

M I T R A T A



THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

1

On the Threshold
of Enlightenment



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Cover Symbol:

The symbols on the covers of the issues in this series are from original lino-cuts by Dharmachari Alokā based upon the *mudrās* of the eight principal Bodhisattvas of Mahayana tradition. This issue features the *mudrā* of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha, or 'Sky-Womb'. Ākāśagarbha is the celestial counterpart of Kṣitigarbha, or 'Earth-Womb'. He belongs to the spiritual family of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi and so in his right hand he holds a lotus on which rest two crossed *vajras*.

THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

6. On The Threshold of Enlightenment

Part 1

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*Indicates refer to Glossary

Editorial

Have you been keeping up with us these past eighteen months? Were you with us when we first embarked on our journey into the world of the Bodhisattva Ideal? Were you with us — were you reading *Mitrata* — even before that? In the days of the old typewriter, before we had a computer, we explored the 'Noble Eightfold Path'. Perfect Vision was our starting point and Perfect Meditation our conclusion. If you remember these lectures you will most likely be familiar with the subject matter of this issue of *Mitrata*: 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment'.

We are now concerned with Meditation and Wisdom as the last two of the 'Six Perfections' of the Bodhisattva. Meditation was dealt with in the 'Noble Eightfold Path' under the headings of Perfect Effort, Perfect Mindfulness and Perfect Meditation. Wisdom was looked at under Perfect Vision and also Perfect Meditation.

When the Lion's Roar team studied the present lecture in preparation for research some concern was expressed regarding the fact that much of the material had already been covered. Would we find enough extracts to fill out two issues? But despite the concern, I was presented several weeks later with a very substantial pile. Familiar ground had indeed been covered but there were fresh angles to approach it from. In one of the extracts the Venerable Sangharakshita elaborates on what he means when he encourages people to do more and more of less and less. I read what I wanted to hear — that we must keep on coming back to whatever is of basic importance. It is all too easy to get caught up in studying broadly and to neglect studying deeply. It doesn't matter how many times we come back to the 'hindrances' or to the 'purpose of meditation'. Each reference, each new angle, could be a source of inspiration to us. And inspiration is what keeps us going. It keeps us going on our journey — our journey not just in theory but in practice too. And it's practice that brings us closer to perfection.

SRIMALA

Lecture

For five weeks now we have allowed ourselves to be carried along by a great stream, the stream of the Bodhisattva Ideal. Each week we have travelled just a little farther. As we have travelled, we have seen the stream, as it were, broaden. When we travel down a stream, and that stream begins to broaden, we know that we will eventually reach a point when the stream — or by this time the river — is so broad that we cannot be quite sure whether we are still in the stream, or whether we have not started entering the great ocean. This is the point we reach today. Today we are, as it were, about to pass out of the estuary of our river into the great ocean of Enlightenment itself.

In order to reach this point, we have had to cover quite a distance. We have seen unfold, week by week, many different aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal. In the first week's lecture we saw how the Bodhisattva is the ideal Buddhist, one who lives for the sake of the Supreme Enlightenment of all sentient beings, and that he is the living embodiment of Wisdom and Compassion.

In our second lecture we saw, in some detail, that one becomes — or is born — a Bodhisattva by virtue of the 'arising of the Bodhicitta'. The Bodhicitta is often translated as 'thought of Enlightenment', but we saw that it is in fact something much greater than that: it is not just a thought, or idea, or concept of Enlightenment in somebody's mind — even in the Bodhisattva's mind — but something Transcendental. The Bodhicitta, we further saw, is only one, but individual Bodhisattvas participate in that one Bodhicitta, each to the measure of his capacity. This Bodhicitta arises in a man or a woman, transforming them into a Bodhisattva, in dependence on certain conditions. In this connection, we examined Śāntideva's 'Supreme Worship', a set of seven conditions in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta arises, as well as Vasubandhu's 'Four Factors'.

In the third week's lecture we saw that though the Bodhicitta itself is universal, the Bodhisattva is an individual being, and the Bodhicitta therefore expresses itself, in the Bodhisattva's life and work, in a thoroughly individual, even in a unique, manner. The individual, unique expression of the Bodhicitta in the life and work of the Bodhisattva is known as the 'Bodhisattva's Vow'. We speak of the Bodhisattva's Vow in the singular, but in reality it is plural — the Bodhisattva makes a number of vows. There are several famous sets of vows, especially the 'Four Great Vows' of the Bodhisattva. We examined the 'Four Great Vows' in detail.

Even more than all this, we have seen that the Bodhisattva Ideal represents a union of opposites. In general, it represents a union of the mundane and the Transcendental, samsara and Nirvana. More specifically, it represents a union of the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life, as well as the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' approaches to the spiritual life.

In the fourth lecture we saw that the first of these pairs of opposites, the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life, are represented, in the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal, by *dāna*, Giving, and *sīla*, Uprightness, which are the first two *pāramitās*, (Perfections), the first two Transcendental virtues to be practised by the Bodhisattva.

In last week's lecture we saw that the second pair of opposites, the 'masculine' and 'feminine' approaches to the spiritual life, are represented by the second pair of *pāramitās*: *kṣānti*, Patience, and *vīrya*, Vigour or Energy.

Today we come to a pair of opposites still more rarefied, and we shall be seeing how the Bodhisattva synthesizes these too in his life, work and spiritual experience. This pair of opposites is represented by *dhyāna* on the one hand and *prajna* on the other, that is to say, by Meditation (in the widest sense) and Wisdom. These two are the last two *pāramitās*, the fifth and the sixth of the Perfections. This lecture is entitled 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment', because that is where we find ourselves when we practise, either separately or together, Wisdom and Meditation, Meditation and Wisdom. These two *pāramitās* between them represent the consummation of the 'establishment aspect' of the Bodhicitta.

We have here, in meditation and wisdom, two vast subjects, and it is very difficult to know where to begin. One could well speak on either of these subjects for a very long time, without saying, in comparison with the enormity of the subject matter, very much at all. There is certainly no question of trying to treat these two subjects exhaustively. All that can be offered in the course of this lecture is a more or less connected account of certain topics of importance.

First of all, *dhyāna*. I have translated this as 'meditation', which, for practical purposes, is good enough. However, the term *dhyāna*, like so many other Indian Buddhist, Sanskrit and Pali terms, cannot really be translated by any single English word. We shall not go very far wrong, however, if we consider *dhyāna* as comprising two things: firstly, higher states of consciousness — states of consciousness above and beyond those of our ordinary everyday waking mind; and secondly, not only the higher states of consciousness themselves but also the various practices which lead to the experience of those higher states of consciousness.

These higher states of consciousness are, broadly speaking, of two kinds. On the one hand, there are those which, though higher than our everyday states of consciousness, are still mundane; on the other hand, there are those which are truly Transcendental. What this distinction really means we shall see a little later on.

In the Buddhist tradition there are quite a number of lists of these higher states of consciousness. These lists represent different levels within, or different dimensions of, the higher consciousness. Today we are going to concern ourselves with three lists: the 'Four *Dhyāna*s of the World of Form', the 'Four Formless *Dhyāna*s', and the 'Three Gates of Liberation'. As we go through these three lists, we shall get some idea of what *dhyāna* in the sense of higher states of consciousness really means. But we must remember that though we may understand what is said perfectly well, this is no substitute for our own first-hand experience.

First of all, the 'Four *Dhyāna*s of the World of Form'. Traditionally there are two ways of describing these: in terms of psychological analysis or in terms of images. These two methods of description correspond to the two principal modes of human communication, or the two principal 'languages' which we may use. We may speak the language of ideas, of concepts, of abstract thought (it is this sort of language which is spoken by science and philosophy), or we may speak the language of images, of mental pictures, even of archetypes (this language comprises such things as metaphor, myth and symbol).

Buddhism uses both of these languages. On some occasions, it speaks the language of concepts; on other occasions, it speaks the language of images. Both of these languages are of equal importance. The language of concepts appeals more to the conscious mind — to our conscious rational intelligence; the language of images, which is much more concrete, vivid, and pictorial — in a way much more deeply moving — appeals to the unconscious depths within us.

Most modern expositions of the Buddha's teaching, fortunately or unfortunately, are given in terms of concepts, and if one reads through the literature which is available (at least in English) on Buddhism, one sometimes gets the impression that Buddhism is one-sidedly, not to say overwhelmingly, intellectual (one is almost led to believe sometimes that to really understand Buddhism one needs to undergo a rigorous course in Buddhist logic, metaphysics and epistemology). This impression needs to be corrected, because traditional Buddhism *does use* the non-conceptual mode of communication — the communication through images. In fact, traditional Buddhism speaks the language of images at least as frequently, and at least as powerfully, as it speaks the language of concepts. We have to try to redress this imbalance in the presentation of Buddhism in the West by encouraging various methods of communicating non-conceptually — even perhaps non-verbally — the truth and the reality of the Buddha's teaching.

There is a very beautiful example in the life of the Buddha of such non-conceptual communication. This story comes from the Zen tradition. We know that sometimes the Buddha spoke at length, discoursing intellectually upon his spiritual experience. But not always. Sometimes he resorted to more direct methods and spoke the language of images. This is what happened on one very famous occasion. With the assembly

sitting silently around him, the Buddha, instead of speaking, simply took from an attendant a golden flower and held it up. He held up this flower in the midst of the assembly and said nothing — nothing at all. He did not even smile. But Mahākāśyapa, one of the greatest of the disciples, he smiled. He smiled because he understood what the Buddha was trying to communicate through holding up this golden flower, through this non-verbal communication.¹

This action on the part of the Buddha was, we are told, the origin of the Zen transmission. It is worth just reflecting on this, that the great spiritual movement of Zen, which is one of the greatest forms of Buddhism, which has spread all over the Far East, which has produced hundreds of Enlightened masters, did not spring from a system of philosophy, nor from a lengthy discourse by the Buddha, but, according to tradition, from this one simple symbolical action of the Buddha, this holding up of the golden flower. Mahākāśyapa understood what the Buddha meant and so he smiled. He probably thought to himself that the Buddha had never done anything more wonderful than hold up that single golden flower. We may say that that golden flower, even now, all over the Far East, even over those parts of the West which now know about the Zen tradition, is shedding its lustre.

It is easy for us to discuss Buddhist philosophy; speaking the language of concepts, we can talk the hind legs off the proverbial donkey. It is this other language, the language of images, which we need to learn to speak. We have to immerse ourselves in myth and symbol, and learn to experience this comparatively unfamiliar dimension of human communication.

We have digressed, however, so let us return to the 'Four *Dhyāna* s of the World of Form'. Usually four *dhyāna* s, but sometimes five, are enumerated. This should remind us that we are not to take these classifications too literally: the 'Four *Dhyāna* s' represent successively higher states of psychic development, which in reality constitute one continuous ever-unfolding process.

Now for the description of these four higher states of consciousness in terms of psychological analysis. We will speak the language of concepts for a little while, before going on to speak the language of images.

