



THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

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The Bodhisattva Hierarchy



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Cover Symbol:

The symbols on the covers of the issues in this series are from original lino-cuts by Dharmachari Aloka based upon the mudrās of the eight principal Bodhisattvas of Mahayana tradition. This issue features the mudrā of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, 'The Friendly One', the future Buddha. Maitreya resides in the Tuṣita heaven whence, when certain conditions have been fulfilled, he will descend to earth for his final rebirth. His right hand is shown here holding a Nāgakeśara flower, a special symbol associated with the Nāgas, legendary serpent deities of the oceans, rivers and lakes, reputed to have been entrusted with the care of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras.

THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

7. The Bodhisattva Hierarchy

Part 1

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*Indicates refer to Glossary

Editorial

In the first seminar extract in this issue we find that 'even the Buddha looked up'. Even the Buddha 'needed' a spiritual friend, someone — or in his case something — to look up to, to revere. There being no other person more developed than he, the Buddha revered the Dharma.

If we want to go beyond ourselves we must aspire to an Ideal. We too can reverence the Dharma. We can deepen our understanding of it, we can practise it and we can eventually become one with it. *Mitrata* offers us the Dharma to study, to practise and to realize. *Mitrata* makes available to us the Bodhisattva Ideal, the path of the Buddhist par excellence. *Mitrata* is essentially for practising Buddhists — but where are they? Where are all the aspiring Bodhisattvas, the novice Bodhisattvas? Are they managing without *Mitrata*, or are they unaware of all it has to offer? If the number of real Buddhists is to be judged from the *Mitrata* sales figures then there are not many in our midst.

Mitrata is produced for the sake of all sentient beings. If all aspiring Bodhisattvas — or at least all Order Members and Mitras — bought it there would be no cause for concern. But if we don't value *Mitrata*, if we are not prepared to pay for it, we could be in danger of losing it altogether.

Reading from his memoirs recently the Venerable Sangharakshita movingly described his heroic attempts to keep the magazine *Stepping Stones* in print. Having established the Young Men's Buddhist Association in Kalimpong, poetically referred to as a beautiful iridescent glass ball, the publication of *Stepping Stones* was the next avenue through which the Dharma could be further communicated — the second brilliantly flashing glass ball. How sad indeed it must have been when that ball came falling to the ground and shattered into a thousand rainbow fragments.

SRIMALA

Lecture

In the course of the last few weeks we have been on a journey through the mountainous terrain of the Bodhisattva Ideal. On a journey of any kind we may sometimes look forward, at other times look back. Sometimes we look forward to see how far we still have to go, if we are able rightly to judge that. Sometimes we look forward to encourage ourselves: we fix our eyes on the final snow peak, which is perhaps our goal, as it discloses itself in the midst of the blue sky when the clouds momentarily part. Sometimes we look back to estimate how far as yet we have come. Sometimes we look back to see the appearance of the country through which we have been passing, because often when we look back, especially if we look back from a high altitude, we can see that country more clearly and more definitively than when we were actually struggling through it.

As we look back, perhaps from this higher altitude, we may see certain landmarks. This is particularly true when it is mountainous country through which we are travelling. Certainly the country through which we are even now still travelling is nothing if not mountainous. To me, as I look back in thought over the lectures of the previous weeks, there is one landmark that stands out. It dominates the entire landscape. It is the Bodhicitta, the Will to universal Enlightenment. In retrospect, all the other aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal seem to group themselves quite naturally around the Bodhicitta, just as lesser mountain peaks group themselves around one particularly lofty peak.

We have seen in this series of lectures how the Bodhisattva, one who lives for the sake of the Enlightenment of all sentient beings, becomes a Bodhisattva only by virtue of the arising of the Bodhicitta. We have seen that the Bodhicitta is something Transcendental, cosmic, universal, something which sweeps through the whole of existence. The Bodhicitta, we have also seen, has two great aspects. These are traditionally called a 'vow aspect' and an 'establishment aspect'. The vow aspect consists in the formulation by the Bodhisattva of certain vows, the import of all of which is universal. This vow aspect of the Bodhicitta represents the expression of the one universal Bodhicitta in the life and work of the individual Bodhisattva. The establishment aspect consists in the practice by the Bodhisattva of the 'Six *Pāramitās*', the 'Six Perfections'. These, as we have seen over the last three weeks, are made up of three pairs of opposites: Giving and Uprightness, which represent the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life; Patience and Vigour, which represent respectively the 'feminine' and the 'masculine' approaches to the spiritual life; and Meditation and Wisdom, which represent the internal and external dimensions of the Enlightened mind. Each of these pairs of opposites is synthesized and balanced by the Bodhisattva. In his spiritual life there is no one-sidedness whatsoever; everything is harmonized and integral.

Today we are still concerned with this same Bodhicitta. In previous lectures we were concerned with it by way of general principles; today we are considering the different concrete embodiments of those principles. Today we are dealing with what has been described as the 'Bodhisattva Hierarchy'.

'Hierarchy' is not a very popular word nowadays — it is not one of those 'in' words which are on everybody's lips. According to the dictionary, it is generally used in the sense of 'a body of ecclesiastical rulers'. You may read in the newspapers, for instance, of the Roman Catholic hierarchy: that the Roman Catholic hierarchy has issued a statement condemning divorce, or condemning birth control, or condemning something else — they usually seem to issue statements condemning something. I am not using the word 'hierarchy' in that sense. The sense I am using it in is nearer to its original and true meaning. I am using it in the sense of an embodiment, in a number of different people, of different degrees — higher and lower degrees — of manifestation of Reality.

Using the word 'hierarchy' in this sense, one can speak of a hierarchy of living forms, from the amoeba up to the unenlightened man. The higher living form manifests a more abundant degree of Reality than the lower form. This hierarchy of living forms is what we call the 'Lower Evolution'.

Now there is another hierarchy of living forms, which people don't usually take into consideration. This is the hierarchy from the un-enlightened man up to the Enlightened man. This hierarchy of living forms corresponds to what, in other contexts, we have described as the 'Higher Evolution'.¹ Just as the un-

enlightened man embodies, or manifests, more of Reality, more of truth, than the amoeba, so the Enlightened man embodies, or manifests, more of Reality — in his life, work, in his words even — than the man who is unenlightened. The Enlightened man manifests Reality more clearly than does the un-enlightened man. The Enlightened man is like a window, through which the light of Reality shines without any diminution; the light of Reality shines through the Enlightened man, just as the light of the sun shines through a window that is made not even of glass but of pure, transparent crystal.

In between the un-enlightened man and the Enlightened man (the Buddha) there are a number of people at various stages of spiritual progress. The majority of them are not completely Enlightened — to a greater or a lesser extent they are still short of full and perfect Enlightenment — but at the same time they are not wholly *un*-enlightened. It is these people who make up the spiritual hierarchy, and it is the higher reaches of this spiritual hierarchy which is known as the 'Bodhisattva Hierarchy'.

This principle of spiritual hierarchy is a very important one for Buddhism. It is important therefore that we try to understand it radically. We can perhaps do this by remembering that we, that human beings, are related to Reality in two different ways: directly and indirectly.

We are related to Reality directly in the sense that in the very depths of our being there is something, a golden thread if you like, which all the time connects us with Reality. In some of us that golden thread may be thin, may be gossamer thin, but it *is* there. In others that thread has become a little thicker and stronger. In the case of those who are Enlightened, there is no difference at all between the depths of their being and the depths of Reality — the two are directly continuous. Most of us, though we are directly connected with Reality, do not realize it — we do not even see that thin golden thread shining in the midst of the darkness within ourselves. Nevertheless, however oblivious to the fact we may be, we are related to Reality, directly, in the very depths of our own being, all the time.

We are related indirectly to Reality in two ways. We are related, in the first place, to those things which represent a lower degree of manifestation of Reality than ourselves. We are related to nature: to minerals, to stones, to water, to fire; to the different forms of vegetable life; to the different forms of animal life. In this way we are indirectly related to Reality; we are related to Reality through these forms which manifest a lesser degree of Reality than we manifest ourselves. In the second place, we are indirectly related to Reality also through those forms which represent a higher degree of manifestation of Reality than ourselves.

The first kind of indirect relationship with Reality — through those forms of life which manifest Reality less than we manifest it ourselves — may be compared with the seeing of a light through a very thick veil. Sometimes the veil — especially in the case of material forms — seems to be so thick that we are unable to see the light which is there behind it. The second kind of indirect relationship with Reality — through those forms of life which manifest Reality more than we manifest it ourselves — is like seeing a light through a very thin veil. In this case, the veil seems at times to become diaphanous, or even to have rents in it, through which the light of Reality can be seen directly, as it is, without any intermediation at all. This thin veil, through which we see the light of Reality, is the spiritual hierarchy, especially the Bodhisattva Hierarchy.

