⁴⁴ Sangharakshita gave a list of four people: the Buddha, Milarepa, Dharmapala and Dr Ambedkar. He said he was influenced deeply by Dr Ambedkar's concern for the oppressed and exploited. He resonated strongly with that concern and was inspired by the religious revolution that Ambedkar achieved by peaceful means.

Sangharakshita said in the same interview that it was Dr Ambedkar's *Dhamma Revolution* that inspired him to begin his own Dhamma Revolution in the UK. He was inspired to teach the Dhamma in a way that enabled people to make real changes in their lives. He said that the changes that people make in the West are often different from the changes they make in India, often they are psychological in nature rather than social, but nevertheless, they are real, not superficial, changes. Sangharakshita has been clear that though the changes that we make are different, we are one Movement, one Sangha. In India and the West, in the whole of Triratna, the *Dhamma* does not 'stay on the shelf for a convenient moment', it is who we are.¹⁴⁵

Sangharakshita's strong personal connection with Dr Ambedkar and his followers, and also his deeper understanding of the significance of Buddhism for society, was strengthened by an incident that occurred just after Ambedkar's death. Sangharakshita had a strong sense that he should go to Nagpur despite being asked to stay in Mumbai with his friends. He didn't know why he should go to Nagpur, but he had a strong, clear intuition that he could not ignore. Soon after he got there he was told that Ambedkar had died. He organised a public condolence meeting in which he ended up being the only speaker, the other speakers overcome by emotion before they could utter more than a few words. Though Sangharakshita was deeply moved, and could also feel tears rising, he realised he had to address Ambedkar's followers. The new Buddhists were left demoralised and in terrible shock after the death of their leader and Sangharakshita had to encourage them that the work Dr Ambedkar had started must be carried on by his followers. 'While I was speaking I had an extraordinary experience. Above the crowd there hung an enormous Presence. Whether that Presence was Ambedkar's own departed consciousness still hovering over his followers, or whether it was the collective product of their thoughts at that time of trial and crisis, I do not know, but it was as real to me as the people I was addressing.'¹⁴⁶

In the four days that followed, he gave about 40 talks and initiated about 30,000 people into Buddhism, each time giving them the same message that he had given on that first evening. Far from being tired by this activity, he felt as if part of a greater force than his own. He was acting clearly and effectively through an energy that was unconnected with self interest and at the same time was not outside of himself. As he wrote to a friend of that experience

143 Ibid

144 Interview with Mahamati, 2009

145 Ibid

146 Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I, Complete Works, vol. 9*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016

My own spiritual experience during this period was most peculiar. I felt that I was not a person but an impersonal force. At one stage I was working quite literally without any thought, just as one is in samādhi. Also I felt hardly any tiredness – certainly not at all what one would have expected from such a tremendous strain. When I left Nagpur I felt quite refreshed and rested.¹⁴⁷

This experience is akin to what is described of the *bodhicitta* – a term that can be translated as ‘awakened heart or mind’. This experience arises when we are no longer motivated by self-clinging and self-orientated action, but feel instead as if an ‘impersonal force’, as Sangharakshita describes it, is working through us, benefiting all beings. The *bodhicitta* arises in an individual as a response to others, rather than belonging to that person as their property or attainment. When described, it feels beyond an individual’s personal experience, as if arising from outside of themselves. At the same time it seems that it doesn’t arise at random. Those who are receptive to it are in a state of compassionate awareness of others and of reality itself. Given the nature of Sangharakshita’s emotional response to Dr Ambedkar and his followers, his resonance with the sincerity of the new Buddhist’s Going for Refuge, and his inspiration on seeing the potential of Buddhism to change society, it is perhaps not surprising that an experience of this kind should arise in this context.

The other context in which Sangharakshita talked about a similar experience, was in setting up the Triratna Buddhist Order. There again he felt as if a force greater than himself, but also not different from himself, was working through him. He said that rather than it being him that took on the responsibility of founding the Order and Movement, he felt as if it was the responsibility ‘that took on me.’¹⁴⁸ He described it as though a ‘supra-personal energy or force was working through me, an energy or force for which, in a way, I was not responsible.’¹⁴⁹

One could say a similar force worked through Ambedkar, giving him tremendous capacity for action and reflection. A common question from Buddhists who are new to Ambedkar’s life and work is what kind of spiritual practice Ambedkar had. Sangharakshita answered this by saying the following: ‘He didn’t meditate, to the best of my knowledge, in any formal sense; but despite his intellectuality he seems to have been a very emotional man to begin with, and he seems to have had very strong devotional feelings towards the Buddha. Those feelings seem to have been very strong indeed, particularly strong at the end of his life. There is no doubt he led a spiritual life in the sense that throughout the whole of his career he was concerned with the needs of others; there is no doubt about that. In India, politics can be a very dirty game and there is a lot of corruption in politics, but so far as one knows Ambedkar was completely free from anything of that sort. He certainly had a very strong moral sense and very strong ethical principles, and he based his life very much on those.’¹⁵⁰ Ambedkar’s life was very much an embodiment of the Bodhisattva ideal – a life of service dedicated to the material and spiritual growth of others, and his followers regard him as a Bodhisattva.

There is much we don’t know about Dr Ambedkar’s inner life and experience, or his personal practice of the Dhamma. What we have are glimpses from the testaments of his assistants and secretaries. It seems that he did, in fact, have a formal meditation practice, as well as chanting the Avalokiteśvara mantra: ‘Babasaheb was a master of wisdom. He was follower of the Buddha. When he used to meditate, he was absorbed in himself. In his study room, Babasaheb

147 Sangharakshita, *Dear Dinoo: Letters to a Friend*, Ibis Publications, 2012

148 Sangharakshita, *My Relation to the Order*. Lecture, 1990

149 See Subhuti, *A Supra-Personal Force*. Paper, 2012

150 Sangharakshita, *Buddha and the future of His religion*. Seminar 53

was always engrossed in his studies. When continuous study would lead to fatigue, Babasaheb would counter this by ambling in his study room and wholeheartedly chanting “*Mani Padme Hum*” through which, he used to concentrate his mind. Buddhist meditation was the foundation of Babasaheb’s life.’¹⁵¹

Dr Ambedkar said of himself that he could have had an easier life based in North America or the UK, but that he chose to remain in India, where he had a life of continuous struggle, in order to devote himself to the uplift of his people. A life of such self-sacrifice has to be fuelled by deep currents of inspiration: ‘whatever good things I have in me or whatever have been the benefits of my education to society, I owe them to the religious feelings in me.’¹⁵² Dr Ambedkar’s inspiration came from his devotion to the Buddha and to a vision of creating a land in which the Dhamma flourishes and each individual has beneficial conditions for spiritual growth. This is similar to the vision of a Bodhisattva whose work is envisioned as creating a ‘Pure Land’ or ‘*Buddha Kṣetra*’ in which all beings have the ideal conditions for practising the Dhamma. Dr Ambedkar called his vision ‘*Prabuddha Bharata*’, ‘Enlightened India’. However, he did not limit his vision to India. He wanted the whole world to participate in the flourishing of the Dhamma.

In the light of this, it is significant that he ended *The Buddha and His Dhamma* with the four Bodhisattva vows and a prayer to Amitābha to be born into his Pure Land. The Four Bodhisattva vows are to deliver all beings from suffering, to eradicate the mental poisons, to understand the Dhamma fully and to attain Buddhahood. Dr Ambedkar focused on the first vow by prefacing the vows with the title ‘A Vow to Spread His Dhamma’. The prayer to Amitābha is originally a prayer to be born in *Sukhāvati*, the ‘Happy Land’ and there to proclaim the Truth. At the end of *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Dr Ambedkar gives it the title ‘A Prayer for His Return to His Native Land’, thus equating the Happy Land with India, or at least the potential for India to be a Happy Land. Taken together, both these prayers give a sense of Dr Ambedkar’s heartfelt aspiration to be reborn in India and to there continue working for the revival of Buddhism.

The Centrality of Going for Refuge

Sangharakshita’s relationship with Ambedkar affected him by influencing his thinking around what he later termed ‘the centrality of Going for Refuge’. In *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Sangharakshita reflects on the implications of the ceremony in which Ambedkar and his followers embraced Buddhism. In the ceremony, Dr Ambedkar and his wife became Buddhists by repeating the Three Refuges and Five Precepts after U Chandramani, who was the most senior Buddhist monk in India at the time. Dr Ambedkar then turned to the 400,000 of his followers assembled there and asked those that also wanted to embrace Buddhism to stand. All 400,000 of them stood, and he asked them to recite the Refuges and Precepts after him. This was some departure from Buddhist tradition. If a monk is present, particularly a senior one, it is more usual for him to perform a conversion ceremony. Usually the lay followers repeat the Refuges and Precepts after the monk as the more senior Buddhist present with the lifestyle of a more committed practitioner. In administering the Refuges and Precepts himself, Ambedkar showed that, even though he did not have the lifestyle of a monk, he did have a sincere commitment to Buddhism, which was enough to give weight and authority to 400,000 people making their own commitment. For the purposes of the ceremony, the sincerity with

151 From Shakarananad Shashtri, *Yugapurush Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar-Jivan Sangharsh evam Rashtra Sevayein*, Amrit Book Company, 1990. Translated by Maitriveer Nagarjun

152 Rattu, Nanak Chand, *Dr Ambedkar Important Messages, Sayings, Wit and Wisdom*. Samyak Prakashan, New Delhi, 2001. p100

which he administered the Refuges and Precepts was more important than the fact he was not living a monastic lifestyle. Without necessarily being conscious of the fact, by administering the Refuges and Precepts himself, Dr Ambedkar was emphasising the unity of the whole spiritual community in their Going for Refuge, whether one was living a monastic or lay lifestyle.

As we have seen, though Sangharakshita was a monk himself at that time, he shared the new Buddhists' dedication and enthusiasm to a degree that was more significant to him than what lifestyle they led. He felt a shared intensity of Going for Refuge, despite the fact that he was seen to be more committed to Buddhism than them on account of his monastic vows. This helped Sangharakshita realise that it is not living a particular lifestyle that makes one a Buddhist, but Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. One doesn't have to be a monk to be Going for Refuge wholeheartedly and effectively.

