

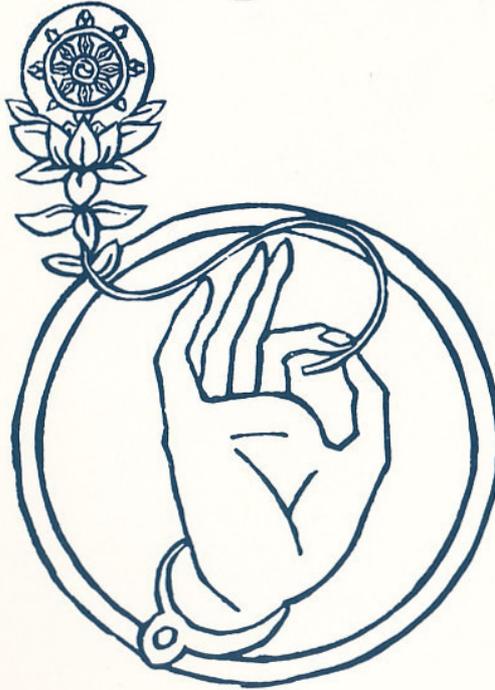
M · I · T · R · A · T · A



# THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

I

'Masculinity' & 'Femininity'  
in the Spiritual Life



Series No. 9  
FEBRUARY 1987

**Mitrata 64 February 1987**

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 the Bodhisattva Sarva-nīvaraṇa-vīśkambhin or 'he who destroys the hindrances'. His right hand is shown here holding the lotus flower with the Wheel of the Dharma resting on it. He holds his left hand in the *kāruṇa mudrā*, which is directed against the forces of evil.

# THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

## 5. 'Masculinity' and 'Femininity' in the Spiritual Life –

### Part 1

#### Contents

Editorial .....	3
Lecture.....	4
Seminar Extracts.....	15
1 Flies at Breakfast Time .....	15
2 A Conservationist.....	18
3 Low Level Energy .....	20
4 All or Nothing.....	22
5 Can We be Hurt by Being Receptive?.....	24
6 What We Need is Stamina! .....	25
Glossary .....	27
Notes .....	28

\*Indicates refer to Glossary

## Editorial

*Just as a blind man  
Discovering a jewel in a heap of rubbish ...*

In this verse from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* Śāntideva describes the arising of the Bodhicitta for which, apparently, an incredible coincidence of conditions is necessary.

However, in our exploration of the Bodhisattva Ideal no coincidence is necessary. All we need is receptivity to listen and vigour to keep us going. We are now halfway through our journey, halfway through the present series of *Mitrata* and halfway through our consideration of the 'Six Perfections'. We have come this far due to our response to the Buddha's vision, the Venerable Sangharakshita's teaching, and our own efforts to put them into practice!

Already we have chanced across so many jewels. We have seen for ourselves how the Bodhisattva Ideal originated and developed. We have had a glimpse of the Bodhicitta and of its reflection in the Bodhisattva's great Vow. In the last two issues of *Mitrata* we contemplated *dāna* and *śīla* as the altruistic and individualistic aspects of the spiritual life.

Now, with this issue, we are dazzled by the radiance of the jewels of *kṣānti* and *vīrya*. 'Receptivity' and 'vigour' are spiritual qualities which are indeed precious, beautiful, and many-faceted. In an irresistibly attractive fashion the Bodhisattva synthesizes these qualities, encouraging us to develop them within ourselves. Now is the time, we could say, that we have reached the very heart of our journey. The jewels are shining so brightly. And yet, our everyday experience denies their glory; *kṣānti* and *vīrya* appear to oppose each other. It is not easy to be at one and the same time energetically outward-going and also open and receptive, to be both 'masculine' and 'feminine'. But, if we don't believe in mere coincidence and if we want to draw closer to the brilliant jewel of Enlightenment itself, then as the Venerable Sangharakshita concludes, 'What we need is stamina'.

SRIMALA

## Lecture

In the course of this series of lectures we have seen that the Bodhisattva represents a living union of opposites. The Bodhisattva synthesizes the mundane and the Transcendental, synthesizes Wisdom and Compassion. Last week we were concerned with altruism and individualism. We saw that the Bodhisattva synthesizes these opposites too; we saw that the Bodhisattva embodies both altruism and individualism. Today we are concerned with another very important pair of opposites and with the way in which the Bodhisattva synthesizes these. Today we are concerned with 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in the spiritual life.

In the title of this lecture on the printed programme you will have noticed that the words 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are in single inverted commas. This indicates that we are not to take these terms too literally: we are to take them in a more metaphorical sense. How they are really to be understood in this context we shall see in due course.

This evening we are still concerned with the establishment aspect of the Bodhicitta; in other words, we are still concerned with the practice of the 'Six *Pāramitās*'.<sup>1</sup> Last week we dealt with *dāna*, Giving, and *śīla*, Uprightness, the first two *pāramitās*. This week we are dealing with *kṣānti*, Patience, and *vīrya*, Vigour, the third and the fourth *pāramitās*. It is these which represent, within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, the 'masculine' and 'feminine' aspects of the spiritual life — or, represent the active and the passive poles of the Bodhisattva Ideal. *Vīrya* represents the 'masculine' aspect; *kṣānti* represents the 'feminine' aspect. Incidentally, in the ancient Indian languages, in a compound of this sort, the feminine usually comes first. For instance, in Pali and Sanskrit one always says *mātā-pitara*, 'mother and father' — one never says 'father and mother'. In English it is very often the opposite. Today we are following the Indian order and are dealing first with *kṣānti*, then with *vīrya*. After that we shall try to see in what way *vīrya* represents the more 'masculine' aspect and *kṣānti* the more 'feminine' aspect in the spiritual life.

*Kṣānti* is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful words in the whole vocabulary of Buddhism. It combines quite a number of associated meanings; no single English word is sufficient to do justice to the richness of meaning which the word *kṣānti* contains. Literally, *kṣānti* means 'patience', 'forbearance'. But it also includes the idea of gentleness or docility, even the idea of humility. Sometimes we say that humility is not a Buddhist virtue, but we mean humility in the more artificial, self-conscious sense. In this connection, there is a little story about Mahatma Gandhi. When he started one of his ashrams in India he drew up a list of all the virtues which the inmates were supposed to practise. Right at the head of the list he put the virtue of humility. Someone pointed out to him that if you practised humility self-consciously, then it was not real humility and your practice was hypocritical. So Gandhi crossed it out and wrote at the bottom of the list 'all the virtues are to be practised in a spirit of humility' — which was a rather different thing. If one takes humility in the right sense — as an unselfconscious self-abnegation of spirit, or as an unawareness of self — then one can include humility also as part of the connotation of *kṣānti*. *Kṣānti* also contains very definite overtones of love, even of compassion, of tolerance and acceptance, and receptivity. On the negative side, *kṣānti* covers such things as absence of anger and absence of the desire for retaliation and revenge.

It is not very difficult to understand from these facts what kind of spiritual attitude *kṣānti* represents. Generally speaking, we may say that it represents, within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, the antidote to anger. In other words, it is a form of love. You may remember that *dāna*, giving, the first of the *pāramitās*, represented, within the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, the antidote to craving. In the same way, *kṣānti*, patience, forbearance, or love, within the context of the same Bodhisattva Ideal, is the antidote to anger.

There is a lot that one can say about *kṣānti* — as one can in fact about all the *pāramitās* — but I propose to discuss in this lecture just the three principal aspects of *kṣānti*: firstly, *kṣānti* as forbearance; secondly, *kṣānti* as tolerance; and thirdly, *kṣānti* as spiritual receptivity. I am going to depart from my usual custom by introducing each aspect with a story — the story is not going to come in the middle or at the end, but right at the beginning. This will serve to remind us that *kṣānti* is not something to be theorized about or

speculated about, but is essentially something to be practised in our everyday life, as in fact we shall see a little later on with the help of a verse from the *Dhammapada*.

First of all, *kṣānti* as forbearance. *Kṣānti* in this sense is illustrated by a story from the life of the Buddha himself. This story is found in the *Sūtra of Forty-two Sections*. (This sutra is historically of considerable importance. It was the first Buddhist text ever to be translated into the Chinese language. We now no longer have the Sanskrit — or perhaps the Pali — original of the sutra ; we have only this Chinese translation.) One of the earlier sections relates the following story about the Buddha.

The Buddha, we are told, was going about as usual, preaching or going for alms, when he happened to encounter somebody, probably a brahmin, who for some reason was not happy with him. The Buddha was not universally popular in his day; quite a lot of people did not like what the Buddha was doing — enticing people away from their wives and families, putting them on the spiritual path, making them think about Nirvana\* instead of about making money. On this occasion, this person who met the Buddha straight away started to abuse him: he started to abuse the Buddha with all the words in his vocabulary. But the Buddha did not say anything at all: he just waited for the man to stop. After five minutes of uninterrupted abuse, the man just stopped — he got out of breath, apparently. So the Buddha very quietly asked him, "Is that all?" The man was a bit taken aback and said, "Yes, that's all." So then the Buddha said, "Let me now ask you a question. Suppose you have a friend, who one day brings you a present. But suppose you don't want to accept that present. If you don't accept it, to whom does it belong?" The man said, "If I don't accept it, it belongs to the person who wanted to give it to me." The Buddha then said, "You have tried to make me a present of this abuse. I decline to accept your present. Take it, it belongs to you." <sup>2</sup>

This is how the Buddha behaved. However, I think you will agree, upon a little reflection, that this is not how we, in similar situations, usually behave. If we are abused we retaliate, either by making a similar retort or in some other way. At best we keep the abuse burning in our mind and take revenge later.

The great teacher, Śāntideva, in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, gives some very useful hints on how we are to emulate the Buddha's example and check the arising of anger. Śāntideva says that if someone comes along and beats you with a stick, though that is indeed a very painful experience, nevertheless you should not straight away fly into a rage. He says that you should reflect on, and try to understand, what has actually happened. If you analyze it, all that has happened, when you are beaten with a stick, is that two things have come together: the stick and your body. The painful experience arises on the coming together of these two things. <sup>3</sup>

Śāntideva goes on to ask who is responsible for this coming together and therefore who also is responsible for this painful experience. The other person, the enemy, has admittedly taken the stick to you and so is partly responsible, but you, Śāntideva argues, have brought the body (the body comes from your previous *saṃskāras*,<sup>4</sup> from your ignorance and activities based upon ignorance of previous lives); the enemy provides the stick but you provide the body. Because you provide the body, you are equally responsible with the enemy for the painful experience. The enemy has put the stick there, it is true, but you have put the body there, so why should you get angry with him for his stick being there and not with yourself for your body being there? Śāntideva has a number of reflections of this sort, which help us to practise forbearance.

There is more however to practising forbearance than practising forbearance towards people expressing harsh words or people with sticks. In Buddhist literature the objects towards which forbearance is to be practised are sometimes classified into three groups.

First of all, there is nature: the material universe that surrounds us. We have to practise forbearance especially towards nature in the form of the weather. We are rarely forbearing towards the weather: it is always either too hot or too cold, or there is too much wind, or too much rain, or not enough sunshine. We also need to practise forbearance towards what are known in law as 'acts of God': natural disasters beyond human control, like fire, flood, earthquake, and lightning.

Then secondly, we are to practise forbearance towards our own body, especially when our body is sick or suffering in any other way. We should not get angry with the body; we should not start beating 'brother ass' — it is not his fault. After all, we have brought the body here; it is our own responsibility. Some people of course find it difficult to practise forbearance towards their body: they get a little headache sometimes, but from the fuss they make — expressing their need for sympathy and so on — one might think that they were undergoing a major operation without anaesthetic.