It is very important for us to be in contact with those through whom the light of Reality shines a little more clearly than it shines through us, those who are at least a little more spiritually advanced than we are. Such people are known traditionally in Buddhism as our spiritual friends, our Kalyana Mitras. Most of us, undoubtedly, are not ready for contact with a Buddha. For most of us, if not for all of us, the idea of receiving guidance directly from a Buddha is perhaps even ridiculous. Even if we met a Buddha — or even an advanced Bodhisattva — we would not be able to recognize him or her for what in truth they were. Nevertheless we certainly can benefit immensely from contact with those who are just a little more spiritually developed than we are, those whose veil lets through a brighter glimmer of light than does our own.

In this connection there is a very beautiful passage in that great Tibetan spiritual classic by sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. Speaking of spiritual friends, Gam.po.pa says:

Since at the beginning of our career it is impossible to be in touch with the Buddhas or with Bodhisattvas living on a high level of spirituality, we have to meet with ordinary human beings as spiritual friends. As soon as the darkness caused by our deeds has lightened, we can find Bodhisattvas on a high level of spirituality. Then when we have risen above the Great Preparatory Path we can find a Nirmānakāya of the Buddha. Finally, as soon as we live on a high spiritual level we can meet with the Sambhogakāya as a spiritual friend.

Should you ask, who among these four is our greatest benefactor, the reply is that in the beginning of our career when we are still living imprisoned by our deeds and emotions, we will not even see so much as the face of a superior spiritual friend. Instead we will have to seek an ordinary human being who can illumine the path we have to follow with the light of his counsel, whereafter we shall meet superior ones. Therefore the greatest benefactor is a spiritual friend in the form of an ordinary human being.²

This association with spiritual friends is what the Indians even today call *satsangh*. *Satsangh* is something to which they attach tremendous importance. *Satsangh* is a Sanskrit word (it is in fact a Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and Bengali word too). It is made up of the two parts, *sat* and *sangh*. *Sat* means 'good', 'true', 'right', 'real', 'genuine', 'holy', and 'spiritual'. *Sangh* means 'association', 'company', 'fellowship', 'community', even 'communion'. So *satsangh* means 'good fellowship', or 'communion with the good', or 'holy association' — all these shades of meaning are included and suggested by the word.

The reason why in India all down the centuries and even today the importance of *satsangh* is stressed is that we all need help from other people in leading the spiritual life: we need at least strong moral support. If we are honest with ourselves we have to admit that we cannot get very far on our own. If there was no meditation class to go to, no lectures to come to; if one never met another person interested in Buddhism week after week, month after month, year after year; if one couldn't even get any books on Buddhism, because even reading books in the right way is a kind of *satsangh*; if one was entirely on one's own; however great one's enthusiasm and sincerity — one would not be able to get very far.

We get encouragement, inspiration, moral support, help, from associating with others who share similar ideals with us and who are following a similar way of life. Especially is this the case when we associate with those who are at least a little more spiritually advanced than we are, or who, putting it even more simply, are just more human than most people usually are.

In our own particular Movement, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, we lay very great stress on this principle of spiritual hierarchy and its corollary, the principle of spiritual fellowship, or spiritual brotherhood. In practice this means that we should try to be receptive to those who are above us in the spiritual hierarchy, those who have greater insight, understanding, sympathy and compassion than we have. We should try to be open to them and ready to receive from them, just like the lotus flower, which opens its petals to receive the light and warmth of the sun. It means that towards those who are below us in the spiritual hierarchy, we should try to be generous, kind and helpful. Then with regard to those on the same level as ourselves, our attitude should be one of mutuality, sharing, reciprocity.

These three attitudes — the attitudes we have towards those who are higher than us, lower than us and on the same level as us — represent the three great spiritual emotions of the Buddhist spiritual life. Firstly, there is the emotion of *śraddhā*. *Śraddhā* is often translated as 'faith' or 'belief', but it does not really mean that. *Śraddhā* means a sort of receptivity, or devotion, to the light streaming from above. Secondly, there is compassion. Compassion means a giving out to those below us of what we are receiving from above. Thirdly, there is love, which we share with, which we radiate towards, all those who are on the same level as ourselves. When we speak in terms of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood, we have in mind these three great spiritual emotions: faith and devotion directed upwards; compassion directed downwards; love radiating all around us.

Though I have referred to those who are 'higher up' and those who are 'lower down', I must stress that there is no question here of any sort of official grading. There is certainly no question of anyone saying, "Well, I'm a bit higher than you are". If we start even thinking in those terms, then we have forgotten the whole meaning of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood. The appropriate emotion should flow forth naturally, spontaneously and unselfconsciously: when we encounter something which we feel is higher we spontaneously feel devotion; when confronted by someone in distress, we respond spontaneously with compassion; when we are surrounded by equals our feelings towards them are those of love and sympathy.

I remember in this connection sometimes going with Tibetan friends, whether lamas or lay people, to visit Tibetan monasteries and temples. It was very interesting to see their responses when they entered the place we were visiting. People in this country when they go to a place of worship, perhaps to a great cathedral, don't quite know what to do, because the tradition in a way no longer appeals to us. But it is quite different with the Tibetans. As soon as they see an image of the Buddha, or a beautiful *thang-ka*,³ or painted scroll, the feelings of devotion and reverence at once well up within them. They immediately put their hands to their forehead and very often prostrate themselves flat on the ground three times. They do this naturally, spontaneously, and completely unselfconsciously, because this is how they have grown up and learnt to behave.

Devotion, compassion and love should pervade the spiritual community, based as it is upon the twin principles of spiritual hierarchy and spiritual brotherhood. People in such a community, some of whom are higher and some of whom are lower in the spiritual hierarchy (though none are conscious of being higher or lower), should be like roses that are at different stages of growth and unfoldment, all blooming on a single bush. Or they should be like a family, of which the Buddha is the ultimate head and the great Bodhisattvas are the elder brothers. In a family of this sort everybody gets what they need — the younger members for example are cared for by the older members — and everybody gives what they can. The whole family is filled with a spirit of joy and with a spirit of freedom.

The Bodhisattva Hierarchy concentrates all this into a single focus of dazzling intensity. The Bodhisattva Hierarchy has its own radiant archetypal figures in the higher and ever higher stages of spiritual development, right up to Buddhahood itself. It is at some of these figures that we are now going to look; but as we proceed, we mustn't forget that we are still concerned really with the Bodhicitta.

The Bodhisattva Path is divided, according to the Mahayana, into ten progressive stages, which are known as the 'Ten *Bhūmis*' (for general purposes *bhūmi* just means a 'stage of progress'). These 'Ten *Bhūmis*' represent increasing degrees of manifestation of the Bodhicitta: the Bodhicitta begins to manifest in the first *bhūmi*, and continues to manifest a little more in each succeeding *bhūmi*, until by the time it reaches the ninth and the tenth *bhūmis* it has, as it were, shaken off all mundane habiliments and stands entire and perfect in itself, identical with complete Enlightenment, the Enlightenment of a Buddha.

In some of the scriptures the process of the progressive manifestation of the Bodhicitta through and up the 'Ten *Bhūmis*' is compared to the process of smelting and refining a lump of gold that is mixed with dross. The dross is gradually purged away and the gold is finally worked up into a beautiful ornament, a diadem for a prince perhaps. In the simile the gold is of course the Bodhicitta, which all the time is within us but is adulterated, is covered over by all sorts of defilements, foreign elements. The foreign elements have to be separated, so that the gold of the Bodhicitta is allowed to manifest its own incorruptible nature.

I am not going to attempt to describe these 'Ten *Bhūmis*'. I am simply going to use them as points of reference for describing the four principle kinds of Bodhisattva which make up the Bodhisattva Hierarchy: the Novice Bodhisattva; the Bodhisattva of the Path; the Irreversible Bodhisattva; and the Bodhisattva of the *Dharmakāya*. I am going to deal with each of these in turn.

Novice Bodhisattvas are sometimes also called 'Bodhisattvas in Precepts'. Novice Bodhisattvas are all those who genuinely accept the Bodhisattva Ideal as the highest possible spiritual ideal. In other words, they aspire to attain the Enlightenment of a Buddha, not just for the sake of their own emancipation but so that they may contribute to the cause of universal Enlightenment, the Enlightenment not just of the human race

but of all forms of life. Genuinely accepting the Bodhisattva Ideal is not of course just a matter of intellectual understanding — anyone can read a book about the Mahayana and understand the words that describe the Bodhisattva Ideal, but they don't thereby become a Novice Bodhisattva. Novice Bodhisattvas do not just understand the Bodhisattva Ideal intellectually or just accept it theoretically, they devote themselves deeply to its realization and make a real, tremendous effort to practise it. Such Novice Bodhisattvas may even have taken what is called 'Bodhisattva ordination', which entails formally, publicly pledging oneself to the fulfilment of the Bodhisattva Ideal.