In terms of psychological analysis, the first *dhyāna* is characterized by the absence of all negative emotions. Specifically, in terms of the Buddhist tradition, the first *dhyāna* is characterized by the absence of lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt, which traditionally are called the 'Five Mental Hindrances'. Unless all negative emotions are inhibited, suppressed, suspended, unless the mind is completely free, at least for the time being, not only of the 'Five Mental Hindrances' but of fear, anger, jealousy, anxiety, guilt, there is no entry into higher states of consciousness. It is quite clear, therefore, that if we want to practise meditation seriously, our initial task must be to learn to be able to inhibit, at least temporarily, the gross manifestations (at least) of all these negative emotions.

On the positive side, the first *dhyāna* is characterized by the concentration and unification of all our psychophysical energies. Last week we saw that our energies are usually scattered over a multiplicity of objects; we saw that our energies are blocked and wasted — in the latter case they simply leak away in various directions. When we take up the practice of meditation one of the things that happens is that all our energies are brought together: those energies which are blocked are unblocked, those which are being wasted are checked in the waste. In this way, all our energies come together, flow together, are concentrated, are unified. This flowing together of psychophysical energy, this heightening of energy, this accumulation of energy, is characteristic of the first *dhyāna* and, in fact, is characteristic, in increasing degrees, of all four *dhyānas*.

This concentration and unification of energies is experienced, in the first *dhyāna*, as something intensely pleasurable. When all our energies come together, when there is no dissipation, or division, or conflict of energy, when our energy is naturally concentrated on higher and higher levels, then this is experienced as something intensely pleasurable, even blissful. In this first *dhyāna* the pleasurable sensation experienced is of two kinds: there is a purely mental aspect and also a physical aspect.

The pleasurable physical aspect, which is called *prīti*, or 'rapture', manifests in various ways. It may, for instance, manifest by way of somebody's hair standing on end. It may manifest in the form of tears: some people, when they practise meditation, after a while start weeping violently — this is a very good, healthy, positive manifestation of *prīti*, though it does pass away after some time.

The first *dhyāna* is also characterized by a certain amount of discursive mental activity. One can enter upon the first *dhyāna* having suspended all negative emotions, having unified one's energies, having experienced various pleasurable sensations, mentally and physically, but with some vestige of discursive mental activity still remaining. This discursive mental activity is present, but is not enough to disturb concentration. It is a little flickering mental activity, at least about the meditation experience if not about anything else. After a while, it may seem as though this recedes to the fringes of one's concentration.

In the second *dhyāna* the discursive mental activity disappears: with increased concentration, it fades away. The second *dhyāna* is therefore a state of no thought. When one speaks in terms of 'no thought' people often become a little afraid. They imagine that if there is no thought, one must almost cease to exist; they perhaps think that one goes into a sort of coma or trance. In fact nothing like that happens. It must be emphasized that in the second *dhyāna* there is simply no discursive mental activity. One is fully awake, aware, conscious. In fact, one's whole consciousness is heightened: one is more awake, more aware, more alert than one normally is. Even though the discursive mental activity fades away, even though the mind is no longer active in that sense, a clear, pure, bright state of awareness is experienced. In the second *dhyāna* one's psychophysical energies become still more concentrated, with the result that both the mental and the physical pleasurable sensations of the first *dhyāna* persist.

We noticed that in passing from the first to the second *dhyāna*, discursive mental activity was eliminated. Now in passing from the second *dhyāna* to the third *dhyāna*, it is the pleasurable physical sensations that disappear. Consciousness is increasingly withdrawn from the body, so the pleasurable, even blissful, sensations are no longer experienced in, or with, the body. The mind nevertheless is blissful. In this stage bodily consciousness may be very peripheral indeed: it is as though you are conscious of your body a great way away, right on the edge of your experience, not right at the centre of it, as is usually the case. The other factors remain in the third *dhyāna* as before, except that they are still further intensified.

In the fourth *dhyāna*, even the *mental* experience of happiness disappears. This does not mean that one in any way becomes unhappy. In this stage the mind passes beyond pleasure and pain. This is something which is rather difficult for us to understand. We cannot help thinking of such a state as being a sort of neutral grey state, rather *lower* than pleasure — perhaps even lower than pain. But it is not like that. In the fourth *dhyāna* the mind passes *beyond* pleasure and pain, beyond even the mental bliss of the previous *dhyāna*s, and enters a state of what is called 'equanimity'. To be paradoxical, one may say that the state of equanimity is even more pleasant than the pleasant state itself (one cannot say, of course, that it is more painful than the painful state). The state of equanimity is a state which is even more deeply satisfying than the pleasant state. It is a sort of positive peace, even more blissful than bliss itself. In this stage, the total energies of one's being are fully integrated, so that this *dhyāna* is a state of perfect mental, perfect spiritual, harmony, balance and equilibrium.

These are the 'Four *Dhyāna*s', the four states of higher consciousness, in terms of psychological analysis. Now for the description of them in terms of images. Here we find the Buddha using four similes, one for each *dhyāna*. You will notice that the Buddha gives very ordinary, everyday sort of illustrations, but ones which nevertheless are very apposite.

The Buddha's simile for the first *dhyāna*: The Buddha says, "Suppose there is a bath attendant, who is going about his usual work. He takes a handful of soap powder and mixes it with water." (You might be rather surprised to hear that they had soap powder in ancient India two thousand five hundred years ago, and you may be still more surprised to learn that they got it, and still get it, from a soap tree. If you dry and powder the fruit of this particular tree you get something which works in exactly the same way as soap powder.) The Buddha said, "Suppose this bath attendant mixes and kneads the soap powder and water until the soap powder is a ball, fully saturated with moisture. It is so fully saturated with moisture that it

cannot absorb one more drop of water; at the same time, no single speck of soap powder is unpermeated by the water. The experience in the first *dhyāna* is just like that."

The Buddha's simile for the second *dhyāna* : The Buddha says, "One's experience in the second *dhyāna* is like a great lake, full of water. The water in this lake does not come from rainfall, nor from streams flowing into it, but from a subterranean inlet, deep down in the middle of the lake. There is a little inlet where the cool, cold, fresh water bubbles up, gradually extending throughout the waters of the lake."

The Buddha's simile for the third *dhyāna* : Here the Buddha takes not just a lake of water, but a lake of lotuses. He says, "Suppose you see great beds of lotus flowers, red, blue, white and yellow, growing in the midst of the water. What is the condition of those lotuses? They are fully in the water: their roots, stems, leaves, even the petals of their blossoms, are soaked in water. They grow there, permeated by the water. One's experience in the third *dhyāna* is like that."

The Buddha's simile for the fourth *dhyāna* : The Buddha says, "Suppose there is a man who, on a very hot day, takes a bath — in the open air, in a tank. Having bathed, he takes a great length of white cloth, wraps it round himself, and sits down. Now he feels pure, clean, insulated. This is what one feels like when one experiences the fourth *dhyāna* ." ²

These are the four similes which the Buddha uses to describe one's experience in the 'Four *Dhyāna s*'. Here the Buddha is speaking the language of images. You may well have got more out of this description than you got out of the description in terms of psychological analysis; it may be that the Buddha's language of images spoke to you more closely, more intimately, perhaps even more truthfully, than his language of concepts.

One can see from these four similes that there is a definite progression as one passes from one *dhyāna* to the next. In the first *dhyāna* there is a unification of the energies of the conscious mind. In the first simile you start with a duality: there are the two things, soap powder and water. But that duality is resolved: the soap powder and water are kneaded together. The first *dhyāna* really represents a unification of all the energies of the conscious mind on the conscious level.

Then, in the second *dhyāna* the energies of the superconscious mind begin to penetrate into the unified conscious mind. This is what is meant by the cool, clear, cold water bubbling up within the innermost recesses of the lake. The superconscious energies bubble up, as it were, in the unified conscious mind as a sort of source of inspiration.

Next, these energies which have started to bubble up within one — or pour down into one — take, as it were, complete possession. They take complete possession just as, in the third simile, the lotuses are completely permeated by the water — their roots, stems, flowers, are soaked by the water. In this third stage the superconscious energies transform the energies of the conscious mind.

Finally, in the fourth *dhyāna* the conscious mind is dominated by, enclosed and enfolded by, the superconscious energies, just as the man who has taken his bath is enclosed and enfolded by the white sheet in which he swathes himself. You may notice that in the second *dhyāna* the superconscious, in the form of the water flowing in from the inlet, was contained within the unified conscious, the lake, but now, in the fourth *dhyāna* it is the conscious — though the thoroughly transformed conscious — which is contained within the super-conscious: the situation has been completely reversed.

All this could be represented visually. One is painting pictures with words, but it could be done more directly with the brush, with colours, etc. In fact, Lama Govinda has done this. Years ago I saw a series of paintings by him — he called them 'abstract paintings' — which represented the 'Four *Dhyāna s*'.³

So much then for the 'Four *Dhyāna s* of the World of Form'. We have spent rather a long time on them because of their central importance for the practice of meditation and, in fact, for the practice of the spiritual life generally. We are now turning to the 'Four Formless *Dhyāna s*', four states of higher

consciousness associated with the Formless World. These are often superimposed upon the 'Four *Dhyāna s* of the World of Form'. They are rather remote from the experience of most meditators, so we shall be dealing with them only briefly. They consist in the experience of objects of ever increasing degrees of subtlety and refinement.

The first formless *dhyāna* is known as the 'Sphere of Infinite Space'. You may recollect that by the time we reached the fourth *dhyāna* of the World of Form we had left behind the body consciousness. If one abstracts oneself from the senses through which objects in space are perceived, one is left, as it were, with the experience of infinite space — space extending infinitely in all directions, all of which is everywhere. It is not just a sort of visual experience of looking out into infinite space from a certain point in space; it is a feeling of freedom and expansion, an experience of one's whole being expanding indefinitely.

The second formless *dhyāna* is known as the 'Sphere of Infinite Consciousness' (*vijñāna*). One reaches this by 'reflecting' that one has experienced infinite space; in that experience there was a consciousness of infinite space. That means that conterminous with the infinity of space, there is an infinity of consciousness: the subjective correlative of that objective state or experience. Abstracting or subtracting from the experience of space and concentrating on the experience of consciousness, one experiences infinite consciousness, once again extending in all directions, but not from any one particular point — consciousness which is all present everywhere.

The third formless *dhyāna* is the 'Sphere of No-thingness', the 'Sphere of Non-particularity'. In this experience one cannot pick out any one thing in particular as distinct from any other thing. In our ordinary everyday consciousness we can pick out, say, a flower as distinct from a tree, or a man as distinct from a house, but in this state, there is no particular 'thingness' of things. One cannot identify this as 'this' and that as 'that'. It is not as though they are confused and mixed up together, but the possibility of picking out does not exist. This is not a state of nothingness but of no-thingness.