The fact that we should practise forbearance towards physical suffering does not mean that we should not try to alleviate suffering, whether it is our own suffering or the suffering of other people. But we should at least realize that there is always a residue which cannot be relieved, which we simply have to bear with patience.

Even if there is no sickness, sooner or later come old age and, eventually, death. In the West many people rebel against the thought that old age must come creeping inevitably upon us. They rebel and refuse to grow old gracefully. This is sometimes quite tragic. In the East, especially in the Buddhist countries, it is different: people there very often look forward to old age. They think, or even say, "How wonderful, in ten years time I'll be sixty." In many parts of the East they think that old age is the happiest time of life. It is the happiest time of life because in old age all the passions of youth have subsided — there is no emotional turbulence; one has gained experience and with that experience perhaps just a little wisdom; one has fewer and fewer responsibilities — one hands over everything to the younger generation; one has little to do; one has plenty of time for reflection, even for meditation. In the East people do very much look forward to their old age; but even in the East it very often is not easy for people to accept the fact of death. Whether in the East or West, the fact of death is, for most people, a very sobering consideration. Nevertheless there is no alternative: whether we like it or not, one day death will come. One is therefore advised to practise forbearance towards the dissolution, or the idea of the dissolution, one day, of the physical body.

Thirdly and lastly, one is advised to practise forbearance towards other people. It is said to be much more difficult to be forbearing towards other people than towards the weather or even towards one's body. Other people can be very difficult indeed. This is perhaps why someone once said that hell is other people — heaven is other people too, but that is another story.

We can perhaps already see that the Buddhist ideal of forbearance is a very sublime one. In Buddhist literature, even in Buddhist life, the ideal is sometimes carried to what we in the West would regard as extremes. For instance, there is the Buddha's parable of the saw.<sup>5</sup> The Buddha one day called all his disciples together and said, "Monks, suppose you were going through the forest, and suppose you were seized by robbers who were highwaymen, and suppose they should take a sharp, two-handed saw and saw you limb from limb, if in your mind there arose the least thought of ill-will, you would not be my disciple."

This is the sort of extreme to which this ideal could — perhaps should — be carried. Practising forbearance is not just a question of stoical endurance; it is not just a question of gritting your teeth and bearing it, while feeling angry and resentful inside. The Buddha's teaching makes it clear that forbearance is essentially a positive mental attitude, essentially an attitude of love. This fact is very well brought out in a passage from the Majjhima Nikāya (*The Collection of Middle Length Sayings of the Buddha*). In this passage the Buddha, again addressing his disciples, says, 'When men speak evil of ye, thus must ye train yourselves: "Our heart shall be unwavering, no evil word will we send forth, but compassionate of others' welfare will we abide, of kindly heart without resentment; and that man who thus speaks will we suffuse with thoughts accompanied by love, and so abide: and, making that our standpoint, we will suffuse the whole world with loving thoughts, far-reaching, wide-spreading, boundless, free from hate, free from ill-will, and so abide." Thus, brethren, must ye train yourselves.'<sup>6</sup>

On this same subject there is a highly significant half line in the *Dhammapada*, '*Khantī paramam tapo titikkhā*<sup>7</sup>, which is usually translated as 'patience is the greatest penance', or 'forbearance is the greatest asceticism'. *Tapo* (or *tapa*) means 'penance', 'austerity', 'self-mortification', 'asceticism'. There were lots of these practices in ancient India. If you reduced your food to a few grains of rice a day, that was an

asceticism. If you meditated while hanging head downwards from a tree, that was an asceticism. If you stood with one hand in the air and kept it there for months until it withered, that also was an asceticism. There was a famous asceticism called the *pañca agni tāpasya*, 'the asceticism of the five fires'. To practise this, you kindled four fires at the four cardinal points. When they were blazing, you sat and meditated in the middle, with the sun, the fifth fire, directly overhead.

All these forms of asceticism, self-mortification and torture were very popular in the Buddha's day (there are plenty of references to them in the Pali scriptures) and were regarded by many people as means to salvation. They believed that the more the flesh was mortified, the finer, the purer, the more enlightened the spirit became. But the Buddha did not agree with this; he had tried it all for six years and had found that it did not work. So in this little verse he says that forbearance is the greatest asceticism. It is as though he is saying, "If you want to practise asceticism, there is no need to seek out special opportunities for it (no need, for example, to sit in between five fires). Just go back to ordinary everyday life and practise forbearance in the midst of *that*. You could not have a more difficult asceticism than practising forbearance in the trials of everyday life." So in that sense *kṣānti* is the greatest of all asceticisms.

Secondly, we come to *kṣānti* as tolerance. You may know that the Mongols were converted to Buddhism in the thirteenth century by a great Tibetan spiritual master called 'Phags.pa. 'Phags.pa was the head at that time of the Shakyapa School, one of the four great schools of Tibetan Buddhism (the other schools are the Gelugpa, the Nyingmapa, and the Kagyupa Schools).<sup>8</sup> 'Phags.pa was a man of great ability and great influence. He was the guru, the spiritual teacher, of the great Kubla Khan, who was emperor of China as well as Khan of Mongolia. In gratitude to 'Phags.pa for his teaching, Kubla Khan gave him the secular jurisdiction over the whole of Tibet. At the same time Kubla Khan wanted to pass a law and apply it throughout his domains compelling all Buddhists to follow the Shakyapa teaching. Now you might think that 'Phags.pa would have been very pleased that there was going to be such a law, but that was not the case. 'Phags.pa in fact dissuaded Kubla Khan from passing the law. He told the emperor that everybody should be free to follow their own conscience, to follow that form of Buddhism which they liked best.

This is an example of tolerance. This tolerant attitude is the attitude of all Buddhists everywhere and has been the attitude of all Buddhists at all times. If there have ever been any exceptions, they have been very few indeed. There might have been two or three, at the most four, very minor exceptions in two thousand five hundred years of Buddhist history.

We cannot help reflecting in what striking contrast this all stands with the history, in the West, of Christianity. If one goes through the history of the Church, especially during the Early and Middle Ages, one cannot help being — I will say — revolted, because there are so many instances of intolerance, of fanaticism, of persecution. These things seem to be the rule, not the exception. We have only to think, for example, of the ruthless destruction of practically the whole pagan culture of Western Europe. We have only to think of the wholesale massacre of heretics, like the Cathars, the Albigenses, the Waldenses.<sup>9</sup> We have only to think of the sad and sorry story of the Inquisition and the Crusades and, later on, the witch burnings. We have only to recollect that all these things represented the official, declared policy of the whole body of the Church and that everybody, from the Pope downwards, was involved — even, in some cases, some of those who were considered to be saints. If we go through the history of the Church and attend to this particular aspect of it, we cannot help sometimes getting the impression of something deeply abhorrent, even deeply pathological. Some people do say that all this is an aberration; they say that it does not represent real Christianity. That may be so. However, one may certainly observe that there are quite strong traces of intolerance even in the Gospels themselves. In fact, we may say that Christianity seems to have been intolerant right from the very beginning, and continues so, in the vast majority of cases, right down to the present day, the only difference between the past and the present being that nowadays the Church has very little secular power and therefore cannot do very much harm to its opponents.

It would seem, in fact, that intolerance, exclusiveness, and a tendency towards persecution and fanaticism are characteristics of all forms of monotheism; monotheistic religions tend to be of this nature. Not only Christianity, but Judaism and Islam too are very intolerant. As I mentioned in last week's lecture, if I wanted to go and preach Buddhism in a Muslim country I simply could not do it. If I attempted it I would probably

pay very dearly for it. Muslims do not have a tradition of tolerance of other religions.

Buddhism, on the other hand, is non-theistic: it does not believe in a personal god, it does not believe in a supreme being, it does not believe that religion consists in faith in, or submission to, such a supreme being. According to the Buddhist teaching, each and every individual is responsible for his or her own spiritual destiny. But you cannot be responsible, you cannot be expected to be responsible, without freedom. Therefore in Buddhism everybody is encouraged to choose and to follow, in their own way, their own path. This is why there are many different forms of Buddhism. These different forms are not sects; they are not rival bodies; they do not all claim exclusive possession of Buddhist truth. The different forms of Buddhism represent particular aspects of the one total tradition.

Though Buddhism is tolerant, not only towards all other forms of Buddhism itself but towards all other religions, it is not vague. Sometimes you find that individuals are tolerant, but they are very vague and woolly: they mix everything up and don't distinguish, don't divide, don't analyze. But Buddhism is not like this. In Buddhism there is no pseudo-universalism. The teaching of Buddhism is a clear, precise teaching; at the same time, perfect tolerance is practised.

This combination of certainty on the one hand and tolerance on the other is very difficult for the Western mind to understand. We tend, in the West, to think that the more confident you are that you know, the greater your right to impose your views on other people. We tend to think, "I know that this is right and true, therefore I have to bring other people into it, if necessary I have to force them to accept. Why can't they see it? It's their blindness, their foolishness, their stupidity!" But in Buddhism it is not like this. Buddhists are very clear in their understanding of the Buddhist teaching, say, the 'Four Truths', the 'Eightfold Path', Conditioned Co-production,<sup>10</sup> *śūnyatā* — these make up a clear, precise teaching, which has been well formulated intellectually; and those who do believe the teaching believe it *wholeheartedly* — they are fully convinced of its truth; but at the same time, perfect freedom is extended to other people to think differently.

Furthermore the Buddhist does not become agitated, worried or upset at the thought that elsewhere in the world, even in his own environment, there are people who do not accept what he accepts — who do not believe that the 'Noble Eightfold Path' leads to Nirvana, for example — and in fact reject what he accepts. The Buddhist recognizes this fact, sees it quite clearly, but is not disturbed; whereas in the West, if someone does not share our belief, we tend to feel threatened, insecure and undermined, and this results in this fanatical desire to make everybody believe what we believe.

There is much more that could be said on this topic of tolerance, but we do not have any time to pursue it this evening, so we will pass on now to the third aspect of *kṣānti*: *kṣānti* as spiritual receptivity. This time our illustration comes from chapter two of the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra*.<sup>11</sup> This chapter opens with the Buddha surrounded by his disciples: tens of thousands of Arahants<sup>12</sup> and Bodhisattvas. The Buddha is just sitting there, cross-legged, in the midst of the assembly, with his eyes half closed and his hands folded on his lap; he is immersed in very profound meditation. He sits there a long, long time. As it is an assembly of Arahants and Bodhisattvas, they don't become impatient — they don't start fidgeting and coughing — but just sit there along with him, quietly, calmly, also immersed in meditation. When, eventually, the Buddha comes out of meditation, he announces to the assembly that the Ultimate Truth is something very, very difficult to understand, that even if, having seen it himself, he were to explain it, very likely nobody would be able to understand it; he says that it is so profound, so vast and so transcends all human capacity, that no-one will be able to fathom it. Naturally his disciples entreat him to at least try to communicate this Truth to them. Eventually the Buddha agrees and says, "I shall now proclaim to you a further, higher teaching, a more profound teaching than anything that you have heard before, something which, because it is so tremendous and goes so far beyond anything that you have heard before, will make your previous understanding and experience seem childish." When he says this, five thousand of the disciples just walk out. As they leave they murmur among themselves, "Something further? Something higher? Something we haven't understood? Something we haven't realized? Impossible! We know it all already. We have realized all there is to realize. We are 'there'!"

So this represents a very universal human tendency; people think that they have nothing more to learn. It is a tendency that is especially strong, and especially dangerous, in the spiritual life. We think that we have nothing more to learn, that we have taken it all in, that we have got it, that it is all under control. When we think like this, however, we close our minds and become no longer receptive. Of course we are not altogether fools and we say, "Oh yes, I've got a lot more to learn; I know I don't know everything." We say that, but we don't really mean it — in fact we don't really know what we mean by those words. We go on thinking in the same old way; we go on behaving in the same old way; we maintain the same old attitudes.