The point to remember about the Novice Bodhisattva is that, despite his genuine, heartfelt acceptance of the Bodhisattva Ideal, despite the real efforts he makes to practise the Bodhisattva Ideal, as yet the Bodhicitta has not actually arisen in him: he has not, as yet, had the direct, dynamic experience of the urge to universal Enlightenment taking possession of his entire being. We may say perhaps — this is not said unkindly — that the Novice Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva in every respect except the one that is most important. This is because it is upon the arising of the Bodhicitta, it is when the breath of the Bodhicitta breathes through one, that one becomes a Bodhisattva. Nevertheless the Novice Bodhisattva, by virtue of his acceptance of the Bodhisattva Ideal and his efforts to practise it, is genuinely a Novice Bodhisattva, he has set his foot on the path. We must admit that most sincere followers of the Mahayana, whether in the East or the West, fall into the category of Novice Bodhisattvas.

The Novice Bodhisattva, among other things, devotes a great deal of time to studying the Mahayana scriptures, those which deal with *śūnyatā*, or Emptiness, with the Ideal of the Bodhisattva, with the *pāramitās*. He may not read many volumes, may not read commentaries and expositions; he may read just a very few volumes, even just a few pages. But what he does read he reads again and again: he steep himself in the spirit of the texts and tries to make the teaching one with his own mind and heart. In many parts of the Mahayana Buddhist world it is a traditional practice for the Novice Bodhisattva to learn some of these scriptures, like the *Heart Sutra*,⁴ by heart and to repeat them from time to time, especially after meditating.

The Novice Bodhisattva should even make copies of the scriptures. Making copies of scriptures is a practice to which the Mahayana attaches very great importance. It is not done with the intention of producing as many copies as possible as quickly as possible, but as a spiritual discipline, as a sort of meditation. You have to concentrate so that you can form the letters beautifully, so that you don't miss any words, so that you don't make any spelling mistakes. You think of the meaning with your conscious mind, but as you concentrate on writing, something of the meaning also percolates through, perhaps drop by drop, into the depths of your unconscious mind, influencing and transforming you.

The Novice Bodhisattva may not just copy texts, he may illuminate them too, just as in the West, in the Middle Ages, the monks spent hours, days, weeks, months, years illuminating manuscripts — burnishing them with gold, decorating them with red and blue, painting all sorts of beautiful pictures and designs. Only the other day — I can't resist this little digression — I was looking through a volume of French miniature paintings of the Middle Ages, and I was quite astonished to discover one painting which might have come straight out of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.⁵ It was an illustration to an illuminated manuscript, called *The Hours of the Duke of Rohan*. It was an illustration of a dead man face to face with his judge. It wasn't done in the traditional Renaissance style of Christian art. The corpse of the dead man was drawn very realistically indeed — with gruesome realism. Above the dead man was painted a sort of explosion of blue light, studded with golden stars, and in the midst of that was the face of the judge. Those of you who have read the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* will at once recognize this. You had the impression of a blaze of blue light, then golden stars, then the golden-haloed face of the judge, breaking in upon the inner vision of the dead man. When one speaks of illuminating texts, whether Christian texts or Buddhist texts, this is the sort of thing that one has in mind. This is the sort of care, the sort of devotion, the sort of love, which is traditionally lavished upon them. In fact all these activities that the Novice Bodhisattva engages in — studying, reading, learning by heart, copying, illuminating — are done as labours of love, as *sādhanas*, spiritual disciplines.

The Novice Bodhisattva meditates, and meditates especially upon the 'Four *Brahma-vihāras*': metta, love; *karuṇā*, compassion; *muditā*, sympathetic joy; and *upekṣā*, equanimity, or perfect steadiness and evenness of mind. It is said that the Novice Bodhisattva should especially devote himself to the practice of the 'Four *Brahma-vihāras*' because they form the foundation for the development later on of the Great Compassion which characterizes the truly developed Bodhisattva.

The Novice Bodhisattva directs his attention to the practice of the *pāramitās*, the Perfections though at this stage we cannot strictly speaking call them *pāramitās* because they have not as yet been conjoined with Wisdom. He also performs, in some cases every day, the 'Sevenfold Puja'. He also cultivates the 'Four Factors' for the arising of the Bodhicitta, as mentioned by the *ācārya* Vasubandhu. The Novice Bodhisattva, of course, tries to be straightforward, helpful, friendly and sympathetic in all the affairs of daily life.

The second kind of Bodhisattva is the Bodhisattva of the Path. I have referred to the 'Ten *Bhūmis*', the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's progress up to supreme Enlightenment. These 'Ten *Bhūmis*' are divided into two sections, consisting of *bhūmis* 1-6 and *bhūmis* 7-10. Those who have attained to any of the first six *bhūmis* are Bodhisattvas of the Path. In the case of Bodhisattvas of the Path the Bodhicitta has arisen. In fact it is upon the arising of the Bodhicitta that one is said to enter upon the first *bhūmi*. The Bodhisattva of the Path has therefore also made his Vow, or Vows, and has embarked upon the really serious practice of the Perfections.

Incidentally, I should also observe that, according to many Mahayana traditions, the Stream-Entrant, the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, and the Arahant of the Hinayana teaching are all regarded as Bodhisattvas of the Path — the Mahayana makes them sort of honorary Bodhisattvas. So far they have all been aiming at individual Enlightenment, but according to the Mahayana one can at any time change over to the Path of the Bodhisattva, the aim of which, of course, is Enlightenment for the sake of all: even if one has progressed along the path of individual emancipation right to the end, there is still the possibility, on the basis of one's previous practice of the individual path, of going on to practise the Bodhisattva Path and rising to supreme Buddhahood.

Moving on now to the Irreversible Bodhisattva, the third kind of Bodhisattva, we are ascending into really rarefied heights. The arising of the Bodhicitta within the individual is in itself a tremendous experience, but the achievement by the Bodhisattva of this stage of Irreversibility is an experience greater still. We may say that Irreversibility represents, within the context of the Mahayana, an extremely important aspect of the whole spiritual life: the aspect of non-retrogression, not falling back, not falling away.

We all know from our own experience how difficult it is to advance on the spiritual path. Some of us might look back over the last few months, even over the last few years, a little sadly, thinking, "There hasn't been much change. I'm still more or less the same person that I was. What progress have I made?" Progress is very difficult to make on the spiritual path; we measure our progress, we may say, by inches, not by miles. But though it is difficult to advance, it is only too easy to fall back, even a mile or two. We are familiar with this in the sphere of meditation. We may get on quite well for a few weeks or a few months, but then it happens that just for a couple of days we don't meditate. When we next sit down to meditate we find that we are right back where we were those few weeks or few months before. I'm sure everybody has had this experience, once or twice at least, in their spiritual life so far.

This danger of falling back applies at all levels of the spiritual life, so it becomes important for us to reach, from time to time, within a particular context at least, a point upon the attainment of which there is no danger of falling back — it is important to reach firm land where we can stand and from which we don't regress.

In the context of the spiritual life in general, this point is what we call the point of Stream-Entry (we enter the Stream which bears us eventually to Nirvana itself). Once we reach this point, once we enter the Stream, then there is no danger of ever falling permanently back into the round of existence, into mundane life. Those of us who have studied a little of the Hinayana teaching, the basic Buddhist teaching, know that Stream-Entry is achieved by breaking the first three of the 'Ten Fetters' ⁶ which bind us down to the Wheel

of Life,⁷ to the round of conditioned existence.

The first fetter is the fetter of belief in self. It is the belief that I am I and that this is fixed and final. It is the belief that my personal, individual existence is something irreducible, ultimate. It is the conviction that there is nothing beyond me: there is no such thing as a universal consciousness, a universal mind, an absolute Reality, outside of me. It is the belief that I am, as it were, the terminus, the point at which all the ends of the earth meet. This is how we feel most of the time. We believe in ourselves as identified with the body, as identified with the lower mind, as identified with the thinking principle, the *vijñāna*, the *manas*,⁸ and so on; we are blind to any more ultimate selfhood, any more universal consciousness. Sometimes a little chink is made, and through that chink in ourselves we see something greater than ourselves, but usually we believe in ourselves in the narrow, egoistic sense I have described. This belief in the ego-self is a fetter that has to be broken before we can enter the Stream and break through into a higher, wider dimension of being and consciousness.

The second fetter is the fetter of doubt. This is not doubt in the sense of an objective, cool, critical enquiry: that sort of doubt — if you like to call it doubt — Buddhism encourages. Doubt as the second fetter is a sort of soul-corroding scepticism — that won't settle down in anything; that is full of fears, humours, whimsicalities; that won't be satisfied; that doesn't really want to know and then complains that it doesn't know; that shies away from life; that won't really try to find out. This sort of scepticism, this sort of *vicikitsā* as it's called, is also a fetter that must be broken for Stream-Entry to be possible.

The third fetter is what is known as 'attachment to moral rules and religious observances'. If you're too moral you can't get Enlightened — not that you can get Enlightened more easily if you're immoral. If you are so moral, so good, so holy, that you think a lot of yourself on that account (you think that you have really got somewhere, you really are somebody, and you think that that is ultimate) and at the same time you look down on those who don't do what you do, who maybe don't keep the rules that you keep (you think that they're nowhere, they're nothing, they're miserable sinners), if you have this sort of rigid attitude, then you are in the grip of this third fetter of attachment to moral rules and religious observances. An example of this sort of attitude is found in Sabbatarianism, which regards the Sabbath as an end in itself, forgetting the words of Christ: 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'.