The fourth formless *dhyāna* is known as the 'Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-perception'. This is still more rarefied, though is still within the mundane. In passing from the first to the second formless *dhyāna*, one passed from the infinite object to the infinite subject. Now, one passes beyond subject and object. One is not fully beyond subject and object, but one can no longer think or experience in terms of subject and object. One reaches a state in which one cannot say — because in a sense there is no one to say — whether one is perceiving anything or whether one is not perceiving anything.

The 'Four *Dhyāna s* of the World of Form' and the 'Four Formless *Dhyāna s*' are all classified in the Buddhist tradition as mundane, or worldly — as opposed to Transcendental. They are not mundane in the ordinary sense: they are super-conscious states, and as such represent a very high degree of unification and refinement of psycho-spiritual energy; they represent spiritual states, spiritual experiences. However, they are still not truly Transcendental; they have no direct contact with Ultimate Reality. In Buddhism, only that is termed 'Transcendental' which is of the nature of Ultimate Reality or which is directly conducive to it. It is this contact with Ultimate Reality from the heights of the mundane, from the heights of the superconscious, which now has to be made. This contact is made when the concentrated mind (i.e. the mind in the *dhyāna* state, whether higher or lower) turns with awareness from the mundane to the Transcendental, when the concentrated mind begins to contemplate Reality. It is then that the *dhyāna* states pass from being mundane to being Transcendental.

There are many different Transcendental *dhyāna s*. Sometimes the Transcendental *dhyāna s* are called *samādhis*. They differ according to the particular aspect of Reality which is contemplated. Among the most vital and significant of these Transcendental *dhyāna s* are a set of three, known as the 'Three Gateways to Liberation'. We will go into these briefly.

The first is known as the 'Signless *Samādhi*', or the 'Imageless *Samādhi*'. In this Transcendental *dhyāna*, in this experience with a Transcendental object, Reality is contemplated as devoid of all conceptual constructions. One sees that all thoughts and all concepts about Reality have no reference to, have no bearing upon, Reality itself. One sees that even the word 'Reality' is quite nonsensical (only when one sees

that there is 'no word', 'no thought', can one get at that Reality which is not Reality). In this 'Signless *Samādhi*', one contemplates Reality as devoid of all signs which might give the mind some hint of what it 'really' is.

Secondly, there is the 'Unbiased *Samādhi*', or the 'Directionless *Samādhi*'. The mind at this level of superconscious experience does not discriminate between this and that. It does not discriminate between the means and the end, between the here and the there, between the then and the now. There is no time sense — no past, present or future; there is no direction in which to go; there is no bias, no tendency. The mind contemplates Reality under this aspect, that there is no tendency or bias towards this or that, because there is no this or that.

Thirdly and lastly, there is the 'Voidness *Samādhi*'. Here Reality is contemplated as having no self-nature. Reality has no characteristic of its own by which it might be recognized, or distinguished from other things. In this experience one cannot say that a chair is 'this', a human being is 'this' and Reality is 'that'. Reality is not any thing as distinguished from any other thing; Reality does not have a particular self-nature of its own. The 'Voidness *Samādhi*' is the contemplation of Reality under the aspect of having no recognizable, identifiable nature of its own, distinct from the natures of other things.

With these Transcendental *samādhis*, which represent a very lofty peak of spiritual experience indeed, we begin to pass from *dhyāna*, meditation, to *prajna*, Wisdom. But before we deal with Wisdom, I will say just a few more words about *dhyāna*.

We have dealt with *dhyāna* in the sense of the higher states of consciousness, but we have still to deal with *dhyāna* in the second sense of the practices leading to those higher states of consciousness. Under this heading I could speak of the 'Five Basic Methods of Meditation', or of the preparations for meditation, or of some of the experiences which occur in the course of meditation practice. However, I have dealt at some length with these subjects on other occasions,⁴ and so here I am going to limit myself to just one observation. That observation is that *dhyāna* in the sense of the experience of superconscious states is a natural thing. Ideally, as soon as one sat down to meditate, as soon as one crossed one's legs and closed one's eyes, one would go straight into *dhyāna*. It could be, should be, as natural and easy as that. In fact, we may say that if we led a truly human life, if we had spent the previous day, or week, or month, or year, properly, then this might well happen — there is no reason why it should not. However I need hardly tell you — it seems almost cruel to mention it — that this is not what usually happens. We all have to strive, struggle, and sweat — and sometimes swear under our breath. We feel disappointed; we think that it is not worth the effort, that we are making fools of ourselves and might just as well be at the cinema or watching the television. We have to strive and struggle. However, it is not, in fact, that we strive and struggle to meditate, to get into the *dhyāna* state, but that we strive and struggle to remove the obstacles which prevent us assuming the *dhyāna* state. We have to remove such obstacles as the 'Five Mental Hindrances'. If we could only remove them, then we would go sailing at least into the first *dhyāna*. Most meditation exercises do not lead us directly to higher states of consciousness, but simply help us remove the obstacles to those higher states of consciousness. By practising the Mindfulness of Breathing, we can remove the obstacle of distraction. By practising the Metta Bhavana,⁵ we can remove the obstacle of ill will. If we can, with the help of such meditation exercises, just remove the obstacles, then the higher states of consciousness will naturally manifest themselves.

Now the Bodhisattva does not simply practise *dhyāna*, meditation: the Bodhisattva practises *dhyāna pāramitā*, the Perfection of Meditation, Transcendental Meditation. In other words, he practises meditation in order to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all. He does not practise it for the sake of his own peace of mind, though that comes. He does not practise it so that he may go to heaven, though even that may come if he wants. He practises meditation as one aspect of the path which will lead him one day to Supreme Enlightenment for the benefit of all.

Finally, on this subject of *dhyāna*, we may say that the Bodhisattva's practice of meditation does not exclude external activity. In our case, meditation does exclude external activity: if we want to meditate, we have to retire, find a quiet place, sit still, close our eyes, etc. But the Bodhisattva is practising something

much higher and is able to do both — practise meditation and perform external activities — simultaneously. The scriptures stress this in a number of places;⁶ they say that internally he should be immersed in *dhyāna*, but externally he should be carrying on various activities. This does not mean that he suffers from a sort of partial schizophrenia. What appear to us to be two contradictory things, in the case of the Bodhisattva are one thing. The activity is the external aspect of the meditation; the meditation is the internal dimension of the activity. Inner meditation and external activity are, as it were, the two sides of a single coin.

The Bodhisattva practises meditation as not excluding external activity, and this should be our aim too, eventually. Meanwhile we must not delude ourselves, but recognize that for us, for a very long time to come, meditation will exclude external activity and external activity *will* exclude meditation, even though we shall certainly try to see that the effects of our meditation persist and carry over into our everyday life and activities. It will be a very long time before we can meditate when we are in the midst of traffic, or when we are washing up, just as we meditate at our best on our meditation cushion; but that should be our ultimate aim.

It is time now that we passed on to *prajna*, which is the sixth and last *pāramitā*, the sixth and last Perfection. *Prajna* is from the Sanskrit root *jna*, 'to know', and *pra*, which is simply an emphatic prefix. *Prajna* is therefore knowledge in the extreme, or knowledge *par excellence*, which means of course knowledge of Reality. The word for Reality in this connection is *śūnyatā*, which literally means 'Voidness', 'Emptiness', though not emptiness as opposed to fullness, as the word *śūnyatā* indicates a state beyond opposites, a state beyond words. *Śūnyatā* is Reality. Knowledge of Reality means knowledge of *śūnyatā*. Knowledge of *śūnyatā* is *prajna*, or Wisdom.

Śūnyatā is the subject matter of the 'Perfection of Wisdom' group of sutras, one of the most important of all the groups of Mahayana Buddhist scriptures. There are over thirty Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, some very long — the longest has one hundred thousand verses⁷ — and some very short. Among the shorter versions are the well-known *Diamond Sutra* and *Heart Sutra*,⁸ both of which present the essentials of the whole Perfection of Wisdom teaching in a highly condensed form.

We find that four main degrees of *śūnyatā* are enumerated (some texts speak of twenty, even thirty-two degrees, but really there are four main degrees). These are not four different kinds of Reality, but rather represent four progressively deeper stages of penetration by Wisdom into Ultimate Reality. By looking at these four, we will get some idea of the nature and content of *prajna*. As we go through them, however, we should not forget that these are all conceptual presentations, not the real thing, not the experience itself; they are only 'fingers pointing to the moon', and if we can get a glimpse of the moon with their help, then we shall be lucky.

The first degree of *śūnyatā* is *samskrta-śūnyatā*, 'Emptiness of the Conditioned'. This means that conditioned, phenomenal, relative existence is devoid of the characteristics of the Unconditioned, the Absolute, the Truth. The characteristics of the Unconditioned in Buddhism are: firstly, Bliss; secondly, Permanence, that it is beyond time (not that it persists in time, but that it occupies, as it were, a dimension in which time itself does not exist); and thirdly, True Being, Ultimate Reality. Conditioned existence is devoid of these characteristics. It is, on the contrary, unsatisfactory, impermanent and not ultimately real. For this reason, the conditioned is said to be empty of the Unconditioned. This means that we should not expect to find in the flux of relative existence what only the Absolute can give us. So this is the first of the four degrees of *śūnyatā*, that the conditioned is empty — empty of the Unconditioned.

The second degree of *śūnyatā* is *asamskrta- śūnyatā*, or 'Emptiness of the Unconditioned'. Here Wisdom sees that the Unconditioned is devoid of the characteristics of the conditioned. Conditioned existence, as we have noted, is unsatisfactory, even riddled with unhappiness, impermanent and not wholly real, whereas the Unconditioned is the locus of Bliss, of Permanence, of True Being. Therefore we speak in terms of the emptiness of the Unconditioned — that it is empty of the conditioned. Just as in the conditioned one will not find the Unconditioned, in the Unconditioned one will not find the conditioned.

These first two degrees of emptiness are common to all forms of Buddhism and represent, obviously, a comparatively dualistic approach (the conditioned is not the Unconditioned, the Unconditioned is not the conditioned; this world is not that world, that world is not this world; the conditioned is empty of the Unconditioned, the Unconditioned is empty of the conditioned). This approach is necessary as the working basis of our spiritual life in its early stages. To begin with, we have to make this distinction, we have to think, "'Here' is the conditioned and 'there' is the Unconditioned, and I want to get from 'here' to 'there'." In the early stages of our spiritual life we cannot help thinking in these terms, and so we take as our working basis this (mutually exclusive) duality of the conditioned and the Unconditioned.