As a result of my contact with the [Scheduled Caste] Buddhists I came closer to seeing that monasticism and the spiritual life were not identical, and that Going for Refuge was the principal unifying factor in Buddhism.¹⁵³

As well as administering the Refuges and Precepts, Ambedkar also recited, and asked the new Buddhists to recite, 22 vows of his own devising. These made it clear that in becoming a Buddhist, one has to leave behind one's old religion, in this case Hinduism. It also made it clear that whatever lifestyle we are leading, becoming a Buddhist means practising Buddhism wholeheartedly and to the best of one's ability. These are summed up in vows 18, 19 & 22:¹⁵⁴

153 Sangharakshita *The History of My Going For Refuge*. Windhorse Publications, Glasgow, 1998. p53

154 The full 22 vows are:

- 1 I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh nor shall I worship them.
- 2 I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnation of God nor shall I worship them.
- 3 I shall have no faith in 'Gauri', Ganapati and other gods and goddesses of Hindus nor shall I worship them.
- 4 I do not believe in the incarnation of God.
- 5 I do not and shall not believe that Lord Buddha was the incarnation of Vishnu. I believe this to be sheer madness and false propaganda.
- 6 I shall not perform 'Shraddha' nor shall I give 'pind-dan'.
- 7 I shall not act in a manner violating the principles and teachings of the Buddha.
- 8 I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins.
- 9 I shall believe in the equality of man.
- 10 I shall endeavour to establish equality.
- 11 I shall follow the 'noble eightfold path' of the Buddha.
- 12 I shall follow the 'paramitas' prescribed by the Buddha.
- 13 I shall have compassion and loving kindness for all living beings and protect them.
- 14 I shall not steal.
- 15 I shall not tell lies.
- 16 I shall not commit carnal sins.
- 17 I shall not take intoxicants like liquor, drugs etc.
- 18 I shall endeavour to follow the noble eightfold path and practise compassion and loving kindness in everyday life.
- 19 I renounce Hinduism which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion.
- 20 I firmly believe the Dhamma of the Buddha is the only true religion.
- 21 I believe that I am having a rebirth.
- 22 I solemnly declare and affirm that I shall hereafter lead my life according to the principles and teachings of the Buddha and his Dhamma.

18. I shall endeavour to follow the noble eightfold path and practise compassion and loving kindness in everyday life.
19. I renounce Hinduism which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion.
20. I solemnly declare and affirm that I shall hereafter lead my life according to the principles and teachings of the Buddha and his Dhamma.

These vows make it clear that Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels means a path of actual practice. We do not become a Buddhist simply by saying we are a Buddhist, we have to put the Buddhist teachings into practice in the lives we lead. Ambedkar's followers were not taking up the monastic lifestyle, but they were committing themselves to living a wholehearted Buddhist life. Sangharakshita set up the Triratna Buddhist Order on a similar principle. The Triratna Buddhist Order is not a monastic Order, but is based on shared wholehearted and effective commitment to the Three Jewels. It is this commitment that informs what lifestyle each Order Member leads, and within that commitment, different lifestyles are possible. Another way of putting it is that lifestyle emerges out of commitment, and not commitment out of lifestyle.

The vows also make it clear that in order to embrace Buddhism, we have to give things up, particularly our old religion. This can be a difficult point for some people outside of India. Perhaps we are sensitive to religious intolerance and we don't want to say that any religion is better than another. It is important to see what Dr Ambedkar was guarding against when he devised the 22 vows. Buddhism in India had, and still has, a danger of being seen as simply another branch of Hinduism with the Buddha as another incarnation of Vishnu and Buddhists as another, untouchable, caste. Ambedkar was making it clear that being a Buddhist means being outside the caste system all together, taking on a new system of beliefs and a new way of living.

Sangharakshita has said we can also learn from the fact that the followers of Dr Ambedkar took 22 extra vows. He has wondered whether we could have different versions of the 22 vows for different cultures. It is easy in a culture without a strong religious background to think that renouncing our previous religion is not necessary for us, but we are surrounded by a prevailing culture that at times is antithetical to Buddhism. Perhaps our own 22 vows would include resolving to abandon certain current cultural views and harmful practises. On the other hand, it may be that we do have a strongly religious background and we need to be clear that we are no longer following that path. Renouncing our previous religion does not exclude recognising what is helpful in other religious beliefs, being tolerant to others, and also sensitive to our early spiritual aspirations that may have been expressed through different religious forms.

A New Vision of the Sangha

Both Sangharakshita and Ambedkar envisioned a new kind of Buddhism, what Ambedkar called *Navayāna*, which did not identify solely with any one particular Buddhist school, but was founded on the principles of Buddhism itself. In the press conference before his conversion, Dr Ambedkar rejected the idea of joining any particular form of Buddhism, but saw himself foremost as being a Buddhist and joining a worldwide spiritual movement. In the same way, one of the emphases of the Triratna Buddhist Order is its 'critical ecumenicalism',

drawing inspiration from all Buddhist schools without identifying solely with any one school.¹⁵⁵

As we have seen in *Buddha and the Future of His Religion*, Dr Ambedkar was critical of the monastic Sangha whose members, he thought, tended towards inactivity. He had some ideas about how the monastic Sangha needed to be transformed for the monks to be of service to society. Unfortunately Dr Ambedkar died so soon after publicly becoming a Buddhist that he did not have time to make his ideals of a new Buddhist Sangha a reality, nor did he have time to explore what the *Navayāna* would really look like.

Though Dr Ambedkar did not found a new Sangha, Sangharakshita took up this work, not initially in India, but in the UK. The new Buddhist Order he founded, The Triratna Buddhist Order, then became established in India. The first ordinations in the UK were in 1968, and in India in 1979. Perhaps the ‘weight’, or responsibility, that Dr Ambedkar transferred to Sangharakshita became the creation of this new Sangha. They certainly shared the same ideas about the common principles upon which a new Sangha should be founded. This can be looked at in terms of the following areas ‘The Group, the Individual and the Spiritual Community’, ‘The Nucleus of a New Society’, and ‘Blueprint for a New World’.

Both Sangharakshita and Ambedkar outlined the difference between the group, the individual and the spiritual community. Sangharakshita defined the group as being made up of those ‘whose consciousness is an aspect of the group consciousness and whose thoughts, feelings and behaviour conform to group patterns and norms.’¹⁵⁶ For Ambedkar, the group is defined as defending its own members without consideration for the whole of society: ‘It is not that there is no morality among thieves. There is morality among businessmen. There is morality among fellow caste-men and there is also morality among a gang of robbers. But this morality is marked by isolation and exclusiveness. It is morality to protect “group interest”. It is therefore anti-social.’¹⁵⁷

For Sangharakshita, ‘the individual’ is someone who is emotionally positive, creative, is able to think and act independently and is ethically responsible. Ambedkar never defined precisely what he meant by the term ‘individual’, but it is clear from his writings and speeches the qualities he had in mind. He advocated in his followers a sense of potency and self-responsibility, not giving way to feelings of victimhood despite the terrible oppressions they had undergone. ‘You must abolish slavery yourselves. It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one’s self-respect. Self-respect is a most vital factor in life. Without it man is a mere cipher. To live worthily with self-respect one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength, confidence and recognition.’¹⁵⁸ In a very moving speech he gave in 1936, detailing to his followers why he thought they should leave Hinduism, he describes someone who is free. These qualities come very close to Sangharakshita’s description of the individual, as we can see from this talk by Dr Ambedkar:

Mere physical freedom is of no use. Freedom of the mind is of prime importance... A person whose mind is not free, though he is not in chains, is a slave... To whom can we say that his mind is free? I call him free who with consciousness awake, realises his rights, responsibilities, and duties; he who is not a slave of circumstances, and is

155 See Sangharakshita, *The Six Distinctive Emphases of the FWBO*. Lecture, 2002.

156 Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels II, Complete Works*, vol. 3, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016.

157 Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and his Dhamma*. Book 4 Part 1.6.

158 Keer, Dhananjay, *Dr Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Harsha Bhatkal, Mumbai, 2016.

always bent upon changing them in his favour, I call him free. One who is not a slave of usage, customs, and traditions, or of the teachings because they are brought down from the ancestors; one whose flame of reason is not extinguished, I call him a free man.

He who has not surrendered himself, who does not act on the teachings of others blindly; who does not keep faith on anything unless [it has been] examined critically in the light of the cause and effect theory; who is always prepared to protect his rights; who is not afraid of public criticism; who has enough intellect and self-respect so as not to become a doll in the hands of others, I call such a man a free man. He who does not lead his life under the direction of others, who carves out his own aim of life according to his own reason, and decides himself as to how and in what way the life should be led, I call him a free man. In short, a man who is the master of his own [life], him alone I consider a free man.¹⁵⁹

As we have seen in *Annihilation of Caste*, he emphasised the need for the individual to have the liberty to follow through their own choices, especially in what job they did and who they married. He even regarded the choice of his followers to leave Hinduism and embrace Buddhism as each and every individual's choice: 'you should not, however, be led away by emotion, and follow me only because I say so. You should consent only if it appeals to your reason.'¹⁶⁰ In the preamble of the Constitution of India, he defined fraternity as 'assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation'. In these and other speeches and writings, Dr Ambedkar advocated an ideal of an individual free to follow their own path, with self-respect, intelligence, responsibility and dignity. Sangharakshita also writes about the ideal of the individual, the development of which he sees as one of the goals of the Sangha.

Whilst 'the group' is helpful to give a sense of cohesiveness and belonging, both Sangharakshita and Ambedkar regard the group as undermining the development of the individual. The group demands that an individual conforms to group norms through fear of rejection and isolation. As the individual develops, they are reliant on the group for their material survival and a sense of social belonging, at the same time as developing their own individual sense of personal responsibility and ethical integrity. This means that where the individual differs in opinion from the group, their ideals and natural ethical sensitivity can be compromised. The individual is not able to act freely, through fear of being ostracised by the group, their actions having to adhere to what the group says they should do. It can be dangerous to take a different stance if the group punishes individuals who dare 'step out of line'. This means that the individual is not free to think and act independently. 'Groups fear individuality and all its manifestations, and always tend to discourage it. The group requires conformity. This is because it is based on power, which whether physical, intellectual, or economic is always the power of the strong over the weak.'¹⁶¹

The group's power over the individual is especially evident in the Indian caste system. If someone attempts to break out of the caste system by marrying someone from a different caste, getting a job outside of their traditional caste occupation, or even owning land or getting an education when their caste does not permit it, they can be ostracised by the wider community, or in many cases, violently attacked. For this reason Ambedkar stated that

159 Dr Ambedkar, *What Path to Salvation?* Lecture, Dadar, 31 May 1936.

160 *ibid*

161 Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels II, Complete Works, vol 3*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016

Under the struggle for existence or under group rule the interests of the individual are not safe. This group set-up prevents an individual from acquiring consistence of mind which is possible only when society has common ideals, common models. His thoughts are led astray and this creates a mind whose seeing unity is forced and distorted... The group set-up leads to discrimination and denial of justice.¹⁶²

Both Sangharakshita and Dr Ambedkar were concerned with how to provide the conditions for the development of the individual. Dr Ambedkar was largely concerned with the role of society in the development of the individual, and Sangharakshita more specifically in the role of the spiritual community in developing the individual. However, Dr Ambedkar also saw how religion could provide important conditions for the creation or suppression of the individual. He saw the real aim of religion as individual development, 'Man's life is independent. He is born not for the service of the society but for his self-development... The basic idea underlying a religion is to create an atmosphere of the spiritual development of the individual.'¹⁶³ Though they were using at times different terminology, both Sangharakshita and Dr Ambedkar had at the heart of their vision for an ideal society free thinking and ethically responsible individuals. Sangharakshita further developed this vision by considering what could happen when those individuals come together on the basis of shared ideals and principles. This is his definition of what the spiritual community can be at its highest, a 'free association of individuals',¹⁶⁴ who can act independently at the same time as sharing common values. When the spiritual community is in intense communication and work together, they create what Sangharakshita calls 'the third order of consciousness', a higher spiritual unity that is beyond the individuals themselves, though not apart from them. This he relates to the *bodhicitta*.¹⁶⁵

The creation of the atmosphere that encourages the development of the individual requires that the members of the Sangha have a common spiritual ideal and framework in which to develop, an ideal that is universal rather than applying to just their spiritual community. For Ambedkar, this common spiritual ideal is fraternity or *mettā*, 'what is the remedy? The only remedy lies in making fraternity universally effective. What is fraternity? It is nothing but another name for brotherhood of men which is another name for morality. This is why the Buddha preached that Dhamma is morality and as Dhamma is sacred, so is morality.'¹⁶⁶

At its heart the Sangha also has to have people who are individuals themselves, that is to say they are emotionally positive, creative, aware and independent. These individuals encourage others' individuality as well as acting on the basis of universal *mettā*. Sangharakshita set up the Triratna Buddhist Order on this basis:

First, there is the Order, a spiritual community which is open to anyone who is sufficiently integrated as an individual as to be able to make a valid commitment to the path to Enlightenment, and who can thus seriously undertake the primary act of all Buddhist everywhere – Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. The heart of the movement, therefore, consists of individuals. And the positive group [the Triratna Buddhist Community] is open to anybody who wishes to take part in its activities. These are the two distinct but overlapping – even interfusing – levels within the movement as a whole. Together they comprise what one could call a Buddhist group,

162 Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and his Dhamma*.