You get this sort of attitude, I'm sorry to say, even in some forms of Buddhism. A dispute split the Burmese Sangha as to whether, when a monk went out of the monastery, he should cover his right shoulder or leave it bare. This issue rocked the Sangha in Burma for a whole century. Books, articles and commentaries were written about it. I believe it is now settled only in the sense that the two sides have agreed to differ. Really this is a matter of attachment to moral rules and religious observances.

Some things may be good as means to an end (meditation, a moral life, charity are all good as means to an end); but as soon as you set them up as ends in themselves, they become hindrances. The third fetter therefore really consists in treating moral rules and religious observances — which in themselves, as means to an end, may be good — as ends in themselves. Breaking this fetter does not mean giving up the moral rules and religious observances: one uses them as means to an end, without being attached to them, or dependent on them. This fetter is very difficult to break indeed; but when you break it, you enter the Stream.

In the context of the career of the Bodhisattva, it is only when he achieves Irreversibility that he is no longer in danger of falling away from the Bodhisattva Ideal. The Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible in the eighth *bhūmi*, the eighth stage out of the ten. This gives us an indication what a long way the Bodhisattva has to go before he can be completely sure that he's going to persevere to the end. In the eighth *bhūmi* the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible from full Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Up to that point, till he becomes Irreversible, there's always the danger, not that he'll fall away from the spiritual life itself (he has overcome that danger long before), but that he'll fall back into spiritual individualism: he'll give up trying to become a Buddha for the sake of all and instead seek to gain Enlightenment just for his own sake.

After all, one must recognize that the Bodhisattva Ideal, if one takes it seriously, is a very difficult Ideal to live up to. You are aspiring to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. You are supposed to be feeling compassion *for all living beings*. But sometimes feeling compassion even for the few dozen people that you meet is difficult enough, because people can be very trying, very foolish, very weak, very misguided. So even the Bodhisattva of the Path, who has got up even to the seventh *bhūmi*, may be tempted to give them all up in despair, as a bad lot. He may think, "I can't do anything for them. Never mind. I'll just get on with my own emancipation and let them do what they like." Sometimes he might express it even more strongly than that! Having given up the Goal of universal Enlightenment, he may achieve individual Emancipation, Arahantship, Nirvana. But in relation to his original Goal of supreme Buddhahood for the benefit of all, this represents a falling away. For the Bodhisattva Nirvana represents a failure. One can realize from this how high the Ideal is set for him.

How does the Bodhisattva become Irreversible? This is something that will not really concern us for a long time to come, but we may at least see what the scriptures have to say on the subject. Broadly speaking, the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible by the realization of 'Great Emptiness', *mahā-śūnyatā*. We dealt with this to some extent in last week's lecture.⁹ We saw then that *mahā-śūnyatā* is the third of the four principal kinds of *śūnyatā*. The first of these is 'Emptiness of the Conditioned'. This is the fact that the conditioned is empty of the characteristics of the Unconditioned. Secondly, there is 'Emptiness of the Unconditioned'; the Unconditioned is empty of the characteristics of the conditioned. Thirdly, there is 'Great Emptiness', which is the emptiness of the very distinction, the non-ultimate validity of the very distinction, between conditioned and Unconditioned. Here the conditioned and the Unconditioned are both reduced to one non-dual Reality, transcending both Nirvana and samsara. Finally there is 'Emptiness of Emptiness', *śūnyatā-śūnyatā*, in which even the idea, even the conception, of emptiness vanishes away — the finger, however transparent, disappears, and the full moon is left, with nothing pointing to it.

In what way is Irreversibility connected with the realization of 'Great Emptiness'? 'Great Emptiness', as we have seen, is essentially a realization of the emptiness of the distinction between conditioned and Unconditioned. When the experience of 'Great Emptiness' dawns one sees clearly that neither the conditioned nor the Unconditioned is really a separate, independent Reality. One sees that the distinction between the two — 'this' is conditioned and 'that' is Unconditioned — is not ultimately valid. The distinction may be useful provisionally, at the beginning of one's spiritual life, for practical purposes, but ultimately it is not valid. When you go deeply into the conditioned you encounter the Unconditioned; when you go deeply into the Unconditioned you encounter the conditioned. With the experience of 'Great Emptiness', therefore, one gives up the distinction of conditioned and Unconditioned, one reduces them, as it were, to one common, non-dual Reality.

Until the Bodhisattva attains the eighth *bhūmi*, there is always the danger of his falling back into spiritual individualism. Spiritual individualism is based on dualistic thinking. It is based on the idea that there is an Unconditioned 'up there', or 'out there', separate from the conditioned, to which one can aspire, to which one can escape, as it were, by oneself. When the Bodhisattva realizes 'Great Emptiness', he sees that it is not so — the conditioned is not separate from the Unconditioned. He awakens from dualistic thinking as though from a dream. He sees that all this talk of conditioned and Unconditioned, and getting from 'here' to 'there', is unreal. He sees through all this — out of the conditioned into the Unconditioned, whether to go by himself or whether to take others with him, whether to come back or stay there ... He sees that this is all a dream, or a game that he has been playing, a make-believe. He wakes up from this dream of dualistic thinking into the light, into the reality, of the one mind, the non-dual mind, the non-dual Reality, or whatever one likes to call it. He sees that in its ultimate depth the conditioned is the Unconditioned. He sees that there is no line, no division, whatsoever between them. He sees, in the words of the *Heart Sutra*, that *rūpa* is *śūnyatā* and *śūnyatā* is *rūpa*.

There is no difference whatsoever between the conditioned and the Unconditioned. Therefore there is nothing to escape from and nowhere to escape to. Seeing this, the Bodhisattva sees the utter absurdity of the very idea of individual emancipation. By realizing the import of 'Great Emptiness' in this way, the Bodhisattva becomes Irreversible. He cannot fall back to individual emancipation because he sees that

there is no individual emancipation to fall back to.

The scriptures, especially the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures,¹⁰ tell us that there are various signs of a Bodhisattva's Irreversibility — this is how to know whether or not you have become Irreversible. We are told that the Irreversible Bodhisattva, if asked about the nature of the ultimate Goal, always includes in his reply a reference to the Compassion aspect of that Goal: he does not speak just in terms of individual emancipation, but always includes a reference to other sentient beings. In this way he is known to be Irreversible. The Irreversible Bodhisattva, we are told, has archetypal dream experiences. In a dream he may see himself as a Buddha preaching the Dharma, surrounded by Bodhisattvas. Or he may see himself practising the *pāramitās*. We are told that he may especially see himself sacrificing his life and feeling quite happy about it, not afraid or upset at all. These are all signs that he has become Irreversible. Finally, it is a sign of his Irreversibility that the Bodhisattva never wonders whether he is Irreversible or not.

The fourth and last principal kind of Bodhisattva is the Bodhisattva of the *Dharmakāya*. The Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya* make up the innermost circle of the Bodhisattva Hierarchy. Here we find ourselves on a wholly Transcendental plane.

In English there are very few words for Ultimate Reality; 'God', 'Reality', 'Truth', maybe 'the Absolute' (people don't usually use that expression in everyday conversation) are practically the only words available to us. But Buddhism is very rich in words for Ultimate Reality. It has many terms, and each term has its own special flavour, its own particular connotation. The word *Dharmakāya* is one of these terms. The scholars — bless their hearts! — translate it literally as 'Body of Truth' and leave it at that. We are told that it is the third of the three bodies of the Buddha, the first two being the Buddha's 'Body of Transformation' and his 'Glorious Body'. We are maybe to imagine these three bodies one on top of another or maybe side by side — it is not very clear. The literal translation of *Dharmakāya* conveys nothing at all. *Dharmakāya* really means Ultimate Reality as the constitutive essence of Buddhahood and Bodhisattvahood. It means Ultimate Reality as the fountainhead as it were of Enlightened being and Enlightened personality, as the fountainhead from which Buddha forms and Bodhisattva forms come welling up inexhaustibly.

Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya* are of two kinds, though at this Transcendental level one cannot really speak in terms of differences of kind at all. The first kind consists of those who, after gaining Enlightenment, though being in Reality Buddhas, retain their Bodhisattva forms, so that they can continue working in the world. The second kind consists of those who are aspects, or direct emanations, of the *Dharmakāya* and have got no previous human history. These two kinds make up the Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya*. They are all archetypal forms of Buddhahood, each revealing, manifesting, incarnating one or another aspect of the one Buddhahood. There are vast numbers of these forms. In some meditations you imagine an infinite blue sky, free of cloud, filled with mandalas* containing tens, hundreds, even thousands of these Bodhisattva forms. The majority of these forms are represented as very young men, of slender, graceful appearance, with long flowing hair, and decorated with ornaments of gold and silver. This represents the beauty and richness of the *Dharmakāya*, its superabundant efflorescence.

