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# THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

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The Origin and  
Development of the  
Bodhisattva Ideal



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Cover Symbol:

The symbols on the covers of the issues in this series are from original lino-cuts by Dharmachari Aloka based upon the *mudrās* of the eight principal Bodhisattvas of Mahayana tradition. This issue features the *mudrā* of Bodhisattva Manjughosha, the 'Gentle-Voiced', who is the embodiment of Wisdom. His left hand is shown here holding the volume of the *Prajñā-pāramitā*, the 'Perfection of Wisdom', which he presses to his heart. His right hand wields aloft the flaming Sword of Wisdom which cuts through all delusion.

# THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

## 1. The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal

### Part 1

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\* Indicates refer to Glossary

## Editorial

The 'Eightfold Path', on which we have just completed a series (*Mitrata* 40-55), presents a basic and sober view of the spiritual life, with few exuberances or adornments. We now step into a quite different world of much greater spiritual intensity and richness, the world of *The Bodhisattva Ideal*. Rather than the beautiful but stark mountain peaks amongst which the 'Eightfold Path' led us, we journey now through landscapes filled with fabulous blossoms and trees made of jewels, lakes of crystal waters on which float enormous lotus blooms, fantastic palaces each of which is an entire cosmos, gigantic stupas made of precious stones and metals soaring high above vast concourses of beings gathered from the furthest ends of the universe, and brilliant, rainbow-hued beams of light which radiate from the hearts of Buddhas without number.

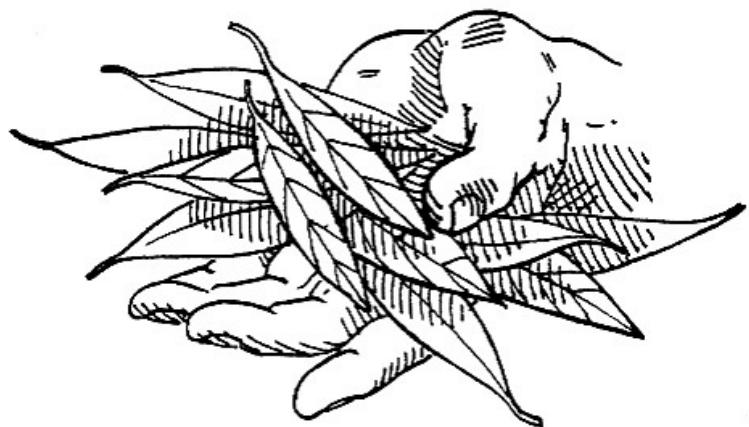
Distinct as these worlds might seem to be, they are in fact one and the same world, looked at in different perspectives. The spiritual goal seen from the lofty vantage-point of the Bodhisattva is infinitely more magnificent since the horizon over which it appears is infinitely more distant. Nonetheless, it is the same goal and the same path which leads towards it. It is one of the Venerable Sangharakshita's greatest contributions to Buddhism in the West is that he has given us the key which enables us to view Buddhism as a whole. In this issue in particular he reconciles the varying perspectives of traditional teachings, and in the series as a whole he shows us how to apply the exalted Ideal of the Bodhisattva within our own lives.

The modern Buddhist is heir to all the different schools of Buddhism, each with its own perspective on the world of the Dharma, usually developed in isolation from other perspectives and without the methods of literary and historical criticism which we have today. We have to make sense of the various attempts by Buddhists in the past to reconcile differing presentations of the Dharma without being deceived by the language in which they are cast. Although we are studying the Bodhisattva Ideal, we see that it is not a separate Ideal from, say, the Arahant Ideal of the so-called Hinayana schools nor from the Ideal of the Siddha of the Vajrayana. The series we are embarking upon is of vital importance because it not only introduces us to the imaginative and inspiring world of the Bodhisattva but shows us how that world is an aspect of the one world of Buddhism. Most importantly of all, it shows us that the Bodhisattva is not some distant figure, the object of admiration but not of emulation, but that he has a direct bearing on our lives — and particularly upon the collective life of the FWBO.

With this new series come some changes. Dharmacharis Padmaraja, Devamitra, and Vessantara have resigned as members of the Editorial Board and Dharmacharini Srimala has been appointed in their place. We gratefully acknowledge the work of the former in establishing the 'new style' *Mitrata* and welcome Srimala who has already been chiefly responsible for research and production for the past two years. The 'Mitrata Production Team' — a group of Dharmacharinis and women Mitras in Norwich who have gathered all the material from which the final selection is made, prepared and typed copy, and overseen production — has been transformed into 'Lion's Roar', an independent Charity, responsible not only for *Mitrata* but for other Buddhist publications.

We have reduced the size of the publication in response to our readers' suggestions, and we have improved the typesetting and layout. This has enabled us to include more seminar material than in previous issues. In addition more extensive notes have been added with suggestions for further reading together with a glossary of key terms which are not otherwise explained in the text. All this necessitates a somewhat enlarged *Mitrata* and we have been forced to raise the price accordingly — the first increase for more than two years in spite of rising production costs. We hope that you will appreciate these improvements and that they will make *Mitrata* yet more useful to you in your study and pursuit of the spiritual Path. As usual, we would like to hear from you with your comments or suggestions so that *Mitrata* can be continually refined.

SUBHUTI



## Lecture

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.<sup>1</sup> 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 *śimśapā* 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."<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> 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*,<sup>4</sup> 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 *simsapa* 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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'.<sup>7</sup> 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,<sup>8</sup> 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*'.<sup>7</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

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 supernormal 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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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 *Parinirvāna*, 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.

## Seminar Extracts

### 1 Hinayana Mahayanists and Mahayana Hinayanists

from Questions and Answers on The Bodhisattva Ideal, Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1984

Abhaya: [I should like to know more about] the split that you talk about [in the lecture (p. 11)] which occurred between the two parties of disciples, one of whom concentrated on the teaching and the other on the life and experience of the Buddha. I was wondering how soon this split comes into evidence and what evidence there is for it, and whether you could recommend any sources.

Sangharakshita: I have deliberately not gone into the historical background in any detail here. The split took place about a hundred years after the *Parinirvāṇa*, in connection with, or perhaps even at, the Council of Vaisali. It was there that the Theravadins seceded from the Mahāsaṅghikas, or vice versa, — the Mahāsaṅghikas, as the name suggests, being the majority party, and the Theravadins, or Sthaviravādins, the minority party. There are a number of different accounts in Pali, and in Sanskrit sources which have been translated into Chinese and Tibetan. They differ to some extent; in fact, sometimes they differ considerably.

The broad picture that emerges is of a minority party that attached more importance to the letter of the teaching, and a majority party that attached more importance to the spirit of the teaching; a party that concentrated on what the Buddha had *said*, and a party that concentrated on what the Buddha *was* and what the Buddha had actually *been*.

So I think the explanation that I have given is, on the whole, a quite fair interpretation of the real point at issue. It is perhaps significant that it was mainly from among the Mahāsaṅghikas that the Mahayana eventually arose. Information about the split is available in quite a number of modern works. One of the latest — perhaps the latest and if not the most reliable certainly the most exhaustive generally available — is Warder's *Indian Buddhism*.<sup>14</sup> That gives quite a good account of this whole business.