163 Dr Ambedkar, *What Path to Salvation?* Lecture, Dadar, 31 May 1936.

164 Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels II, Complete Works, vol 3*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016.

165 Sangharakshita, *Precious Garland Seminar*, Padmaloka, 1976.

166 Dr Ambedkar, *The Buddha and his Dhamma*.

although I prefer to use the expression ‘movement’ because this suggest that it is in its essence a dynamic process. All the activities of this movement have one purpose, and one purpose only: to help people grow and develop as individuals.¹⁶⁷

As we saw in *Buddha and the Future of His Religion*, Dr Ambedkar saw the need ‘to make changes in the organisation, aims and objects of the Bhikkhu Sangha’. He saw the danger of the members of the Sangha becoming individualistic and ‘idle’. He wanted the Sangha ‘to set up a society which would live up to the Buddhist idea embodied in the principles of Buddhism and serve as a model to the laymen.’ This Sangha would be trained not only in Buddhism, but in arts and sciences, offering ‘true and impartial guidance to others’, and would be ‘free to do service to the people.’ He also wanted to set up a ‘world Buddhist mission’ to help facilitate the spread of Buddhism throughout the world. He suggested that not only *bhikkhus* spread Buddhism, but trained ‘lay preachers’ or ‘priests’ who could be married and would be funded for both their training and their work.¹⁶⁸

Though using different terminology, Sangharakshita founded the Triratna Buddhist Order on similar principles. The Triratna Buddhist Order is made up of those who are seriously committed to living up to the Buddhist ideals, trained in those ideals, who can model those ideals to others. It is a Sangha fully dedicated to what are called the ‘three duties of an Order Member’. These are to attain Enlightenment, to create a harmonious spiritual community with other members of the Order and to spiritually benefit all beings. In 1976, Sangharakshita described the Triratna Buddhist Order as a ‘nucleus of a new society’ offering a ‘blueprint for a new world’.¹⁶⁹

It was clear from its earliest days that Sangharakshita also saw the dangers of individualism in the Sangha, ‘Without the idea of the New Society – without the idea of transforming world as well as self – our Going for Refuge is in danger of becoming an individualistic affair and, to that extent, in danger of being not truly a Going for Refuge at all.’¹⁷⁰ The Order was envisioned to have an impact on society, and Sangharakshita drew parallels between this dimension of the Sangha in the UK and in India: ‘The FWBO/TBMSG¹⁷¹ wants to change society and even to create a new society. It doesn’t see Buddhism just as a philosophy, but also something that can change society... Here too is a parallel with the situation in India. In India, too, people don’t regard Buddhism just as a philosophy. Dr Ambedkar did not regard Buddhism as a philosophy. He saw it as a means of social, economic, educational, cultural and spiritual uplift for millions of people, and as a means of the all-round development of the individual human being.’¹⁷²

A key part of the strategy by which Sangharakshita thought that the Triratna Buddhist Community could change society was by offering different models of living, working, friendship and altruistic activity that would influence the wider society. The most expression of these different models would be Buddhist communities, team based right livelihoods and Centres. However, he recognised not every member of the Community or Order would be

167 Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels II, Complete Works, vol 3*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016.

168 , Y.D. Sontakke, *Thoughts of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar*, Samyak Prakashan, Delhi, 2004. p249 & 252.

169 See the talks with the same titles on freebuddhistaudio.com:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=133>

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

170 Sangharakshita, *My Relation to the Order*. Lecture, 1990.

171 The Triratna Buddhist Community was originally called ‘The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order’ and ‘Triratna Baudda Mahasangha’ in India.

172 Sangharakshita, *Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I, Complete Works vol. 9*. Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2016. p241.

involved in all of them at any one time, some Order Members having families for example. Despite having different lifestyles, the effect of the Sangha coming together on the basis of real commitment to the practice of Buddhism, would have an effect on those around them and would exemplify a different way of living.

Both Dr Ambedkar and Sangharakshita warned against trying to impose higher values on society by force, rather they saw Buddhism as encouraging and inspiring others with higher values in a peaceful way. One of Dr Ambedkar's last speeches was a comparison between the Buddha and Karl Marx in which he said of the Buddha, 'His method was to change the mind of man: to alter his disposition: so that whatever man does, he does it voluntarily without the use of force or compulsion. His main means to alter the disposition of men was his Dhamma and the constant preaching of his Dhamma.'¹⁷³ This he contrasts with communism which seeks to change society by force. Sangharakshita saw that to change society, the Triratna Buddhist Order would act together harmoniously, each as a 'hand of Avalokiteśvara', a part of a compassionate whole, offering their different skills and talents to the world as an altruistic expression of their Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.¹⁷⁴ This would influence society at large by providing a vision of a different way of being rather than forcing society to change.

What is interesting is that Sangharakshita also saw that Western Buddhists' engagement in social transformation could be encouraged by involvement with Buddhists from India. He saw that, as he put it, 'Here we are much more concerned, it seems, with our subjective psychological state, with our feelings. There's nothing like that in India. The people who became Buddhists in India, for them the point of departure was social. They saw the teaching of the Buddha, which was critical of the caste system, as the key to their social and economic and even their political uplift as well as a spiritual path. So here we go from the psychological to the spiritual, there they go from the social to the spiritual, to the Dhamma. In a way you need both, you need to balance the two.'¹⁷⁵ At the time of speaking Sangharakshita noticed a drift in the West towards purely personal Buddhist practice away from the public or collective aspects of our Movement such as Centres, team based right livelihoods and communal living. The way he thought we could counteract that drift and balance the psychological with the spiritual was to be in communication with cultures with different perspectives on the spiritual life.

So that's why I think it's very good that in the FWBO [Triratna], we have these two great "wings". We've got our "Western wing" where people are more concerned with psychological problems, and our "Indian wing" where people are more concerned with social problems. So perhaps, I won't say that people in India will become more interested in psychological problems, I hope they won't have them, but perhaps people in the West should pay a bit more attention to objective and social issues rather than just to their own subjective feelings... I hope we can perhaps learn a bit of a lesson from our friends in India who are very much concerned with social and economic and other such issues.¹⁷⁶

Times have changed and since Sangharakshita said that there has been more interest in the West in the potential of Buddhist practice to change society. However, the principle still holds

¹⁷³ Dr Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx*, Writings and Speeches Vol.3. Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Sangharakshita, *Looking Ahead a Little Way*. Lecture, 1999.

¹⁷⁵ Sangharakshita, *Remembering Ambedkar*, lecture 2006.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

that interaction between Sangha members from different countries with different cultural backgrounds and initial motivations for Buddhist practice can benefit all who take part.

We will never know how Ambedkar's vision for the Sangha would have manifested had he lived long enough to see through its inception, but the principles underlying the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community are in line with the principles that Dr Ambedkar had begun to explore. The Triratna Buddhist Order is based on the primacy of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels with lifestyle as an expression of that commitment. Its purpose is to facilitate the development of the individual, having at its heart a community of individuals who can model the ideals of Buddhism to the wider society. It emphasises the altruistic dimension of Dhamma practice, teaching the Dhamma to others and creating contexts for Buddhists to live, work and practise together, enabling others to benefit from the Dhamma just as we have. It emphasises that the Sangha can have an effect on the wider society. It is also founded on the basis of *mettā*, of fraternity, a universal value that holds that all can develop as individuals, no matter what race, caste, gender, age or background they come from. It is open to all.

On a more mysterious level, there is another comparison between Sangharakshita and Dr Ambedkar, another way in which Sangharakshita took up the weight that Ambedkar was carrying. Perhaps it wasn't a weight that Dr Ambedkar transferred to Sangharakshita, but a sharing of inspiration. Sangharakshita has described how the Triratna Buddhist Order was founded by a 'supra-personal force' working through him. He describes it in similar terms as the force he felt when addressing the crowds of new Buddhists after Ambedkar's death. They felt the same force working through them; the force that also drove Ambedkar's thoughts and actions, leading him to devote his whole life to the welfare of others, a force moving into different cultures and traditions and growing in ways neither Sangharakshita nor Ambedkar could have predicted.



Suggestions for reflection, research and discussion

11. What might the 22 vows look like in your own culture? Are there views and practices that you think we need to renounce on becoming Buddhist?
12. How do you think the Triratna Buddhist Order fulfils Ambedkar's ideas about the reformation of the Sangha – serving as a model for society, offering impartial and true guidance and free to do service to the people?
13. How do you think the Triratna Buddhist Order has changed society? How can you imagine it changing society in the future, and what do you think would have to happen in order for it to do so?
14. Do you agree that in the West there is a drift towards the personal and psychological and away from the collective and social? What are your experiences of this?
15. How do you think you might benefit from interaction with Buddhists, particularly Triratna Buddhists, from other cultures that have different approaches to the Dharma? How do you think you could facilitate that interaction?

16. What are Triratna's gifts to the world? What are its current limitations, and how could we address them?

Introduction

This week's study material is an essay by Subhuti called *The Dharma Revolution and the New Society*. It is based on talks he gave in 2010 at Padmaloka retreat centre in England. In it he looks at the *Dhamma Revolution* that is taking place in India, and how it can influence the Dhamma practice of those outside India. For over 30 years, Subhuti has been spending half the year in India, working closely with the Indian Sangha to spread the Dhamma.

Subhuti has given a number of talks on this theme including *The Significance of Dr Ambedkar in the West*

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC332>

You may also want to listen to Yashosagar, a Public Preceptor from India. He gave a talk in 2016 imagining the next 50 years from the Indian perspective. It can be found on vimeo:

<https://vimeo.com/179497175>

The Dhamma Revolution and the New Society

The Dharma can be revolutionary – indeed, the Dharma is revolutionary, when it truly is the Dharma. When the Dharma is genuinely understood and practised on a wide enough scale, there will be a significant change for the better in society.