Amongst the most prominent of all the figures is Avalokiteśvara. The name Avalokiteśvara means 'the Lord who looks down'; he looks down in compassion, and thus represents the Compassion aspect of Enlightenment. Suppose you imagine a great blue sky, completely empty; and suppose you see appearing in that sky, not even a face, but just the features of a face, features which are just sufficient to express a smile, a smile of compassion — this is the Compassion aspect of Reality, this is Avalokiteśvara.

Iconographically Avalokiteśvara is depicted as pure white. He carries a lotus flower, which symbolizes spiritual rebirth. His face is usually alive with a very sweet, compassionate smile. One foot is tucked under in the posture of meditation, showing that internally he is deep in meditation; the other hangs loose, representing his readiness to step down at any moment into the turmoil of the world to help other living beings. As I explained in last week's lecture, in the Bodhisattva these two aspects of inner recollection and external activity are not contradictory, rather are different aspects of the same thing.

There are altogether one hundred and eight different forms of Avalokiteśvara. One of the most famous of these is the eleven-headed and thousand-armed form. To us it perhaps seems a little grotesque, but the symbolism is very interesting. It is said that once the great Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara was contemplating the miseries that sentient beings suffer — death, sickness, separation, bereavement, flood, famine, war, and so on. He was overwhelmed by Compassion, we are told, to such an extent that he was weeping. He wept in fact so violently that his head shivered into eleven pieces, each of which itself became a head. There were eleven of them because there are eleven directions of space (north, south, east, west, the four intermediate points, up, down, and in the centre). This means that Compassion looks in all directions simultaneously — while it is looking here it is also looking there, while it is looking on this side it is also looking on that side. Avalokiteśvara also has a thousand arms — I think they stopped at a thousand only because the artists couldn't represent any more. At the end of every arm there's a hand stretched out to help. With the help of this symbol, Buddhism tries to express the nature of Compassion, that it is looking in all directions and trying to help in all conceivable ways.

Mañjuśrī represents the Wisdom aspect of Enlightenment. He is depicted as a beautiful golden, or orange, or tawny colour. In his right hand he carries a flaming sword. He whirls it above his head. It is a sword of Wisdom, which he uses to cut through the bonds of ignorance and the knots of karma — what we are tangled up in and tripped up by all the time. In his left hand he carries a book. He holds it close to his heart. It is a little book of the Perfection of Wisdom (it is left to our imagination whether it is the *Diamond Sutra* or the *Heart Sutra*). His legs are crossed in the lotus posture, the posture of meditation, because Wisdom, as the Dhammapada¹¹ also teaches us, springs from meditation. Mañjuśrī is the patron of all the arts and sciences. In traditional Buddhism, if you want to write a book, or paint a picture, or compose a piece of music, you invoke Mañjuśrī. His mantra, the *arapachana* mantra, is repeated for retentive memory, for understanding of the Dharma, for eloquence, and so on.

Vajrapāṇi represents the Power aspect of Enlightenment. He does not represent power in the usual sense of political power, power over other people, but power in the sense of spiritual Power or simply Power in itself. Though he has a peaceful form, Vajrapāṇi is usually depicted in a wrathful form, because he is engaged in an act of destruction: he is destroying the dark forces of ignorance which separate us from the light of the truth. He is usually depicted, appropriately, in a dark blue colour. He is not slender or graceful; he has a stout, thick body, a very protuberant belly, and very short, heavy limbs. His countenance expresses extreme anger. He has long white teeth. Usually he is represented as naked except for ornaments of human bone. Sometimes he is depicted wearing a tiger skin. He carries in one hand a *vajra*,¹² a thunderbolt, and if he has a number of hands he carries other weapons too. This terrifying figure is crowned with five skulls, representing the 'Five Wisdoms'.¹³ One foot is uplifted, as if about to trample on all the forces of ignorance. He is surrounded by a roaring halo of flames, which consume whatever of conditioned existence is near.

By way of contrast, there is Tārā. She represents the essence, indeed the quintessence, of Compassion. She is a Bodhisattva appearing in female form. (It is not strictly correct to say that she is a female Bodhisattva, because Bodhisattvas have gone far beyond the distinction of male and female. Some Bodhisattvas may appear in male form, others in female form; sometimes a Bodhisattva may appear at one time in male form and at another in female form -- it does not really make any difference.) Tārā is the spiritual daughter of Avalokiteśvara. According to a very beautiful legend, she was born of his tears as he wept over the sorrows of the world. It is said that one day he was weeping so much that his tears formed a great pool. In the midst of the pool a white lotus emerged, which opened to reveal Tārā at its heart.

Tārā is usually depicted as either green or white in colour. Very often she bears a white lotus flower, sometimes a blue lotus flower, depending on the particular form. In her white form she has seven beautiful eyes, which just look at you from different parts of her body (there are two ordinary eyes, a third one in her forehead, one in each of her two palms, and one in each of the two soles of her feet). What this means is that the compassion which Tārā represents is not foolish, sentimental compassion, it is not in any way blind, it sees. True Compassion, even in its remotest operations, is informed by awareness. That is more than can be said of some people's compassion, or rather pity, which sometimes just makes things worse. That is why there is the little saying, that it takes all the wisdom of the wise to undo the harm which is done

by the merely good, or the merely pitiful.

The last great Bodhisattva that we are concerned with is Vajrasattva. He represents the aspect of Purity. This is not physical purity, nor moral purity, nor even spiritual purity. It is not any purity that can be attained. Vajrasattva represents primeval Purity, the Purity of the mind from beginningless ages. We may, through our spiritual practice, purify the lower mind, because the lower mind can become impure, but we never purify the Ultimate Mind, because the Ultimate Mind never becomes impure. We purify ourselves truly by waking up to the fact that we've never become impure, that we were pure all the time. This primeval purity of the mind, which Vajrasattva represents, is a Purity above and beyond time and a Purity above and beyond the possibility of impurity.

Vajrasattva is usually depicted as dazzling white, like the sunlight reflected from fresh snow. He is usually completely naked — he does not even have any Bodhisattva ornaments. The one hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva is recited and meditated upon for the purification of one's faults, or for purification from the impurity of thinking that one is not — primevally — pure. Many important practices are connected with Vajrasattva, all of which are included in what is called the 'Vajrasattva Yoga', which makes up one of the 'Four Foundation Yogas' of the Tibetan Buddhist Tantra.¹⁴

As I mentioned, there are very many Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya* — these few must suffice by way of illustration. They are all, we are told, in the last analysis, which is not an intellectual analysis, simply different aspects of our own fundamentally Enlightened mind, our own immanent Buddha mind.

Finally a few words about the Bodhisattva ordination. The Bodhisattva ordination is not just a ceremony; it is the natural expression of the arising of the Bodhicitta. As such it usually occurs in the first *bhūmi*, which is when the Bodhicitta itself arises. But as a ceremony, as something undergone externally, it may be taken at any time, even by the Novice Bodhisattva. In the case of the Novice Bodhisattva, he takes the Bodhisattva ordination in anticipation of the arising of the Bodhicitta. The taking of the Bodhisattva ordination in this way is therefore included among the conditions in dependence upon which the Bodhicitta arises.

The Bodhisattva ordination consists of two parts. First of all there is the taking of the Bodhisattva Vow, usually in the form of the 'Four Great Vows'.¹⁵ Secondly there is the acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts, which are principles governing the behaviour of the Bodhisattva. There are different lists of these precepts in different branches of the Mahayana. They have all been extracted from the Mahayana scriptures and constitute a more detailed application of the Great Vows themselves. The taking of the Bodhisattva Vow as a part of the Bodhisattva ordination corresponds, on its own higher level, to the Going for Refuge.* The acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts corresponds to the acceptance of the five, or the ten, ordinary precepts.

The Bodhisattva ordination is the third of the four degrees of ordination which we have in the Western Buddhist Order.¹⁶ The first degree is that of lay brother or lay sister; the second is that of senior lay brother or senior lay sister; the fourth is that of the full time bhikshu, or lama, or master. It must be emphasized that the Bodhisattva ordination, which comes third, does not represent the conferring of any spiritual status. Spiritual status in fact cannot be conferred. Bodhisattva ordination does not even imply a *recognition* of spiritual status. Bodhisattva ordination represents a public pledge by the person concerned that he or she will do their best to live up to the Bodhisattva Ideal ('public' here means 'in the presence of the Buddhist spiritual community', especially in the presence of other members of the Order). It is a quite different matter whether or not the Bodhicitta arises at the same time. It is obviously very difficult for other people to know, in the case of any given person, whether or not the Bodhicitta has arisen.

For most of us, even for those who are interested, the Bodhisattva ordination lies a long way ahead; for most of us, our immediate objective is the first or the second degree ordination. For the time being, therefore, we have to be content to contemplate from afar the glories of the Bodhisattva Hierarchy.

Seminar Extracts



1 Even the Buddha Looked Up

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

Padmavajra: [This question refers to] the lecture on the Bodhisattva Hierarchy. In the Pali Canon it's reported that the Buddha, just after his Enlightenment, wanted to find somebody he could revere and respect. Could you comment upon this?