One needs also to understand that it is not a question of there having been this kind of split in Buddhism at one particular point and that thereafter all Mahāsaṅghikas, and all Mahayanists, invariably adhered to the spirit rather than the letter and all Theravadins or Sthaviravādins invariably adhered to the letter rather than the spirit. It is not quite as straightforward as that. There have been Mahayanists who have adhered to the letter of the Mahayana (very much against the spirit of the Mahayana!) and you can find Theravadins who adhere to the spirit rather than the letter of the Theravada. When one has any sort of formulated teaching, whether a Buddhist teaching or any other, there is always the possibility of taking towards it either of those two attitudes. The fact that, historically, you belong to the school of the spirit as opposed to the school of the letter does not necessarily mean that you yourself, personally or individually, are more observant of the spirit than the letter. So you mustn't say, "Ah, well, I'm a Mahayanist, I'm broad-minded automatically. I only consider the spirit, not like those wretched Theravadins!" One is not really justified in thinking in that way, or assuming that, because someone is a Theravadin, he necessarily, on all occasions, adheres to the letter rather than the spirit. It is very much a question of your personal attitude or personal response to the teaching, which can be taken in either of these two ways, however [it may be] formulated and whether within this *yāna* or that *yāna*.

This is why I am inclined to say, nowadays, not so much that there is a Hinayana or a Mahayana as a spiritual phenomenon, or even that there are individual Mahayanists and individual Hinayanists as though

they are always either one or the other, but rather that, on any particular occasion, within any particular context of spiritual life, you may adopt either a Hinayana attitude or a Mahayana attitude. It seems very much more like that. It is not that *this* is the Mahayana and *that* is the Hinayana (except in a purely historical and technical sense) or that here is a Mahayanist and there is a Hinayanist. It is more that, at this particular moment, is my attitude towards, say, meditation a Hinayana attitude or a Mahayana attitude? Is my attitude towards work a Hinayana attitude or a Mahayana attitude? Is it self-regarding or is it other-regarding? Or is it self-regarding or is it self- *and* other-regarding? It is not just a question of slapping on the labels Hinayana and Mahayana, or Hinayanist and Mahayanist, more or less indiscriminately.

I have met many a Tibetan Buddhist who was technically a follower of the Bodhisattva Ideal but whose attitude, one might say, was thoroughly Hinayanistic, and I have also met Theravada bhikkhus whose attitude, one might say, was cheerfully Mahayanistic.

Vessantara: In the 'Survey'<sup>15</sup> you give an account of the charges which the Mahayana made against the Theravada. How did the Theravada defend itself against the various criticisms?

S.: Broadly speaking, the Hinayana, certainly in the person of the Theravada or Sarvastivāda, simply ignored the Mahayana — as it continued to do. In one of the works which we find in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka of the Theravada, that is to say the *Kathā-vatthu*, usually translated as 'Points of Controversy', there are a number of discussions between different schools with the Theravada on the one hand and various Mahāsaṅghika offshoots or proto-Mahayana schools on the other.

But, apart from that, there is very little indeed in the way of controversy between the Hinayana on the one hand and the Mahayana on the other. The Hinayana ignored the Mahayana, except somewhat later on when it came to various quite technical philosophical discussions, as between, say, the Sarvastivādins and some of the other schools.

The two also tended to be geographically isolated, especially in the case of the Theravada. The Theravada survived in Ceylon. Of course, in Ceylon the Theravadins were very much opposed to certain Mahayanistic or quasi-Mahayanistic schools which did gain some foothold in Ceylon. There were the two great *vihāras*, the Abhayagiri Vihāra and the Mahar Vihāra, and the Abhayagiri Vihāra was, as it were, Mahayanistically inclined. But we do not know of any actual polemics in the philosophical sense. We only know that, with the help of the king, the Abhayagirivādins were eventually suppressed, and that was that. We know very little indeed about what they actually taught. The impression we get from Theravada sources,<sup>16</sup> whenever they are mentioned, is that their teaching was so dreadful that a decent Theravadin couldn't even go into any details. They were usually referred to as *Vetullavādins*, which for some modern Theravadins is a term of abuse. Some scholars maintain that *Vetullavāda* or *Vaitulyavāda* is synonymous with *Vaipulyavāda* (Mahayana sutras are called *Vaipulya sūtras*, or extended or expanded sutras), but this is a matter of controversy.

However, broadly speaking, there was very little in the way of controversy between the Theravadins, or Hinayanists, on the one hand, and Mahayanists on the other. They seem to have agreed to differ.

Very often, of course, in the later periods of Indian Buddhist history, one does find followers of the Hinayana and followers of the Mahayana living virtually side by side in the same monastery. The difference between the two was simply that the Mahayana monks, it is said, 'worshipped the Bodhisattvas and studied the Mahayana sutras' whereas the Hinayana monks did not. The Mahayana monks studied whatever the Hinayana monks studied but with the addition of the Mahayana sutras. They also worshipped

the Mahayana Bodhisattvas, which the Theravadins or Hinayanists would not have done. But they seem to have lived together in the same monastic complex at least quite amicably.



## 2 Two Versions, One Path

from Men's Study Leaders' Course on The Bodhisattva Ideal Padmaloka, January 1985

Ratnaprabha: This question arose from a discussion of what you've said to correlate Stream-Entry, [the arising of] the Bodhicitta, and [the] Irreversibility<sup>17</sup> [of a Bodhisattva]. Despite what you've said on this subject, I wonder if there is not actually an ideal of individual Enlightenment, which is, in a sense, genuinely Enlightenment, and represents a cessation of bodily influence in the Samsara, [but] which is, in some sense, a less complete — or smaller — manifestation of Compassion than the Enlightenment of a Buddha (who gains Enlightenment in the worlds where there is no Dharma). We've located Stream-Entry on our chart of the Lower and Higher Evolution:<sup>18</sup> can we locate the Bodhisattva's Irreversibility on the same chart?

Sangharakshita: I think it goes back to something I have said before. Traditionally the Mahayana has regarded itself and the Path of the Bodhisattva as following on from the Hinayana and the Path of the Arahant. But that cannot really be historically justified. So one sees [rather], as it were, the Hinayana Ideal of the Path and of the Goal (Arahantship) as, so to speak, a more attenuated version of what was presented more fully in the Mahayana's Path of the Bodhisattva. It would seem, if we go back to archaic Buddhism, that the Buddha did not teach an Arahant Ideal in the later Hinayana sense. He did not distinguish, it would seem, between the content of his disciples' realization and his own. Therefore, I don't personally place the Hinayana and the Mahayana end to end. I place them, rather, side by side: the one being a more attenuated, and the other a fuller, version of the same spiritual Path. Now, inasmuch as each version — the

Hinayana and the Mahayana version of the Path — underwent considerable independent development, in respect of those independent developments we cannot always make them coincide, or correspond point by point. There are developments of the idea of the Irreversibility of a Bodhisattva that don't quite correspond to the idea of the irreversibility (so to speak) of the Stream-Entrant. That is because the Mahayana doctrinally elaborated on its own particular tradition in that non-historical perspective. What I have been trying to do is to pull them all back to what they are all talking about, what they are all really concerned with, and to see the points of general correspondence. So, drawing things back in that way, I see Stream-Entry within the, as it were, Hinayana context corresponding to Irreversibility within the, as it were, Mahayana context. I see the two Paths as side by side, not one following upon another. Therefore, there's no question of, say, another point for a Bodhisattva's Irreversibility further along that same hypotenuse, because it [i.e. a Bodhisattva's Irreversibility] is, as it were, a more open-ended version of Stream-Entry itself. Or rather, we might say that in the Hinayana Stream-Entry is a narrower version of what the Buddha himself was actually talking about, which the Mahayana tried to get back to.

Padmavajra: So Stream-Entry and Irreversibility are synonymous?

S.: Broadly speaking, yes. Stream-Entry as formulated by the Hinayana and Irreversibility as formulated by the Mahayana are not the same thing if you see them out of their context of historical development. But if you understand how they are each as it were historical developments — the one narrower than the other, and the other partly in protest against the narrower, previous development — you can see that they are really concerned about the same thing. You don't [then] have the idea that there is really a Path of individual Enlightenment, in the way that the Hinayana thinks — one regards that as a sort of deformation. So you don't regard the emergence of, so to speak, Compassion as a separate stage further on under the auspices of the Bodhisattva Ideal, in the way that the traditional Mahayana does.