This is not merely theory: we have solid evidence that it can be true. In 1956, the great Indian statesman and Buddhist leader, Dr Ambedkar, precipitated a social revolution in India on the basis of the Dharma, affecting the lives of millions of 'Dalits', people who were formerly considered untouchable by their fellow Hindus. When large numbers of these people converted to Buddhism, they gained a new confidence in themselves and began to take their rightful place in society. The effects of this revolution are evident in statistics showing the much greater improvement in social and economic status of those who became Buddhists compared with similar castes in which very few conversions took place.¹⁷⁷ This gives us an important illustration of what Dharma revolution means.

Dr Ambedkar saw the Dharma as the best, even the only, way to bring about something like an ideal society – a 'new society'. He defined such a society in terms of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which for him were deep spiritual principles, derived not from the French Revolution but 'from the teachings of my master, the Buddha'.¹⁷⁸ There is liberty when people

¹⁷⁷ Census of India, 2001, see <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-common/censusdataonline.html>

¹⁷⁸ Dr B. R. Ambedkar, speech on All-India Radio, 3 October 1954.

are free to live the kind of life they consider best – so long as they do not harm or infringe the liberty of others. Equality means that everybody has broadly the same opportunities, at least to begin with – although he was quite clear that not everybody is equal in talent, ability, intelligence, or character. And fraternity, which is perhaps the area where he has the most interesting things to say, means an attitude of respect and reverence of each citizen for every other. This he equates with democracy itself: democracy is not merely a means of choosing a government, but a state of mind, he says, a fraternal attitude that is ultimately one of *mettā* or loving-kindness that expresses itself in moral action – *śīla* or morality being metta in action. Society should, he taught, be founded on ethical principles, which themselves are the expression of respect, reverence, and even of *mettā*, of love.

Dr Ambedkar arrived at his conclusions about the transformative effects of the Dharma after many years of struggle to overcome the terrible historical injustice of untouchability, to which he himself had been subjected simply by his birth. Though born into a caste then considered untouchable, he was fortunate, through the philanthropy of two reformist Maharajas, to get an excellent education in the West and returned to a senior post in the government of one of these princes. However, he soon realised that education was not enough, for he still suffered humiliation and prejudice, for all his Doctorates. ‘Modernisation’ alone did not bring change. He devoted himself thereafter, with outstanding selflessness, to freeing his people from the oppressions of caste by every means at his disposal: journalism, social agitation, labour organising, legal action, political activism, and even in government – first in the Viceroy’s Council and then in the first Cabinet of independent India, in which he served as Law Minister. He was asked by Pandit Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister, to chair the committee that oversaw the drawing up of the Constitution of the Republic of India – and is reported to have done the lion’s share of the work himself.

However, even at this pinnacle of personal achievement, he knew that not enough had been done: caste discrimination persisted throughout India, much as it always had, and hundreds of millions of people suffered under its oppressions. When there was resistance in Parliament to his attempts to bring full equality to women by reforming Hindu family law, and Government support was withdrawn, he became finally disillusioned with the political process as a means of eradicating social injustice. He had done so much to give India political democracy and at least the legal basis for social democracy, yet the old attitudes persisted. The problem lay much deeper than laws and constitutions could reach:

We built a temple [the Constitution] for a god to come in and reside, but before the god could be installed, the devil had taken possession of it.¹⁷⁹

Dr Ambedkar had been thinking deeply about the roots of caste over many years, coming to understand that those roots lay in the mind itself: ‘Caste is a notion, a state of mind.’ That notion was integrally embedded in the whole Hindu mind-set, entwined with its powerful and superstitious beliefs in a social destiny ordained by the gods. But this insight also suggested the solution: ‘What mind creates, mind can undo’.¹⁸⁰ In 1936 he decided that he would leave Hinduism and began the search for another religion, both for himself and for his people. He had definite criteria for his search: such a new religion must enshrine the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, utterly rejecting caste in all its forms. It must also be compatible with reason and science, not enjoining blind belief in supernatural agencies that control human fate. And it should not justify poverty.

179 Dr B. R. Ambedkar, speech in Rajya Sabha, 2 September 1953.

180 Dr B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*.

He had long been personally drawn to the Buddha and his teaching, both for its spiritual power and its emphasis on social morality. After a sincere exploration of the major world religions, he concluded that this ancient Indian religion was the best one for his people, indeed for all humanity, and, on 14 October 1956, he went for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha himself, and then inducted some 400,000 of his followers into Buddhism. The Dharma Revolution had begun.

For Dr Ambedkar, real reform comes about only from a change in mental attitudes and outlook on the part of many people in society. It is the Dharma that offers the firmest basis for that change of heart – a change that would express itself in a transformed society that was truly equal, just, and free, underlain by a powerful sense of shared citizenship, even by respect and love between all citizens. He considered this to be true not just for the oppressed castes from which he himself came or even for all Indians – he believed that the Dharma was the surest basis for a truly just society anywhere.

Many of us in the Triratna Buddhist Community share this perspective, which we have learned from our own teacher, Urgyen Sangharakshita, and we are deeply inspired by Dr Ambedkar's teaching and work. What we want to see is the Dharma brought to bear on social, political, and economic questions everywhere. We want the power of the Dharma to transform not only us, but the whole of society. We want to help bring about a Dharma Revolution.

But what does this mean? When I talk about allowing the power of the Dharma to transform us and society, what do I mean, very specifically, by the Dharma and what is its 'power'? We could broadly say that the Dharma is the truth – the way things truly are. If we can see the truth and allow it to guide our actions, even one might say work through us, it represents a kind of force that shapes our thoughts, words, and deeds for the benefit of all.

This requires closer, if brief, examination in more precise Dharmic terms. The Dharma is the truth, the way things are, the true nature of existence, and that can be understood in terms of the three *lakshanas* – everything is impermanent, nothing has substantial identity, and nothing that is impermanent and insubstantial can offer enduring pleasure, satisfaction, or fulfilment. We can express this also in terms of the more fundamental principle of *pratītya samutpāda*, dependent arising – everything is conditioned: there is no phenomenon, external or internal, that does not arise from previous conditions and provide the conditions for future events. Reality consists of conditioned arising.

The Principles of Karma and Dharma

Within the overall principle of conditionality, there are two aspects that, from the point of view of personal transformation and the transformation of society, are especially significant: the Karmic and the Dharmic kinds of conditionality – known in Buddhist tradition as the Karma and Dharma *Niyamas*, meaning law in the sense of a scientific law. It is in the working of these two laws that the Dharma's power to transform lies.

The law or principle of Karma is concerned with the operation of conditionality within the sphere of individualised consciousness and it states the dynamics of the interaction between a self-conscious individual and the external world. Skilful actions – actions performed with a helpful state of mind – lead to inner fulfilment and a smoother path through life. Actions performed with hatred and greed and out of unawareness lead to increasing suffering – a sense of frustration and stultification, and also a rough ride in life. The Karmic is then the sphere of moral action. If you act taking Karma into consideration that will lead to your own

consciousness arising in more and more subtle, sensitive, and highly positive forms, ultimately capable of directly seeing the true nature of things. And, of course, acting in harmony with Karma means that you will benefit all who come in contact with you.

But Karma only take us so far. There is a deeper principle that transcends our merely personal efforts, leading us far further, beyond our narrow selfhood towards Enlightenment. This kind of conditionality emerges decisively at the pinnacle of our Karmic efforts, which have led to our conscious experience emerging in an increasingly open and selfless way. We begin to realise that the apparent fixity and clarity of self-identity is really quite fluid and indefinable. At that peak of Karmic development, we gain insight into the nature of our experience, seeing that the idea of self is simply a linguistic convenience that refers to no permanent, isolated reality.

Indeed, we recognise that we need no such notion. We do not have to will in the old self-referential way and we gradually relinquish our selfish clinging. A new kind of motivation then takes over, as the Dharma emerges more and more fully within our experience. We enter the 'stream of the Dharma', flowing spontaneously onwards, beyond our self-oriented desires. This is the Dharmic mode of conditionality, the Dharma Niyama, which gradually replaces the Karmic kind, expressing itself in increasingly compassionate activity and leading us towards Buddhahood.

These two, the Karma principle and the Dharma principle, are deep in the nature of things. They are not merely conceptual constructions, added onto experience; they are not just ideas about life: they are to be discovered in life itself. Just as the law of gravity can be discovered by observing the fall of an apple, we can discover the laws of Karma and of Dharma. Just as the law of gravity only awaited a Newton to name it and describe it, even though it had always operated upon us, the Buddha discovered Karma and Dharma principles in life, as potentialities always ready to be discerned.

We too can recognise the Karma principle working in our own experience, as we notice that skilful action leads to a greater sense of fulfilment – and indeed that unskilful action brings pain and frustration. We can see that, as we act more and more in accordance with moral principles, our own consciousnesses become more open, sensitive, and awake.

In the same way, we can discover Dharmic conditionality at work, as we allow it to unfold within us, letting it move us, we might say, beyond ourselves. We can see that principle most clearly exemplified by great beings, especially by the Buddha himself. We can see in his life and in the lives of his great disciples that there is a stream of conditionality that, once fully entered into, leads inevitably onward to complete Enlightenment – the transcendence of all our suffering and the spontaneous unfolding of compassionate activity.

So, when I speak of bringing the power of the Dharma to bear on the social, political, and economic situation, what I mean is bringing the principle of Karma and the principle of Dharma to bear within society so that they transform it in a progressive direction, thereby bringing greater and greater happiness and freedom and fellowship to more and more people. This is the Dharma revolution.

How are we to bring Karma and Dharma to bear in society? What strategy should we adopt for bringing them to bear? How do we launch the Dharma revolution? I suggest that there are three particular target areas that Buddhists should focus on, each requiring a somewhat different approach.

The Marginalised and Disadvantaged

First of all, we must bring the Dharma to bear on those who are marginalised and disadvantaged within society, because this is where change is most urgently needed. Dr Ambedkar himself began here: he brought the Dharma to bear on his own people, the Dalits ('Downtrodden') of India. And what the Dharma did for them was initially mainly at the level of Karma. They learned from the Buddha that they were human beings, like everybody else. They were not to be defined by some cosmic myth, but by the personal moral responsibility they took, by their human capacity for ethical conduct.¹⁸¹ The Buddha says that what makes you an outcaste, an 'untouchable', is not your birth, but your deeds – your moral worth. You're only an untouchable if you refuse to live by ethical principles. Conversely, you're only a Brahmin, not because your parents were Brahmins, but because you act skilfully, because your actions are genuinely helpful, both to yourself and to others.¹⁸²

Those who are poor, marginalised, excluded, or subject to prejudice need to hear the Dharma's most basic message: they are human beings, equal to all others in the most important sense of being morally responsible. Their dignity and their strength is to be found in accepting responsibility for their own lives and acting in accordance with ethical principles to be found within Karmic conditionality. Understanding this, they will gain the power and the courage to help themselves – not passively waiting for others to help them, but lifting themselves up and making for themselves a better life through skilful, responsible action.