Sangharakshita: I have thought of giving a lecture on this.¹⁷ You know that I have given talks on different episodes in the Buddha's life — we've had *A Case of Dysentery*, *A Wreath of Blue Lotus* and *Between the Twin Sal Trees* — and I've had other episodes in mind, and this was one of them, because it raises an extremely important principle.

Here was the Buddha, and he was Enlightened — or, at the very least, he had started undergoing the Enlightenment experience; he had started exploring all the aspects, the different facets, of that experience which we usually refer to, as though it was one undifferentiated thing, as 'Enlightenment'. But even to the Buddha, even at that moment, the thought came that he should dwell reverencing something or someone.

This really requires pondering. It's as though it was only after the Buddha bethought himself that he should dwell reverencing someone that he realized that there was nobody for him to reverence. It's as though his fundamental, basic impulse was to reverence — to look up, not to look down; and it was only when he tried to look up that he found that there was no one, 'no thing' to look up to. In a sense there was no up, because *he* was up. Up was he — I'm not sure whether that's grammar or not! — it isn't 'up was he' but 'Up' was *him*. The Buddha wasn't concerned to find somebody, to find anybody, below him. His concern was to find somebody, or something, above him that he could reverence.

At the end he couldn't find any being or person, he could find only the Dharma — that is to say that great Cosmic Law, that great Spiritual Law, in accordance with which he became Enlightened, or by virtue of the existence of which it was possible for him to attain Enlightenment. And therefore he decided to dwell or to abide or to live reverencing that Dharma. This is very, very significant — that the Buddha, even after his Enlightenment, looked for something or someone that he could live reverencing and perhaps we could say worshipping

This question of reverence, and the Buddha, even, reverencing: I think that this is something that can't be insisted upon too much or called to mind too often. It goes so counter to the modern spirit of not wanting to be indebted to anybody and not wanting to look up to anybody. We're very willing or happy to look down on others, but not willing to look up to others; even resenting that others appear to be in any way superior to us. Perhaps we have a sort of respect for superior brute strength, but very often we're unwilling to respect, or to reverence, qualities which are genuinely superior from the spiritual point of view.



2 The Anti-Hierarchical Tendency

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

Devamitra: The term 'hierarchy' is one which you use in a variety of different contexts. [Recently] you've used it in relation to veneration, [in relation] to images, and in the lecture we're studying at the moment it's the Bodhisattva Hierarchy. It seems that the principle of hierarchy is of fundamental importance, but is there any equivalent traditional [Buddhist] term? If so, are there any expositions of that principle? I'm not aware of any.

Sangharakshita: [Someone] made the point that in any civilization or culture where a particular principle is of fundamental importance, so fundamental that it is taken for granted, no word for it exists. For instance, in Buddhism there's no traditional term that corresponds to 'tolerance', nor to 'intolerance'. [The Ancient Buddhists] seem to have taken all that for granted. It's as though in order to appreciate the tolerance of Buddhism you have to be able to look at it from the standpoint of a tradition or culture which is not tolerant. Buddhism traditionally does not think of itself as tolerant. It doesn't make play with that concept, doesn't recommend itself as being a tolerant religion; it hadn't attained that sort of self-consciousness with regard to its own nature.

It's much the same with hierarchy. Buddhism is traditionally saturated with it, to such an extent that Buddhists are unable, almost, to step aside and see Buddhism as hierarchical. For instance, there's the hierarchy of the different levels of the cosmos — what I've referred to as the stratification of mundane existence — the *kāmaloka*, *rūpaloka* and *arūpaloka*.¹⁸ The [spiritual] path itself consists of a series of steps or stages in which the hierarchical principle is deeply embedded. In fact, the spiritual life itself is inseparable from the hierarchical principle. Similarly there's a hierarchy of faculties. There is a hierarchy of *prajñās*: *śrutramaya-prajñā*, *cintāmaya-prajñā* and *bhāvanāmaya-prajñā*.¹⁹ There's a hierarchy of persons, as with the *ārya-pudgalas*²⁰ and of course the Bodhisattvas themselves.

Therefore, it would seem that the concept of hierarchy is absolutely basic and fundamental to Buddhism, without which Buddhism as we know it can hardly exist. For that very reason there is no traditional word or concept for [hierarchy]. There are certain words which express the idea of a sequence, in progressive order, of increasing value within a particular [context], but [there is] no overall, highly-generalized term covering all these different, more specific hierarchies. One could [easily] make up a term [for hierarchy] from Sanskrit, but it wouldn't have general currency.

Devamitra: It seems that in seeing the hierarchy that is implied within the Dharma, we are seeing [the Dharma] from a slightly different perspective.

S.: This is because we're standing outside traditional Buddhism. We've been brought up in the West, with Western conditioning. When we approach Buddhism [we see it] as an object 'out there', and certain things about it strike us, which don't strike the traditional Buddhist 'in there'. [He] has been brought up in the midst of it all, with a different kind of cultural and psychological conditioning.

Prasannasiddhi: Does this mean that if Buddhism catches on in the West and people become imbued with it, the term 'hierarchy' will drift out of use?

S.: It may or it may not, but it would be difficult to deny the fact that Buddhism in the West had gone through that phase of having to grapple with the idea of what we termed 'hierarchy'. I myself after so many years in Buddhism have if anything the opposite difficulty. I find it hard to sympathize with the concept of equality, the non- or anti-hierarchical concept, which seems very limited and restricting. I find it difficult [to understand] how people can actually believe that everything and everybody is equal in all possible respects, and that there is no hierarchy. How can they possibly see things in this way? It would seem that inequality is almost the most obvious thing about life. You can see that even in biology.

Simon Turnbull: Why do you think this attitude has arisen in the West?

S.: Well, there are historical reasons. I can only give a few hints, because it requires exhaustive investigation. One can say there are true hierarchies and false ones. In Europe in the eighteenth century, especially in France, the social and ecclesiastical hierarchy was a completely false one, it did not correspond to any actual facts or realities. Eventually there was the great upheaval which we call the French Revolution, and that false hierarchy was overthrown, both in church and state.

But [in negating] the false hierarchy, people asserted not the true hierarchy against false hierarchy, but rather *no* hierarchy, or *anti*-hierarchy against the false one. [Hence] the famous slogan, 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'. All through the eighteenth century — perhaps it goes back even earlier than that — especially in France, the philosophers and encyclopaedists were very much concerned with a hierarchy which may originally have been genuine, but had become something completely unreal and false. It was no longer fulfilling the role it was supposed to fulfil. [For example], court favourites were appointed to bishoprics and archbishoprics without even the faintest pretence to piety. In this connection, I think it was Louis XV who, when the name of a certain courtier was proposed to him for Archbishop of Paris, demurred, with "it was too much". He said, "No, no, the Archbishop of Paris should at least believe in God!" (*Laughter.*) That indicates how far things had gone. In the case of poor Louis XVI, who was guillotined, his real interest was making locks, as a hobby, which he spent quite a lot of time doing. He had apparently no idea whatever about government, he couldn't rule; in other words, he wasn't a King. These are extreme examples, but [they show] there was no real hierarchy any more. The social and ecclesiastical order did not reflect any genuine hierarchy.

I think we've inherited quite a lot intellectually from that period. The eighteenth century leading up to the French Revolution was a very important period, and we're still feeling the effects in all sorts of ways: politically, socially, intellectually, spiritually. We have inherited an anti-hierarchical tendency, which is not just opposition to false hierarchies but opposition to hierarchies as such. I think that has been rather unfortunate. One can understand people at that time not being able or even *willing* to distinguish between a genuine hierarchy and a false hierarchy. They didn't want to give a false hierarchy any quarter at all, or any reason for existing. But in calmer times (if in fact times are *calmer*) we shouldn't have to [reject all hierarchies] like that.



3 Enough to Put You Off

from Questions and Answers on *Buddha and the Future of His Dhamma*, Men's Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1986

A Voice: I don't think, by what Dr Ambedkar says here, that he has got a very strong feeling for spiritual hierarchy. [He seems to be saying] that it's up to oneself as an individual to ...

Sangharakshita: I think that one has to understand that in India, especially for the ex-Untouchables, the whole idea of hierarchy is completely out. They have had so much of this quite iniquitous social hierarchy — [the Caste System]²¹ — being at the very bottom of it, and having been so oppressed in the name of hierarchy, that it is going to take generations before they can think of hierarchy in a positive, spiritual sense. I think it is not surprising that [the ex-Untouchables] can't think in terms of hierarchy. Some of our Indian Order Members can just about appreciate the idea, but the masses of ex-Untouchables regard the whole *idea* of hierarchy as an absolute abomination. To them it means the hierarchy of *brahmins*,

kshatriyas, vaishyas and *shudras*, and themselves as Untouchables right underneath the *shudras*. I think we can just have no idea of their feelings in this respect. Hierarchy to them is the most negative of negative terms and, as I said, it's going to be generations before they can have much of an idea of *spiritual* hierarchy.

Vessantara: Do they not have an appreciation of hierarchy, do they not appreciate the idea of Order Member, Mitra, Sahayak?²² I don't get the impression they suffer particularly from individualism or pseudo-egalitarianism.