The third and fourth degrees of *śūnyatā* are peculiar to the Mahayana. The third degree is *mahāśūnyatā*, or 'Great Emptiness'. In the Mahayana *mahā* always means pertaining to *śūnyatā* (the Mahayana is 'the vehicle of *śūnyatā*', the Bodhisattva is also the *mahāsattva*, 'the being born out of the Voidness'). *Mahāśūnyatā* consists in the emptiness of the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. We see that the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned is not ultimately valid, that it is a product of dualistic thinking. We may spend ten, fifteen, twenty years of our spiritual life working on the assumption that the conditioned is the conditioned and the Unconditioned is the Unconditioned — that is necessary — but eventually we have to learn to see the emptiness of the distinction between the two: we have to see that the distinction is not ultimately valid and has ultimately to be transcended. We have to see, to experience — not just intellectually theorize, nor just speculate — that *rūpa* and *śūnyatā* ('form' and 'Voidness') are ultimately of one and the same essence and reality, as are the conditioned and the Unconditioned, samsara and Nirvana, ordinary beings and Buddhas. This is *mahāśūnyatā*, the 'Great Void', in which all distinctions, all dualisms are swallowed up and simply do not exist any more. It is this 'Great Void' into which people, even spiritual people, are so afraid of disappearing. People want to cling on to their dualistic ways of thinking — self and others, this and that — but eventually these must all be swallowed up. The 'Great Void' is the tiger's cave which is remarkable for the fact that many tracks lead into it, but none come out (you get into the 'Great Void', but you never come out, which is why, in fact, you want to get into it).

The fourth and final degree of *śūnyatā* is *śūnyatā-śūnyatā*, 'Emptiness of Emptiness'. Here we see that emptiness itself is only a concept, only a word, only a sound. Even with *mahāśūnyatā*, you are still hanging onto subtle thoughts, subtle dualistic experiences, so ultimately even *mahāśūnyatā* has to be abandoned. When that is abandoned, when you come to *śūnyatā-śūnyatā*, then there is just nothing to be said: all that is left is silence, a significant silence, a thunderous silence.

These are the four degrees of *śūnyatā*, which represent successively more advanced stages of penetration into Reality. What penetrates, what breaks through, is *prajna*, Wisdom. Earlier I referred to the *Heart Sutra*, which is so called because it contains the heart, the essence, of the Perfection of Wisdom teachings. The heart of the *Heart Sutra* is contained in its concluding mantra, *gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*, which literally means (though the literal meaning does not give the real meaning): 'gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond. Enlightenment. Success.' The words of the mantra refer to the four degrees of *śūnyatā*.

Gate gate, 'gone, gone'. This means gone from conditioned existence, gone from relative existence, gone from the world. This is the first degree of *śūnyatā*, *samskrtaśūnyatā*, experience of the 'Emptiness of the Conditioned'. As a result of this experience one leaves the conditioned, one goes forth from it.

Pāragate, 'gone beyond'. When one leaves the conditioned one goes to the Unconditioned — there is nowhere else to go. This represents the second degree of *śūnyatā*, *asamskrtaśūnyatā*, the 'Emptiness of the Unconditioned'. One goes to the Unconditioned, one goes beyond, because the Unconditioned is empty of the conditioned — in the Unconditioned there is no trace of the conditioned — and one does not want to have anything more to do with the conditioned.

Pārasaṃgate, 'gone altogether beyond'. One goes beyond the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. This represents the third degree of *śūnyatā*, *mahāśūnyatā*, the 'Great Emptiness'. When one goes beyond the very distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned, then one truly does

go altogether beyond.

Bodhi, 'Enlightenment'. There is no sentence here; there is just the word, the exclamation, 'Enlightenment!' Here, in Enlightenment, the idea of *śūnyatā* itself is transcended. It is as though when one comes here, having traversed these three degrees of *śūnyatā* and come to the fourth, one can only open one's arms and say, in Alan Watts' phrase, 'This is IT'⁹ — Enlightenment, Awakening.

Svāhā, 'Success'. *Svāhā* is a word which often comes at the end of a mantra; it indicates 'auspiciousness', 'success', 'achievement'. It means, 'You have done your task, you have achieved success, you have reached your goal, you are Enlightened.' It means that all four degrees of *śūnyatā* have been traversed, that Wisdom has been fully developed and true success has been achieved.

The foregoing account of Wisdom has been progressive; in other words, it has been an account in terms of more and more advanced stages of penetration into Reality. But there is another tradition which unfolds different dimensions of Wisdom simultaneously. This is the teaching of what are known as the 'Five *Jñānas*', the 'Five Knowledges', or the 'Five Wisdoms'. We will conclude with an account of these, which will give us further insight into the nature of *prajna*.

The first of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'Wisdom of the *Dharmadhātu*'. This is the basic Wisdom, of which the other four are subsidiary, or special, aspects. The term '*Dharmadhātu*' is a difficult one. *Dhātu* means a 'sphere', or 'realm', or 'field', and here represents the whole cosmos. *Dharma* here means 'Reality', 'Truth', the 'Ultimate'. So the *Dharmadhātu* means the whole cosmos considered as the sphere of the manifestation of Reality, or the whole cosmos conceived of as fully pervaded by Reality. Just as the whole of space is filled by the sun's rays, so the whole of existence, with its galactic systems, its suns, its worlds, its gods and its men, is pervaded by Reality itself. The whole of existence is a field for the manifestation of, the play of, the expression of, the exuberance of Reality. The Wisdom of the *Dharmadhātu* means direct knowledge of the whole cosmos as non-different from Reality. Not that the cosmos is wiped out or obliterated. The cosmos is still there and you see it still. The houses, the trees, the fields, the men and the women, the sun, the moon and the stars are all there, just as they were before, but now they are pervaded by Reality. You see both the cosmos and Reality at the same time — the one does not obstruct the other. You see the cosmos; you see Reality. You see Reality; you see the cosmos. Cosmos is Reality; Reality is cosmos. *Rūpa* is *śūnyatā*; *śūnyatā* is *rūpa*. This Wisdom of the *Dharmadhātu* is symbolized by the figure of Vairocana, the 'Illuminator', the white Buddha (sometimes he is called the 'Sun Buddha').

The second of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'Mirror-like Wisdom'. This Wisdom is like a mirror, because just as a mirror reflects all objects, so the Enlightened mind reflects everything: it sees everything, it understands the true nature of everything. If you look into the depths of the Enlightened mind you see everything. All the objects of the world are reflected in the depths of the Enlightened mind, but the Enlightened mind is not affected by them. If you take a mirror and place an object in front of it, the object is reflected. If you take that object away and put another object in front of it, that second object is now reflected. When you move the object — or when you move the mirror — you do not find the reflection sticking. The Enlightened mind is just like that: it reflects but nothing sticks. Our mind, however, is quite different. To pursue the illustration, one might say that our mind is a sort of mirror to which all the reflections stick. In fact they not only stick, but they congeal and get all jammed up together. Sometimes the mirror even sticks to the object and they cannot be separated. In other words, in the Enlightened mind there is no subjective reaction, no subjective attachment, there is pure, perfect objectivity. This 'Mirror-like Wisdom' is symbolized by Aksobhya, the 'Imperturbable', the dark blue Buddha.

The third of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'Wisdom of Equality', or the 'Wisdom of Sameness'. The Enlightened mind — we have seen — sees everything with complete objectivity (it sees that a man is a man, a woman is a woman, a flower is a flower, a house is a house, the sun is the sun) and sees the same Reality (*śūnyatā*) in everything. Therefore it has the same attitude towards everything — this is the 'Wisdom of Equality'. The Enlightened mind is equal-minded towards all. The Enlightened mind has the same Love and Compassion for all, without any distinction or discrimination. Sometimes it is said that the Love and Compassion of the Enlightened mind fall without discrimination on all beings, just as the sun's rays fall now on the golden

roofs of a palace and now on a dunghill. It is the same sun which is shining on the palace and the dunghill. The Enlightened mind shines with its Love and Compassion on high and low alike, on 'good' and 'bad' alike. This 'Wisdom of Equality', or 'Sameness', is symbolized by Ratnasambhava, the 'Jewel-born', the yellow Buddha.

The fourth of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'All-Distinguishing Wisdom'. A mirror, as we have seen, reflects all things equally but at the same time does not confuse or blur their distinctive features — a mirror will reflect the tiniest detail. Similarly, the Enlightened mind, especially under its aspect of the All-Distinguishing Wisdom, does not only see the unity of things, but at the same time sees the uniqueness of things, and in fact sees both of these together. The Enlightened mind does not see things only in their unity or only in their diversity, but sees both together. It does not reduce the plurality to a unity; it does not reduce the unity to a plurality: it sees the unity *and* the plurality. Buddhism, on the philosophical level, is neither a monism, in which all differences are cancelled out, nor a pluralism, in which all unity disappears. It is neither monistic nor pluralistic. In the Buddhist vision of existence, unity does not obliterate difference, difference does not obliterate unity. We cannot help perceiving now one, now the other, but the Enlightened mind sees unity and difference at one and the same time. It sees that you are uniquely yourselves, individually blossoming with all your idiosyncrasies; at the same time, it sees that you are all one. These two, the unity and the difference, the monism and the pluralism, are not two different things (we do not say that they are one, but they are not two). This 'All-Distinguishing Wisdom', is symbolized by Amitabha, the 'Buddha of Infinite Light', the red Buddha.

The fifth of the 'Five Wisdoms' is the 'All-Performing Wisdom'. The Enlightened mind devotes itself to the welfare of all living beings. In doing so it devises many 'skilful means' of helping people. The Enlightened mind helps people naturally and spontaneously. We must not imagine the Bodhisattva sitting down one morning and thinking, "How can I help someone today? Is this person more in need of help or that? Maybe I'll go and help so-and-so today." The Enlightened mind does not function like that: it functions freely, spontaneously, naturally. The helpfulness pours forth in a flood, but quite spontaneously, without any premeditation, without any intellectual working things out. This 'All-Performing Wisdom' is symbolized by Amoghasiddhi, the 'Infallible Success', the green Buddha.

These are the 'Five Wisdoms', which exhibit, on the same level, different aspects of *prajna*. We have dealt with *dhyāna* and *prajna* separately, as distinct *pāramitās*. Now it is time to consider them together. This we shall do with the help of Hui-Neng (or Wei-Lang), the Sixth Patriarch of the Dhyāna School in China (the Dhyāna School is the Ch'an or Zen School). Hui-Neng, the Sixth Patriarch, in the course of his *Platform Scripture* — a series of addresses to a body of people whom he very politely addresses as 'learned audience' — has this to say on the subject of *samādhi* (*samādhi* is the highest form of *dhyāna*) and *prajna*:

Learned Audience, in my system Samādhi and Prajna are fundamental. But do not be under the wrong impression that these two are independent of each other, for they are inseparably united and are not two entities. Samādhi is the quintessence of Prajna, while Prajna is the activity of Samādhi. At the very moment that we attain Prajna, Samādhi is therewith; and vice versa. If you understand this principle, you understand the equilibrium of Samādhi and Prajna. A disciple should not think that there is a distinction between 'Samādhi begets Prajna' and 'Prajna begets Samādhi'. To hold such an opinion would imply that there are two characteristics in the Dharma.

Learned Audience, to what are Samādhi and Prajna analogous? They are analogous to a lamp and its light. With the lamp there is light. Without it, it would be dark. The lamp is the quintessence of the light and the light is the expression of the lamp. In name they are two things, but in substance they are one and the same. It is the same case with Samādhi and Prajna.¹⁰

Commenting on this passage, we may say that *samādhi*, which represents the highest form of *dhyāna*, is the Enlightened mind as it is in itself, whereas *prajna* is what we may describe as its objective functioning. We could even say that *dhyāna* represents the subjective and *prajna* the objective aspect of

Enlightenment, except that in Enlightenment there is no subject and no object.