Padmavajra: Are you saying, then, that Stream-Entry, Irreversibility, and the arising of the Bodhicitta<sup>19</sup> are in fact all the same spiritual experience?

S.: One has to be careful about saying that because in the Mahayana the arising of the Bodhicitta is distinguished, of course, from Irreversibility. You could certainly not equate the two *within the context of the Mahayana*.

Padmavajra: How does that, though, square with the fact that in Tuscany<sup>20</sup> you were saying that the arising of the Bodhicitta was the altruistic aspect of the experience of Stream-Entry? You seemed to equate the arising of the Bodhicitta with Stream-Entry. Is it that you can't lump in Irreversibility as well?

S.: Well, you might — but that is at a later stage of consideration, as it were. When one speaks of the arising of the Bodhicitta one is taking the arising of the Bodhicitta to refer to the emergence of the factor of Compassion which seems to be quite wrongly divorced from the Path of the Arahant — because in fact you can't have a spiritual life without that dimension. So, if you [do] take the arising of the Bodhicitta as a sort of separate event, well, then you can only describe it — within this wider context — as an aspect of the Stream-Entry itself.

Padmavajra: So, in fact, would it be more true to say that Stream-Entry and Irreversibility are one and the same spiritual experience?

S.: Well, it would depend on the particular context within which you saw them. (*Pause.*) There is another point that one must remember. There are different levels of the Bodhicitta just as we've got, say, different

levels of the Going for Refuge.<sup>21</sup> You could apply that and say that the effective or real arising of the Bodhicitta corresponds to Irreversible Bodhisattvahood. You could work it out in that sort of way. .... I think the main point in this connection one has to bear in mind is that, as I did say, one can't have a completely neat and tidy, point-by-point, or factor-by-factor correlation just for the very reason that the Hinayana and the Mahayana did develop independently.

Padmavajra: Would it not be better to drop (if one could possibly do that) the Irreversibility that occurs in the eighth *bhūmi* — just drop that from the picture, and try to correlate Stream-Entry and the arising of the Bodhicitta?

S.: Well, one could do that, but inasmuch as one has started a correlation of doctrinal terms of the two *Yānas* somebody is sure to ask, sooner or later, where that comes in. You are not going to be able to, as it were, exclude it. You have to give some sort of explanation.

Ratnoprabha: So, how literally should we take the usual explanation of the Bodhisattva's Irreversibility if we do equate it in some sense with Stream-Entry?

S.: Well, what is it irreversibility from? I think that is the key to the whole issue. It is irreversibility from Enlightenment for the sake of all beings. But my point is that you cannot really have any other kind of Enlightenment. So the moment you set out on the spiritual Path, *that* is your aim and object. As soon as you become irreversible on the spiritual Path, in Hinayana terms that is entering the Stream, and in Mahayana terms that is becoming an Irreversible Bodhisattva. The strictly Mahayana notion of Irreversibility — the Irreversibility of a Bodhisattva — presupposes an earlier, more, as it were, restricted irreversibility, that of the Stream-Entrant leading to Arahant. But we don't admit that earlier, as it were, literally individualistic phase of *genuinely* spiritual life. For us, that is a sort of anomaly, a sort of contradiction in terms. This way of looking at it seems to be more in accordance with what seems to have been the Buddha's own original teaching.

Ratnaguna: Is it not irreversibility from *Samyaksambodhi*, i.e. not just Enlightenment, but ... ?

S.: Well, I said "Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings" — that is *Samyaksambodhi*. It would seem that that was the Enlightenment which the Buddha saw his own disciples attaining, so Stream-Entry was originally, so to speak, irreversibility from *that*, but was eventually to be seen by the Hinayanists as 'irreversibility' inverted commas — from one's own individual salvation.

Ratnaguna: No, I was thinking that *Samyaksambodhi* implied more than that, that in a future life you find yourself without the Dharma, and you rediscover it. Is that not what it is?

S.: Well, in the Mahayana, yes, there is that cosmic perspective, as I call it. But you don't find that in what would appear to be the Buddha's original teaching; you don't find that cosmic perspective at all.

Subhuti: So how are we to take all that? How are we to take the cosmic perspective: the three *kalpas* that it takes to traverse the Bodhisattva Path? Is that just a way of stretching our horizons?

S.: It is partly a way of stretching your imagination. Also, I think, you are not to understand it as pertaining to any particular individual, but as representing a cosmic trend. Do you see what I mean? (Oh dear, it looks as though I should spell this all out in a proper book. Part of it is present, of course, in a very condensed form, in that lecture on the Bodhisattva.<sup>22</sup>) Therefore, I personally see — I think I am being true to original

Buddhism here — that 'cosmic' Bodhisattva Ideal as not pertaining to any given individual at all. I don't really see how any individual can actually form that kind of aspiration — if people think they can it means they don't really realize the significance of the words they are saying. (*Laughter.*) In some of the Mahayana sutras the Bodhisattva is represented as saying that he is willing to go to hell for thousands of *kalpas* if that will thereby help a single living being — just even a little bit. But can one really actually say that? I would say that it is quite impossible for any human being to say that, *and* sincerely believe it. If you think of what the pains of hell are really like; you can't even stand a tenth or a hundredth part of that sort of pain — and here you are saying that you are ready and willing to undergo those sorts of pains for ages upon ages! How can you actually take that as a workable ideal or aspiration for a real, live, human being? You find it difficult enough to give a hand with the washing-up sometimes, to go back to that well-worn example. So, when the Mahayana texts speak of the Bodhisattva in this way, if I am to make sense of it I can only take it as referring to (for want of a better term — and I realize it is open to all sorts of misinterpretations) a sort of cosmic trend, or as recognizing the existence of a potentiality for Enlightenment even under the most unfavourable circumstances.

Ratnaguna: Does that mean that I have misunderstood the Bodhisattva Ideal? I have understood the Bodhisattva Ideal to have that sort of cosmic arena for the individual.

S.: Well, yes, to a limited extent it does. Even for the ordinary individual you can, obviously, think in terms of rebirth; you can think in terms of a series of rebirths extending over quite a long period of time, and you can perhaps imagine yourself as continuing your spiritual life and progress. But can you *really* think in terms of a Bodhisattva career literally extending over perhaps three unthinkable *kalpas*? It is an enormous period of time, involving, perhaps, from time to time, sojourns of maybe even millions or billions of years in various hells for the sake of helping even one living being. Is that really credible?

Ratnaguna: Also, the idea of practising the Dharma so that one day you can become someone in a world sphere somewhere who is going to rediscover the Dharma — is that out as well, really?

S.: I would say, in principle not, but — and this comes back to something we were saying the other evening — you must be very careful not to lose yourself in 'dreams' of that sort to such an extent that you become unable to practise the Dharma here and now. I think all that you really need is your general faith in the sort of conservation of, let's say, spiritual values beyond death. [If you have that faith] you can be sure that if you do really practise the Dharma here and now, the future — how and where you will be reborn, and whether you do actually become a Buddha in some distant world system, etc. — will look after itself. I don't think one can realistically make it the object of an actual aspiration. To that extent I don't take the Mahayana sutras literally. So, I tend to regard the Mahayana sutras as giving a glimpse of a sort of archetypal world (which is inspiring in a general way, and broadens our vision), but not as providing an actual pattern for Buddhist living, so to speak, in a detailed sense. I think our pattern for Buddhist living, in that sort of way, comes much more nearly from the earlier parts, say, of the Pali Canon. (*Pause.*)

Suvajra: Does this mean, then, that Stream-Entry and breaking the 'Three Fetters' itself has a great cosmic significance?