S.: Well, we're talking about two quite different things. It's different within our Movement, where there are only a few hundred involved, while there are several millions [of ex-Untouchables] who are quite different and whom one would have to get to know individually very well, whose confidence one would have to win, before one could get them to understand [the principle of spiritual hierarchy]. This is what we are trying to do, but we are dealing with very vast numbers of people, most of whom are illiterate.

Vessantara: But isn't it [possible that] the people who have suffered in the social hierarchy may bring their fear or hatred of any idea of hierarchy into the spiritual community, and refuse to acknowledge spiritual hierarchy within the spiritual community?

S.: This does not seem to have happened within the Order or our own Movement in India at all, I'm glad to say. If anything, they are less susceptible to reactivity to authority than many Order Members and Mitras in England.

4 Worthy of Reverence

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

Murray Wright: It seems that most ideas of superiority and inferiority are based on the conceit of 'I am'.

Sangharakshita: Well, what does the Buddha say? He says that one should not think of others as superior to oneself, or inferior, or equal. In the modern world we have the fetish of equality. Everybody has got to be equal, so people insist that "I am equal to you". Well, the Buddha says we shouldn't even think in those terms. It precludes communication if you insist that you are equal to the other person, because you may not be. If you are not, you are operating from a false basis and that precludes the possibility of communication. So you should be completely open and not even think in those terms; you should not even, in a way, want to find out whether you are superior or inferior or equal; it doesn't matter, it is quite irrelevant. Just communicate and something will emerge. Even then you won't be bothered too much to ascertain whether at the end of the discussion you have had the best of it or he has had the best of it, or you are superior or he is superior. Sometimes it is quite impossible to say who has gained more, who has given more; it is impossible to say, you shouldn't bother. It doesn't matter.

Mike Sherck: Why should you not view some people as superior? It seems to me that it can be very beneficial to recognize ...

S.: I think the word superior is a loaded word, therefore I don't use it in this context. You can certainly have reverence for those worthy of reverence, but that doesn't say that they are superior to you. You reverence those worthy of reverence. If you feel that they really are worshipful, you worship them, but to regard them as superior is another thing; they might regard you as worshipful. The Buddha doesn't say that those who are worthy of reverence are superior to you in the sense in which we usually use that term. It is not a question of grovelling to them as to your superiors. You reverence them because they are worthy of reverence.



5 The Best of All

from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead Men's Seminar*, Padmaloka, September 1979

Sagaramati: But how do you get people to give of their best without making some people feel inferior and some people superior?

Sangharakshita: Well, it must be accepted that some people are not as good as others. It is part of the democratic ideology, so to speak, that everybody is as good as everybody else in every respect. But it is a *fact* that some people can run faster than others. So you could say that some are *better* at running than others. Maybe you shouldn't put it like that, simply say some run faster than others. But then if you have the concept of excellence you can hardly avoid speaking in terms of good, better and best.

Tejananda: Maybe the whole thing is mixed up with the idea of social advantage. If competition is going to lead to a certain tangible advantage, the whole thing becomes unhealthy.

S.: It does seem to me, though, that in an effort not to be unhealthy [people] become unhealthier still.

Virabhadra: Sometimes one is made to feel — say, if you fail in exams — it reflects on you as a person, you're no good as a person, rather than that you're not very good at doing that particular thing.

S.: But is there not a connection?

Virabhadra: There might be.

S.: Because, you know, there is this attitude that everybody is equally good 'as a person'. But does that really mean anything? I mean are they *equally* persons? One could ask are they *equally* individuals, are they equally good as persons or individuals? It's not as though 'person' or 'individual' represented something static that everybody equally was, for, surely, it suggests a degree of development. Well, some are more developed than others; some are better persons, or better as persons, than are others, or better as individuals. Surely all that can be expected is that everybody should be encouraged to grow, that no one should ever be discouraged or made to feel that everybody is as good as everybody else in every respect. So if you say that everybody is as good as everyone else as a person, and that nobody must defeat anybody else in examination because the defeated person may feel that he is less good as a person, this all seems to be a confusion.

It's as though your value consists in the effort that you make from whatever level. If you've done your best there can be no criticism of you. And it does seem that competition helps people — as least many people, especially men, under certain circumstances or in certain connections — to give of their best and to achieve their best, and to *be* their best.

It reminds me of what the Buddha says in one of the discourses where he runs as it were through the whole Sangha, at least all the more intimate disciples, declaring who was best at what.²³ And it's as though they're all the best at something or other. One was the best preacher — in other words pre-eminent among the

preachers — one was the best at meditation, one was the best at going for alms and collecting food. Everybody was the best at something. So the Buddha didn't repudiate the concept of comparative excellence. He didn't say who was the best bhikshu or who was the most spiritual, but he certainly said who was best at this and who was best at that.

I think this is also something that one needs to consider: you may not win this particular game or this particular match, but there are other circumstances, other games, where you may be better and which you may win. You may be better in certain other respects where competition is not appropriate or where it is not involved. But the fact that you are really good at something, even to the extent of being better than most other people or even all other people, is an aspect of your individuality, your personality as it were.



6 The Archetype of Evolution

from Questions and Answers on *The Higher Evolution of Man*, Women's Study Group Leaders, Norwich 1985

Vimala: Were there any other concepts which you feel you could have used in a series of talks or lectures on the Dharma in a form appropriate to people in the West?

Sangharakshita: I very much doubt it. But it wasn't that I took stock of all the different available dominant concepts and then thought, "Ah! Evolution is the most suitable." No. It's as though I thought in those terms almost naturally from a very early period — in fact earlier than I thought until recently. I had been under the impression that I started thinking along these evolutionary lines, or started thinking of Buddhism in terms of evolution, only when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara where I gave a series of talks [using these sorts of concepts]. But in the course of writing my memoirs I turned up some reports of old lectures and found that in 1950 I had given a talk where I had clearly presented Buddhism in these terms. I was talking to an audience of Western-educated Indians, and I thought it would be a useful way of putting Buddhism across. So I was doing this in 1950, but I never followed it up in India. In fact I forgot about that type of presentation until I was back in England. I forgot that I had used that type of concept before in exactly the same way.

It's almost as though I had derived my concept of evolution in the first place from Buddhism. I think that is quite an important point. I felt that evolution *par excellence* was embodied in the spiritual path itself. Then if you turn to the scientific, or Darwinian concept of evolution, you recognize in that a sort of crude and rather chaotic form of what you see in a much more developed and regular form in the spiritual path. So it's not that I extrapolate from the scientific to the spiritual. Rather, I read back from the spiritual into the scientific and I find a certain amount of overlap with what science itself already has to say. This is, perhaps, the difference between my way of looking at things and, say, that of Teilhard de Chardin. Yes, you can see there is something in what he says about evolution (or whatever he calls it), in a scientific way. But (*with a chuckle*), then he tries to link it up with Catholicism with a real *tour de force!*²⁴ But in the case of Buddhism the two seem to fit together much more naturally and easily. So it is that the process of the Higher Evolution, with which I am familiar through Buddhism, enables me to understand the evolutionary process in the more ordinary sense. And, in a sense, to see the two as one continuous progress, or one continuous process. In the case of the Lower Evolution it is much blinder, more groping as it were. In the case of the

Higher Evolution it is much more clear-sighted. It is seeing the Goal very, very much more clearly. Perhaps I need to make this clearer in some lecture, that when I speak of the Higher Evolution I'm not merely extrapolating from the Lower Evolution. In fact I'm doing just the opposite!

Parami: That is quite interesting. I think that sometimes when people hear your lectures [on *The Higher Evolution of Man*²⁵ they take them more from a scientific point of view, using the concepts] as a scientific model; using them as an allegory of the Higher Evolution. Sometimes I think there is a problem because of that.

S.: For me the model is the spiritual path itself and I find certain resemblances, certain reflections — rather shadowy reflections — in the modern teaching of biological evolution. I am convinced of the fact that there is such a thing as the *Lower* Evolution because I am convinced — partly from my own experience — of the truth of the Higher Evolution, not vice versa. (Putting it in very black and white terms.)

If you look at man at all as constituting some sort of key to the nature of the universe, then if our own experience constitutes a progression, then clearly progression is in some way inherent in the nature of life itself.

Parami: Do you see progressive conditionality and spiritual hierarchy as being synonymous? I suppose they are.

S.: Yes, because what does spiritual hierarchy mean — in the *real* sense, as distinct from anything artificial? It means that different stages of evolution are actually embodied in distinct individuals. In the case of living individuals with whom one is in direct contact, and who are sometimes quite complex, it isn't always easy to tell exactly where they stand vis-a-vis other people, especially if they are all pretty much on the same level. But if someone is quite outstanding in some way you can recognize it pretty easily. I've just been editing my letters to *Shabda* for publication in book form. I went over what I had written in my letter from Wales about David Bohm.²⁶ In his case it was quite clear that he had an exceptionally good mind, or, if you like, intellect. He was head and shoulders above the other people there. He really did stand out. He had a different kind of mind, a much more highly developed mind. It was very clear. So if you do come across people like that you can recognize the fact that they are — at least in certain respects — more highly developed than you. In a few cases you may feel that someone is more developed than you in a general way, not just with regard to some specific faculty or skill. But to come to that sort of conclusion you need to know them over a considerable period of time because before they become Stream-Entrants people can and do go up and down quite a bit. What was the next bit of the question?