We have now completed our journey for this week. We have seen today how the Bodhisattva practises Meditation and Wisdom, the fifth and sixth of the *pāramitās*, which represent respectively the subjective and objective poles of spiritual experience at their very highest level. Now, in imagination at least, we are standing — or maybe sitting in meditation — 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment'.



Seminar Extracts

1 More and More of Less and Less

from 'The Meeting at Silver Spring', (*The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*), Men's Mitra Retreat, Padmaloka, August 1976

Shiwa Aui replied, "You have just said that he who learns a great deal without actual practice is liable to go astray. Please elaborate this a little."

The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, trans. Garma C. C. Chang, Shambhala, Boulder & London 1977, Vol. I, p. 184

Sangharakshita: Milarepa hadn't exactly said that but he certainly implied it. Why do you think it is that one 'who learns a great deal without actual practice is liable to go astray'?

Ananda: It becomes purely intellectual.

S.: Yes. It is very important that one's practice should keep pace with one's theoretical understanding, and nowadays this just doesn't happen at all. If you practise even a *hundredth* part of what you have read and understood you are doing pretty well. Think of all those books on Zen, on the Mahayana, and the Tantra that people read, but how much is ever practised? What's practised is absolutely infinitesimal, which is certainly not in accordance with tradition. I think we often don't realize this — how little we put into practice what we know, or what we understand.

Supposing we had to, forget all about the Buddhism that we've read about in books and had to write an account of Buddhism basing ourselves entirely on our own personal experience. How much do you think we'd be able to write? There would be a little bit about some precept, a little bit about one or two kinds of meditation, maybe a bit about *puja* and our experience of it, a bit about retreats and our experience of spiritual fellowship. We wouldn't be able to write very much about the Void, or about Perfect Wisdom. We couldn't give very detailed descriptions of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas because we probably haven't ever seen them. Even the Buddha Śākyamuni himself we have never seen. It's all from hearsay — admittedly the hearsay of tradition — but not our own personal experience. Even a simple thing like 'hatred never ceases by hatred, hatred ceases only by love' — have we ever actually put it into practice and found that it did work? What about the Precepts, for instance the first precept, '*pāṇātipāta*', how far does our practice of that go?

If one was honest you could probably get your account of Buddhism from your personal experience on the proverbial postage stamp, if one had a fine-nibbed fountain pen — especially on one of those nice big pictorial issues that they've been putting out lately. It would be quite easy — and room for your signature at the bottom, too.

This perhaps reinforces something that I've been saying of late, that is 'more and more of less and less'. Milarepa seems to believe in this and this is what he's giving Shiwa Aui in this song: more and more of less and less. Do you understand what I mean by this? I don't think you all do. What do you understand by it, Sagaramati?

Sagaramati: Concentrate your energies on one thing. In the case of books get rid of forty-nine books and keep the fiftieth.

S.: Concentrate more and more on those things which are of basic importance, although very simple and expressible in a few words.

Mike Chivers: I got caught up in that sort of thing and about two months ago I thought, "Right, let's get back to the 'Eightfold Path' and look at the basics of that."

Ananda: [When you do that] you get more and more out of it every time.

Mike Chivers: [At first] you only read it as an intermediary stage so you don't really give it your full attention, you just see it as part of the key for the next thing. Then you see how the whole structure is shaky and [you have to decide whether] to go further and wobble and crash or go back to what you've read before and start making a firm foundation for the rest of Buddhist philosophy to be built on.

S.: This is what I call 'back to the beginning'. Usually people's tendency is to want to go on to something more advanced. They go into bookshops and they want books on the most advanced forms of Buddhism. They hear that a book is about something very advanced, that it's never been taught before outside a very small band of disciples, and they think, "This is just the thing for me". Why do you think this is, why do people do this?

Peter Cowen: They think they are very special.

S.: Well, everybody is special. But are they special in *that* sort of way?

Padmapani: They want to grab for the experience.

S.: Yes, there is that aspect too — very much so. It's [also] inquisitive, which is a purely intellectual thing.

Mike Chivers: They can't believe that they're not that developed.

S.: They think they are equal to what they understand intellectually. If they've understood it they think they have mastered it. This brings me to a quotation from Coleridge, 'You can't reverence what you understand'.¹¹ [That is,] if you have understood something you have mastered it, but if you think you have mastered it how can you [then] reverence it? You can only reverence that which you have not mastered, that which you look up to, that which you do not understand. If you think you have understood *śūnyatā*, the Buddha, the Vajrayana, Tantric symbolism, how can you then reverence any of those things? You think you have mastered them because you think you have understood them, so there is no reverence for them. If there is no reverence for them — and actually they do represent something infinitely further on than you are — you can't possibly make any *real* experiential approach to them.



2 Dhyanic Suspension

from *Dhammapada*, Ch. 14 & 20,
Men's Order/Mitra Event, Vinehall, April 1981

Sangharakshita: The first line speaks of the Buddha as having conquered thirst, hope, craving and desire — that is, neurotic desire — and makes the further statement that that conquest is not to be undone — in other words, not to be reversed. What does that tell you about the Buddha? More specifically, what does it tell you about the conquest of these hopes, expectations and cravings?

Mark Bowden: It's complete and utter.

S.: It is complete and utter, but what is people's usual experience with regard to these states?

Pete Shann: They recur.

S.: They recur. For instance, in connection with meditation, what you usually find is that if the mind is disturbed by a definite craving, it is quite impossible for you to meditate. But [when you get into] the meditation, in the course of *dhyāna* experience, what do you find with regard to craving?

Murray Wright: It is temporarily suspended.

S.: It is temporarily suspended. You can have quite blissful, ecstatic, concentrated, calm experiences of the *dhyāna* s, but after you emerge from the *dhyāna* state what usually happens?

Pete Shann: Those states recur.

S.: Those cravings recur, so can you say that they've been really conquered? You can't, for to conquer them means that they've been destroyed at root. [Therefore] several questions arise. One is, how do you in fact destroy the cravings at root so that they don't recur? And if they do recur, even after the experience of the *dhyāna* states, what is the purpose of these *dhyāna* states? Could one not even dispense with them? First of all, then, with regards to cutting at the root of these cravings, what is it that cuts at the root and that conquers them finally?

A Voice: When you see through them, and see that they don't really conduce to happiness.

S.: [Yes], when you really see through them, not just in an intellectual way or in a theoretical way; what is the term that is generally used?

Voices: Wisdom, *vipāśyanā*. (Pali *vipassana*).¹²

S.: *Vipāśyanā*. Therefore the *dhyāna* experience is not enough. In the *dhyāna* or *samatha* (Pali *samatha*)¹³ experience the cravings — or negative emotions of any kind — are simply suspended, [and] you're free from them for the time being. But it is only by virtue of some genuine Insight into the nature of those states in themselves, of your own mind, of yourself, or of Reality, that those [negative states] are finally and permanently transcended. What, then, is the function of the *dhyāna* s?

Murray Wright: That is your natural state in the absence of the 'Hindrances'.

S.: Yes, but what's the function or purpose of the *dhyāna* s in relation to the Insight experience? Why not just develop Insight? Some people even maintain that there is no need to experience the *dhyāna* s.

Bob Jones: Does it provide you with an incentive to develop that Insight?

Brian Duff: Is it not more that it actually integrates you [and] makes you strong enough to contain the experience?

S.: Ah, yes! There's a very great deal of difference between Insight and ordinary theoretical understanding. People's ordinary theoretical understanding is usually very weak because they are not able to concentrate; there's no energy behind it. In order really to be able to concentrate and really see the truth of things, you need all your energies together, all your energies behind that effort, that thrust, as it were. Meditation, *dhyāna* experience, from one point of view at least, is just the bringing together of all those energies into a concentrated *focus* of attention, so that you can then *really* see. It isn't enough to think about things in a scattered sort of way, as we usually do. It's through the *dhyāna* experience that the mind is rendered sufficiently concentrated and one-pointed to be able to penetrate through into the truth of Insight.

Therefore, even though it's only by means of Insight that you achieve the final conquest of the cravings, the *dhyāna* experience mobilizes your energies for that particular purpose.

We can see from this that the *dhyāna* s are as necessary and as important as Insight itself, in the long run. Some schools [of Buddhism] do speak of a 'dry' Insight, an Insight which is not, so to speak, 'moistened' by the experience of the *dhyāna* s, but this seems to be purely theoretical, not an actual possibility at all..... The traditional classical Buddhist position is that there is no real Insight without the experience of the *dhyāna* s. The experience of the *dhyāna* s provides the concentrated energy and the positive emotional base, and also enables you as it were *to receive* the impact of the *vipāśyanā* experience. This is quite an important point. It is important to understand the distinction between *samatha*, or 'calm', on the one hand, and *vipāśyanā*, or 'Insight', on the other, and why they are both in fact necessary. *Vipāśyanā* without *dhyāna* experience is only a so-called *vipāśyanā*. It's just a theoretical understanding.

Very often you find that people who are involved with this so-called Vipassana tradition memorize the categories of the Abhidharma¹⁴ and recall them under the conditions I mentioned, and imagine that they are in fact developing Insight. But that is not the case at all. The classical Buddhist tradition is 'Insight on the basis of the *dhyāna* s', and one would find in one's own experience that this is what happens. You as it were immerse yourself in a more concentrated state, the *dhyāna* state; mental activity is suspended; and then you gradually emerge from that. You start up mental activity with that concentrated energy in that phase of a poised and peaceful condition and you develop Insight. You understand things better and better, more and more clearly.

Murray Wright: *In the Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, Hui-Neng says that *samādhi* and *prajna* are inseparable: one automatically gives rise to the other. [He says] an experience of *samādhi* is an experience of *prajna*, and vice versa. Is this *samādhi* a *dhyāna* [state] or is it more equivalent to compassion?

S.: It would seem that there is some difficulty with terminology here. I have suggested [elsewhere] that the *samādhi* of which he speaks is akin to the *ceto-vimutti* (Skt. *ceto-vimukti*), or 'Emancipation of Mind' of the Pali texts, and the *prajna* is akin to the *pāññā-vimutti* (Skt. *prajñā-vimukti*), or 'Emancipation of Wisdom'. In the case of the *ceto-vimutti*, it's as though when you are in a higher *dhyāna* state and when the negative emotions have subsided and you are very concentrated, your mundane consciousness becomes 'transparent', and there are no hindrances present. You're not Enlightened; [it's just that] there are no hindrances present. It is very difficult to distinguish that state of *ceto-vimutti*, 'Emancipation of Mind', where there are no hindrances (though the seed of them is lurking), from the state of [*pāññā-vimutti*, or 'Emancipation of Wisdom']. In the state of *ceto-vimutti* the mundane mind becomes so transparent that even without actively developing *vipāśyanā*, there is a sort of reflection of something beyond. The negative emotions are suspended to such an extent that Insight almost dawns naturally, but not quite. Do you see what I mean?