S.: Well, its repercussions will surely extend beyond the present lifetime — I mean, in respect of the individual breaking those Fetters. Or isn't that clear?

Suvajra: Well, you've correlated Irreversibility with Stream-Entry as being one and the same spiritual experience ...

S.: Yes, but I have also said that there was a separate development of the Mahayana, a sort of elaboration of the Irreversibility, in a sense — you might say, historically speaking — on the wrong basis. So, when you equate the Irreversibility of the Bodhisattva with Stream-Entry you do not necessarily also equate all those independent, as it were, wrongly based developments at the same time.

Suvajra: So, that doesn't necessarily mean, therefore, that breaking the 'Three Fetters' constitutes you being an Irreversible Bodhisattva?

S.: Well, again, you're still trying to compare one *Yāna* literally taken with another *Yāna* literally taken, so in a sense missing the point. Do you see what I mean?

Suvajra: Yes. I was checking that that was what you actually did mean: that they were completely separate.

S.: No. I'd say that they diverge. I can't say that they are completely separate. I say that there are certain developments which are incompatible inasmuch as they are separate developments. Those you cannot reconcile; you just have to leave them aside, so to speak. (*Pause.*)

Padmavajra: At the risk of being a bore, in Tuscany last year you definitely spoke of the Bodhicitta as the sort of altruistic aspect of Stream-Entry ...

S.: Well, yes, in a very broad sense it is. [It is] in the sense that it represents the Compassion aspect of the spiritual experience which is, as it were, left out from the Hinayana's understanding of Stream-Entry. I use the term 'bodhicitta' just to indicate that one cannot in fact divorce Stream-Entry from that Compassion element, as the Hinayana tradition would seem to think.

Ratnprabha: Again I may be being too literal-minded, but if we do see the Bodhicitta as coming before the Irreversibility of a Bodhisattva then it presumably means that the Bodhicitta will arise before Stream-Entry. So, if one can think of Stream-Entry arising in this lifetime one presumably is thinking about the Bodhicitta arising ... ?

S.: No, again I think this is missing the point, because it is only within that, as it were, separately developed Mahayana version of the Path that the Bodhicitta arises before the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible. If you equate, so to speak, the Bodhicitta with Stream-Entry you've already nullified that distinction between the arising of the Bodhicitta and the attainment of a Bodhisattva's Irreversibility.

Padmavajra: So, if you equate the Bodhicitta and Stream-Entry there's no point in trying to ...

S.: ... to follow further the Mahayana's separate development, yes. (*Pause.*) I think this really must be spelt out sometime — in a connected way, if you see what I mean. It is a quite important point. Probably any of you could do it now.

Padmavajra: All the threads are there now — well, most of them.

S.: Well, nearly all. One thread I haven't made a connection with yet is the Going Forth, but that is pretty obvious.<sup>23</sup> There is another which occurred to me. I'll mention it now since I have never done so before, and I might as well get it in here in case I don't get a chance and I'm knocked down by a bus tomorrow. You've all heard of the Shin schools, especially the Jodo Shin Shu. They believe in the 'path of other-power', not

the 'path of self-power'. You know that, don't you? Zen, for instance, follows the 'path of self-power'; the Jodo Shin Shu follows the 'path of other-power'. Their principal spiritual practice — though they don't call it a spiritual practice in the sense of anything implying the exercise of 'self-power' — is simply to recite '*Namo Amitābhāya Buddhāya*' ('Salutation to Buddha Amitābha'). They do this not as a spiritual practice in the 'self-power' sense, but simply as an expression of gratitude to Amitābha for having already accomplished their liberation — by his 48 Vows, I suppose. (That is all spelled out in the 'Survey',<sup>24</sup> anyway. You should know it quite well.) So, the question that occurs to me is: What does the Shin school have to say about the Going for Refuge? I've read a few books by Shin Shu people about Shin Shu, and I've seen no reference to Going for Refuge. Do they regard the Going for Refuge as pertaining to the 'path of self-power', and for that reason have dropped it? Or, do they not regard it as pertaining to the 'path of the self-power', and have they perhaps — and here I am only asking a question, and want to try and find out from a Shin Shu authority — come to regard the mantra of salutation to Amitābha as, as it were, equivalent to the Going for Refuge? [The latter may be the case] because upon reciting the mantra you are as it were, reborn in the Pure Land of Amitābha (at least, you go there at the time of death); you are saved.

Subhuti: Are you saying that you recite the mantra only as an expression of gratitude because your salvation has been accomplished?

S.: Yes.

Subhuti: So, in a sense you don't even need to Go for Refuge.

S.: Well, yes, I suppose you could look at it like that.

Subhuti: Wouldn't that be why it doesn't fit in — because that would imply that there was something that you could do?

S.: Ah, but then I asked the previous question, whether they do regard, in fact, the Going for Refuge as an expression of 'self-power'? They might. Here I am hypothesizing, because I don't know. They might [on the other hand] say that you're not actually doing anything by virtue of 'self-power'; you Go for Refuge to the Buddha out of thankfulness for him, well, either having gained Enlightenment, or having gained it for you too through the fulfilment of his Vows. So, I am merely enquiring at this stage; I've not yet been able to find out. I am just wondering whether a further correlation is not possible, that is all. It is an interesting point anyway, isn't it?

Susiddhi: For the sake of completion, Bhante, could you tell us where the Going Forth fits in — my head is like a beehive?

S.: Well, it is clear that for some people Going Forth coincided with Stream-Entry and opening of the Dharma Eye, but it doesn't, obviously, do that for everybody. Also, it's a question of, well, what one means by the Going Forth. It can be Going Forth in the literal sense; it can be Going Forth in, as it were, a more metaphorical sense — "Well, I'll just be going forth for a minute." (Laughter.)

Padmavajra: Have you ever thought of fitting in *pravrtti* in this?

S.: I have done, haven't I? It was in that series of talks on *The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism*.<sup>25</sup> But I have not referred to that recently, have I? Anyway, you can see what I have been trying to do in a general

sort of way. If one takes any of these teachings seriously one can't help relating them to one's own experience. So *that* is the meeting point: within one's own experience.

Ratnaprabha: I would like to go back to my original question, and carry on being quite literalistic, and think again of the possibilities of, as it were, different kinds of Enlightenment. I think you have said in the past that Enlightened people who we know of do have clearly different temperaments. Now, perhaps some of them are better, as it were, at putting across their experience to unenlightened people than others — in other words, better at helping others in their spiritual progress, and so on. If one extended this idea one might imagine that to become a Buddha — that is, somebody who gains Enlightenment for the first time in a new world-sphere — would require a very long path of perfecting all one's personal qualities until one was ideally suited for transmitting the Dharma. However, gaining Enlightenment as the disciple of such a Buddha could — unless I am being too literalistic — possibly not require such a long path of perfecting all one's qualities for the sake of transmitting the Dharma well. Do you see what I mean?

S.: Yes, there's two opinions about that within the Mahayana itself, as I think is discussed by Tsongkhapa. One is that, admitting what you say to be correct, the Enlightenment experience which one ends up with is nonetheless the same. The other view, of course, is that by accumulating, as it were, the inferior equipment of, say, an Arahant, the spiritual experience with which you end up is, in fact, a different experience, or at least an inferior experience. I would say, personally, that it all hinges on this question of Compassion. Usually the Arahant Ideal is considered to exclude the ideal of Compassion. Personally I cannot imagine Enlightenment in the true sense — in a sense, regardless of level — as being Enlightenment without the inclusion of what we speak of as Compassion. If you regard the Arahant as having, say, a limited degree of Compassion (even as he has a limited degree of Wisdom), well, that's all right, but then Arahantship would merely be a lower stage on that one Path of full Enlightenment (the Enlightenment of a Buddha), and not a separate, diverging path.