This is not merely abstract theory; it is very practical. Recognising their Karmic responsibility, people begin to say, 'It is not my fault that I live in a slum, but my slum is my responsibility. I won't wait for others, I will do something about it myself. I will try to solve my own problems. I will do my best to clear things up myself. I will get together with my fellow sufferers for our common good.' Of course, helping yourself includes demanding that the government does what it is supposed to do for you. It may be necessary to insist on your legal and constitutional rights. You may have to seek help from those who can give it. But, from first to last, you take responsibility yourself, rather than passively waiting for things to change or giving up initiative to others.

Dr Ambedkar expressed this spirit in his principal political and social slogan: 'Educate, Agitate, Organise' – fight ignorance, which is both effect and cause of exclusion, by getting an education for yourselves and your children; agitate, in the sense of struggle actively for a better life, through economic, social, political, and legal action; organise yourselves so that you are united and can work together to get what you need and what you deserve as human beings.

I can bear personal witness to the transformative power of the Dharma on poor and marginalised people in India. For so many centuries Dalits haven't been accepted as fellow citizens by others, but those groups who converted to Buddhism fifty years ago, especially in Maharashtra State, are taken very seriously these days, because they have made something of themselves. When such people really engage with the Dharma, others have to start taking them seriously, because they have become substantial and impressive human beings. They are not going to let themselves be pushed around, they live honourably, and they make a success of their own lives.

181 According to Hindu tradition, different castes were created from different parts of the Cosmic Man's body: Brahmins from his mouth and Untouchables from the soles of his feet.

182 *Vasala Sutta*, *Sutta Nipāta* 1.7

More recently, I have seen this transformative power of the Dharma exemplified in the work that some of our Dharmamitras are doing in Hungary among Roma or Gypsies. They have formed a branch of the Triratna Buddhist Community called the Jai Bhim Religious Network, which already offers some substantial evidence of that power, even though it is still early days for their work.¹⁸³ The way the Dharma supports our Roma brothers and sisters there in their struggle to make something of their lives is very impressive – especially their struggle to get an education and to take responsibility for their own environment. Our friends run schools for Roma, both young and old, who have been unable to connect with the school system run by the state, often because of active discrimination, even exclusion.

Of course most do not yet know much about Buddhism, but they are affected indirectly by the Buddha's message of Karmic responsibility. As a result of their contact with our Dharmamitras and the message they hear coming from Dr Ambedkar and the Buddha, they're beginning to take more responsibility for their own lives. They are not just waiting for handouts, they're trying to make something of their own lives.

There is so much need for this message, all over the world. Even in a country like Britain, which is really very wealthy by world standards, there are many people who still need to hear this basic message of the Dharma. Perhaps we should not expect many to become Buddhists, but at least they should hear the fundamental Buddhist message: 'You are a human being; you are responsible for yourself; your future is in your own hands. If you act in a dignified, human way, you will get satisfaction, your life will be better.'

We need to look around us and ask ourselves: 'Where in my own environment is there marginalization, where is there poverty – cultural poverty, if not economic poverty?' For instance, we have strong evidence of cultural poverty in the appeal that right-wing nationalism, with a strong racist tinge, has in Britain. It's relatively small time at the moment in political terms, but it's something to take very seriously, especially because that sort of bigoted nationalism flourishes in times of economic difficulty. So who votes for them? Usually, it's poor, white, working-class people who have very little of anything really uplifting or inspiring in their lives, but only the example from their televisions of what they're not getting. We need to think about how the Dharma can reach them.

We might think about our local Dharma centre – what's it got to do with those people? Well, probably very little, so let us see if we can make it have something to do with them. Let's try to see what is it in the Dharma that might touch them and the situation they are in. The Dharma is the medicine for all ills. This is what the Buddha called it: the *Dhammosadha*, the medicine of the Dharma. It satisfies all genuine needs, cures all sickness. So what are their needs? What is it that's burning them? What in the Dharma could heal them? It may be that they need quite straightforward material help. Let us give that, if we can. But let us try to get beyond the superficial problem to the deeper attitudes that prevent them from dealing with their own problems. How can the Dharma help them to be bigger and better and far more fulfilled as human beings (and, among other things, not vote for racist parties!). We need to be much more intelligent, much more active: going out, carefully investigating the situation people are in, and trying to bring the Dharma to them.

183 They call themselves the Jai Bhim Network to emphasise their identification with Indian Dalits, since they occupy a comparable position in European society. 'Jai Bhim' is the perennial slogan of Dr Ambedkar's followers in India, used as a greeting. Dr Ambedkar's first name was 'Bhimrao' and 'Jai' means 'victory' – so 'Jai Bhim' means 'Victory to Dr Ambedkar' – or one might say, 'Success to the Dharma Revolution'. For more information see www.jaibhim.hu.

We Buddhists in the West tend to come from a very narrow section of society – most of us come from middle-class, educated backgrounds, or we’ve become middle-class and educated, if we weren’t by birth, so to speak. Our attitudes are, by and large, formed by our experience, and it’s difficult for us to place ourselves in the position of people who have a very different outlook on life. And so we tend to attract people like us to our centres. We need to reflect on this. Buddhism is not just for the middle or upper classes – that’s what Dr Ambedkar proved. Buddhism is also for the uneducated, the uncultured, the illiterate, the underclass – it’s for everybody. And if it’s not getting through, then maybe it’s because we are not thinking boldly, dynamically, and intelligently enough.

Perhaps, to be rather provocative, we could even think in terms of ‘selling’ the Dharma – why should we be afraid of this metaphor or refuse to learn from the commercial world, at least in certain respects? If you want to sell soap, you must find out what need people have that your product will fulfil, and then you tell them that in the most convincing way possible – of course this should not be mere rhetoric: it should really do what it says on the label, otherwise, ethical considerations apart, people will not buy it again or recommend it to others. We need to find out how the Dharma fits the needs that people have.

This will require us to look very radically at what we do. It is quite likely that if we look at the town or region where our Centre is there will be big neighbourhoods from which hardly anyone ever comes through the Centre door. We must then ask, how can we get to them? What is the Dharma food that we can offer them that they will want to taste and that will satisfy their hunger?

We should not think that people from less educated backgrounds are not accessible to religion. Actually, they’re the cannon-fodder of religion, the world over. Much religion feeds upon such people, in sometimes quite unpleasant ways, playing on their misery and their illusions. Of course we do not want to use unskilful means to attract people – the ends do not justify the means, in this case: rather, unskilful means of propagation negate the Dharma. But nonetheless we need a somewhat different approach. If we are to reach the great majority of people it is not going to be through the rather tame, reasonable, calm, take-it-or-leave-it religion, perhaps, that we all know and love – it’s going to have to be something much more emphatic, much more convinced and much more glorious. Buddhism has got things to say to people that we don’t usually stress – for instance, we are often rather apologetic about rebirth: ‘Well, you don’t have to believe it, but this is what the tradition teaches...’ Yet, there are people who want to hear about that, even perhaps need to hear about it, and our rather trimmed-down, sceptical, rationalized, tame, middle-class version doesn’t even get to most middle-class, tame people!

It occurs to me that there is a class of people commonly found in the developed world who are definitely helped to lead better lives by an understanding of Karma: those who suffer from stress, depression, chronic pain, or addiction. In the economic, political, or social sense, relatively few such people could be said to be disadvantaged or marginalised, indeed many are well-educated and have good jobs, yet they certainly are at a disadvantage. We know, from work that some of our Order members are already doing, that mindfulness training can be very effective indeed in helping people to resolve difficulties of these kinds. Through mindfulness one learns to recognise and change the Karmic patterns within the mind itself and thus to free oneself from painful conditioning. This is an important contribution to society.

So we need to look carefully and see what people's needs are and where the Dharma can touch them and then offer them something that is much more lively, much more all-embracing, much more emphatic and convinced, that really can satisfy them.

Attitudes in Society

The second target we need to consider is the outlook and attitudes generally held in our societies. In the modern West, and increasingly in many other parts of the world as well, the dominant outlook is thoroughly materialist, in the philosophical sense – in other words, not in practice giving importance to anything other than matter, consciousness being treated as a mere momentary glow on the surface of matter that burns out when the body dies. That nihilistic materialism finds practical expression in 'possessive individualism' – familiar to us as the consumerism that drives so many people's lives. These are the broad views that most people hold, consciously or unconsciously, in Western society today.

The strange thing is that many such people will profess some religious views, even in thoroughly post-Christian Western Europe. But everywhere one sees that the real values motivating most people's actions are completely consumerist, therefore materialist – in spite of any professed religious outlook. Perhaps this is not surprising. A modern economy in the developed world delivers a steadily improving standard of living – or does so until the system runs into trouble, which is conceived as a short-term mistake that someone should fix. Even in this present time of economic crisis, most people in the developed world nonetheless experience a standard of living unimaginable even to their immediate ancestors. Furthermore, it seems that mastery of our world through technology is really possible and that, given time, science will deliver us solutions to all our problems. After all, I read recently that some geneticists have been able to arrest the ageing process in certain mice.... All this means that the material world seems very convincingly real and potentially satisfactory. And if it isn't satisfactory right now somebody is to blame – probably the government, or the system, or the banks – and it will soon be put right.

These attitudes amount to what Nietzsche called 'passive nihilism', towards which he saw Western society drifting, even in his time. There is no perspective beyond this material world, no upward gaze. God is definitely dead, but we're just trying to get a little bit of pleasure, while being as inoffensive to each other as we can, and accepting that that is all there is – until the final curtain falls.

This materialistic consumerism eats away at our sense of higher values, for there is not much space for idealism when there is nothing more than accidental physical existence. Ideals and values have therefore come to be viewed with cynicism by many people and similarly there is a deep suspicion of leaders of all kinds or of any sense of moral hierarchy. I remember once giving a talk about the Buddha as the pinnacle and standard of human development and afterwards somebody contended with me very indignantly that that was not the proper way to talk: the Buddha was not more developed than anybody else, he was merely differently developed! (In the face of such obstinate relativism, there seemed little to be gained from arguing – all I could do was assert, 'No: more developed!')

This suspicion of idealism and of leaders is, however, partly an understandable and even positive development, for the chronicles of the twentieth century reveal the appalling destructive potential of ideology and authoritarianism. Indeed, there is a longer history to this rejection of oppressive hierarchy in the West: a keynote of the last two or three hundred years has been a revolt against the abuses of the Church, the inequity and waste of aristocracy and absolute monarchy, the injustice of imperialism and colonialism, and so forth.

But our revulsion at all that, justified as it may be, often combines with our materialism to leave us cynical of anything that suggests any moral elevation at all. We're left with a very limited ethical relativism that is easily subverted by more confident, and perhaps less reasonable, beliefs – as many good liberals find today, faced with fundamentalisms of various kinds. Buddhists in the modern Western world are up against these nihilist, materialist, consumerist, relativist attitudes and the cynicism that goes with them, and if we want to transform society, that is primarily what we need to tackle.

And they do need tackling. The consequence of these attitudes is an increasingly shallow and unsatisfying existence, whose meaning lies largely in consumption. Even if people in the developed world can enjoy a material well-being beyond the imagining of the poor and marginalised of the world, they often suffer nonetheless, although in a quite different way: estranged from any sense of community, alienated from natural experience, and burdened by soulless work. It is ironic that the poor and marginalised of a Gypsy ghetto can, in my own experience, seem more truly alive and authentically human than the privileged denizens of the London suburbs. This empty way of life is also, of course, unsustainable: economically, environmentally, and psychologically. Many feel this very deeply, but that is not enough: we must do something about it.