This receptivity is not just a question of acquiring additional information: it does not mean that having learned all about the Mādhyamika School,<sup>13</sup> one should be open-minded about further historical developments — maybe about the arising of sub-schools. Receptivity means that one should be prepared for a radical change in one's whole mode of being, one's whole way of life, one's whole way of looking at things. And it is this that we are not prepared for; it is this which, in fact, we resist; it is against this that — in order to protect ourselves — we set our defences.

We may say that spiritual receptivity is of supreme importance and that without it spiritual progress cannot be maintained. We should hold ourselves open to the truth just as the flower holds itself open to the sun. We should be ready, if necessary, to give up whatever we have learned so far — that is not easy by any means. We should be prepared to give up whatever we have been, whatever we have become, whatever we are so far — that is still more difficult. By spiritual receptivity, we mean holding ourselves open to those higher spiritual influences, which are streaming through the universe, but with which we are not usually in contact, and against which we usually shut ourselves off.

So much then for *kṣānti* in the senses of forbearance, tolerance, and spiritual receptivity. As I indicated earlier, *kṣānti* represents the 'feminine' aspect of the spiritual life. Now we are going to pass on to *vīrya*, or vigour, the fourth *pāramitā*. This of course represents the 'masculine' aspect of the spiritual life.

The word *vīrya* itself presents us with no difficulties. *Vīrya* means 'masculine potency', 'driving force', 'energy', and 'vigour'. It comes from the same Indo-Aryan root as our own English word, 'virtue', which originally meant 'strength' and also 'virility'. In Buddhist terms, however, *vīrya* has the specific meaning of 'energy in pursuit of the good' (this is how it is defined by Śāntideva). 'Good' here means 'Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings'.

It is important to notice that *vīrya* does not mean just ordinary activity. If you are rushing here and there, being very busy, doing lots of things, you are not necessarily practising *vīrya pāramitā*. Vigour as one of the Buddhist virtues is quite a different thing. In fact, in this connection, it is very interesting to refer to sGam.po.pa's definition of laziness. (sGam.po.pa was a great Kagyupa teacher, who lived in Tibet at about the time of the Norman conquest in this country.) In his *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* sGam.po.pa defines laziness as 'being constantly busy and active in subduing enemies and accumulating money'.<sup>14</sup> You can take 'subduing enemies' as representing politics and 'accumulating money' as representing business. So sGam.po.pa is saying that to engage full time, very energetically, in either politics or business — or both — is simply laziness, however apparently busy you may be: this is not *vīrya* in the Buddhist sense.

This *pāramitā*, *vīrya*, is extremely important, because, in a sense, the practice of all the other *pāramitās* depends upon it: if you want to give, or practise the Precepts, or meditate, you need energy; to practise patience and forbearance you need energy, even if it is negative energy in the form of resistance; if you want to develop Wisdom, you need more energy than ever.

This brings us right up against a very big problem. Let us say that we have a spiritual ideal, an ideal that we want to reach and realize. Let us say that our spiritual ideal is the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. We have of this Ideal a quite clear intellectual understanding: we have read about it, heard about it, understood it in our own minds — we could perhaps give a connected account of it if anybody asked us. We genuinely accept it as our ideal. But, despite our clear intellectual understanding of the Ideal, despite our quite genuine acceptance of it, we do not somehow manage to attain it. In fact, the months and the years, perhaps even the decades, go by, and, though we do still have the Ideal — we are still hanging on to it — we do not seem

to have made any perceptible progress towards it: we feel as though we are just where we were. It is as though we stand at the foot of Mt. Kanchenjunga<sup>15</sup> and look up at the snow peak; then, maybe twenty years later, we are still standing at the same spot, with the peak as distant as ever.

I remember a very — in a way — moving example of this, many years ago in India, when I went along to hear a talk by J. Krishnamurti.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the talk there were questions and answers, and a discussion. In the midst of the discussion one woman got up and said to Krishnamurti, with her voice vibrating with emotion (this often happens in Krishnamurti's meetings), "Sir, we've been following you, and accepting this ideal, and trying to put it into practice for forty years, but, we are just where we were forty years ago. What shall we do about it?" (I forget what he said in reply, though he did have quite a lot to say).

This is the sort of thing that happens. The question arises then: why does this happen, why are we not able to make any progress? After all, we *do* have the Ideal: we are quite clear about it, we know what we have to do, we even make an effort. If this question is put to us, we will most likely reply that we have not been able to progress because we have no strength or energy; we will say, "I could not put the energy into it." In other words, there was no *vīrya*.

Why, then, should there be no energy? Why should there be no drive for the living of the spiritual life? *Actually* we have got plenty of energy; there is no shortage of energy at all. Far from being short of energy, we ourselves are embodiments of energy; we are crystallizations, as it were, of psychophysical, even spiritual, energy. We have a body and a mind: these are made up of energy. We ourselves *are* energy. There is no shortage of energy, but usually our energy is dissipated. Our energy is like a stream which is divided and led away into thousands of channels, so that it loses its force. Our energy flows out over innumerable objects, is dissipated in numberless directions. Only a small part of our energy goes into the spiritual life. The rest of our energy goes into all sorts of other activities that contradict the spiritual life. As a result, we sometimes feel pulled apart: part of our energy is going one way — towards the Ideal; another part is going another way — away from the Ideal. We feel pulled apart and very often — for this reason — exhausted.

The central problem of the spiritual life, we may say, is that of the conservation and unification of our energies. Some of you may recollect that I went into this, some months ago, in the course of a lecture on the Sevenfold Puja, 'Poetry and Devotion in Buddhism'.<sup>17</sup> We saw on that occasion that our energies, especially our emotional energies, are not available for the living of the spiritual life, because they are either blocked within us, or are wasted and leak away, or are too coarse.

We find that our energies are blocked within us for various reasons. Very often our emotional energies are blocked because we have been brought up to repress our emotions, to not show them, to not express them — some people say, of course, that the English are particularly good at this. Then again, our energy becomes blocked if we are compelled to engage in mechanical, routine work, work into which we cannot put our energy (we do not want to give our energy to something in which we are not interested). Then again, our energies petrify if we have no real, positive, creative outlet for them. Again, sometimes emotional energies are dammed up on account of emotional frustrations, emotional dis -appointments, fear of being hurt through the emotions. Again, we find that people's emotional energies become blocked on account of the wrong type of education, such as the orthodox Christian teaching on sex, which must have resulted in the emotional stultification, in the course of history, of tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions, of people. Above all, perhaps, our energy becomes blocked if there is an absence of any real communication with other people. We find that real communication has an energizing, almost an electrifying effect on people. Most people are out of communication with one another, but when they come into communication it is as though a negative and a positive terminal meet and a spark, energy, is produced. In all these ways our emotional energies are blocked, and because they are blocked they are not available for the living of the spiritual life.

Secondly, emotional energies are wasted: they are allowed to just leak away. This happens in a number of different ways, though mainly it happens on account of indulgence in negative emotions. If you indulge in negative emotions, energy drains away from you. The negative emotions include: fear, hatred, anger, ill-

will, antagonism, jealousy (perhaps the most terrifying of all the negative emotions), self-pity, guilt, remorse, anxiety. We in the West tend to regard some of these negative emotions as virtues, but from a Buddhist point of view, they are all negative: if we had the words 'vice' or 'sin' in Buddhism they would certainly apply to all of these. Just cast your mind back over the previous day, over the previous week, and recollect how often you have indulged in fear, or hatred, or jealousy, self-pity, guilt, remorse, anxiety - recollect how often there has been, at the least, a sort of ticking over of the mind about this or that, under the influence of one or other of these emotions. For as long as you have been engaging in these negative emotions, energy has been draining away from you.

Our emotional energies are also wasted through the verbal expressions of negative emotions. In the lecture, 'Poetry and Devotion in Buddhism', I went into these in considerable detail. For instance, there is grumbling. Grumbling just expresses negative emotion, nothing more. Then there is carping criticism — fault finding. And then what I called 'dismal-Jimmyism' — looking on the gloomy side of everything, discouraging people from doing things. And then a rather poisonous expression, gossip, which is usually of course malicious. Then lastly, nagging, which unfortunately is especially common in the domestic circle. All of these are verbal expressions of negative emotions. Through these verbal expressions too, energy is leaking and draining away, and is therefore not available for spiritual purposes.

Thirdly, emotional energy is not available for the living of the spiritual life because it is simply too coarse. Spiritual life requires spiritual energy. We cannot, for instance, meditate with our muscles. The muscles may be very full of energy, may be very strong, but for meditation we require something finer. Ordinary human energy, even ordinary human *emotional* energy, is not available for the spiritual life just because it is too coarse-grained: before it can be used for and by the spiritual life it has to be refined.

There are various ways of resolving blockages of emotional energy, of stopping the waste of emotional energy, and of refining the more coarse emotional energies. If we can resolve the blockages, stop the waste, and refine the coarse energies, then energy will be conserved, will be unified, will just flow forth.

Blockages are resolved through awareness, through introspection. They are resolved through engaging in genuinely creative, or at least productive, work. They are resolved through the stepping up of human communication, if necessary with the help of what we call the 'communication exercises'.<sup>18</sup> We also find that quite a lot of blockages get resolved, as it were spontaneously, in the course of meditation practice.

Waste also is stopped through awareness: through awareness of the fact that one is indulging in negative emotions. Waste is also stopped by cultivating the opposite emotion: love instead of hate, or confidence instead of fear, and so on. As regards the verbal expressions of negative emotions, these just have to be stopped by an act of will. There is nothing else that one can do about them. They do not deserve any better treatment. As I have observed on more than one occasion, if we can only stop talking, if we can only stop not just verbal expressions of negative emotions but all verbal expressions whatsoever, if we can just be silent for a while — a few minutes, a few hours, maybe a few days — we find that energy is accumulated within us. Probably most of you know that if you can spend a day quietly at home, all by yourself, not talking to anyone, you experience an accession of energy. An enormous amount of energy goes out of us simply because we have to talk. By stopping the verbal expressions of negative emotions we save energy, but by stopping also, for a while, all verbal expressions, we begin to feel more calm, more aware, more mindful; and then, gradually, it is as though a fresh clear spring of energy begins to bubble up inside us, pure, virginal, not touched, not tainted, because it has been kept within us and not expressed outwardly in any form.

The coarser emotional energies are refined in two ways: through practices of faith and devotion, e.g. the 'Sevenfold Puja',<sup>19</sup> and also through the fine arts.

As we resolve blockages of energy, stop the waste of energy, refine energy, energy becomes available for the leading of the spiritual life, for the practice of all the Perfections, which the Bodhisattva must practise to attain Buddhahood. There is no division of energies. The Bodhisattva becomes the embodiment of energy. At the same time, there is no hurry, no fuss, no restlessness, or anything of that sort; there is just

smooth, uninterrupted activity for the benefit of all sentient beings. Śāntideva may be quoted again, in this connection. Śāntideva says that the Bodhisattva is like an elephant. (In Indian literature if you are compared with an elephant it is highly complementary. They say, for instance, of a beautiful woman that she walks just like an elephant. This does not mean that she is clumsy or well-built, but that she walks with a slow, graceful, stately movement.) The Bodhisattva is said to be like an elephant, because the elephant, especially the male elephant, is very playful. The male elephant loves to bathe in lotus ponds: he squirts water over himself; he trumpets gaily; he plucks up great bunches of lotus flowers and washes them carefully before eating them. In this way he passes the day very happily. Śāntideva says that the Bodhisattva is just like an elephant, because just as the elephant, as soon as he has finished playing and sporting in one lotus pond, plunges into another, so, with equal delight, the Bodhisattva, as soon as one period of work is finished, plunges into another.<sup>20</sup> I hardly need to remind you that with us it is not like that: if we finish one period of work we like to have a good rest, perhaps a cup of tea, and so on.