Ratnaprabha: So, even if the spiritual experiences of the two kinds of temperamentally different people are the same, is there still a possibility of making some kind of choice?

S.: I wouldn't say that you could reduce the presence or absence of Compassion to just a matter of temperament. This is, I think, what it amounts to. (*Pause.*) In other words, I'm saying that any kind of Insight, or Enlightenment experience, *per se* involves the experience or presence of Compassion — which goes directly against Theravada teaching, at least [against] Abhidharma teaching.<sup>26</sup>



### 3 He Put it on His Head and Ran!

from *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* Mixed Order Retreat, Abhirati, August 1974

*Seven Principal Features of Mahāyānism.*

(4) *Its Marvellous Spiritual Energy.*

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

Suzuki, D. T., *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Schocken, New York 1963, p. 63

Sangharakshita: I am not quite happy about this phrase "welfare of the masses", but let it pass. However, it should be remarked that in the Theravada Pali scriptures the Buddha is represented as recommending his disciples to go off and teach *bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya*, 'for the welfare and happiness of many people', and *bahujana*, which means 'many people', or 'many folk', could be translated as 'the masses'. So this idea is there, even in the Theravada, though perhaps it is not stressed in the same way or given intellectual justification.

Devamitra: It's all so interpretive, though. It could equally mean 'not to the masses'. You could interpret it as meaning 'the masses', but not necessarily so.

S.: No, it means 'the people', originally, or 'manyfolk'. Mrs. Rhys Davids translates it, in fact, as 'the manyfolk'; that is quite literal. Anyway, I want to show that the concern for teaching Buddhism even to many people is not confined to the Mahayana; you certainly find it in the Hinayana too. Sometimes you get the impression — this may be being a little unkind and critical — that the Mahayana, in the person of some at least of its followers, protests too much. Sometimes you get the feeling that the Mahayana rather goes on about its own superior altruism a bit too much, whereas there isn't all that practical difference, really, between Mahayana and Hinayana when it comes down to actual life. A Theravada Buddhist is not noticeably less kind and helpful and friendly than a Mahayanist, in fact. ....

Lokamitra: This stressing [of superior altruism], then, would be reactive from the time of the split, and it has been continued, perhaps, for much too long.

S.: Especially, perhaps, where Mahayanists are in actual contact with Hinayanists. You certainly don't find it, say, in Tibetan Buddhism as actually practised. They have the Bodhisattva Ideal and they do stress the Compassion aspect, but they put it into practice in a very genuine way. And, perhaps, because it is more explicit, there is something in the Mahayana teaching and spiritual practice — one must say this, too — a sort of spiritual glow or warmth which is not there in the Theravada. In the Theravada, the kindness and friendliness is more on the human level, as it were. It is very welcome on that level and in that way, but with the Tibetan Buddhism, say, which is Mahayana, even Vajrayana, you get the impression of a much more definitely spiritual and even transcendental kindness and Compassion. That is what I would say from my personal experience: as though the Bodhicitta is at work. It is the difference between *mettā*, which is wonderful, and Bodhicitta, which is still more wonderful! The Theravada have great *mettā* — no doubt about that — but *some* Tibetans at least have Bodhicitta, which goes beyond.

Ratnapani: You also once made the point that there aren't any strings attached, but that there tend to be strings attached at least to the Theravada. You were talking about the Hinayana concept of *mettā*, and about who showed *mettā* in a famine [where there was] a stock of grain, and one [bhikkhu] who went round distributing it [freely] and one who said, "You must come at a certain time" and imposed a whole list of rules to get the grain.<sup>27</sup>

S.: Yes, this is true. This relates to the Theravadin being quite willing to teach you, but on his terms, i.e. strictly according to tradition, whereas the Mahayanist, if he is a real flexible Mahayanist — and you can find narrow Mahayanists, too, who insist on teaching you strictly in the 'Mahayana' way — will just try to help you where you are and won't as it were stand on his dignity.

Manjuvajra: They almost represent two principles rather than ...

S.: This is true. For instance, I remember Sister Palmo telling me a story about her experience in Rajgir. She said she was staying in a Japanese temple and had to go to Rajgir station to catch her train. She had a big, heavy suitcase. A monk accompanied her to the station on foot and carried it for her, and then the train came in and they were going to be late. She didn't know what to do with this heavy suitcase. But the Japanese monk, who was the head of the temple, without more ado just put it on his head like a coolie and ran, and in that way she caught her train. She often used to relate this incident — that he did not stand on his dignity. That is the Mahayana spirit, you could say. A Theravada bhikkhu would never have done that; it's quite unthinkable. He wouldn't have carried her case in the first place. He would have wished her well and helped her, certainly, but not compromising his dignity as a bhikkhu. He would have stuck to that. Even a Mahayanist *might* act like that, but that would be because he didn't have the spirit of Mahayanism; but those who have the spirit of Mahayanism would not stand on ceremony.

#### 4 Pleasure all the Way

from 'The Precious Garland' (*The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses*)  
Men's Mitra Seminar, August 1976

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

*The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses*, Nāgārjuna and the  
7th Dalai Lama, Allen & Unwin, London 1975, p. 171

Sangharakshita: "And along the way all pleasures." What do you make of that? Why are there pleasures all along the way in the Mahayana and not, apparently, in the Hinayana? What sort of pleasures do you think Nāgārjuna has in mind?

Alaya: Is it this thing about the greater pleasure coming later?

S.: He says "Along the way all pleasures" — not even later; along the way. There is 'gathering roses' all the time.

Uttara: Is it the aspiration?

S.: The aspiration, yes.

A Voice: How about that way, that practice?

S.: You could say that the pleasures are the pleasures of meditation and so on, but the Hinayana also has meditation and presumably the pleasures of meditation. Why should there be all pleasures along the way of the Mahayana and not of the Hinayana?

Uttara: Because of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

S.: It's the more inspiring nature of the Ideal. This is in fact true, I think. The Hinayana speaks more in terms of giving up, of disciplining oneself, of getting rid of craving, and if the goal is mentioned it is often mentioned simply in terms of the cessation of suffering or the cessation of craving, which for most people is not a very inspiring prospect — not in the early stages of their spiritual life, anyway. But the Mahayana has the much more inspiring ideal of the Bodhisattva. If people are confronted by that more inspiring ideal, their whole spiritual life will become much more positive, and therefore much more pleasurable. It is as though during the lifetime of the Buddha, when the Ideal was visibly present in the form of the Buddha himself, he did not have to talk about it very much, but when the Buddha was no longer around the Ideal which the Buddha himself personally represented had to be formulated. The Bodhisattva represented the sort of person that you had to become if you wanted to be like the Buddha.

It's rather like saying, in the case of Sukhavati,<sup>28</sup> "There's going to be a beautiful centre here. All sorts of activities will be going on. There will be a wonderful community living here. There's going to be a big image

and golden roofs and spires." In that way you get really inspired working, even though you are only at the moment actually knocking down a wall. If you know nothing or hear nothing about Sukhavati and what is going on there, what it is to be used for and what it is going to be, — if you are simply told to knock down that wall or plaster that surface or sweep that floor, and you don't know why you are doing it, and there is nothing positive in it, — there is a completely different feel to everything. But if you are doing it for the sake of the realization of a very positive goal, you can work much more happily. It becomes pleasure all the way, all pleasure! If you think, "I'm knocking this wall down but there's going to be a better wall in its place, a wall that will end up as the shrine room," what then?