How do we change it? Dr Ambedkar himself made this very clear in a talk he gave just weeks before he died: 'The greatest thing the Buddha taught the world is that the world can only be reformed by reforming the mind of Man'.¹⁸⁴ The problem lies in our minds: more particularly in the interpretation that we give to our lives. The way we understand things at the most fundamental level has a major effect upon how we act. People's actions emerge out of their view of life. Their ethics stand upon their philosophy, in the deepest sense, even if that philosophy is not articulated or consistent or, perhaps, even fully conscious – or even if their real guiding views are at odds with their professed beliefs.

It is this understanding, view, or underlying philosophy that we need to encourage people to transform. If people are to act differently and live a more satisfying life, individually and collectively, they need a very different way of understanding themselves and their experience, a new perspective on their place in the human community, indeed in existence itself. There needs, therefore, to be a reform of the mind on a wide scale and this is task of the Dharma revolution.

Our task then is to proclaim the Dharma as a truly new and more satisfying vision. We need to communicate as widely as we can the Dharma's fundamental perspective on the way things are: dependently arising, without permanent essence. We need to get across the progressive trend in conditionality, the two 'spiral' principles of Karma and of Dharma, which bring ever increasing happiness and fulfilment if we cooperate with them. First, we need to show how Karma can work to our advantage: inner satisfaction comes from the way you think, the way you speak, the way you act. Through acting skilfully your own mind opens up and becomes more sensitive to the deeper current of things and that brings a growing fulfilment and a far greater sense of meaning. Then we need to get across that the Dharma is a potentiality within life that unfolds when you align yourself fully with it and that will lead you to the highest possible fulfilment – for us, embodied in the figure of the Buddha.

184 Dr Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx, Writings and Speeches Vol.3*. Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, 2003.

The Dharma is the truth about the way things are. It is the truth that morality is natural, based on the natural principle of Karma. It should therefore be discoverable through observation and it is significant that there has recently been research, by both economists and psychologists, into what it is that makes people happy. An economist from the London School of Economics, Prof. Richard Layard, has written a very interesting book *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* that sets out some of the latest research on the subject. These scientific findings seem more or less to confirm what the Buddha said about Karma, although not at all in those terms. By and large, what seems to be demonstrated is that, once basic needs are met, what makes people happy is the values they hold, the beneficial activity they engage in, and the quality of their human relationships.

Of course, it is difficult to be happy when you are in economic difficulties or when you are very insecure in one way or another. Material development and economic and political stability certainly do bring an increasing chance of happiness when you live in poverty and uncertainty. But once you have a modest income and stable circumstances, the more you get the less increase in well-being you experience: it seems there is statistical evidence to show that people in USA and in Western Europe have generally not become any happier over the last fifty years, despite real income per head more than doubling.¹⁸⁵

It seems then that increasing wealth itself does not always bring more happiness. For happiness to grow once basic prosperity has been attained, some other factors must enter the picture. Dr Ambedkar himself makes precisely this point – that it's certainly true that poverty generally brings unhappiness, but it's not true that material wealth necessarily brings happiness: happiness comes then from the culture of the mind and is governed chiefly by our moral worth, not merely by our circumstances.

In communicating the Dharma, we're just talking about what is. We are setting before people the facts: the highest potentialities of our lives unfold naturally in accordance with moral laws, which are implicit in the way things are. We're not requiring them to believe something they can't investigate – some myth dressed as history. The Dharma simply asks us to recognise that reality works in ways that we can verify for ourselves by looking at our own experience. This is what we're trying to get across: truths that are accessible to all.

The reality of things directly implies certain ethical and spiritual standards and these we need to assert in the face of the prevailing cynicism and relativism. And it is important that we do, in the end, have the conviction to assert. We must present our values and principles as reasonably as possible, but we should also make it clear that we do truly believe in them and that means we live by them, however imperfectly. Our argument should combine reason, passionate conviction, and exemplification – even if it is but the example of one struggling to live by those values despite repeated failures. We should not merely argue, we should 'bear witness' to our values and principles.

The importance of confidence needs stressing. We need to be convinced by those principles ourselves and to have the confidence to assert them within society, applying them to current social, political, and economic issues. If we do have that confidence that in itself will have an affect. I have been surprised, at times, by the power of such confidence, which can be the decisive factor in many situations. People are often looking for something to have confidence in and many will respond if they hear genuine values expressed with conviction. Of course, it

185 Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, London, 2005, pp. 29 ff.

must again be emphasised that we should communicate our values reasonably, but reason should not preclude even a degree of passion if we want people to take what we say seriously.

We need to let the Buddhist voice be heard, proclaiming the Dharma strongly, clearly, confidently. For instance, we need to let our politicians hear the voice of the Dharma. Their policies and actions may not directly be much affected by what we may say, but when something is asserted cogently and confidently it rings in the air, it enters the collective discourse, so to speak, and it will have its effect. Again I have been very struck by the fact that people often may not like what you say, but they may nonetheless be strongly influenced by it – and even come to adopt it themselves, albeit without acknowledgement perhaps. If we believe in the power and truth of the Dharma and we assert it with reason and conviction, something of it remains echoing in the atmosphere, even if people don't appear to listen very carefully at the time.

We should, I suggest, get hold of our politicians at election time – they want our votes, so for a brief period it is in their interests to pay attention to what we say. Perhaps we could invite them to our Dharma centre, and ask them some searching questions. We could face them with the moral principles we want them to answer to, and get them to say what they think. They will then do what they consider best, of course, regardless of what has passed in our conversations with them, but at least they've heard something of the Buddhist point of view and that may influence them to some extent. And there will be some who are sympathetic to our point of view – after all good people do go into politics, wanting to make a difference for their fellow citizens, and such people may respond to us. When we have weighed and tested them, let us vote for the ones who appear most to appreciate Dharmic principles and to uphold policies that seem most in tune with the Dharma – or at worst least out of tune with it.

However, we need to speak to politics all the time. We should continue to try to influence our national and regional or city politicians in any way we can that is line with our principles. It is probably not wise, under present circumstances, to stand for election oneself at that level, because it would be very difficult to remain true to one's commitments as a Buddhist if one did: for a start, in most modern democracies, that would entail accepting a party ticket and thus at times subordinating your own principles to party discipline. But it is possible to enter politics at a local level on a non-party basis, as some Order members and Mitras have already successfully done. Then you can deal with the issues that arise on the basis of your Buddhist principles without any ethical compromise.

Again, we need to use the media to let the Buddhist voice be heard. Those of us who have skill with the pen, the keyboard, or the camera, or with any other medium, need to use our talents to put across the Dharmic perspective on current issues. For instance, Vishvapani is doing some very good broadcasts for *Thought for the Day* on the BBC's Radio Four. I strongly recommend these to anybody wants to hear a really effective example of what a Buddhist can do, in this respect. They are skilful and sophisticated applications of Buddhist principles in a way that really does stand out, even in comparison with some of the very witty and intelligent speakers from other religions who appear on the programme. Of course, this is a specifically 'religious' slot and we should not allow the Buddhist voice to be confined to that rather minority interest. We should find outlets that have far wider appeal.

This is an important consideration: we need to make sure we speak not just among ourselves, or to people like us. We too easily think of going to the margins: the alternative, the radical environmentalists and so forth. Of course we've got to reach such people and they are, in some ways, a natural constituency – but we need also to get the Buddhist voice heard in the

mainstream of society. We should address the issues on which the Buddhist voice has got something distinctive to say that could influence the way people think. We should use the mainstream media, as well as the established political processes, using whatever opportunities arise or making opportunities, so long as we do not in any way compromise our basic principles.

Let me give an example that struck me some years ago: there's been something of a debate in Britain about what it is to be British. Such a large proportion of the population consists of people who have immediate ancestors who weren't born in these islands – what then is their relationship to Britain? What is it to be a British citizen today? It is clearly not the delightfully dotty vision offered by a former Prime Minister, John Major, who talked of warm beer and long shadows on the village green and the sound of leather on willow. It's a gentle, nostalgic image, but it isn't most people's experience today of what it is to be British, even to be English – if it ever was. So what is it, especially when the political entity consists of four historical nations with their own strong identities? Surely Buddhism has something to say about this, because a nation made up of such a variety of cultural identities cannot be bound together merely by history, since that history must by definition exclude some others who are now citizens. The binding force must be found in certain common values, beyond any one religion, values that are universal, but which find a particular expression in these islands. We need to identify the principles that underlie British citizenship, which must nowadays go beyond the particularities of blood and birth or of religion. Buddhists will surely have something very important to say about that.

To give a more pressing instance of the issues we must address: we need to speak about how the economy works, asking whether it is producing genuine well-being for most citizens. All the measurements used by most governments today are usually about economic growth – that's the only value... 'Britain is just getting back on track because the economy grew by 0.2% this quarter.' It is not enough, of course, it needs to grow more, because the whole thing works on growth in productivity! It can of course only continue to work at certain costs, notably human costs, which occasionally will become apparent, as has happened very recently.

We need to be saying very loudly that this is not the way to measure the success of a society or nation. We shouldn't be measuring it simply on whether it is growing in economic terms or not – we should be looking to other values. We should be asking our politicians how they evaluate the success of the nation. Against what will they be assessing the success of their policies? Will they be looking at whether people generally have an increased sense of happiness, fulfilment, satisfaction, whether people are growing in general human qualities, in moral worth, and in creativity? Are they going to measure the cultural and spiritual development of the nation? Or is the measure simply going to be whether or not they have access to more consumer goods? Fortunately, these questions are being asked a little these days, even in mainstream politics, but that voice needs strengthening and Buddhists have much to say about this. We need to put forward an alternative vision of growth – growth in values, in fulfilment, in creativity.

So far I have spoken of the larger social and political context, but much of what needs to be done is more local and particular. Issues arise all the time in our own neighbourhoods that would benefit from Buddhists being directly engaged. For instance, I have been doing the little I can to help my neighbours in the Welsh parish where I have my hermitage to keep their Welsh-speaking primary school open. I am doing it because I believe that it is a factor in preserving a still-intact local community against the assaults of an increasingly rootless society. In my small contributions I have been able to communicate something of the

principles I believe to be at stake and my neighbours seem to appreciate that. There are many, many such issues around us, which give us the opportunity to act on and communicate our Buddhist values – and thereby contribute to the Dharma revolution. Even if we do not have the gifts to appear before the public at large, we can all be expressing our Buddhist values to those we meet; with imagination and even a certain rhetorical colour, coming from our strong feeling for the Dharma.

People need to hear the Buddhist point of view because it brings so much clarity and depth to the issues that confront people. If we do all work together more vigorously in various different ways we can make sure that the voice of the Dharma is heard throughout society. Then the attitudes and outlook that underlie the present unsatisfactory state of things will begin to change. There will begin to be something like a Dharma Revolution. It must, however, be admitted that we Buddhists have, as yet, done all too little to bring this about in the modern world.