Though the Bodhisattva plunges straight from one period of work to the next, he nevertheless does not really think that he is doing anything; he does not think, "I am working." His manifestation of energy is selfless. It is spontaneous activity: it just comes bubbling up, like a fountain; or, like a flower, it naturally unfolds. Sometimes the Bodhisattva's activity is spoken of in the Indian languages as a '*līla*', which means a 'game', a 'sport', a 'play'. Just as a child plays, spontaneously manifesting energy, in the same way the Bodhisattva plays, manifesting the Perfections. Eventually the Bodhisattva plays the great game of Buddhahood and manifests Enlightenment.

This idea of spiritual life being a sort of playfulness, a bubbling up of spiritual, or Transcendental energy is very prominent in some forms of Indian thought and Indian religious life. In this country we tend to take religion very seriously. We have got 'Sabbath faces' and 'Sabbath gloom'. We think that the more serious you are, the more religious you are, and the more religious, the more serious. You never laugh in church! In the East, spiritual life is compared to a game, because it is — in a way — complete in itself, it is self-contained, it does not look beyond itself for its justification. Also the spiritual life is spontaneous; it is free from egotism; it is natural and enjoyable.

So much then for *vīrya pāramitā*, the Perfection of Vigour. Now we have completed our account of both *kṣānti* and *vīrya*, the third and the fourth *pāramitās*. Our account of them has not been exhaustive, but I hope it has at least been sufficient to indicate the specific quality of each of them, and also sufficient to make it clear why one is described as 'masculine' and the other as 'feminine': vigour is clearly the more active, the more assertive, the more creative, and is therefore said to be 'masculine', while patience is the more passive, the more receptive, the more quiescent, and is therefore said to be 'feminine'.

This distinction represents a very important polarity in the spiritual life. We may even say that there are two radically different approaches to the spiritual life. One approach stresses self-help, do-it-yourself, self-exertion. The other approach stresses reliance upon a power outside yourself — in some systems, reliance upon divine grace. One approach represents the attitude of getting up and doing things; the other approach represents the attitude of just sitting there and letting things happen — letting them do themselves, as it were.

In India they have got two rather charming expressions for these two religious attitudes. They say of one that it is the monkey attitude and of the other that it is the kitten attitude. The baby monkey, when it is born, clings with a very tight grip onto its mother's fur. This therefore represents self-reliance (though, admittedly, the mother is moving about carrying it, the baby monkey has to hold on itself with its own strength). The baby kitten, on the other hand, when it is born, is completely helpless. For a while it has to be picked up by the mother, by the scruff of its neck, and carried everywhere. This therefore represents the approach of dependence on another power, reliance on divine grace, and so on.

In the Indian traditions, the first approach, the monkey type of approach, is associated with *jñāna*, wisdom. The wise man is the self-reliant man: he tries to find things out and understand things for himself. But the second approach, the kitten type of approach, is associated with *bhakti*, the path of devotion, which

consists in a feeling of dependence upon some divine power, or divine ideal, superior to oneself.

In Japanese Buddhism, we find that these two different approaches, reliance upon oneself and reliance on some divine power outside oneself, are represented respectively by Zen Buddhism and Shin Buddhism.<sup>21</sup> Zen, as is well known, represents, even stresses, reliance on self-power, *jiriki*, as it is called in Japanese. Whereas the Jōdō Shin Shū represents reliance upon other-power, *tariki*, reliance, in other words, on the spiritual power of Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Eternal Life.

These two approaches, the approach of the baby monkey and the kitten, of the intellectual and the devotee, of reliance upon self-power and reliance on other-power, are generally held to be mutually exclusive: if you follow one path you cannot follow the other; either you depend on your own efforts, or you depend upon another power to do it for you. In fact, Buddhism itself is usually held to be a religion of self-effort as opposed to a religion of self-surrender. But this is not strictly true. In Buddhist literature, we have a number of references to the helpful spiritual influences which emanate from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and which can be felt by those who are receptive to them. They are sometimes called 'grace waves'. This is not like the 'Grace of God' in Christianity, because in Buddhism, of course, there is no God. These spiritual forces arise essentially within oneself, but not within oneself. In other words, they appear to descend from the heights (if you like to call it 'heights') or arise from the depths (if you like to call it 'depths') of which one is not usually aware, not usually conscious, but to which one's awareness can be extended, and which can in a sense be included within one's greatly enlarged 'self'.

The Bodhisattva combines *both* approaches and for this reason practises patience and vigour. He synthesizes the 'masculine' *and* the 'feminine' aspects of the spiritual life. In fact we may say that both approaches are necessary. Sometimes in the course of our spiritual life, as in the course of our worldly life, it is necessary to hang on — for grim death. It is necessary to make an effort. It is necessary to strive, to exert, to struggle. But sometimes also it is necessary to let go, to let things look after themselves, to let them even drift, to let them just happen without one's interference. There is no hard-and-fast rule as to which approach is appropriate at any particular time. Sometimes you have to exert, but on other occasions you have to just let things look after themselves (you may think, "Let whatever is going to be done, be done"). Sometimes one has to adopt one attitude, sometimes the other, according to circumstances. Though there is no hard-and-fast rule, it is safe, very broadly speaking, to assume that a lot of self-effort, a reliance upon self-power, is necessary at the beginning, while later on perhaps, after a great initial effort has been made, one can begin to rely more upon the help, the power, the force, which comes apparently from somewhere outside oneself, or at least from outside one's present conscious self. One cannot start relying — or thinking that one is relying — upon that power prematurely, otherwise one will simply drift in a purely negative sense.

Again there is an Indian illustration. When you leave the shore in a little rowing boat, you first, with a great deal of straining of muscle, perhaps against the current, have to row yourself out into the middle of the river. But then, when you have got there, you can hoist your sail and let your boat be carried along by the breeze. In the same way, a great deal of effort is necessary in the early stages of the spiritual life, but a time comes when you contact forces which in a sense are beyond yourself (in another sense they are a part of your greater self), which begin to carry you along.

Now there is just one more very important point to be made before we close. The active and the passive aspects of the spiritual life have been termed 'masculine' and 'feminine'. I observed at the beginning of this lecture that the use of these terms was more or less metaphorical. At the same time, it must also be said that the use of them is not entirely metaphorical. One may say that there is in fact a real correspondence between biological and psychological masculinity and femininity on the one hand, and spiritual masculinity and femininity on the other. But one must bear in mind that the Bodhisattva combines both. We come therefore to what may appear to some people to be a rather curious statement that the Bodhisattva is what we may describe as psychologically and spiritually bisexual. This means that the Bodhisattva integrates the masculine and the feminine elements at each and every level of his own psychological and spiritual experience.

This fact is reflected very clearly in Buddhist iconography. We find in some representations of the Buddha and of various Bodhisattvas that it is sometimes very hard, from a Western point of view, to distinguish whether the figure is masculine or feminine. I have sometimes had the experience of showing, for instance, an image or a picture of Avalokiteśvara to a friend, who perhaps did not know very much about Buddhism. I would say, "Isn't this a beautiful figure?" and they would say, "Yes, she's lovely". Then I would explain that it was not a female figure but a male figure, and when they looked a little more closely, they would see that it was in fact a male figure, though it seemed to have certain feminine characteristics. This iconographical representation reflects this principle of the psychological and spiritual bisexuality of the Bodhisattva, indeed of the spiritual person in general.

This idea, or even ideal, of psychological and spiritual bisexuality is rather unfamiliar to us in the West. But it was known to the ancient gnostics, one of the heretical sects of early Christianity (the teaching was of course rather quickly stamped out by the Church). There is an interesting passage in a gnostic work known as the Gospel of Thomas. The Gospel of Thomas is one of several gnostic works that we have. The text was discovered in Egypt only in 1945. It consists of one hundred and twelve sayings attributed to Jesus after his resurrection. In Saying 23, Jesus is represented as saying,

*When you make the two one,  
and make the inside like the outside,  
and the outside like the inside,  
and the upper side like the under side,  
and (in such a way) that you make the man  
(with) the woman a single one,  
in order that the man is not the man and the  
woman is not the woman;  
when you make eyes in place of an eye,  
and a hand in place of a hand,  
and a foot in place of a foot,  
an image in place of an image;  
then you will go into [the kingdom].<sup>22</sup>*

This is not the sort of teaching that one normally encounters in church, but you can see its obviously profound significance and import.

Within the context of Buddhism, this concept, or even practice, of spiritual bisexuality is dealt with especially by the Tantra. Enlightenment is represented as consisting in a perfect union of Wisdom and Compassion. In this union Wisdom represents the 'feminine' aspect of the spiritual life and Compassion represents the 'masculine' aspect, both at the highest possible pitch of perfection. This is often represented in Tantric Buddhist iconography by male and female Buddha or Bodhisattva figures in sexual union (these representations are called *yab-yum*: *yab* means literally 'father', *yum* means 'mother'). This sort of iconography would in the West be regarded as obscene, perhaps even as blasphemous — you certainly would not encounter this sort of thing in a church; but in the East, especially in Tibet, it is regarded as extremely sacred. One must observe that, though there are two figures, there are not two persons: there is only one Enlightened person, one Enlightened mind, within which are united reason and emotion, Wisdom and Compassion. These representations embody, under the form of sexual symbolism (here of course one has nothing to do with sexuality in the ordinary sense), the Ideal of Wisdom and Compassion united: the highest consummation of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' in the spiritual life.

## Seminar Extracts

### 1 Flies at Breakfast Time

from *Dhammapada*, Ch. 14 Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1983

*Patient endurance is the highest form of asceticism.  
"Nirvana is the highest" say the Enlightened Ones.*

The *Dhammapada*, trans. Sangharakshita

Bodhiraja: The practice of patience seems to be connected with putting yourself above the situation and getting a broader perspective on it.

Sangharakshita: That certainly does help quite a lot but I think that it is probably most helpful if you can come into the situation in a highly positive state already. If you are not in a highly positive state almost anything will annoy you, almost anything will be just too much. But if you are in a highly positive state you can 'put up' with a lot that is difficult to 'put up' with at other times. Maybe the broader outlook is part of that positive state. By positive of course I mean emotionally positive: you are cheerful, happy and so on. It's interesting to see the way that people come down to breakfast. If people come down to breakfast in a cheerful mood and if there is no bread they don't mind and say, "Oh never mind, I'll have something else". But if they are not in a cheerful mood and there is no bread then it can almost spoil their day. The whole day gets off to a bad start and they think that life is against them, life is really difficult. (*Laughter.*) This is Samsara<sup>23</sup> – no bread this morning! So depending on your mental state you react; you either take it in your stride and don't bother to even think about it or else it becomes a serious grievance and you feel really put out. Ideally, if you have had a good morning meditation you should come to the breakfast table in such a positive state that you don't really mind if there's no breakfast at all. You are quite able to put up with that. But I don't often think that people achieve that degree of positivity even after a good session of meditation. (*Laughter.*)

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe also if you are surrounded by things which you don't like. Continuously throughout the day thing after thing comes up which irritates you, then maybe you need space to relax a bit and get into a more positive frame of mind so that you can handle that sort of thing.

S.: I think you are more likely to feel irritated if you are having to work with other people. Nature does not seem to irritate quite so much nor inanimate things generally, although I have known people who could get annoyed with a pencil for breaking (*laughter*), or get annoyed with the weather. But that is a degree of animism that doesn't usually occur. (*Laughter.*)

Vessantara: At first sight, the idea that life itself — just ordinary life — is frustrating enough in a way, could look as if it is going against the idea of putting yourself into the crucial situation which is something you have also talked about. It's almost as if you don't need to find any particular situation to bring out your energies because ordinary life will do it. What is the resolution of that?