So the positive approach, the positive ideal, seems always more than a negative one. In fact, a negative ideal is almost a contradiction in terms. It is as though in the Bodhisattva Ideal the Mahayana had to create something which would take the place of the actual presence of the Buddha himself, and produce that sort of effect.

## 5 The Creation of a Myth

from Questions and Answers on The Bodhisattva Ideal, Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1984

Sangharakshita: I was trying to think of a modern myth. I am afraid I could only think of negative ones (which is a bit significant), but they might give us a due. What about that myth of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion?* (*Silence.*) You must have heard of them. (*Laughter.*) You've all heard of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is a very unpleasant mental state which during this century has had all sorts of unpleasant consequences. It's based on certain beliefs about the Jews, beliefs which cannot be rationally substantiated. The anti-Semitic sentiment created a myth, and that myth found embodiment in a document (a forged document, as is now known) called *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. These Protocols are supposed to be a report of the discussions and resolutions which took place at a meeting held somewhere in Europe by various influential Jews. The myth goes that, towards the end of the last century, there was a gathering at some secret place of a number of influential Jews and their topic of discussion was how to enslave and dominate the entire Gentile world. And this document, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* – Zion meaning Jewry – purports to record their discussions, decisions and so on. Copies of this document in the form of a little book are still available; it has gone into scores and scores of editions. It's still in print in Britain and it is still being circulated by anti-Semitic groups. This was their myth! So do you begin to see how it works? Why did they produce this myth? They spun this myth out of their fear and hatred of the Jews. Their fear and hatred projected itself into this pseudo-historical form in order to justify their feelings about the Jews. This is a negative example from modern times; no doubt there are positive ones that we could find.

It would seem that you produce a myth when you have very strong feelings about something. Those strong feelings are not adequately supported by the existing state of affairs, by the existing facts. So you project them in such a form that they are or they seem to be supported by the existing state of affairs. Do you see what I mean? So, bearing in mind that this is a sort of negative example and that there are many positive examples, go back to the time of the Buddha, go back to those Mahayana Buddhists. What do you think they were doing? What was happening?

Vessantara: Out of their sheer positive emotion... That emotion wasn't adequately expressed in the rational teaching that had come down to them, therefore they felt ...

S.: Yes. They felt a need to create a myth. But in their case, this myth reflected not only their own emotional state but was able also to reflect something of the higher truths of Buddhism itself. Therefore one might say that it wasn't a question of the Buddhists learning to produce myths; it wasn't really a rational process. (Not that it was an irrational process in the modern sense.) They created the myths out of their own inner emotional spiritual needs. They simply *had* to believe in that sort of Buddhism, the sort of Buddhism that was represented by those myths ... It had become a spiritual necessity for them. They couldn't nourish themselves, so to speak, on the aridities of the Abhidharma – as they saw the Abhidharma. So one isn't to think that the Mahayanists decided on rational grounds that 'it was about time we had a bit of myth in Buddhism'. Don't forget that the myths were not created out of thin air; they had something to go by. There were elements even in the Hinayana itself from which they were able to create and enlarge their own myth. Perhaps there were oral elements going back to the time of the Buddha himself and the Buddha's own teaching. So this is what I think happened.

Mike Shaw: It sounds like a process that almost happened of its own accord.

S.: Yes, it is certainly a process in which a number of people took part. I think one is not to imagine individuals as producing myths. It does seem that a number of people collectively produce myths — if 'produce' is the right word.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think that the Mahayana produced those myths at the end of the Hinayana phase?

S.: I don't think that you can think in terms of a Hinayana phase sharply ending and then a Mahayana phase abruptly beginning. They did overlap; and no doubt there were semi-Mahayanists in the midst of the Hinayana. If you look at the history of Buddhism you find that the older schools exhibit certain Mahayanistic features and are clearly pointing in the direction of the Mahayana.

Kamalasila: How do we engage in that process?

S.: I think the answer is: we don't know. But it is quite clear that it all starts with, or at least is very closely bound up with, a strong feeling which is not satisfied by our current experience or the existing situation. A myth suggests — and I am using the word 'myth' in the way that we have been using it — something which a number of people need to bring into existence. The creation of a myth, it would seem, is the way in which a number of people enable themselves to bring into concrete existence something which is not as yet there.

Prasannasiddhi: I'm wondering about the first split a hundred and forty years after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*. Perhaps the Mahāsaṅghikas had that mythical element present in their tradition right from that point.

S.: We do know that the Mahāsaṅghikas had a canon of their own, corresponding to the Pali Tipiṭaka. As far as we know they did not have their own Abhidharma Piṭaka, but they certainly had traditions corresponding to the Sutta Piṭaka and the Vinaya Piṭaka of the Theravadins. We have some portions of that literature actually surviving in the original Sanskrit. It may be that the Mahāsaṅghikas Canon did contain a larger proportion of mythic elements than the corresponding canon of the Theravadins. We don't really know. According to some traditions there was current among the Mahāsaṅghikas a text dealing with Wisdom which may have been a precursor of the Perfection of Wisdom texts; that's all that we really know. However, there are, for instance, the Lokottaravādins who are regarded as an off-shoot or sub-school of the Mahāsaṅghikas. We have their *Mahāvastu*, and that is a work which consists almost entirely of

legendary and mythic material. That may be of some significance; but how significant we don't know because we have so little surviving Mahāsaṅghikas literature.

Vessantara: Suppose an incident takes place and that incident is then recounted again and again from one person to another over a long period of time. It follows two chains: one is a chain of lawyers who are concerned to preserve the evidence of things, the events as they happened; but the other is a chain of storytellers who feel quite free to embellish and add to the story and to change it for their audience. Could it be that some of the Mahayana sutras started as descriptions of incidents in the historical Buddha's career, but then got embellished and added to and transposed...?

S.: That is quite possible. One can see this kind of process actually happening within the Pali Canon itself, because the Pali Canon consists of material of apparently different dates or at least of a different strata of material. For instance, in the *Mahā-parinibbāṇa Suttanta*<sup>29</sup> there is an episode in which Ānanda asks the Buddha if he is really going to gain *parinirvāṇa* in the little wattle-and-daub township of Kusinārā. Could he not attain his *parinirvāṇa* in a more distinguished place? Then, what does the Buddha say? He says, "Don't say that Ānanda. Formerly this was the capital of a very great kingdom, a great king lived here," etc. In that same Dīgha Nikāya which includes the *Mahā-parinibbāṇa Suttanta* you find a sutta called the *Mahā-Sudassana-suttanta*. This is quite clearly a greatly amplified version, almost along Mahayanistic lines with lots of imagery, of that single paragraph in the *Mahā-parinibbāṇa Suttanta*. So you can see the process beginning in the context of the Theravada Canon itself. It is very likely that that process did happen with regard to the Hinayana and the Mahayana. You could say the *Sukhāvatī Vyūha Sūtras* carry on from the *Mahā-Sudassana-suttanta*, because their imagery is very similar. There are references to rows of jewel trees and so on. Where all that imagery comes from, that is another fascinating question indeed! It doesn't seem it comes from India ... but that would take us too far afield.

So these are really the sort of things one needs to go into if one is going to study Buddhist literature and especially the Pali Canon, not only critically but also with a feeling for its real spiritual import. If you asked a modern Theravadin, "What about the *Mahā-Sudassana-suttanta*? ", he would say, "Ah, well, that's just a bit of legend, you can't take that too seriously." He wouldn't give it a further thought. But it isn't really as simple a matter as that. The Dīgha Nikāya itself is quite interesting in this connection because there is a certain amount of mythical or legendary-cum-mythical material in this Dīgha Nikāya of the Theravadins themselves. They don't utilize that material, they are not particularly interested in it. The modern Theravadins, at least, are certainly far from realizing its spiritual significance. They are interested only in the rational elements.