People who Aspire to a Higher Human Life

Our first two targets are principally concerned with Karmic processes, at least as we have so far presented them. We are encouraging the disadvantaged and marginalised to recognise the power of Karma. That means recognising that, whatever the causes of their suffering, they can play a large part in ending it by taking responsibility for their own actions. The same goes for our second target: the attitudes and outlook of people in society as a whole. In trying to get the Buddhist point of view across in this context we are principally trying to awaken people to the truth of Karma. We are seeking to apply an understanding of the operations of Karma to social, economic, and political questions. However, Karma is only one progressive kind of conditionality. There are also those processes that come under the heading of the Dharma Niyama, and it is the application of the Dharma Niyama conditionality that is at issue in addressing our third target.

So, what are these Dharma Niyama processes? In a phrase one could say that they are the natural potentiality for Buddhahood within reality. That potentiality begins to reveal itself in a decisive way once Karmic processes have been developed to a high degree, establishing the conditions for its arising. Working with Karma can take us to the point at which we see through the illusion of a real, separate, permanent ego identity and thus stop grasping at the idea of self. What then flows from within us is the ‘stream of the Dharma’ – a succession of states, each conditioning the arising of the next, that are not based on ego-clinging: taking us from greater clarity, freedom, love, and joy to yet greater still. This spiral of spiritual progress arises now independently of ego volition and, insofar as it is less and less connected with self, it is less and less selfish – it is a stream of non-egoistic, compassionate motivation and activity, arising entirely spontaneously.

This stream of Dharmic conditionality is an ever-present potentiality of human consciousness. In a sense, it is pulling at us all the time, but our self-preoccupation prevents us even from recognising it – and so we are ignorant of it. Yet some people do directly feel its pull, often as an inchoate call to something more. Perhaps there are many such people. I remember Ugyen Sangharakshita once saying, after looking around while on the London Underground, that he thought roughly one in ten people felt this sort of urge to higher fulfilment to a significant degree. You can recognise something in the eye of such people, a look that suggests they want more from life – not merely in the sense of worldly ambitions, but some greater value and meaning.

Maybe everyone feels a sense of existential dissatisfaction sometimes; perhaps everyone wakes up in the middle of the night sometimes and asks themselves, 'Isn't there more to life than this?' The ordinary life most people live can be quite happy, but it does not seem enough to give us real and lasting satisfaction or to fulfil our true potential as human beings. Everyone perhaps feels that disquieting, questioning breeze at the back of their thoughts from time to time, particularly in their youth, but there are those who cannot forget it, who cannot ignore it. They know that there must be something more and cannot rest easy without it. We need to be appealing to them in a very powerful and direct way, letting them know we share their calling and that we have found that fuller, richer life for ourselves in the Buddha-Dharma and that we are trying to live in accordance with the higher values it expresses so purely.

It is our task to reach such people and give them the encouragement and opportunity they need. It is a profound relief to anyone who senses this disquiet to discover that others feel it too – for, so often, such existential dissatisfaction is seen as a problem, and may even be pathologised. It is a far greater relief still to find, not only do you share that sense of wanting something more with others, but that it is possible to devote your life to seeking its fulfilment. And it is the most wonderful joy of all to discover that some have sought and found and have taught the Path that can be followed, even by you. We need to reach such people and welcome them into the Sangha of those who are not satisfied with ordinary life and seek a higher meaning through following the Buddha-Dharma.

Whilst this task of reaching such people primarily benefits each of them as an individual, it has very important implications for society in general and is thus in itself a significant contribution to the Dharma Revolution. There is first of all what might be described as a negative reason. If people who feel that call to a higher life do not find a way of answering it, what happens to the energy of their impulse? William Blake says, 'He who nurses unacted desires breeds pestilence'¹⁸⁶ – by desires meaning here impulses to creativity – 'arrows of desire'. If a society represses the creative impulses of its citizens, that energy may curdle and sicken, turning either into life-denying depression or a bitter rebelliousness. Unacted desires will find their outlet, if not in creative, then in destructive forms. It is essential for the general health and stability of society that those who feel an urge to a higher, more meaningful life are not prevented from following it.

Simply giving freedom to those who feel this higher call is vital for the well-being, even the survival, of society. However, if positive encouragement and active support is given, that will be even more beneficial. Those who live out the quest for greater meaning thereby establish higher values for society as a whole. Shelley famously spoke of poets as the 'unacknowledged legislators of mankind'¹⁸⁷, and this metaphor could be extended to the creative in general, especially those who follow the spiritual path in its higher reaches. Humanity needs people who are trying to live a creative life, serving ideals that go beyond self-clinging, because this keeps those higher values alive for all and thus opens up larger moral, aesthetic, and spiritual vistas for all. When no one lives on the mountaintops only the dark and muddy floor of the valley seems real.

This is particularly true in modern democracies, which can all too easily become mere arenas for self-interested competition. That will then be played out on the geopolitical stage in nationalistic rivalries, making it impossible to share the world's resources in an equitable and sustainable way. There needs to be a sense of something beyond our narrow self-concerns,

¹⁸⁶ William Blake, *Proverbs of Hell*.

¹⁸⁷ Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry*.

whether individual or collective, something of a higher moral and spiritual nature. There needs to be some leaven in society, that lifts us beyond our selfishness. If society does not have that upward element, it cannot have true justice and freedom and the world will be a very dangerous place.

This cannot not however be a matter of mere rhetoric. This higher life needs to be seen to be lived if it is to have any effect upon society. The more people there are in society who live out moral, aesthetic, and spiritual values the better for society as a whole. A truly healthy society would, then, not merely license those who wished to live in tune with the progressive trend in reality, it would provide active support and encouragement to artists of all kinds, thinkers, social activists, and spiritual voyagers. For instance, although not all that goes by the name of art really does serve the progressive current, nonetheless it is vital that support is given to the arts, both by the state and by individuals, because many engaged in the arts do very genuinely struggle to answer a call to something more. And it is perhaps even more vital that the state provides legal and even financial support to those who wish to lead a full-time spiritual life, of whatever kind – at least economic support in the sense of tax relief and the like. This, incidentally, is one of the issues on which we need to question our politicians: do they consider it important to provide incentives to those leading a ‘higher’ life, to put it that way, whether through art or spiritual endeavour.

In the Buddhist context, it is the Sangha or spiritual community of those committed to the Dharma life that especially needs valuing and supporting. It provides an example of a way of life based entirely on different and higher principles, upholding moral values that can ennoble the entire community. The Sangha is thus of very great significance to society.

Of our three target areas, this is the one that we in the Triratna Buddhist Community most easily identify with and are, perhaps, best at working in – no doubt because that is where many of us ourselves fit in. We could of course do so much better: there are many, many people who do not hear of Buddhism and do not get encouragement to live a real Dharma life, lacking the understanding, tools, or encouragement to do so.

The Nucleus of a New Society

I have suggested that we work in three target areas so that we can help to bring about the Dharma Revolution. Firstly, we can show those who are marginalised and deprived – especially economically deprived or socially excluded, but also culturally, even psychologically, deprived – what they can do to change their situation. Then we can make the Buddhist voice heard in the mainstream of society, as much as we can, so as to change the attitudes and outlook most people hold. And thirdly we can try to get the Buddhist message to those who are wanting, sometimes desperately longing for, a higher life.

If we can reach these three targets to any extent, we will make a very significant contribution to the creation of a new society – one might even say of a Pure Land, here on this Earth. But this is not an easy task: many with noble ideals and lofty intentions have tried and failed, sometimes creating the very reverse of what was intended. We need then a practicable and effective plan for carrying it out. Ugyen Sangharakshita has here a distinctive strategy, based firmly on traditional principles, the implementing of which has been the principal project of the Triratna Community since it was founded and that always inspires its activities. He argues that we need first to create the basis for engaging in the Dharma Revolution: we need to establish what he calls, ‘the nucleus of a new society’. In the midst of the old society, we need to create miniature new societies: situations in which people live and work together on the

basis of the Dharma. From those 'new societies in miniature', we can go out to transform the larger society around us.

There are three principal functions of these nuclei: supporting those who are already committed to the Dharma, exemplifying what the wider society could become, and providing points of contact for those who are exploring the Dharma life.

Support for those who are already committed to the Dharma: If we are to do this work of creating a new society, a great deal of energy and strength is needed. Few of us have that strength on our own – perhaps only the Buddha had it completely, and that is what enabled him to fulfil a Buddha's function of bringing unaided the light of the Dharma where there had previously been only darkness. Dr Ambedkar definitely had strength of that kind – and he needed it: he had to fight alone and stand alone. In one of his meetings with Sangharakshita, he commented that he was the most unpopular man in India. Even his own lieutenants were against his conversion to Buddhism and tried to talk him out of it on the day before it took place. You have to be a real lion to stand alone like that. Ugyen Sangharakshita, in the early days of his return to England, had to stand alone in a similar way. But such people are rare – and no doubt would not have chosen to be alone if there had been any other alternative. It really is very, very difficult.

If we are to help bring about the Dharma Revolution by carrying out these three tasks, we ourselves need support, at least until we're so strong that nothing can stop us – that is, when Stream Entry arises. Till then, in order to keep going, we need to feel we're working alongside some other people. We need to involve ourselves in a living community or society where our aspiration is matched by others, who do not merely mouth superficial rhetoric but genuinely live out the values we share, preferably even live them out to a greater extent than we do. It's so dispiriting when, yourself fired by the Dharma, you try to communicate it to others, but they just aren't interested – they simply argue or your words fall flat. At times one will inevitably lose heart and that is when one needs companions who can empathise with one's difficulties, but who will also re-inspire one.

You need that sort of support and companionship, otherwise it is very difficult to maintain momentum. In my work for the Order and movement, over the years, I've so often had to watch people losing their aspiration because they just didn't get the support they needed. You see people come along to a Centre with such strong and genuine idealism, wanting to make a real contribution. But life's currents carry them away: you meet them later and they say, 'I just could not sustain it. I never lost my desire to create a better world, to live out higher values, but I couldn't sustain it. The circumstances I found myself in were just too much for me.' Such cautionary tales should never be forgotten – for we can be prone to overestimate ourselves, perhaps especially in the individualistic culture of the West.

I remember Sangharakshita saying of one Tibetan 'incarnate lama' who'd gone to America to spread the Dharma, that it was as if he was a bodhisattva who'd taken rebirth in a new land and then forgotten why he was there, seduced by the fascinations of America. I've known a number of Order Members who have gone somewhere new with great enthusiasm and idealism – and then rather lost their way. There's so much against us – and not just outside us, either: our own inner 'Māras', the forces of distraction and compromise in our own minds, will tempt us away.

We need support, we need a community of like-minded people around us. If we can, we need to live with or at least around people who share our aspiration. It's terribly disheartening to

live with people who deny your aspiration or are simply indifferent to it. Indifference is probably a more powerful sedative than opposition: opposition sharpens your wits, rouses your energies, while indifference sends you to sleep. You slowly become passive – and join in the rat-race round and round the wheel: a very active passivity. So that this does not happen, we need to live around, and preferably work with, people who share the same aspiration, who are living out the same values, who are struggling to realise the same ideals in their lives.