S.: I think the crucial situation is more of the nature of a *demanding* situation, which does [in fact] draw forth all your energies, especially your creative energies, your resourcefulness, your initiative, and your enterprise. Even though it is a good practice to put up with [ordinary] difficulties in a patient sort of way, it isn't quite crucial in that sense, is it? It's not sufficiently invigorating or inspiring. In some ways it is better to have one great big difficulty rather than lots of little ones. [For example], if you are constantly being tormented by flies it doesn't bring out the best in you, but supposing you suddenly find a lion in your path, then that would be quite a different sort of experience even though it was only one lion! So that lion is the crucial situation and the flies are like all the little difficulties by which one is constantly beset. You can practise great patience with regard to those flies, but probably the confrontation with the lion. would bring out your more heroic virtues. (*Laughter.*) I suppose in fact it would stimulate a burst of speed! (*Laughter.*)

Bodhiraja: Are you saying that the lion is a better choice, a more heroic choice?

S.: No. I think you probably need both because you cannot go on confronting lions every day. But a lion once in a while is probably not a bad thing. It can be compared to the constant succession of little progressive steps and the big breakthrough. It's as though your spiritual life encompasses both. It encompasses putting up with a number of petty difficulties *and* from time to time facing or confronting crucial situations. You don't need to put yourself into a situation where you have to practise patience. Life will provide you with that but life will not necessarily provide you with crucial situations. You may have, so to speak, to put yourself into those voluntarily. For instance, one might say that being here [on retreat] at Il Convento for three months is a crucial situation. This is a situation in which you have to put yourself wholeheartedly, whereas just having to put up with petty annoyances from the people with whom you are living occurs anyway, because you have contact with people. You'd have to take definite steps not to have that sort of contact. So, '*Patient endurance is the highest form of asceticism.*'

Prasannasiddhi: What about bringing out your wrathful energy? Maybe there's a problem sometimes which is causing a bit of trouble and that brings out your wrathful energy. How's that connected with frustration? Is it an expression of frustration?

S.: Very often it is. But then one has to try to see the situation objectively and see what that person who is the object or potential object of the wrathful energy is actually doing. Sometimes they may need to be checked. For instance, sometimes people who are leading beginners' retreats, or even taking classes for beginners of one kind or another will perhaps have to display a little of their wrathful energy if someone starts behaving in the kind of way that disrupts the whole group and spoils things for everybody. He [or she] may then have to speak — not wrathfully in the sense of angrily — but deal with them in a very vigorous and direct way which they may interpret as your getting angry with them. There may even be a streak of anger in your attitude, because you are, after all, still human in the 'all-too human' sense. Do you see what I mean? If, as I have known happen at a beginners' meditation class, there is someone who insists on speaking and trying to talk during meditation itself you have just got to jump on them. I remember one elderly woman of this sort who was quite nice but as soon as everybody closed their eyes and were away, she'd say, "It's getting quite quiet, isn't it? I rather like this, don't you? It's nice being so quiet." (*Laughter.*) She would go on like this until she was stopped and the strange thing was, she didn't realize what she was doing, in a sense. I would sort of glare at her and she'd say, "No, we're not supposed to talk, are we? That would spoil the quietness. It's so nice and quiet now, I really like it here." (*Laughter.*) I'd then say, "Now you [all] have got to *be quiet!*" and she would just beam at me. She couldn't understand that this applied to *her* [too] and that *she* [too] had to be quiet. She just couldn't grasp that but she was a nice old lady! (*Laughter.*)

So sometimes this more wrathful attitude is better if something needs to be checked instantly in the interests of the general situation, but not because it's getting you down personally.

Prasannasiddhi: And you say that would be tinged with a bit of human anger?

S.: It might be, just because the leader of the group, or the retreat, might himself actually feel annoyed. That would be a pity but it might well be the case. On the other hand, he might be able to put on a display of wrathful energy without actually feeling personally annoyed or angry. I don't want to underestimate the people who lead retreats and beginners' classes and so on but the person who was the object of wrathful energy might well say afterwards, "I'm awfully sorry, so and so got rather annoyed with me." Or they might even accuse you of not being very patient. But, certainly, a display of wrathful energy is necessary sometimes to sort of keep people in order, especially people who are disrupting the whole situation. If you were to stop and talk with them reasonably at length, then that would itself be disruptive of the situation. So you cannot do that, you have got to cut them off short as it were. I remember an occasion — I can't remember what happened — but Padmaraja absolutely pounced on someone. I don't know what they'd done but it was just like a hawk pouncing on a mouse! .... Sometimes one really does have to act in that sort of way otherwise, as I've said, the whole situation is spoiled for a large number of people. So being patient, practising patient endurance, practising *kṣānti* does not exclude that kind of action.

*"Nirvana is the highest" say the Enlightened Ones.' 'Nibbānam paramam vadanti buddhā'.* In a way that is obvious, isn't it? Do you think there is any logical connection between this sentence and the preceding one [*'Patient endurance is the highest form of asceticism'*] or, is this just a loose association of ideas? It almost suggests — although it only suggests — that if you really practise patient endurance, you are not really very far from Nirvana. The fact that the two subjects are juxtaposed in that way seems to suggest something like that. It's almost as though Nirvana is not some sort of remote state dissociated from this world, or from one's experience of this world, or *in* this world. If you can only practise patience in all situations you come very near to Nirvana. [The text] doesn't say that but the fact that a clause about Nirvana is juxtaposed with a clause about patient endurance does suggest that there's a sort of association or connection. It's as if the Buddha, having spoken about patient endurance, is immediately put in mind of Nirvana, and says something about that. ....

Vessantara: Presumably there could be a sort of backward connection between these two sentences too. If you are firmly set on Nirvana as the highest, and that is what you are involved with, then presumably patient endurance becomes a lot easier, if you see what I mean.

S.: Yes. But perhaps one should be careful not to think of Nirvana as a state out there which you are going to attain and which has got nothing to do with the way in which you react to the situation in which you actually are at this moment. It's as if to say that it doesn't matter if you get a bit irritated and upset and annoyed with the present situation because your aim is Nirvana after all. Whereas if you can adopt a sufficiently skilful attitude, such as [is] exemplified by the attitude of patience, towards your present situation, then that itself could be Nirvana. Because in a sense Nirvana isn't a distinct goal out there but it is something which, if you had the right attitude towards the things that you are experiencing now, you would experience here and now. One could also say that it's not a goal 'out there', but it is a possibility within the present situation itself. Hence the Buddha seems to think of Nirvana immediately after saying something about patient endurance, thus suggesting that we don't need any special spiritual exercises because the patient endurance of the ordinary difficulties of life will give you quite enough practise in that particular virtue anyway. Generalizing from that suggests that if you have a right attitude towards the situation in which you actually find yourself, i.e. a skilful attitude, even an irreversibly skilful attitude, then that will be Nirvana. Nirvana is not a goal out there separate from that particular situation. Ultimately it depends on your own mind. You can go off to a monastery in a remote part of the Himalayas but you carry your mind with you. And you can be in what might seem the most unfavourable situation but if you are determined to have a positive attitude towards that situation then you can make spiritual progress, difficult though it may be. External conditions do help, sometimes almost decisively, but in the very last resort, it does depend on your own attitude to the situation.



## 2 A Conservationist

from *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1982

*When the enlightenment-factor of energy is present, he knows, 'The enlightenment-factor of energy is in me'; when the enlightenment-factor of energy is absent, he knows, 'The enlightenment-factor of energy is not in me'; and he knows how the arising of the non-arisen enlightenment-factor of energy comes to be, and how perfection in the development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of energy comes to be.*

The *Foundations of Mindfulness*, trans. Nyanasatta Thera, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy 1974, p. 24

Sangharakshita: Thus in the case of the former Bodhyanga<sup>24</sup> one is distinguishing between skilful mental states and unskilful mental states. In *this* stage one devotes all one's energies to the development of those [same] skilful mental states: that is the connection. Energy is of course *vīrya*. (I've explained this in the Stages of the Path.<sup>25</sup> The sequence here, for a few stages, coincides with that of the 'Positive *Nidānas*'.)

One could also say that energy is withdrawn from the unskilful mental states and concentrated more and more in the skilful mental states, which one then increasingly cultivates.

Suvajra: So this stage, like the previous bit, is referring not to how you apply the energy to the unskilful and skilful mental states but to the arising of that energy?

S.: Yes. So what factors do actually conduce to the arising of energy? (*Pause.*)

Suvajra: Clear comprehension of what mental state you already have. If you really thought it was something unskilful and would lead you in a wrong direction [you would not do it].

Cittapala: Rather like sticking your hand in a fire. As soon as you realize it is actually unskilful you rapidly ...

S.: Yes, the energy to pull it back immediately arises. (*Laughter.*)

Suvajra: Discipline, setting yourself a discipline.

S.: Setting yourself a discipline and not dissipating one's energy. (*Pause.*)

Don't you find that on certain days, on certain occasions, you feel more full of energy than usual? Sometimes you can see why that is; maybe you just had a good night's sleep, or a good meditation, or an interesting conversation. But sometimes there is no perceptible reason for it.

Devamitra: Do you think it's more a question of one conserving energy rather than actually trying consciously to develop it?

S.: I think in the case of a lot of people conservation of energy is quite important, because a lot of energy is wasted and frittered away. For instance, after a period of silence most people will probably observe that they have more energy than usual, suggesting that energy is often frittered away in idle talk. Do you notice this at all? That you have a bit more energy — at least a *bit* more — when there's silence?

Surata: Perhaps.

S.: In some cases you've maybe got so much energy that you don't notice that little extra bit that accrues as a result of practising just a few hours of silence. But if you're quite tired you notice it then. The silence gives you a rest, and you accumulate a bit of energy.

Gunapala: I notice it. One place I notice it quite a lot is when I'm taken away from distractions, from advertizing. In the city or shops where there's a lot of distractions, energy is dissipated quite quickly, and if I remove myself to a situation such as this [i.e. the men's pre-ordination retreat at Il Convento] the energy isn't dissipated so much. It's quite noticeable.

Devamitra: I initially put that question because — I don't know whether this is true — but I have the impression that a lot of people think more in terms of the need to *develop* energy, while I think much more in terms of *conservation*.

S.: It seems to me that it is foolish to try and develop energy when you are wasting the energy that you've already got. The first step towards developing energy is to conserve energy — just as if you really want to have more money at your disposal the first thing to do is to stop unnecessary expenditure. If you're short of energy, therefore, the first and the easiest thing for you to do is to stop expending your energy unnecessarily. Then if you still don't have enough energy for what you want to do, you can think in terms of tapping fresh sources of energy.

Devamitra: I wonder if actually one needs to do that, if the actual damming up process would be sufficient in itself.

S.: One can only wait and see. It may differ from one individual to another, depending on what you want to do and how much energy is required. This is one of the reasons for observing celibacy. Athletes, I believe, often observe celibacy, to conserve energy, don't they?

Devamitra: I've heard that boxers do. I don't know how reliable the source of my information is!

Ratnaprabha: So if one does feel that one needs to generate energy, and it's not sufficient just to conserve it, how does one go about that?

S.: Well, how does one go about that? What is energy? Where does it come from?

Cittapala: One way of generating it would be a solitary retreat.

S.: Or any kind of retreat. I think it is generally recognized that people come back from almost any retreat charged with energy, compared with the state in which they went away.

Cittapala: Doesn't the sequence of these Factors of Enlightenment seem to suggest that it actually comes from a clear-sighted understanding of what is skilful and what is unskilful?

S.: It comes, presumably, from no longer wasting energy by putting it into unskilful activities, and that definitely results in a bringing together of one's energies. If all one's energies are going into a skilful activity there's a greater degree of integration and therefore, again, more energy. Your energies are not working against one another, they're working all together; so in an overall sense you have *more* energy.