Kamalasila: In your lecture 'History versus Myth in Man's Quest for Meaning',<sup>30</sup> in the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* series, you refer to the realm of myth as the whole realm of undefined meanings ...

S.: That is to say, meanings which are not exhausted by rational definition. The emotional overtones are, as it were, left over because rational definition cannot capture them.

Kamalasila: The idea of 'the FWBO myth' seems to refer to the kind of indescribable pattern which is nevertheless clearly felt and understood by a number of individuals. Is this how you see it; if so, would you say that for us to tune into this is essential for the survival of Buddhism? If so, is there anything specific you can recommend that would make this tuning-in most likely? For example, just how important is knowledge of Classical myth and European culture?

S.: There are lots of people who know all about Classical myths and European culture, but they know about them in a purely academic way. Clearly it is not enough to know about them: one must be moved by them. One must start actually to enter that world, in the sense of becoming a part of that world and living in that world. I think it is quite difficult to explain in rational terms exactly how one does this.

One of the difficulties that we have in these modern times is that we know the *theory* of everything so well. Often the fact that you know the theory gets in the way of you actually practising or experiencing something, because the fact that you know the theory interferes with the actual experience of whatever it is a theory of. But nonetheless, I am not hopeless that an FWBO myth — I won't say will be created, [because] I'm quite sure that an FWBO myth is being created. I think it sort of peeps out here and there — but I wouldn't like to say what it was! (*Laughter.*) I think the most important factor and the most important element is, or would be, that people have very deep feelings, very profound aspirations, which go beyond their existing situation, in the widest sense, and even beyond the existing world situation. If they *do* have those feelings and those aspirations, eventually there will be a need for them to be projected outwardly in an objective form as a myth. And that myth, or the consciousness of that myth, or the feeling for that myth, on the part of all the people involved in the FWBO, will no doubt contribute to the actual embodiment, in the world in which we live, of whatever it is that that myth represents.

Vessantara: Where can you see that myth peeping out?

S.: Well, for instance, when some people speak about Sukhavati, Sukhavati clearly has overtones for them. So it is not just that particular brick building in East London that they are speaking of...



## Glossary

**Arahant** (Skt.)(Pali Arhat): lit. 'worthy, deserving'. In pre-Buddhist usage Arahant was an honorific title for high officials (cf. 'His Worship'). In the earliest period of Buddhism it was applied to all ascetics (see, for instance, *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.73) but only later began to acquire the precise meaning of one who gains Enlightenment at a time when the Path to Enlightenment is already known. There was probably an intermediate meaning corresponding to *ārya*, i.e. a Stream-Entrant or beyond. (Early Buddhism does not seem to have distinguished sharply between the different 'grades' of transcendental attainment.) The gradual upgrading of the term to denote one who has achieved the goal of the spiritual life was succeeded by its being given an increasingly narrow and technical meaning within the Hinayana schools. For the Mahayana Arahant applied to those who had attained the lesser (Hinayana) spiritual Ideal of Enlightenment for one's own sake as against that of *Samyaksambodhi* — full and perfect Enlightenment for the sake of all beings — which was the goal of the (Mahayana) Bodhisattva (see, for instance, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra* Ch.II). Since an individualistic spiritual goal is a contradiction in terms the Arahant should be understood as referring to the self-regarding aspect of the spiritual Ideal whilst the Bodhisattva refers to its altruistic dimension. They are not two distinct goals but one goal viewed from different perspectives. Both are integral to the overall Ideal.

**Buddha:** lit. 'One who is awake or who understands'. In pre-and early Buddhist usage Buddha referred to a wise man but came to be used specifically for an individual who has gained Enlightenment (*bodhi*) without benefit of a teacher at a time when the Path to Enlightenment has been lost and who then teaches others. Before this precise meaning was acquired, the term may have applied to *Āryas* in general — Stream-Entrants and beyond (cf. Arahant). Buddha is not a proper name although the historical Buddha, Gautama Śākyamuni, is often referred to as 'The Buddha'. Tradition has it that there have been previous Buddhas in this world-system, each of whose teaching has eventually died out so that the Path to Enlightenment has to be rediscovered by his successor. The Mahayana holds that there are innumerable Buddhas in other world-systems and eventually developed a complex Buddhology which distinguished between the historical, archetypal, and essential natures of a Buddha (*Trikāya* doctrine). Although early Buddhism did not distinguish the content of a Buddha's Enlightenment experience from that of an Arahant the two came to be seen as different goals. According to the Mahayana the Bodhisattva's career was directed to the goal of Buddhahood whereas the Hinayana Śrāvaka (disciple) aimed only at Arahantship. This distinction cannot be taken literally and, insofar as both a Buddha and an Arahant are Enlightened the only difference between them can be that the former gains Enlightenment without benefit of a teacher in his last life and that the latter gains Enlightenment at a time when the Dharma is still being taught. The Buddha is, with the Dharma and Sangha, one of the *Tri Ratna* (Three Jewels), the three fundamental Ideals 'Going for Refuge' (commitment) to which makes one a Buddhist.

**Dharma** (Pali *Dhamma*): lit. 'that which supports'. 1. Reality — the Truth experienced by the Buddha, i.e. the *content* of the Enlightenment experience. 2. The Teaching — the *expression* of the Enlightenment experience. (These first two meanings are usually distinguished from the next three in Roman script by an initial capital 'D' — Sanskrit script has no capitals.) 3. A phenomenon or thing. In Abhidharma philosophy *dharmas* are the ultimate constituents of the universe, both subjective and objective. 4. An object of the mind sense (Buddhist psychology adds the mind to the usual five senses), an idea, or 'presentation to consciousness'. 5. A state or condition of existence (e.g. the 'Eight *Loka Dharmas*': gain and loss, fame and ill-repute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain). As the second of the *Tri Ratna* (Three Jewels) commitment to which makes one a Buddhist, it is the first two meanings which apply. Dharma may be used simply to refer to Buddhism itself (often in the form *Buddha-dharma*) as the whole collection of teachings and practices which lead to Buddhahood.

**Ideal:** In FWBO usage the Ideal is the highest possible perfection which stands as a model for human aspiration. Only the Transcendental and its embodiments — the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, the Dharma, the Sangha etc. — fully express the Ideal. Buddhism insists that, distant as the Ideal may be, it is attainable by any human being.

**Parinirvāṇa** (Pali. *Parinibbāṇa*): lit. 'complete or final Nirvana'. When a Buddha, having gained Enlightenment during his earthly life, - dies he is said to enter *parinirvāṇa*. Since he has broken all the fetters which bind him to mundane states he will not take rebirth in any form. This does not mean that a Buddha becomes extinct after his *parinirvāṇa*. The Buddha refused to explain whether a Buddha existed after death or not, or both or neither (see, for instance, *Cūla-māluṇkyāsutta*, Majjhima Nikāya I 426). In other words, the Buddha's nature after his *parinirvāṇa* cannot be expressed using any of our usual categories of thought. '*The Parinirvāṇa*' often refers specifically to the *parinirvāṇa* of the historical Buddha, Gautama Śākyamuni.

**Pūjā** (Pali. and Skt.): lit. 'worship'. *Pūjā* may refer to worship in general but most often applies to a devotional ceremony, usually before a shrine on which is an image of one or more Buddhas and/or Bodhisattvas, during which verses will be recited expressive of devotion to and reverence for the *Tri Ratna* (Three Jewels) and offerings of flowers, candles, and incense will be made. Worship in Buddhism is not directed to a god but to the Ideal and its embodiments. *Pūjā* helps to strengthen and extend feelings of aspiration and commitment by allowing them expression in a beautiful and meaningful form. Within the FWBO two liturgies are used: a longer 'Sevenfold Puja', which is taken from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva, an eighth century Indian Buddhist poet and thinker, and a shorter 'Basic Puja', composed by the Venerable Sangharakshita. Puja is performed regularly at FWBO Centres, communities and retreats.