Murray Wright: You've got a vision of a vision.

S.: It's as though Insight is like a window with no glass in it, there's just an open space and you can look straight out. [Our] usual mental state is like a window with very, very, dirty [glass], so you cannot see out at all. But the mind in a very purified state, when the passions are completely suspended, is like [the window] with glass so clean that you're not really sure whether the window is open or not. But if you try to put your fist through, you soon find out! If you try to act upon this superior *samādhi* state you soon find out that you weren't, in fact, Enlightened. But it's not easy to distinguish between the two [states]. I think this is why in the Pali scriptures the Buddha often uses these two expressions *ceto-vimutti* and *pāññā-vimutti* together, and why, perhaps, Hui-Neng speaks in terms of *samādhi* and *prajna* as being inseparable. If you look at his statement in strictly doctrinal terms, he is using *samādhi* in a quite different sense. One could say that he is using *samādhi* in the sense of 'Enlightenment', and *prajna* in the sense of 'the activity of that Enlightened state'. But that is to drop the original meaning of those terms and to take up a very different Mahayana usage.

One might even say that Hui-Neng's own usage is not really even very standard Mahayana usage, but clearly he is trying to communicate the fact that the inner experience of Enlightenment is dynamic, it manifests and operates in the world. He is trying to guard against the danger of what in the West is called 'quietism'.¹⁵

3 Disintegrated Genius

from *The Sutra of Golden Light*,
Community Seminar, Sukhavati, December 1976

Aryamitra: I don't quite understand what a lower stage of integration is.

Sangharakshita: [It is] when the bits and pieces that make up 'you' are just sort of hanging all loose and don't add up to a harmonious total psycho-spiritual organism.

Aryamitra: At the same time you call it an integration — a lower level of integration.

S.: Integration is on a lower level when it incorporates elements which belong to that lower level, so you can have an integrated person who is on the whole a low-level person, and an unintegrated person whose total unintegrated being involves elements which are, as it were, higher than any included in the integrated low-level person. Sometimes quite gifted and richly endowed people can be quite unintegrated. When they do become integrated eventually, there's a far richer synthesis and a far richer and more highly evolved person. An animal is quite integrated, but it's only an animal. Lots of people are quite integrated on their own level, as it were — animal-like, sometimes — but someone who is capable of much higher experiences, much deeper insight, [may be] relatively unintegrated. In a way, the greater the range of your experience and the [deeper] it goes the more difficulty you have in being an integrated person. You've more to integrate.

Vimalamitra: How do you integrate it if you're on a different level?

S.: You can only integrate around the centre. You've got to fix what your centre is, what your ultimate aim is, and gradually get everything working towards that. In that way you integrate yourself. The average man is probably relatively [well] integrated. The great genius may not be at all integrated — he may be quite disorganized — but when he does become integrated he'll not only be more integrated, he'll be integrated on a much higher level, in a more comprehensive way, and be an altogether richer sort of individual.



4 Safe in a Material World

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

Dipankara: I've actually got two questions Bhante. The first one is to do with the hindrance of anxiety. I couldn't recall you talking about states of anxiety as a hindrance. How would you define anxiety and what is its specific treatment in terms of practice?

Sangharakshita: Quite a lot has been written about anxiety in recent times by psychologists of one sort or another who have made a study of it, because it does seem quite a pervasive feature of modern life. In fact, this age has been called 'The Age of Anxiety' — for reasons that are perhaps obvious. There's quite a lot that could be said on the subject but there's just one point that I want to make which emerges from studies with regard to the basic nature of anxiety. It seems that anxiety arises when there is a strong emotion of one kind or another which one doesn't want to experience but which keeps trying to come to the surface. You're half-conscious of it lurking there somewhere below the surface and you're doing your best — though of course it may be a predominantly or even entirely unconscious process — just to keep it down where it is and not allow it to emerge into consciousness. If you start to feel it 'coming up' then you experience that uneasy sensation which you call anxiety because you're not ready and not willing to face it.

If this is the basic situation in the case of anxiety clearly one has got to acknowledge that particular emotion, sooner or later, and confront it, whatever it may be. There's a lot that could be said on how to do that — depending on the nature of the emotion, the nature of the individual person concerned, his or her particular situation, the sort of people they're in contact with, their particular beliefs and way of life and so on and so forth. From the Buddhist point of view, anxiety, which is a form of fear, is a quite unskillful emotion and we have to deal with it and resolve it. [This is a situation in which] one's spiritual friends can be particularly helpful. They can assure you that there's nothing to be afraid of when emotions which you are unwilling to recognize or acknowledge, begin to emerge in to consciousness. [In fact] it would be better for you to have those emotions out in the open and confront them. Eventually, to the extent that they are positive, you can integrate them into your conscious attitude, or in any case, whether they are positive or negative, you can integrate the energy invested in them into your conscious attitude.

Speaking generally perhaps one can't usefully say much more than that. Incidentally you speak of anxiety but that's probably only one aspect of that particular hindrance.

Dipankara: The other part being restlessness?

S.: No, I think it's more complex than that, because anxiety can make you restless — that's one of the symptoms. But I don't know that anxiety in the modern sense was part of the original connotation of that particular Pali and Sanskrit term. Certainly however, anxiety is a member of the family of unskillful mental states.

And there's a second question?

Dipankara: It's about the difficulty of getting into the third *dhyāna* . (*Laughter.*)

Vessantara: Did you say third?

Dipankara: Third. (*Laughter.*) Briefly, is this because physical sensation has to disappear and we tend to relate to our experience on the basis of physical sensation? Or is it more the sheer mental stretch in conceiving of the term permeation?

S.: Well, it's all of these. Disappearance of perception of the external world, that is to say the *kāmaloka*,¹⁶ is usually associated with the fourth *dhyāna* , but certainly that kind of perception does become attenuated in the third *dhyāna* . I suppose that in a way anxiety is involved again, although in a somewhat different form, because all the familiar signposts disappear. We probably don't realize the extent to which we make ourselves at home in the material world — the *kāmaloka* as that is called in Buddhist tradition, although *kāmaloka* covers a rather wider band of existence than the modern terms 'material world' or 'material universe'.

When we begin to find ourselves in a state where we're not actually feeling anything in the sense of experiencing anything tangible — where we don't hear anything, don't see anything, don't smell anything, don't taste anything — when these familiar signposts start disappearing then we can become quite uneasy. It is partly, or even to a great extent, that feeling of uneasiness which prevents us going any further. We want to hang on to what is familiar because our security is there. After all, what would life be like you might think, if you didn't see anything, didn't hear anything, didn't touch anything, didn't taste anything and didn't smell anything? You'd feel yourself sort of disintegrating.

In a sense therefore, entry into the third, and still more the fourth *dhyāna*, represents entry into a state of sensory deprivation. Of course there are compensations, since the *rūpaloka*¹⁷ is incomparably preferable to the *kāmaloka*, but until you have actually experienced something of the *rūpaloka* it is only a word. You are just familiar with that safe, warm, cosy *kāmaloka* and if you get very far beyond that you begin to enter unfamiliar territory. Hence you feel uneasiness. Thus, I think that its only when one has had a certain amount of experience of the *rūpalokas*, and especially when you've started going beyond ordinary sense experience, that you begin to find it less and less anxiety inducing. Of course, for quite a while, you'll have a foot, so to speak, in both worlds. Sense impressions will not have died out completely by any means but, at the same time, some experience of the *rūpaloka* — which includes the *dhyāna s*, especially the third and fourth *dhyāna s* — will begin to filter through. It's like being under water and the rays of the sun penetrate through to some extent so that you perceive them even though you are in the midst of the water.

However, this is just one specific instance of a very general rule. We tend to fear the unfamiliar. We often experience this when we go to an unfamiliar place, especially an unfamiliar country, or when we meet a new person or even when we embark on a new enterprise. Anything that is new or represents an extension or expansion into an unfamiliar field is often accompanied by anxiety or even by fear. In some ways you could say that to experience anxiety or fear in that way is not an unhealthy sign, in as much as it does suggest you are moving into new territories — or at least thinking that you are. Of course, when you are anxious and afraid in familiar situations that is definitely neurotic (*laughter*), and requires further and deeper investigation. But I think we probably don't realize the extent to which we do experience anxiety in all sorts of situations in which perhaps we shouldn't experience it at all. It's quite a pervasive feature of our mental and emotional life. It manifests itself in the case of a lot of people as hesitancy, nervousness, diffidence, reluctance, lack of initiative and so on. Anxious people — especially young people — are very noticeable and stand out from those who have confidence and are not anxious or fear-ridden. You can [distinguish] sometimes very easily between people. If you ask someone to go and buy you something quite ordinary in a shop, you give one person the money and off he goes but someone else will say, "How will I find the shops?" and "What will I ask for when I get there?" and ask a dozen similar questions instead of going off and trying to buy the item for you. This is quite often an expression of anxiety.



5 What Are Friends For?

from '*Meghiya Sutta*' (*Udana*)

New Zealand Men's Retreat, Padmaloka, February 1983

Gunapala: It seems quite strange what you said about having to meditate in order to be able to utilize [the qualities of] your spiritual friend, if he is more developed than you are.

Sangharakshita: I put it more technically than that and spoke in terms of Insight. If you are really to benefit from somebody else's Insight, then you've got to develop Insight yourself. However, you can't develop Insight without some experience of meditation in the sense of some experience of *samatha*. You need to build up experience of the *dhyāna s*, and some degree of concentration and emotional positivity with the help of meditation.

Gunapala: It seems to contradict Meghiya's situation in which he can't meditate because he's immature. He needs friendship first but maybe it has to be on quite a low level and maybe he can't relate to the Buddha?

S.: It would seem that the kind of spiritual friendship that he needs is on quite a low level.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose, in a similar way, that your full capacity for meditation is the higher *dhyāna s*, but most people can't utilize that capacity because they're just not ready for it. In the same way with friendships, you may not be ready for the peaks of friendship, but you could utilize it on [a more] immediate kind of level.

S.: Perhaps one should distinguish between spiritual friendship and Transcendental friendship. You may be ready for spiritual friendship and in a position to benefit from it, but that doesn't mean you're ready for Transcendental friendship. What the Buddha was in fact offering Meghiya was Transcendental friendship, but he just wasn't ready for that. He needed ordinary spiritual friendship. Nonetheless, Kalyana Mitrata — whether spiritual friendship or Transcendental friendship or both — is put first. The fact that the Buddha says elsewhere that spiritual friendship is the whole of the *Brahmacarya* — or as we say, the holy life — means that it doesn't come first just by accident, or in relation to the specific situation with Meghiya. It is intrinsically first. It's first in a way because it is all, or all in all.

Prasannasiddhi: It comes first even before meditation?

S.: It does seem to, doesn't it?

Murray Wright: You learn meditation from spiritual friends.