Cittapala: Yes, so if you want to obtain more energy then it's really a question of seeing with greater clarity.

S.: That is certainly an important factor. If you 'see' certain things with sufficient clarity it's as though it releases energy. It releases the energy which is necessary to do those things which, in the light of that vision, you see need to be done. From a more common-sense point of view, or a more ordinary point of view, if you want to have whatever energy is necessary to lead a spiritual life first of all you need to lead a regular life, with regular rest, regular sleep, regular diet, regular working hours, regular meditation, and so on. Then you need to withdraw energy from unskilful activities, to integrate your energy generally — to integrate *yourself*. [You] also [need to] tap deeper sources of energy through meditation or, perhaps, through reading, especially [through] reading things which are inspiring and stimulating, as well as by means of contact and communication with your spiritual friends and, perhaps, by going away on retreat

from time to time. *That* should give all the energy you need for your immediate spiritual purposes. It sets you in a sort of healthy spiritual glow. You should be incandescent. You should be an embodiment of *tejas*.

A Voice: Who or what is *tejas*?

S.: *Tejas* — as in Tejananda and Tejamitra and Tejamati — is a fiery energy generated by spiritual practice.

Cittapala: It's interesting that you put regularity of life style as one of the first aspects of developing that energy.

S.: I think that regularity of life style helps to bank up one's energies and prevents them from being frittered away in useless activities.

Devamitra: But very often that would not be looked to as a source of energy.

S.: It is not exactly a source of energy but it does prevent energy from being wasted, and to the extent that energy is flowing constantly in the same channels, it does, perhaps, also tend to intensify that energy.



### 3 Low Level Energy

from 'The Nature of Existence' (*The Three Jewels*), Community Seminar, Sukhavati, June 1982

Sangharakshita: I think one must be very careful about the sort of music to which you expose yourself. Music of different kinds affects you in different ways, maybe at different times. It is not surprising that on the whole people in the FWBO tend to favour Mozart or Bach or Beethoven or early music. I do not think that they are simply being precious. Music of that sort does have a closer relevance to what the FWBO is all about. There are other composers too, some of whose works can have a very inspiring effect, but those composers I have mentioned are outstanding. We should be very careful about things like rock music and jazz. A lot of rock music is very disturbing, from what little I have heard, or overheard, of it. You are just shaking yourself up emotionally [by listening to it]. You are not inspiring yourself. But has anyone any views on this topic? Does anyone disagree?

A Voice: When it comes to the medium of the printed word we don't just confine ourselves to reading sutras. Sometimes we read short stories, sometimes travelogues, and suchlike things. As regards to music, which is a sort of audible medium, do we have to confine ourselves to only listening to 'Dharma music', such as Beethoven and Bach? Do not other forms of music have a place, though one can definitely identify them as not being high forms of culture?

S.: I'll turn the question back and say, why should one read in such a miscellaneous way? (*Laughter.*) Reading affects one too, though maybe not as powerfully as music. One should be careful and scrupulous about one's reading, and be especially selective if one has not got much time. .... In general, one has to be careful what one does to one's emotions. [If one is a Buddhist, then] integrating and refining the emotions is one's emotional life. So what is one doing about it? Music, poetry, literature in general, and one's communication with other people, are very powerful agents; [and, as such, need to be used very carefully.]

I was hoping to draw somebody out on the subject of rock music, because some people still go to rock concerts don't they? Or they listen to rock music records? Or are these things entirely 'out' now? (Laughter.)

Kulananda: Not entirely. (Laughter.)

S.: But do you think that people derive anything at all positive from them?

Harshaprabha: I suppose a release of energy.

S.: Why should one want to release energy? Do you mean throwing away your energy?

Harshaprabha: When you are doing hard physical labour, for instance, rock or disco music can get your energies moving ...

S.: I thought the hard physical labour did that. (Laughter.)

Sagaramati: If you are doing physical things like building work or driving, then it is easier to listen to rock music because you are *physically* more in tune with it. It is a very physical sort of music: you don't have to think or do anything, you just respond physically to it. If I am driving I would rather listen to The Grateful Dead<sup>26</sup> than Bach, because I am doing something with my body.

S.: Yes, you do not want to be on two wavelengths at the same time — *that* one can understand. But though you might have to work, you do not *have* to go to the disco after work. Admittedly it is easier to continue on the same level [and go to the disco], rather than make an effort to get up onto a higher level [by going to a Bach concert]. One argument in favour of rock music that I have heard is that people are very blocked and have a lot of repressed negative emotions; and they find rock music, and all that sort of thing, helpful in contacting and expressing these emotions. Is this so? Do people agree with this argument or not?

Nagabodhi: Rock music can be quite crudely positive sometimes.

S.: That may be so, but at the same time one must recognize that all this is taking place on quite a *low* level. One really needs to build up from that low level; and that level should certainly have been left behind by the time one Goes for Refuge.

Nagabodhi: I do not listen very often to rock music, but sometimes if I do listen I become quite impressed just by the skill that is used in putting some of the stuff together: the sheer technical skill of the arrangement and the mixing and that sort of thing.

S.: Well, I am told that Bach is even more skilful. (Laughter.) *The Goldberg Variations* are said to be absolute masterpieces. (More laughter.) There are forty-eight of them, I believe. And as for Bach's counterpoint .... (laughter), it is absolutely dazzlingly expert. And the way that he works out his canons and fugues, it is almost as though he had a computer to hand. .... But to come back to the overall point: through one's experience of artistic creativity, in this case music, one's emotions should become more powerful, positive and refined. These are the three great characteristics for which you must aim. Your emotions should be powerful; they should be positive rather than negative — that is, they should be emotions of warmth and friendliness, joy and faith, rather than of anger, frustration, rebellion and resentment; and also they should be more refined, i.e. your emotions of joy, faith, delight and so forth should not even be crude or boisterous, but should have become more and more delicate, refined and transparent. If that is so, then your refined emotional experience, or higher level of intensity, can fuse with your understanding of things. If you are free from self-centredness and unskilful mental states, especially the negative emotions, then you are a much more unified and integrated being, and can develop real understanding and real wisdom, and eventually see things as they really are.



#### 4 All or Nothing

from Question and Answer Session  
Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1981

Sthiramati: Is it correct to speak in terms of sublimating energy? People do speak of, say, sublimating sexual energy. Is that a correct way of putting it?

Sangharakshita: Yes, but there is the question of what one means by sublimation. This is a term which is rather overworked, or used rather loosely. The general question is whether one form of energy can be transformed into another. Broadly speaking, I think we can say that we know it can be. For instance, you eat food and that is transformed into physical energy; or even psychophysical energy, because if you starve yourself your brain will stop functioning, you won't even be able to think clearly. So obviously there is an interconnection; but at the same time it does not always seem to be practically possible to transform one energy directly into another. For instance, suppose you become conscious of a surplus of sexual energy, you are not necessarily going to be able to directly channel that into an appreciation of art. It isn't as easy or straightforward as that.

Sometimes it's also a question of not allowing your energies to build up in any particular way, or not allowing any particular form of energy to build up beyond a certain point and only then trying to do something about it. One must foresee the way in which energy builds up, the way in which energy develops, and try to 'manage' one's total energy —using that term — sensibly and with a certain amount of foresight. (*Pause.*)

Sthiramati: So it's almost a matter of re-directing your attention to another area rather than allowing yourself to get too involved in a particular way of expressing it?

S.: Yes. It's also a question of directing your attention, that is to say your self totally. Of course, so long as one is a relatively unimaginative being that is going to be very difficult. And if by sublimation one means the transformation of a grosser energy into a more refined energy — again using these terms, which are perhaps a bit questionable -- one may be able to do it in certain cases and not in others. I think, for instance, when one is quite young it's probably quite difficult to sublimate sexual energy completely. Maybe some people can do it, but quite a lot seem unable to even if they want to.

I don't think it's a straightforward question of taking a certain energy, which perhaps one considers a gross energy, and sublimating it in the sense of transforming all of it into a more subtle kind of energy — even if one does think in those particular terms. No doubt the main point is that gradually one does direct oneself more and more in a *wholehearted* manner towards those things which one recognizes in one's best moments as being of lasting and greatest value. So one can say that sublimation takes place by virtue of a re-direction of one's whole being. You can't really deal with a particular item separately, you can't really say, "I want to sublimate my sexuality, I want to sublimate my aggressiveness", you have to sublimate your whole being, and that comes about by a reorientation of your whole being. Gradually all your energies are flowing in that one direction — which doesn't mean that they may not have their own individual expressions at the same time — but overall, all your energies are flowing in one and the same direction; because you are flowing, so to speak, in one direction. (*Pause.*)

This does suggest — perhaps this should be underlined — that we can't really tinker with particular problems and deal with them separately. It does seem that transformation, or human development, is either total, or it doesn't take place at all. Just to dwell a little on this question of sublimation of sexual energy, everybody knows that the sexual drive is quite strong, one might even say very, very strong; so you're not likely to be able to sublimate such a powerful energy except by a re-organization of your whole life and your whole being. You're not going to be able to just tinker around with it and re-direct it like that because it is so strong. It can only be re-directed and integrated if a very deep process of transformation is going on within you generally; a process which is bringing all your energies together, giving all your energies, all your interests, all your activities, a common, overall orientation.

Malcolm Webb: Did you not infer in that statement, Bhante, that sexual energy is slightly different from other energies?

S.: As experienced by most people it seems to be, even though it might not actually be so. But again, it is physical, psychophysical and part of one's overall energy. I think it's most people's experience that if they're in poor health and feeling rather run down then sexual drive also diminishes, and vice versa; so clearly there's an interconnection. It's as though sexual energy is a sort of special case of one's *general* human energy. (*Pause.*)

I do tend to think that if one fully and wholeheartedly throws oneself into the spiritual life, and is making a genuine effort to develop, the problem of sexuality, in the long run, will practically solve itself. I don't think you need to pay quite so much separate attention to it as is sometimes paid. If you're getting on with your meditation well and are assured within yourself that you are getting deeper and deeper into it, if your communication with other human beings is improving, if your understanding of the Dharma is deepening, and if you find your attitude towards people in general is more and more positive; if you can be sure of all those things you need not be over concerned whether you're 'having sex' — to use that rather unpleasant expression — or not having it, and how often and with whom. You needn't really bother very much about those things; they are relatively speaking, or comparatively speaking, side issues. Let your concern be with the main things.

If, of course, you ever do find that sex is beginning to occupy the centre of the stage, or even moving towards the centre, then you can be sure that something *is* seriously wrong, and you may have to take new steps to deal with that. But, so long as it isn't occupying the centre of the stage and you are getting on well with your spiritual life, with your development as a human being, I think you don't need to bother too much about sex. But one must be quite honest with oneself, and not delude oneself, "I'm not bothered. It doesn't matter very much to me. I can take it or leave it", when that may not be the case at all. This is an area in which one can delude oneself very easily. (*Pause.*)

Perhaps that's one of the advantages of people taking a vow of celibacy from time to time — just to know where they are — not out of feelings of guilt, or not under the impression that celibacy will automatically catapult them into the Brahmaloaka,<sup>27</sup> but just to give themselves a rest for one thing (*laughter*), just to accustom themselves to doing without it. Just like giving up coffee for a while, or giving up smoking for good. Quite a few people in the past have taken vows of celibacy for a month, three months, six months, a year; and I think most of them have learned quite a lot from it.

Malcolm Webb: Is the vow of celibacy different from the vow of chastity?

S.: It's the same thing in this connection; celibacy and chastity are interchangeable. Strictly speaking they aren't really the same thing, but the words are used as synonymous. Two or three years ago there seemed to be quite a few people in the Order and on the fringes of it taking vows of celibacy for certain periods. There don't seem to be so many of them around now. I'm not quite sure why, but I think it would be a pity if people overlooked the value of this sort of discipline.