We need the support of instruction and guidance, too. We need to learn from others how to live the spiritual life and to apply the Dharma to the concrete realities of daily life. We need to have frequent recourse to places where the Dharma is in plentiful supply, until the Dharma is so much part of us that we cannot lose it.

Perhaps the most important reason for the establishment of these nuclei is the sheer scale of the enterprise. The task of social transformation is limitless and requires a vast amount of energy and a wide range of talents, skills, and experience. It will only be possible to carry it out on a significant scale when many people cooperate together, pooling their efforts and their capacities. In effect, these nuclei of the new society are the basis for the creative teamwork that is needed.

If we want to transform society this is what most of us, if not all, need: the nucleus of a new society, somewhere where those who share that aspiration, can gather the support to carry it out and can combine their efforts. It's only on that basis, perhaps, that you might begin to think about political activism or engaging with the media, for instance, even at the most local level. Without that immersion in the nucleus of a new society, politics would be likely to take you over and you would get lost, as has happened to so many who started with genuine social and political aspirations, their ideals submerged in the struggle for power. You need the basis of the spiritual community to work effectively to transform society, whilst retaining your high intention.

Exemplification of what the wider society could become: We also need the nucleus of a new society to provide an example of what the whole of society could be. Many have, for instance, been struck by their experience of particular situations they have come across in the Triratna Community. They will have gone to an urban Dharma Centre or to a place like Padmaloka or Taraloka and they will have felt something different and special in the atmosphere: in the way people relate, the welcome they give you. There's a very positive and even beautiful environment.

People often find this kind of inspiring atmosphere is created on retreat. I remember coming back from my first retreat, thinking, 'This is what life should be like – I want this all the time'. That gave me so much courage and confidence to change my life so that I could base it on the Dharma and such a strong motivation to make experiences like that available to others. We need to uphold that kind of example of what society as a whole can be, so that people believe it can be achieved and dedicate themselves to making it happen.

Such exemplification has a more subtle dimension. The fact that situations exist that do, at least to some extent, exemplify what the whole of society could be like itself has an uplifting effect – one might almost say whether people know of such situations or not. Human collective life is far more sensitive and even responsive than might appear – sensitive to good influence as well as bad. The mere existence of people living together on the basis of ideals and values derived from the Dharma in some mysterious way may affect the overall texture of society. Something is asserted, something is kept alive that affects everyone, however subtly

and unconsciously. Because such nuclei exist, values are kept alive and, when the circumstances are ripe, have a far wider and more effective influence – just as seeds lie dormant in the soil, sometimes for very long periods of time, until conditions come about in which they can germinate. If these nuclei of a new society can achieve no more than this, they have justified themselves – although such a perspective should not be used to rationalise timidity or laziness!

A point of contact for those who are exploring the Dharma life: I recently met with a group of volunteers at the London Buddhist Centre, people who once or twice a week or so come in and keep the centre clean, look after the reception, do some of the basic administration, indeed, do a lot of work in an impressively generous spirit. I am President of the centre and I was trying to thank them for their contribution, but they were saying, 'No, it is we who are grateful for this opportunity to be part of the community'. The people who live and work together around the centre much of the time build an atmosphere that these volunteers can participate in and so benefit from a collective life based on the Dharma.

This then is the third function of the nucleus of the new society. It offers opportunities for contact to those who cannot or do not want to live or work full time with Dharma brothers and sisters. Its doors are open and it shares its atmosphere in various ways, especially through Dharma classes, retreats, festivals, and other such events and situations – including opportunities for volunteering. Through contact with that new society in miniature, people can get support, guidance, and inspiration that will help them to maintain their values at other times. They can stay for a while in a kind of spiritual oasis, where they can refresh themselves. And, whenever they are ready, they can move closer to the heart of that new society, if they want to.

The nucleus of a new society may be an oasis in the midst of a desert, an oasis where can be found cool water and shade from the burning heat, but there is a danger in that. We should not simply settle down in the oasis and take our own ease for too long. The oasis is not a retirement home: it is a base where we can find refreshment, inspiration, and support for going out into the world – for bringing about the Dharma Revolution and building the new society. Our aspiration should be to expand that oasis so that it fills the desert. Oases are essential – so many would die of thirst or burn up in the heat if there were none; so many of us would simply become dispirited because of the unending, barren sand. However, our aspiration is to transform the entire desert, the entire world, into an oasis where all can live decent, fulfilling, and beautiful lives.

In the Triratna Buddhist Community we have done a lot, over the years, to set up at least a few such nuclei of a new society. But we need to create so many more and to strengthen and develop those we already have. We have so many Buddhist centres, where people can make contact with the Dharma and around which broad communities begin to form; we have many residential communities where people can live together on the basis of the Dharma; and we have some working situations and businesses, which give remarkable opportunities for sharing a Dharma life. We have, for instance, a team-based Right Livelihood business at *Windhorse: Evolution*, which has people working in it from all over the world. What has been achieved so far needs to be used more fully, especially by new generations, and we need to make it available in new places to new people, otherwise we won't be able to sustain our efforts – the efforts that are needed to transform the world. We collectively will not have the necessary inspiration or strength.

Conclusion

I hope that you are convinced that the Dharma is the medicine for the ills of the world. And I hope I've persuaded you that what is needed of you is your complete confidence in it, your diligent practice of it, and your proclamation of it in the most powerful and persuasive way that you can. If we all do proclaim it in that way, the Dharma could be a major force for positive social transformation throughout the world. What needs to change is the way people understand life and the values they hold. Once they hear the Dharma and respond to its values, then society will begin to change, especially if they have the example before them of a nucleus of a new society. There is no lasting and truly worthwhile political, social, or even economic revolution without a preceding revolution in attitudes and values.

And it is our task in the Triratna Buddhist Community to help bring about that Dharma Revolution. And we do it by first developing the nucleus of a new society and then working within the three target areas: the poor and marginalised, the general attitudes and outlook of society, and those who have heard the call to a spiritual life. Then we will be transforming the world - and at the same time, of course, we ourselves will be transformed.



Suggestions for reflection, research and discussion

7. How do you respond to the idea of participating in a 'Dhamma Revolution'?
8. What might be the dangers of such an approach?
9. Which area do you feel you can best contribute: the disadvantaged and marginalised, attitudes in society or people who aspire to a higher human life?
10. What situations in the Triratna Community have given you a glimpse of a different way of life, and how might you contribute to making those available to others?

Conclusion

Now you have been introduced to the teachings of Dr Ambedkar, and his importance for Buddhism world-wide, you may feel you would like to be more involved with the Triratna Buddhist Community in India.

There are three ways you could do this. The first is to go on a **pilgrimage** led by Triratna Order Members and Mitras in India. This is an invaluable way to develop a stronger relationship to the Buddha and to become friends with Indian Sangha members. The pilgrimage route goes to the main sites of the Buddha's life in North India, and you may also visit the main centres of the Triratna Buddhist Community in Maharashtra. The best way to find out about pilgrimages is to ask at your local Buddhist Centre, or email the *India Dhamma Trust*:

info@indiadhammatrust.org

The second thing you could consider is participating in a **Karuna door knocking appeal**. *The Karuna Trust* is a charity run by members of the Triratna Buddhist Community that raises money for social projects in India and Nepal. These projects work with the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The Karuna Trust support a wide range of initiatives such as hostels, educational projects and health projects. Participating in a Karuna door knocking appeal is a spiritually transformative experience of living and working together for something you find deeply worthwhile. They have a great deal of experience in leading appeals and will give you the support and tools you need to be a successful fundraiser. Their website is www.karuna.org and their special appeals page is www.appeals.karuna.org.

The Karuna Trust's remit is to fund social projects, but they are unable to fund projects that directly spread the Dhamma. Though Dr Ambedkar initiated the 'Dhamma Revolution', there is still a great need for the Dhamma to be spread throughout India. Many people have embraced Buddhism in India, it is estimated about 30 million so far, with thousands joining them each year. They need a Sangha to guide them and help them deepen their understanding of the Dhamma. To do this, there is an urgent need to support Dhamma work in India financially. The **India Dhamma Trust** is a Triratna charity that supports key Dhamma projects, in particular inspired Dhamma teachers, without whom there would be little possibility of spreading Triratna Buddhism in India.

You could become an advocate for the India Dhamma Trust at your Centre. This would involve keeping people at your Centre up to date with news from the India Dhamma Trust and organising fundraising events. The India Dhamma Trust is also committed to making available information about Dr Ambedkar and the Indian Sangha to Sangha members around the world. Look at their website www.indiadhammatrust.org, or find them on thebuddhistcentre.com.

In India there is a tradition of singing devotional songs to Ambedkar in Hindi or Marathi. Here is one such song to end the course. It was composed and translated by Dharmachari Maitriveer-Nagarjun.

Devotional Song to Babasaheb

His heart was with the people who suffered,
Every breath aware of the deep pain of human beings,
Let him breathe in peace at last at the shore of the Arabian Sea,
Oh Ocean, be calm now...

The pyre is still burning at the shore,
Every stick of the pyre is still giving the message of Liberation
Let the spark of a single stick catch the fire of Liberation in our hearts.
Oh Ocean be calm now
Baba is at rest now...

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 deepen your understanding of Dr Ambedkar and his message, especially for those of us outside of India.

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.

The Complete Works: Volume 9, Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism 1, Sangharakshita. Published by Windhorse Publications, ISBN 9781909314788.

<https://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-complete-works-of-sangharakshita-volume-9-dr-ambedkar-and-the-revival-of-buddhism-i/>

This edition includes *Dr Ambedkar and Buddhism* which can also be downloaded for free from Sangharakshita's website.

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

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the film of his life made in 2000 (3 hours).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yv6aU-9xQ0>

Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition, B.R Ambedkar, with an introduction by Arundhati Roy, Navayana Publishing, New Delhi 2015, ISBN 9781784783525.

The Buddha and the Future of His Religion, seminar by Sangharakshita, 1986.

https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminartexts/SEM053_Buddha_and_the_Future_of_His_Religion_by_Dr_Ambedkar_-_Questions_and_Answers.pdf

The Buddha and the Future of His Religion: Dr Ambedkar, Dharma talk by Subhuti

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC484>

Sangharakshita gave a video-recorded interview to one of our Order Members from India, Maitriveer-Nagarjun, called *United for Dhamma*. It can be found on the *India Dhamma Trust* page of thebuddhistcentre.com:

<https://thebuddhistcentre.com/IDT/interview-bhante-ambedkar>

The Significance of Dr Ambedkar in the West, Subhuti, talk given in the London Buddhist Centre

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC332>

Towards an Enlightened India, Gail Omvedt Ambedkar. Penguin, New Delhi 2004, ISBN 9780143440215.

Buddha and the Future of His Religion, B.R Ambedkar. Available to read online at:
<https://drambedkarbooks.com/2015/05/31/buddha-and-future-of-his-religion-dr-b-r-ambedkar/>

Buddha or Karl Marx, B.R Ambedkar, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015, ISBN 9781517205218

The Buddha and His Dhamma, B.R Ambedkar, independently published 2017, ISBN 978-1520321707. Available to read online at:
<https://drambedkarbooks.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/english-buddhaandhisdhamma.pdf>