S.: Yes.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe [there's] even more to it than that. You were saying that in a sense, Insight just relates to knowing the facts of life, in a way the Reality of life. In the context of a friendship with someone who's alive and living you sort of learn the Realities of life.

S.: Yes. There are quite a lot of things you never actually learn unless somebody tells you. (*Pause.*) Is there some further aspect of spiritual friendship which we haven't explored so far?

Gunapala: The point Prasannasiddhi made expanded [the subject] in a slightly different direction for me, that through Kalyana Mitrata one is gaining Insight into Reality, in a sense into the communication or the relationship of life as it were. By understanding that and participating in it one is gaining Insight, rather than seeing Insight as being gained through meditation.

S.: Or through books.

Gunapala: Yes. It's something which is gained through Kalyana Mitrata.

S.: This does seem to come out clearly in the Zen tradition. Followers of Zen meditate quite a lot and in some forms of Zen sitting meditation is very much emphasized, but, at the same time, there is the tradition of the dialogue with the Zen master. And it would seem that it's within that sort of exchange — maybe

even a sharp exchange — between master and disciple that Insight is at least equally likely to arise. It's as though the master is prodding, or even provoking the disciple into some kind of Enlightenment experience. The disciple isn't always just sitting and quietly meditating, although he does that too — both quietly and not so quietly — in forms of Zen where they use koans.¹⁸ In the case of the dialogue with the master a definite exchange takes place in the course of which Insight can actually arise. It doesn't arise — and this is the main point — *merely* in the context of meditation.

Prasannasiddhi: It's a bit as if the Zen master's standing on the other side of the fence and he can see you exactly as you are and he can see exactly what's wrong and why you're not Enlightened.

S.: Yes, and what you need to break through.

Prasannasiddhi: Yes and he can provoke that area, whereas if you're on your own generally you don't have much of a clue.

S.: You mean if you're on your own you just have some very general guidelines which you apply as best you can to yourself in the light of your own self-knowledge, which may be quite limited by virtue of the fact that you are unenlightened. The Zen master, however, can see what the disciple can't see for himself. He sees just which particular area the disciple needs to work on, and he can feel where the weakness lies. It's well known that it is very difficult really to see one's own weaknesses or blind spots, on whatever level. If you could see your own blind spot, then it wouldn't be a blind spot. The mere fact that it's a blind spot means you can't see it and you need someone else to point it out. And sometimes it may be such a big blind spot that even if the Zen master himself points it out, you don't see it and can't accept it.

Gunapala: You have to have faith to accept it.

S.: Well, sometimes if the blind spot is so big you may not even realize that you're being hit on it. (*Laughter.*) You may just think the master is behaving in an odd way which you can't understand. You don't know what he's getting at. This does therefore point to the fact that at the very least, Insight does also arise within the context of spiritual friendship — especially within the exchange between spiritual friends — and not *simply* within the context of meditation. In a sense a meditative element is present in that exchange in as much as both parties are intensely concentrated on that occasion.

6 The Twist of Duality

from 'The Great Chapter of the *Sutta Nipāta*', (*Woven Cadences of the Early Buddhists*),
Order/Mitra Seminar, Padmaloka, August 1976

*All ill that comes is caused by mind-at-work,
By ending mind-at-work there comes no ill;
Knowing this bane: 'Ill's caused by mind-at-work,'
A monk, completely calming mind-at-work,
Becomes from yearning free and wholly cool.*

'The Great Chapter', *Sutta-Nipāta, Woven Cadences of the Early Buddhists*, trans.
E. M. Hare, (Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. XV), Oxford University Press,
London 1945, Ch. III, vv. 734-5

Sangharakshita: '*Mind-at-work*' — as it's translated here — is *viññāṇa*, or in Sanskrit *vijñāna*. In a certain sense there's nothing wrong with *vijñāna*. But in another sense there is. What is wrong with *vijñāna* is that it is not *jñāna*. The '*jñāna*' bit of it is all right, but not the '*vi*' bit. What does '*vi*' mean? *Vi* means 'discriminative'. Guenther translates *vijñāna* as 'discriminative awareness' (as distinct from '*prajna*', which he translates 'analytical appreciative awareness'). In other words, *vijñāna* is the subject/object type of

consciousness; the consciousness which is oriented towards an object and inseparable from it.

In a way, this is the ultimate basis of the difficulty. The rest is really relatively superficial. Even the *samskaras*¹⁹ (Pali *sankhāras*), — these blind forces which are striving and clinging and craving — presuppose an object. They're going blindly forward towards something; they're oriented towards something. So, without realizing it, they too function within that dualistic subject/object framework.

So here the Buddha comes down to something even more fundamental: the division of consciousness into subject and object. And here we can make a sort of connection with the *Mahāmudrā* teachings.²⁰ The whole framework of our experience is subject and object: subject in relation to object, object in relation to subject. This is how our experience is organized; and this is why we suffer. So, *vijñāna* is the root of our suffering. You do away with *vijñāna*, you do away with *discriminative* consciousness — which doesn't mean that you do away with consciousness — and you do away with suffering.

Ratnapani: If you see things as subject and object, does that imply that you're seeing things as pleasant and unpleasant, nice and nasty?

S.: Well, it's all part of the same dualistic process. The duality of subject and object is the most fundamental of all dualities; once that is established every other form of duality follows.

Vimalamitra: Does this imply a kind of self-satisfaction, a satisfaction with the self?

S.: In a way it does; and at the same time, in a strange way, satisfaction with the object too — or dissatisfaction with the object. Or perhaps it's best to think more positively in terms of the *jñāna*, which means the knowledge, the awareness, which is not divided, which is not split up into the polarity of subject and object. And obviously this is something that is very difficult for us to imagine. We can't think it; because when we think it we make it an object — and it isn't an object. It is that in which there is no subject and object. Even to talk about it makes it into an object. But it's not a subject, in the sense of a subject as distinct from an object. So it is non-dual awareness, non-dual knowledge.

Aloka: And this is what the *Mahāmudrā* is all about?

S.: This is what, in a way, Buddhism generally is about. This is what Enlightenment is about. But the *Mahāmudrā* tackles this much more directly and pertinently than do many of the other schools. It's much more directly and exclusively concerned with it.

So as long as you are operating within the framework of subject and object, you experience yourself as a subject in relation to a world 'out there' — which is not you but with which you're somehow mysteriously connected and from which you are inseparable and which is inseparable from you. I can give an illustration of what happens — I don't think this illustration has ever been given before because it's only just occurred to me. Has anyone got a piece of string? Or a rubber band? I think I'll have to show you this. It's difficult to explain it.

A Voice: It's difficult to imagine doing away with discriminative awareness and still being able to function normally.

S.: Well, you don't do away with the awareness; you only do away with the discrimination.

Right. Suppose this is the complete circle, a perfect circle. This represents your non-dual awareness: no subject, no object. [Figure 1.] It's whole and it's complete. What happens then? It's twisted over like this —

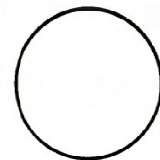


Figure 1.

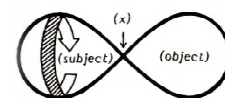


Figure 2.

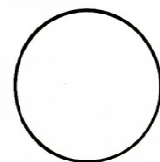


Figure 3.

and you've got a subject and an object. [Figure 2.]

So the question is how that twist occurs and how you're going to untwist it. And this is the 'turning about' [in the deepest seat of conscious-ness].²¹ You just have to untwist it — like that. [Figure 3.] So in a sense, nothing has changed. There's just the aware-ness, the *jīḥna*, instead of the *vijñāna* with the subject and object. It's as simple as that.

Ratnapani: Truth and the cat's cradle.

S.: So the subject and object are touching at this infinitesimal, indivisible point ['x' in figure 2], and they can't separate from each other. They're pulling and struggling. The subject can't get away from the object; the object can't get away from the subject. Where there's a subject, there's an object; where there's an object, there's a subject. So there's duality, division, strain, tension. But all you have to do is to untwist — like that — and you just get your pure, non-dual consciousness. And then you're Enlightened. (*Laughter.*)

You might say that the untwisting is when you start making yourself positive; untwisting is doing that. You can begin to feel that there's not just subject and object in diametrical opposition. The duality is a bit relieved. It 'gives' a little bit. You get this sometimes in meditation, but you're not able to make the complete twist round. The complete twist round only comes about through Insight. So how to untwist, how to 'turn about'? That's the great question. The Buddha doesn't go into it here. He simply says: '*Ill's caused by mind-at-work*'. What is the work that the mind is doing? Creating duality.

7 I Do Not Want Your Clothes

from 'The Meeting at Silver Spring', (*The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*),
Men's Mitra Retreat, Padmaloka, August 1976

*Gracious patron, listen closely to me.
With blindness as a guide
I wandered down perilous paths;
Buffeted by Passionate Winds, now hot, now cold,
I was drenched in the rain of Retribution-Karma.
Worn out by these ordeals,
I longed for Freedom City.*

*With the cloth of Ah Shea Vital Heat
Is the lapel of the Four Cakras made.
My tailor is inner Prāṇa-Mind
Who warms Tig Le and makes it flow;
The merged Bliss-Void experience
Is the needle used for sewing;
The cloth is Inborn Vital Heat.
Now summer and winter are for me the same!*

*Though your woollen clothes are pretty,
My cotton shirt is lighter and gives more comfort.
Dear patron, I do not want your clothes;
You should now go home.*

The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, trans. Garma C. C. Chang, Shambhala,
Boulder & London 1977, Vol. I, pp. 166-7

Sangharakshita: Milarepa's saying that he's clothed with the Vital Heat, *the gTum.mo, the Chandali*,²² and therefore he doesn't need the short coat [offered to him]. The psychic heat shouldn't only be taken

literally. The heat represents, in a way, the blissful experience. Part of the Tantric teaching, though it's not exclusively Tantric, is that the experience of the voidness must be conjoined with the physical or psychophysical experience of blissful warmth or heat; and that these two must be experienced together. In this way you experience the '*Bliss-Void*', as it has already been called. One could say that it's also more like the union of Transcendental Insight with the experience of supremely positive emotion, or the union of *samādhi* and *prajna*. The Tantra puts it in even more concrete terms.

Padmapani: On a more mundane level, Bhante, I get the experience on retreats that with the build up of concentration, through meditation, I get very hot at night. I feel a sort of heat.

S.: Yes, with concentration you do generate bodily heat which others can perceive. You may even feel you have a temperature, the only difference being that you feel happy and comfortable at the same time. The bliss is the psychic, or emotional, counterpart of the intensely pleasurable sensation of heat which you experience with the body.

The '*Bliss-Void experience*' is not just a sort of clear experience of intense blissfulness. The blissfulness is a transformation, one could almost say, of bodily sensations and positive emotionality conjoined with the purely 'mental' experience of the Void. The Bliss experience gives content to the Void experience; the Void experience gives clarity to the Bliss experience. The Tantra emphasizes strongly that the two must go together.

A Voice: Like fire from ice.