## 5 Can We be Hurt by Being Receptive?

from 'Instruction in the Transitoriness of the Composite' (*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*), Women's Seminar, Padmaloka, June 1980

Sangharakshita: Passivity is just the antithesis of the following of the spiritual path. I make a distinction between passivity and receptivity. Receptivity means that, although in a way you are not active, you *are* active in the sense that you actively open yourself to the influence of higher spiritual forces. But when you are passive you are closed to higher spiritual forces, because when you are passive, in the sense of passively enjoying pleasure, this is self-oriented, ego-oriented. You are nourishing, even fattening, yourself. You are not opening yourself to anything higher in order to transform yourself, as you are when you are receptive. So it is important to distinguish between passivity, into which one can very easily slide and which is the antithesis of the spiritual life, and receptivity, which is an essential part of spiritual life. You can contrast receptivity and activity but you could also say that in a sense receptivity is a form of activity. Activity in a way also is a form of receptivity because you are not acting as it were from yourself, not acting to consolidate yourself. In real action, action as a part of spiritual development, there must be continuous receptivity, otherwise you settle down. There must be receptivity to what is higher.

Joan Graham: Passivity is a sort of acquisitive state.

S.: You could say that, indeed. We often misuse these terms, passivity and receptivity, but they are quite different, quite antithetical, mutually exclusive.

Paloma Massip-Pozo: The difficult thing with receptivity is to find that when you are receptive you are vulnerable. Maybe I had a wrong conception of it: the way you said it just now, it sounds as though receptivity is something strong, as 'active' is, whereas passivity is weaker ...

S.: Well, receptivity, as I have said, is receptivity to something higher. So, since you mention vulnerability, the question arises: in what sense is it possible to be vulnerable to what is higher? Will what is higher do you any harm?

Paloma Massip-Pozo: Well, yes, in a way, it is always very painful to hear truths about things. Like spiritual friends might point out something that you are doing in a certain way which is not good for you or for others and you are not seeing what you are doing. So you might realize they are right and are pointing out something to you, and that is quite painful. You are vulnerable as long as you ...

S.: It is not really you that are vulnerable, not you in the sense of the growing developing you. It is only you in the sense of your weaknesses, or to the extent that you are identified with your weaknesses or your past. You are not really vulnerable, because you are being strengthened. There are parts of you that feel vulnerable because they feel threatened or able to suffer or feel pain. But that is only to the extent that you are not being receptive. If you were wholly receptive, there would be no vulnerability, because vulnerability suggests that you have something to fear from that other force .... but no! that is not the source of your suffering, that wishes you only well. The source of your suffering is in you.

Dhammadinna: It is the fixed parts of you that don't want to change.

S.: Yes, it is not that you are very tender and sensitive and the force is being a bit rough; not at all. The force is being completely gentle and calm and considerate. It is your own weaknesses that are putting up resistance and therefore suffering. When I say that you are not really vulnerable this is what I mean; it is not that there is an objective fierce and sort of terrible power trying to affect you. So to the extent that it is a higher power it is completely gentle [and] harmonious.

Paloma Massip-Pozo: I think what Dhammadinna said is very valid. It is the parts that don't want to change in you that are the vulnerable parts.

S.: Yes, but I am saying that they are not vulnerable to that higher power .... They are not vulnerable in the sense that they are exposed to some rough or insensitive treatment on the part of that higher power. The suffering they create entirely for themselves. It is not that if that higher power were a little more gentle or a little more tactful you would not suffer: no, however gentle, however tactful [it is], you are going to suffer, because the cause of that suffering is not with that higher power; it is with you.

Paloma Massip-Pozo: I didn't think it was, but ...

S.: But the word 'vulnerable' suggests that, you see? For instance, you say, "I am feeling very vulnerable. Please handle me gently." But however gently you are handled, you will still feel hurt because the potential for hurt is there on your side, in the fact of your own weakness or backsliding, not in the other person.

Marichi: So any weakness or vulnerability is in effect your own ... ?

S.: Well, yes, in this context. Of course, actual spiritual friends may sometimes actually be clumsy. One cannot deny that. I was referring more to, as it were, disembodied spiritual forces. But sometimes actual spiritual friends may not be fully experienced. They may mean well and try to help you but they may speak at the wrong time or too strongly. That is a different thing. The vulnerability that you have in relation to the purely spiritual content of what is said is, as it were, your own responsibility, not the effect of clumsiness or, as it were, violence on the part of that spiritual force to which you are trying to be receptive.



## 6 What We Need is Stamina!

from 'Patience and Strenuousness' (*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*), Women's Seminar, Padmaloka, June 1980

Sangharakshita: People very often think of the spiritual life as something very refined and delicate, and a bit wispy and ethereal. In a sense it is [like that], but they forget that other aspect [of the spiritual life]: the solidity, strength, stability and what I call stamina, which is equally important. The two aspects are not incompatible or contradictory.

A Voice: Stamina means to know one's limitations and not overstrain your organism.

S.: Well, if you have to think about your own limitations and worry about not straining yourself, you haven't got stamina. Do you see what I mean? Stamina is that quality which enables you to carry on without thinking in those sort of terms.

A Voice: But physically you have limits.

S.: You do have limits, but [if you've got stamina] you don't think in those terms, you don't bother [about your limits]. You know, when people get by with very little sleep, just snatching sleep when they can —

they manage, they survive and function, they don't do themselves any harm.

[Winston] Churchill during the war used to keep himself going with brandy and cigars, snatching ten minutes' sleep whenever he could. He seemed to thrive on it — he had stamina. I think people in politics very often need stamina; unfortunately, the uses to which they put it aren't [always] very skilful, to say the least. Think of the sort of tours the American presidential candidates have to make, the number of speeches they have to give, and the number of hands that they have to shake, running into tens of thousands at a time: you can't be that sort of politician without having tremendous stamina.

People who are into the spiritual life need that sort of stamina too, not only for their personal development, but in the course of their work for others. Otherwise, in the spiritual world too often people make a bit of an effort for a couple of days and then say, "Oh, I've got a headache, I've got to rest now", or "I'm feeling a bit delicate, I'm going through things, I think I'll go away on holiday to Greece for a few months". (*Laughter.*) This is the sort of thing you get. Of course, you don't get [that attitude] in India, to come back to Lokamitra; [both he] and Purna have got stamina.<sup>28</sup> They couldn't survive out there otherwise, [given] the things they have to do and the strains to which they are subjected.

We are so effete in the spiritual life, more often than not. We can't stand any sort of strain; after any bit of extra effort we have to go away and rest, have a little holiday, sit down for a while, play a record and take things easy. It's pathetic! (*Laughter.*) Here you are, aspiring to gain Enlightenment, which is after all the most difficult thing you can possibly propose to yourself, and look how easily one usually takes it — what an easy time one gives oneself. And there, [on the other hand] are people aiming at very inferior, trivial, easily attained things like the Presidency of the United States. Just look at the massive effort they are putting in — it puts us to shame! (*Laughter.*) At least we should be able to rush around like Jimmy Carter! (*Laughter.*)

Sanghadevi: It seems to tie up with your emotional involvement; if you're emotionally committed to what you're doing, then you *find* the energy [to do it]. If you're not really behind it then ...

S.: (*Interrupting.*) As we were saying [earlier] in relation to the [Right Livelihood] Co-ops,<sup>29</sup> there's no carrot and there's no stick. All that can keep you going [in a Co-op] is sheer vision.

Ann McMillan: It's interesting that you quote politics, which is in the *asura*<sup>30</sup> realm quite a lot. It's a heroic quality [you're getting at], isn't it?

S.: Yes. You must transpose that *asura* quality to the spiritual plane, and this is what the Bodhisattva does: he has no less energy than the *asura*; if anything, he's got more. The Bodhisattva in the Mahayana literature is not depicted as a weak, feeble sort of creature by any means: there's nothing effete about the Bodhisattva. Of course, in art they may depict the Bodhisattva as very young, slim, delicate and willowy-looking, but don't be deceived — just read the literature. If you can't be like Jimmy Carter, at least be like Rosalyn Carter, at least she's called the steel magnolia. You can at least be a steel lotus flower, or something like that! (*Laughter.*) It is an *asura* quality, but transpose it from the *asura* mode to the Bodhisattva mode. People who don't know anything about Enlightenment or Bodhisattvas should feel that you are a steel lotus blossom. We want more steel lotus blossoms, we want to have garlands of steel lotus blossoms, otherwise we won't really get moving.

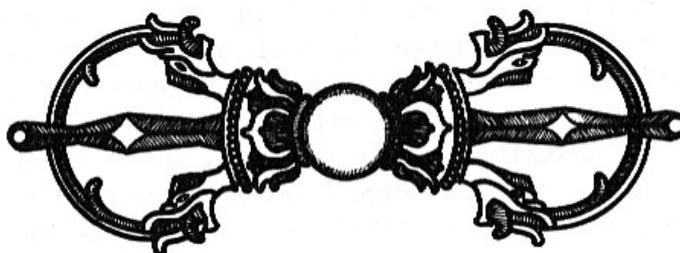
## Glossary

**Nirvana** (Pali *Nibbana*): lit. 'the state of fire having been extinguished'. The favoured classical etymology for the word is 'nir' + 'vr', 'vr' meaning 'to cover'. Thus the metaphorical source of the word indicates that it literally means a state of fire having been extinguished either by covering it up or depriving it of fuel. In the spiritual sense, it refers to the extinction of the fire of craving, the cause of all unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*), as expressed in the second of the 'Four Noble Truths'.

Nirvana is the goal of all Buddhists, being the final 'stage', as it were, on the path of spiritual progress. As such, Nirvana denotes a state where all traces, subtle and gross, of the three 'poisons' of greed, hatred and delusion have been eradicated and a positive state of complete freedom, bliss, peace and victory (over the Samsara) has been attained. Thus Nirvana is not, as is often erroneously asserted by secular scholars, a 'cessation' alone. It is a definite state of Transcendent Wisdom, Compassion and Energy. If, in the earlier scriptures, the Buddha seems to define Nirvana in primarily negative terms, this is mainly due to (a) his pragmatism in avoiding mere theorizing and (b) the complete inability of mundane media to communicate fully the ineffable nature of the Transcendental. See Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications, Ch. I, Section 8

**Vajra** (Skt.): lit. 'thunderbolt' or 'diamond'. In Indian mythology, the *vajra* or thunderbolt is wielded by Indra, the King of the Gods. The *vajra* had various qualities: (1) it was indestructible, being the most powerful thing in the cosmos; (2) it could not be used inappropriately; (3) it always returned to its wielder. The *vajra* represented the natural phenomenon of lightning, similar to the thunderbolt wielded by Zeus. In the Tantric phase of Buddhism, the *vajra* became a symbol for the nature of Reality, for *śūnyatā*, indicating endless creativity, potency and skilful activity. The term '*vajra*' gives the third great phase of Buddhism its name, the *Vajrayana*, and is employed extensively in Tantric literature; the term for the spiritual teacher is the *vajracarya*; instead of Bodhicitta, we have *Vajracitta*, and so on. The practice of prefixing terms, names, places, and so on by '*vajra*' represents the conscious attempt to recognize the Transcendental aspect of all phenomena; it became part of the process of 'sacramentalizing' the activities of the spiritual practitioner and encouraged him to engage all his psychophysical energies in the spiritual life. See Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications, pp. 381 ff.

The *vajra* is also extensively used in the rituals of the Tantra. It consists of a spherical middle, with two symmetrical sets of five prongs, which arc out from lotus blooms either side of the sphere and come to a point at two points equidistant from the centre, thus giving it the appearance of a 'diamond sceptre'.