**Samyaksambodhi** (Pali. *Sammāsambodhi*): lit. 'full and perfect Enlightenment'. *Samyaksambodhi* is the goal towards which the Bodhisattva moves on the attainment of which he will become a Buddha at a time when the Dharma has died out, establishing his own *buddha-kṣetra* (lit. buddha-field), a world-system within which he has spiritual responsibility. This goal is contrasted with that of the *Pratyeka-Buddha*, who gains Enlightenment on his own initiative but does not teach, and the Arahant, who gains Enlightenment under the dispensation of a Buddha. The goal of *Samyaksambodhi* represents the transcendence of a one-sided and individualistic view of human development.

**Theravāda:** lit. 'School or Doctrine of the Elders'. The only remaining representative of the Hinayana schools of mediaeval India. The school was preserved in Sri Lanka whence it spread to Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos in which countries it is still extant. The Pali Tipiṭaka is the canon of this school, containing much very early material.

**Yāna** (Pali and Skt.): lit. 'vehicle'. The term originally denoted the Path to Enlightenment in general (in the Pali Canon reference is made to *Brahma-yāna*, the 'Perfect Vehicle', *Dhamma-yāna*, the 'Vehicle of Truth', and *Eka-yāna*, the 'One Vehicle'). It later came to mean particular Paths to Enlightenment within the Dharma as a whole. Different sets of *yānas* have been formulated at various times. The most well-known is that comprising Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, the 'Little', 'Great', and 'Thunderbolt' or 'Diamond' vehicles to Enlightenment. In the first instance these represent three distinct phases in the development of Buddhism in India, each emerging successively out of its predecessor during 500 year periods, starting at the time of the Buddha's death. From this point of view they are simply the forms that the Dharma took in different epochs. Thus the Buddhists of Sri Lanka and South East Asia are heirs to the first, Hinayana phase, those of China, Japan, and Korea to the Mahayana phase (with some Vajrayana influence), and the Tibetans

to the full Vajrayana tradition. By the Mahayana and Vajrayana the three vehicles are also regarded as phases in the spiritual life itself, the Hinayana being the phase of ethical observance and psychological purification wherein the goal is personal salvation, the Mahayana that of metaphysical insight and altruistic desire to work for the salvation of all beings, the Vajrayana that of the realization of Buddhahood in this lifetime by magico-yogic means. The Mahayana regards itself as superseding the Hinayana by adding a higher goal than that of personal Enlightenment — Supreme Enlightenment for the sake of all beings (*Samyaksambodhi*). The Vajrayana conceives of itself as the highest level of the Mahayana. Modern Buddhists should perhaps beware of taking literally traditional doctrinal categories which have developed without benefit of historical perspective or scientific literary scholarship. There is but one Path to Enlightenment (*Ekayāna* — so called in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra*) although that Path may take many forms and may be viewed from different perspectives according to temperament or stage of spiritual evolution.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> FWBO Newsletter no. 3, Jan. 1969

<sup>2</sup> 'Simśapā-sutta', Saṃyutta Nikāya v. 437

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of the term see Dayal, H., *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi 1975

<sup>4</sup> The *Dhammapada* is one of the oldest books of the Pali Canon and is found in the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Sutta Piṭaka. It contains more than 400 aphorisms attributed to the Buddha, arranged in 26 Chapters. Their powerful and uncompromising statement of basic Buddhist principles makes the *Dhammapada* one of the most popular and important of basic Buddhist scriptures. Versions of the *Dhammapada* have survived in Tibetan and Chinese translations from Sanskrit. For this and other references to Buddhist scriptures see Sangharakshita, *The Eternal Legacy: an Introduction to the Canonical Literature of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the story of Bāhia of the Bark-garment, *Udāna*, i, 10

<sup>6</sup> See Suzuki, D. T., *Studies in Zen*, Rider, London 1957, p. 12

<sup>7</sup> These are all important basic teachings of the Buddha, held in common by all schools. For further information see: Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications; *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse Publications; and 'The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path', *Mitrata* 40-55 and Windhorse Publications.

<sup>8</sup> See *Mahā-parinibbāna Suttanta*, Dīgha Nikāya, ii, 137

<sup>9</sup> Vinaya Piṭaka, *Mahāvagga*, viii, 26. See also Sangharakshita, *A Case of Dysentery*, available on FreeBuddhistAudio, <http://tinyurl.com/kjy8mt3>

<sup>10</sup> See *Therīgāthā* vv. 213-23 for verses sung after she had become an Arahant.

<sup>11</sup> Vinaya Piṭaka, *Cullavaga*, VII

<sup>12</sup> Dīgha Nikāya, i, 49

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, *Mahā-govinda*, *Mahā-samaya*, and *Sakka-pañha Suttantas*, Dīgha Nikāya, XIX-XXI

<sup>14</sup> Warder, A. K., *Indian Buddhism*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi 1980. For a brief account see Conze, E., *A Short History of Buddhism*, Allen & Unwin, London 1980, pp. 33-5

<sup>15</sup> Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications, Ch. 2

<sup>16</sup> *Cūllavaṃsa*, Ch. 78, 21ff

<sup>17</sup> 'Irreversibility' will be explained fully in *Mitrata* 68, 'The Bodhisattva Heirarchy'. For present purposes, the Irreversible Bodhisattva is one in whom the essential Bodhisattva spirit of striving to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all beings has become so powerful that he cannot slip back from it. In the same way, in the Hinayana context, the Stream-Entrant has gained an Insight so decisive that it cannot be lost.

<sup>18</sup> See *Mitrata* 50: *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path*, 'Perfect Effort I', Oct. 1984, p. 14

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<sup>19</sup> The arising of the Bodhicitta will be dealt with fully in *Mitrata* 58: 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart'. The Bodhicitta is the essential spirit of the Bodhisattva which makes him a Bodhisattva. Its arising marks the commencement of his career. Irreversibility takes place at a much higher stage.

<sup>20</sup> See Session Three of Questions and Answers on the Bodhisattva Ideal from The Pre-Ordination Course for Men, 1984, held in Tuscany, Italy.

<sup>21</sup> See Sangharakshita, *Levels of Going for Refuge*, available on FreeBuddhistAudio,  
<http://tinyurl.com/ntap8pw>

<sup>22</sup> Sangharakshita, *The Bodhisattva: Evolution and Self-transcendence*, Windhorse, London 1983

<sup>23</sup> See Sangharakshita, *Going for Refuge*, Dhammadmeha 12, Triratna Grantha Mala, Pune 1983

<sup>24</sup> Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications, Ch. III sect. Vii

<sup>25</sup> Sangharakshita, *The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism* series, available on FreeBuddhistAudio,  
<http://tinyurl.com/ob4nq8o>

<sup>26</sup> See Guenther, Herbert V., *Philosophy & Psychology in the Abhidharma*, Shambhala, Berkeley & London 1976, pp. 202-3

<sup>27</sup> See Sangharakshita, 'The Universal Perspective of Mahayana Buddhism', available on FreeBuddhistAudio  
<http://tinyurl.com/nt9egfe>

<sup>28</sup> The London Buddhist Centre & Sukhavati Men's Community — at that time still in process of conversion from a derelict former fire station by a team of Order Members, Mitras, and Friends.

<sup>29</sup> Ch. V, 17

<sup>30</sup> Sangharakshita, 'History versus Myth in Man's Quest for Meaning', available on FreeBuddhistAudio,  
<http://tinyurl.com/npyobfl>