S.: Yes, it's fire joined with ice — like hot ice, you could say. There's the clarity of the ice and the heat of the fire.

Sagaramati: When you say, then, that in the *dhyanic* states the physical sensations die away, it's almost put as if they die away to nothing. But is that because you don't reflect upon it?

S.: They don't die away, they [only] lose their turbulent aspect, as it were. It's not the energy, but the turbulence of the energy, that is lost. It's the 'bubbly' quality that dies away, not that particular intense experience itself, which just becomes more solid, more stable. It's not that you no longer experience *prīti*, full stop. The *prīti* is fully transformed into *sukha*, which means that the energy contained in the *prīti* loses its 'bubbly' quality.

Milarepa's cloth or covering is the Vital Heat. This experience of blissful warmth, both as a physical sensation and as an emotional experience, '*Is the lapel of the Four Cakras made*' — a reference to the *Chandali Yoga*, the *gTum.mo* practice of drawing the psychic energy up through the median nerve, through the four psychic centres. '*My tailor is the inner Prāṇa-Mind*' — since it is that which guides the whole process — '*Who warms the Tig Le and makes it flow*'; Tig Le means the *Bindu*, which also means semen, though not so much semen in the literal sense as the gross psychophysical energy which is gradually sublimated and made more and more refined. '*The merged Bliss-Void experience/Is the needle used for sewing*'. It's as though you have the clear Void experience in your head and bring up all the psychophysical energies, in the form of gradually intensifying bliss, and unite them with that experience. '*The cloth is Inborn Vital Heat*', that is, the Transcendental Vital Heat conterminous with Reality that was there from the beginning — not any artificially produced or created Vital Heat. '*Now summer and winter are for me the same!*' Not that Milarepa is impervious simply to extremes of climate. He has gone beyond *all* distinctions, because it is the 'inborn' Vital Heat, the Transcendental Vital Heat, which he has now realized. '*Though your woollen clothes are pretty,/My cotton shirt is lighter and gives more comfort./Dear patron, I do not want your clothes;/You should now go home.*'

Glossary



Guru (Skt.): lit. 'teacher'; (equivalent to Tibetan 'lama'). The term refers specifically to a spiritual teacher. In Vajrayana Buddhism, the guru assumes a special significance and can be seen either as a fourth 'refuge' in addition to the Three Refuges of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, or as the first of the three 'esoteric refuges' (Guru, *Yidam*, *Dakini*). In the Vajrayana, the guru is viewed as the embodiment of Buddhahood. On one level, the term 'guru' refers to the spiritual teacher in his capacity as teacher, on an intellectual level, of the conceptual formulations of the Dharma, but it also has a further significance — for the guru has the function, through his skilful means, of sparking off the transformation of the deeper emotional energies of the disciple so that the latter can progress spiritually. The term can also refer to Padmasambhava, often called 'Guru Rinpoche' (Precious Teacher), who is the 'archetypal guru', especially with regard to the guru's function of transforming emotional energies.

The Venerable Sangharakshita has given his own explanation of the term in a lecture entitled 'Is a Guru Necessary?', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/qd6aguf>. Having explained that a guru is not the head of a religious group, not a teacher, not a father substitute nor a problem solver, though he may at times function temporarily in any of these capacities, he goes on to say that a guru is essentially someone who stands on a higher level of being than the disciple and someone with whom the disciple is in regular contact. This contact is a dynamic interaction, consisting of what he calls 'vertical' communication, in which a mutual modification of being takes place and the disciple is 'compelled' to evolve.

The Spiral Path is an image used by the Venerable Sangharakshita to refer to the Higher Evolution or to the path of spiritual development of the individual. The Spiral Path is contrasted with the traditional circular image of the Wheel of Life, which refers to the reactive mode of conditionality (the samsara). In particular, the image refers to the 'Twelve Positive *Nidānas*' (*nidāna* = 'link') mentioned in the *Nidāna-Vagga* of the Samyutta Nikāya (XII, 23, xxviii) of the Pali Canon, which is one traditional formulation of the stages of the spiritual path and contrasts specifically with the 'Twelve Negative *Nidānas*' depicted around the rim of the Wheel of Life. (See Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse Publications, Ch. 13). The spiral image is used to convey the idea of a creative process, in which one stage is augmented by the next, moving away progressively from the samsara, whereas the process depicted by the Wheel of Life is characterized by a repetitive, reactive movement between opposite poles (such as pleasure and pain), without any real growth beyond these.

The positive *nidānas* are traditionally expressed as follows:- In dependence on *duḥkha* (Pali *dukkha*) (unsatisfactoriness or suffering) arises *śraddhā* (Pali *saddhā*) (faith); in dependence on *śraddhā* arises *prāmodya* (Pali *pāmojja*) (satisfaction, delight); in dependence on *prāmodya* arises *prīti* (Pali *pīti*) (rapture); in dependence on *prīti* arises *praśrabdhi* (Pali *passaddhi*) (tranquillity, calm); in dependence on *praśrabdhi* arises *suhkha* (Skt. and Pali) (bliss); in dependence on *suhkha* arises *samādhi* (Skt. and Pali) (concentration); in dependence on *samādhi* arises *yathābhūtajñānadarśana* (Pali *yathābhūtañānadassana*) (Knowledge and Vision of Things As They Are); in dependence on *yathābhūtajñānadarśana* arises *nirveda* (Pali *nibbidā*) (Withdrawal); in dependence on *nirveda* arises *vairāgya* (Pali *virāga*) (Dispassion); in dependence on *vairāgya* arises *vimukti* (Pali *vimutti*) (Freedom); in dependence on *vimukti* arises *āsavaḥkṣayañāna* (Pali *āsavakkhayañāna*) (Knowledge of the Destruction of the Poisons). The seventh link is crucial in that the arising of Knowledge and Vision of Things As They Are marks the beginning of the Transcendental Path. From this point onwards, no slipping back is possible and further progress is assured. For an exposition of

the 'Twelve Positive *Nidānas*', see Sangharakshita, 'The Stages of the Spiritual Path', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/ndhprwb> ; Subhuti, 'The Buddhist Vision' Windhorse Publications, Chs. 9 & 10.

Notes

¹ There appears not to be any historical basis for the story; it is apocryphal. It first appears in writings of the T'ang dynasty in China (618-907 C.E.). See D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, (First Series), Rider & Co, London 1949, p. 60, where Suzuki states: 'The historicity of this incident is justly criticised, but knowing the value of Enlightenment we cannot ascribe the authority of Zen just to such an episode as this. Zen was in fact handed over not only to Mahākāśyapa but to all beings who will follow the steps of the Buddha, the Enlightened One.'

² Majjhima Nikaya (*The Collection of Middle Length Sayings*), trans. I. B. Horner, Pali Text Society, London 1967, Vol. III, 119, vv. 92-4.

³ Lama Govinda includes paintings evoking some of his meditation experiences in his book *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness*, A Mandala Book, Unwin Paperbacks, London 1976. The coloured illustrations (opposite page 182) include four entitled 'Turning Inwards', 'Unification', 'Birth of Happiness' and 'Samādhi' which seem to correspond roughly to the first 'Four *Dhyāna s*'. Lama Govinda is illustrating what he understands of the *dhyāna s* from his own experience; he is not giving a visual equivalent of the four similes which the Buddha uses to describe the *dhyāna s*.

⁴ See Sangharakshita, 'A System of Meditation', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/kjayxji>

⁵ See *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 1', Glossary.

⁶ See *Ratnagotravibhāga* I, v. 73, quoted in *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, ed. Edward Conze, Harper Torch Book, New York 1964, p. 130. The ability to be born into the world of sensuality without spiritually departing from meditative concentration is quoted as one of the ten powers of the Bodhisattva by sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. Herbert V. Guenther, Rider & Co., London 1970, Ch. 3, p. 33.

⁷ For an outline of the development of the Perfection of Wisdom texts, see Sangharakshita, *The Eternal Legacy: An Introduction to the Canonical Literature of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications. A fuller exposition is to be found in Edward Conze's *The Prajnapāramitā Literature*, Mouton & Co., 'S-Gravenhage 1960.

⁸ See *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, trans. Edward Conze, Allen & Unwin, London 1958, or Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words*, Windhorse Publications.

⁹ The title of a book by Alan Watts: *This Is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience*, John Murray, London 1961.

¹⁰ The analogy of the lamp and its light is from *The Sutra of Hui-Neng: The Basic Scripture of Zen Buddhism*, trans. Wong Mou-Lam, the Buddhist Society, London 1966, p. 52.

¹¹ *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. T. Ashe, George Bell & Sons, London 1905. Sangharakshita's quote here is not verbatim, but gives the sense of what Coleridge said.

¹² See *Mitrata* 62 in this series, 'Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life - Part I', Glossary.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Glossary.

¹⁴ The Abhidharma (Pali Abhidhamma: *Abhi* - 'higher', 'superior'; *dhamma* - 'the teaching of the Buddha') is the third section of the Tripitaka (see *Mitrata* 60, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 1', Windhorse, London 1986, Note 11, p. 49-50); it is the systematic arrangement, over several hundred years, of the material handed down in the original oral tradition and eventually written down in the other two Pitakas. The Abhidharma established the meaning of technical terms, collated references to and discussions of the same topics and

expounded the whole range of the teaching systematically. See Sangharakshita, *The Eternal Legacy: An Introduction to the Canonical Buddhist Literature*, Tharpa Publications, London 1985, Ch. 7, p. 67ff.

¹⁵ According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, 'quietism' is 'a form of religious mysticism originating in Spain in the late 17th century, requiring withdrawal of the spirit from all human effort and complete passivity to God's will'. By extension, the term is used to refer to passivity in other religious contexts.

¹⁶ See *Mitrata* 65 in this series, "'Masculinity' & 'Femininity' in the Spiritual Life - Part 2', Glossary.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁸ See *Mitrata* 61 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 2', Note 11.

¹⁹ See *Mitrata* 64 in this series, "'Masculinity' & 'Femininity' in the Spiritual Life - Part 2', Note 4.

²⁰ See *Mitrata* 61 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 2', Note 15. *Mahāmudrā* is also called 'the Great Seal of the Voidness'. It refers to a state in which all duality is transcended and all delusions and obstacles eliminated from the mind. See Wang Chu'ug Dorje, *The Mahāmudrā: Eliminating the Darkness of Ignorance*, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, India 1978.

²¹ The technical term for this is *pravṛtti*, used by the Yogacara School to indicate a profound transformation of the whole system of *vijñāna* or consciousness. For a detailed exposition of this teaching and information on the Yogacara School, see Sangharakshita, 'Depth Psychology of the Yogachara', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/lp4d6js>

²² *gTum.mo* (pronounced Turn-mo), 'Psychic' or 'Vital Heat'. This is a specific Vajrayana Yoga practice perfected by Milarepa and other famous Tantric Yogis. It is described in *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, ed. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Oxford University Press, London 1958, p. 172ff. 'Chandali' is another word for 'gTum.mo'. It means 'the fiery one', 'the blazing one' or 'the wrathful one'.