Various figures in Tantric iconography are represented holding or wielding the *vajra*. Two of the most famous of these are Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi. Vajrasattva (lit. *Vajra-Being*) holds the *vajra*, in his right hand, to his heart. The figure of the Wrathful Vajrapāṇi (lit. *Vajra* in the hand) brandishes the *vajra*, in his right hand, above his head. For further information on the symbolism of the *vajra*, see Sangharakshita, 'The Symbolism of the Sacred Thunderbolt or Diamond Sceptre of the Lamas', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/omrbg6a> or Sangharakshita, 'Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism', Windhorse Publications.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Mitrata* 59 in this series, 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart - Part 2', Glossary.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Sutra of Forty-two Sections and Two Other Scriptures of the Mahayana School*, trans. John Blofield (Chu Ch'an), The Buddhist Society, London 1977, Section 8, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> See *Entering the Path of Enlightenment: The Bodhicaryāvatāra of the Buddhist Poet Śāntideva*, trans. Marion L. Matics, Allen & Unwin, London 1971, Part II, Ch. VI, vv. 41-3.

<sup>4</sup> As it is used here, the term *samskāras* (Pali *sankhāras*) refers to the second link in the chain of Conditioned Co-Production (see Note 10 below), that is, to the principle of conditionality as applied to an individual life. According to the Pali-English Dictionary, *sankhāras* is one of the most difficult terms in Buddhist metaphysics. Sometimes it is translated as 'karma-formations', sometimes as 'volitional activities' or even 'impulses'; it indicates the totality of those tendencies which are built up through habitual ways of being, possibly over several lives, and which eventually determine a specific rebirth. For a detailed discussion of the term, see Subhuti, *The Buddhist Vision*, Windhorse Publications.

<sup>5</sup> The Parable of the Saw is in the Majjhima Nikāya (*The Collection of Middle Length Sayings*), trans. I. B. Horner, Pali Text Society, London 1967, Vol. I, 21, vv. 123-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, 21, vv. 128-9.

<sup>7</sup> *The Dhammapada*, trans. Nārada Maha Thera, Maha Bodhi Society, 1962, Ch. 14, v. 184.

<sup>8</sup> See *Mitrata* 57 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 2', Note 20; *Mitrata* 63 in this series, 'Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life - Part 2', Note 24. The Kagyupa (lit. 'transmitted command') School was founded by Marpa the Translator whose chief disciple was Milarepa. The Shakyapa School is named after the monastery of Shakya (lit. 'tawny or yellow earth') which was its chief centre for a long time.

<sup>9</sup> 'Cathars' or 'Albigenses' (Albigensians) are alternative names for the members of a 'heretical' Christian sect which developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E. in Western Europe and flourished mainly in the Languedoc area of southern France. The Cathars were dualists, in the sense that they believed that good and evil have two separate creators: the good world of the spirit comes from God, whereas the evil, material world is created by Satan. They strongly advocated simplicity of life style, (including a vegetarian diet), as a means of freeing the spirit from imprisonment in the material world. At the instigation of Pope Innocent III, the Cathar movement was systematically crushed both by a crusade launched against it in 1209 and by the ruthless procedures of the Inquisition. The word 'Albigensian' was sometimes used by the Catholic authorities to refer to all 'heretics' in the region, both Cathars and Waldenses (Waldensians); the Waldenses were, in fact, a separate sect, though similar to the Cathars in that they upheld a life of poverty and simplicity. For a detailed account of the Cathars and their beliefs, see Arthur Guirdham, *The Great Heresy: the History and Beliefs of the Cathars*, Neville Spearman, Jersey 1977.

<sup>10</sup> 'Conditioned Co-Production' or 'Dependent Origination' are alternative renderings of the term *pratītya-samutpāda*, (Pali *paticca-samuppāda*). The teaching of Conditioned Co-Production, namely, that all mundane things whatsoever arise in dependence on a multiplicity of conditions and have no independent, unchanging reality 'beneath' or 'within' them, is of fundamental importance in Buddhism; it is the expression, in terms comprehensible to the intellect, of a truth which can only be apprehended by direct Insight into the nature of Reality. The Buddha referred to it as the essence of his Enlightenment experience. See Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications, Ch. I, Sections XI-XIII; Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India: Three Phases of Buddhist Philosophy*, Allen & Unwin, London 1962, pp. 156-8;

---

Nyanatiloka Mahathera, *Guide Through the Abhidhamma-Pitaka*, Buddhist Publication Society, Ceylon 1971, Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> *The White Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra*): lit. Discourse of the White Lotus of the True Dharma, is one of the most famous and most important of the major Mahayana or 'Vaipulya' ('extended') sutras or discourses of great length. The incident mentioned occurs in Chapter II (pp. 589) of 'The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law', the second sutra in the volume entitled *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, trans. Bunnō Katō, Yoshirō Tamura and Kōjirō Miyasaka, with revisions by W. E. Soothill, Wilhelm Schiffer and Pier P. Del Campana, Weatherhill/Kosei, New York and Tokyo 1975.

For a detailed study of the sutra, see Sangharakshita 'Parables, Myths and Symbols of Mahayana Buddhism in the White Lotus Sutra', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/oyutqoe>; Sangharakshita *The Eternal Legacy: An Introduction to the Canonical Literature of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications.

<sup>12</sup> See *Mitrata* 56 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part I', Glossary.

<sup>13</sup> Mādhyamīka School, lit. 'the Middle Way School', was one of the two great philosophical schools of the Mahayana, the other being the Yogācāra School. It was based on the teaching of *śūnyatā* as expounded in the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras*, that is, the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras*. The scholar Edward Conze called the Mādhyamīka the 'New Wisdom School', as distinct from what he called the 'Old Wisdom School', i.e. the School of the Abhidharma. It was founded by the great Buddhist teacher Nāgārjuna, who flourished in the second century C.E. His dialectical work, the *Mūla-Mādhyamīka Karikas* is the basic text of the Mādhyamīka School. One of the effects of the Mādhyamīka was to counteract the growing literalism and scholasticism of the Hinayana.

<sup>14</sup> sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H. V. Guenther, London 1959, Ch. 15, p. 183.

<sup>15</sup> Kanchenjunga, or Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world (8,586m), is in the Himalayas, straggling the borders of Sikkim (India) and Nepal, north west of Darjeeling. The name is derived from four words of Tibetan origin and means 'Five Treasuries of the Great Snow'. It has great religious and mythological significance for the inhabitants of Sikkim and, to a lesser extent, those of the surrounding regions.

<sup>16</sup> J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986), philosopher and popular religious teacher. He spent much time travelling in different parts of the world, giving talks, and reached an even wider audience through his books, which are chiefly transcripts of his talks. The selection, *The Penguin Krishnamurti Reader*, Penguin Books, 1970, gives some idea of his teaching.

<sup>17</sup> See Sangharakshita, 'Poetry and Devotion in Buddhism: The Sevenfold Puja', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/ojqebpt>

<sup>18</sup> The Communication Exercises are a set of exercises frequently practised in FWBO classes and retreats as a means of improving the quality of human communication. They are effective in freeing blocked energy and in increasing mutual receptivity and openness between people.

<sup>19</sup> See *Mitrata* 58 in this series, 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart - Part I'.

<sup>20</sup> See *Entering the Path of Enlightenment: The Bodhicaryāvatāra of the Buddhist Poet Śāntideva*, trans. Marion L. Matics, Allen & Unwin, London 1971, Part II, Ch. VII, v. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Zen and Shin are two of the schools — or groups of schools — of Buddhism in Japan. Both are tributaries of the Indo-Chinese Mahayana tradition, but are distinctive in character. The 'goal' of the two is the same, Liberation or Enlightenment. According to Zen Buddhism, Enlightenment is achieved by one's own unaided, individual effort. In Shin, there is no effort to achieve any goal; instead there is surrender of self to 'other-

---

power', that is, to Amitābha, or Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light. Such surrender leads to rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land, Sukhāvātī (the 'Land of Bliss'). In Zen, there is much emphasis on meditation; the word 'Zen' is from Chinese 'Cha'an', (Skt. *dhyāna*) which means 'meditation'. Shin, on the other hand, stresses devotion, not in the sense of spiritual exercises, but in the sense of 'spontaneous expressions of the devotee's feeling of intense gratitude to Amida for having accomplished our Enlightenment' (Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Shambhala, Boulder 1980, Ch. III, Section VII). A text much revered by Zen Buddhists is *The Sutra of Hui Neng: the Basic Scripture of Zen Buddhism*, trans. Wong Moulam, ed. Christmas Humphries, The Buddhist Society, London 1966. Shin devotees revere *The Longer and Smaller Sukhāvātī Vyūha Sūtras and The Amitāyuv-dhyāna Sūtra*. See *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, ed. E. B. Cowell and others, Dover Publications Inc., New York 1969.

<sup>22</sup> R. M. Grant and D. N. Freedman, 'Gospel of Thomas'. *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, trans. W. R. Schoedel, Fontana 1960, Saying 23.

<sup>23</sup> See *Mitrata* 57 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 2'.

<sup>24</sup> This is a reference to a teaching known as the 'Seven *Bodhyaṅgas*', the 'Seven Factors' or 'Limbs' (*aṅgas*) of Enlightenment (*Bodhi*). The first Factor is Recollection or Awareness (*Smṛti*), the second is Investigation of Mental States (*dharma-vicaya*). See Sangharakshita, *Mind Reactive and Creative*, Windhorse, London 1985.

<sup>25</sup> See Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse Publications, Ch. 13.

<sup>26</sup> An American rock music band.

<sup>27</sup> *Brahmaloka*: lit. 'the world, abode or realm (*loka*) of the Brahmas. According to Buddhist cosmology, the plane of human experience is only one of many. The total system includes the *devalokas* or realms of the devas, the gods or celestial beings. The highest of the deva realms is that of the Brahmas, known as the *Brahma-kāyikā* devas, lit. 'deities bearing Brahma bodies'. The *Brahmaloka* itself consists of several planes all belonging to the broader divisions of *Rūpaloka* (the World of Form) and the *Arūpaloka*, (the Formless World). From the point of view of individual experience as distinct from the point of view of cosmology, it is possible to experience these worlds and the beings who inhabit them in the course of meditation, in the higher states of consciousness known as the *dhyānas*. However, Buddhism always emphasizes that such experiences are only incidental and not essential in reaching the goal of meditation which is the development of Insight. In the Pali Canon, the Buddha tells Ānanda about his own appearance in the *Brahmalokas*. See Samyutta Nikāya, *Some Sayings of the Buddha*, trans. F. L. Woodward, The Buddhist Society, London/New York 1973, pp. 173-4. See also the *Kevaddha Sutta* (No. XI) of the Digha Nikāya, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part I, trans. T. W. Rhys Davids, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, Vol. II, ed. Max Muller, Pali Text Society, London 1973. Tradition stresses that the *Brahmalokas* can be reached especially by the development of Metta or Universal Loving Kindness. See *Mitrata* 57 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 2', Glossary; and *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part I', Glossary.

<sup>28</sup> Lokamitra, an English member of the Western Buddhist Order, is a key figure in the work of the FWBO in India (known there as the TBMSG) among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists. He has been working indefatigably for the Movement there since 1978. Purna is another Order Member, a New Zealander, who worked with Lokamitra in India for a few years.

<sup>29</sup> Right Livelihood Co-ops are the business ventures set up by the FWBO in various places in the UK and abroad. As team-based ventures, run according to Buddhist ethical principles, they provide an opportunity for those who are involved in them to develop a spirit of friendship and true co-operation and contribute to raising funds for the Movement, while at the same time supporting themselves financially. Among the most successful FWBO businesses are health food shops and vegetarian restaurants.

---

<sup>30</sup> See *Mitrata* 62 in this series, 'Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life - Part I', Glossary.