Vimala: You have answered it actually.

S.: Have I? Perhaps I can add just a few words. [I think] one needs to get clearly into one's mind what I might call 'the archetype of evolution' and see that archetype very clearly reflected, very clearly embodied, in the path of the Higher Evolution, and much less clearly in the path of the Lower Evolution. When I speak of the path of the Lower Evolution I'm thinking in terms of the whole process of biological evolution from the amoeba upwards.



7 The Seed of Humanity

from 'Meeting Spiritual Friends' (*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*), Men's Mitra Retreat, Padmaloka, August 1976

Sangharakshita: What does one mean by 'human'?

Alan Angel: I see it as quite a developed state really.

S.: Well, I've sometimes said that one needs to become a human being before one starts trying to become a spiritual human being. But of course there is the point, can you really distinguish the two? There is that point also. Can you have a completely non-spiritual human being?

Alan Angel: No.

S.: So what makes you say that?

Sagaramati: Well, the ideal for a human mind is spiritual development. If you're a human being ...

S.: But is it an ideal that goes beyond the present human life or is it somehow implicit in it?

Sagaramati: I think it's implicit in it.

S.: Yes. In other words, perhaps we shouldn't think dualistically about a natural man on to whom the spiritual man is somehow grafted. Perhaps we can look at it in terms of embryology. [Take] this question of abortion. When you perform an abortion or when you have an abortion, what is really happening? Are you taking the life of a human being? This is the great question, isn't it? Some people — I think most people nowadays — would say no. The foetus, the being that is being aborted, is not a human being. But from a Buddhist point of view could one say that? [After all] it becomes a human being. It's able to become a human being. Can one ever really say that it becomes a human being at a certain point in the process and before that it was not a human being? Or is it a human being from the beginning, even though not a developed human being?

Graham Steven: It has life from the beginning. The spark is there in the beginning.

S.: Yes, but is it human life? Or is an undeveloped human being a non-human being?

Graham Steven: That doesn't mean it doesn't deserve the right to live.

S.: No, that's quite a separate question, that applies to an ant or an eel or anything.

A Voice: The spark of human consciousness. A Voice: From conception.

S.: From conception, yes. Because if you arrested its development, you wouldn't have a monkey or a frog. You would still have a human being, though not a fully developed one. Therefore one could say — or one has to say — that from the Buddhist standpoint if one practises abortion then one is, in fact, taking human life, which is, of course, prohibited in Buddhism, fortunately.

So in the same way one can say that there is no such thing as a purely natural human being. A human being by definition is a spiritual being because the spiritual potential is implicit in that human being. It's not that literally when he reaches a certain point, after that he's spiritual, but up until that he's only human. The idea of your being human up to that point, and only human, but after that point your becoming something else, seems to be a residue of Christian dualistic attitudes: the natural man and the supernatural man as it were.

A Voice: So man is a spiritual being who goes through a human phase.

S.: One could say that. But I think one has to be careful otherwise you imply a sort of spiritual being who falls into a human state and then has to recapture the original spiritual state. Buddhism doesn't say that. I think one does have to be careful of this dualistic attitude because it often results in a dualistic attitude towards oneself [as if] certain things in oneself were human things and certain things were spiritual things, whereas [in fact] there is just you functioning either this way or that way. Do you see what I mean?

In a way, without [at all] weakening any of the force of the distinction between the Lower Evolution and the Higher Evolution, one can say that one can't really think of a human being who is not, at least implicitly, a spiritual being.

Vessantara: How can we know that the spark of human consciousness is present from conception?

S.: One mustn't think of the spark as something that is there like an object in a box. That is only a manner of speaking. What you mean when you say that the spark is there from the beginning is that the sequence can be completed.

A Voice: If left to itself ...

S.: Yes, in a sense, though [it would need to be] guided, encouraged, directed. Then of course spiritual consciousness can be developed, so you can say that the spark of that was present from the beginning — but you are not to imagine a definite object like a spark or a seed there. When you say 'the seed', you mean potentiality, the possibility of the whole process coming to its completion, reaching its destination.



8 A Friend in Need

from 'Benevolence and Compassion' (*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*), Women's Seminar, Padmaloka, January 1980

So also why should we not feel compassion over this great abyss of the bad existences of gods, men and demons, from which it is difficult for us to escape once we have fallen in, and in which we suffer through not having a spiritual friend at hand and so not knowing how to abjure evil. Compassion should be practised in the desire to liberate beings from this misery.

Sangharakshita: The states that are usually referred to as bad existences are those of the beings in hell, animals, pretas or hungry ghosts and anti-gods. These are known as the four states of loss or downfall (*apāya*). [Because they are states of downfall] they are likened to a precipice and rebirth in those states to falling down a precipice. According to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in the *bardo** or intermediate state you sometimes have the experience of falling down a precipice, i.e. of descending into a lower state of existence from which, 'once we have fallen in', it is 'difficult for us to escape'.

Here there is something that deserves comment, and which is quite important. It is what I sometimes call the negative spiral: [the principle that] the lower you get the faster you fall. You know the sort of thing I mean. A good example is that of growing addicted to alcohol. Supposing you don't usually drink, but then you decide to have a little drink. At that point, though you've had the drink you've certainly got the power to stop drinking and not have a second drink. But then suppose you take a second drink — and a third. The more you take the less able you are to get out of the practice or the habit, as it becomes. If you have become a regular drinker it's very difficult to give up being a regular drinker, and if you're an alcoholic it's correspondingly more difficult to give up being an alcoholic. In respect of any unskilful action (obviously it's difficult to give up all unskilful actions at once) you [at least] have to be very careful that you don't [allow yourself to] come to the point where your performance of the unskilful actions can only increase, because they've reached a certain momentum.

A Voice: Like a negative Point of No Return.²⁷

S.: Yes, like a negative Point of No Return. This is what we have to be careful of. We also have to be careful not to get so far away from the spiritual life and the spiritual community that getting back, re-establishing contact, becomes virtually impossible. And of course the spiritual friend is mentioned in this connection. Usually, when you've got to that point, the only hope [for you] is that some spiritual friend takes drastic action, undertakes a rescue operation as it were, and takes a strong and powerful initiative to re-establish contact with you, even against your will as it may appear. (*Pause.*) This is one of the reasons why the spiritual friend is so necessary and why, also, you see in pictures of the Tibetan Wheel of Life the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, in the form of a Buddha, descending into all the six realms.²⁸ Sometimes you are not in a position to make the first move yourself: you are in too negative a state. Someone has to make the approach to *you*.

Sometimes it may be necessary to approach somebody who you see is not able to make the first move themselves, and you may have to be quite patient, because they may repel or reject you. You also have to be very tactful and not force yourself upon them. You have to be very gentle in your approach and make quite sure you are operating in what I call the love mode, not the power mode — make quite sure you really are motivated by *maitrī*, by compassion. (*Long pause.*) This is why we say at the time of the Kalyana Mitra ceremony that it is the Kalyana Mitras' responsibility to keep up or to re-establish contact even if [it is] the Mitra [who] gets out of contact. The Kalyana Mitras have to launch a rescue operation as it were. Someone might have been out of touch for a long time. They might be ashamed to come back, even though they wanted to. They might not know quite how to go about it. They might feel awkward walking into the Centre after so many months or even years. They might be uncertain what sort of account they can give of themselves: what they've been doing, why they've been out of touch. They might even be thinking, in extreme cases, that they wouldn't be welcome, that no one wants them back, that people won't be glad to see them. The spiritual friend has tactfully to overcome all that. But I'm afraid some people remain convinced you don't want to see them even when you [specifically] go to see them.



9 The Stages of Compassion

from 'Benevolence and Compassion' (*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*), Women's Seminar, Padmaloka, January 1980

Benevolence with reference to sentient beings is found in Bodhisattvas who have just formed an enlightened attitude; with reference to the nature of the whole of reality in Bodhisattvas who live practising good; and without reference to any particular object in Bodhisattvas who have realized and accepted the fact that all entities of reality have no origin.

sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H. V. Guenther, Rider, London 1970, Ch. 7, pp. 91-2

Sangharakshita: '*Benevolence with reference to sentient beings is found in Bodhisattvas who have just formed an enlightened attitude*'. This really suggests how difficult it is [to develop such benevolence]. You're virtually a Bodhisattva when you've got, well I won't say an unflinching but at least a reasonably constant attitude of goodwill towards other sentient beings. You're very well on the path [by] then. I think most people can manage a quite positive experience of metta in the course of their practice of the Metta Bhavana but it isn't easy to keep it up in the midst of contact with other people. But when you can be at least reasonably constant in that, reasonably positive towards other people much of the time, you could say that at least the beginnings of [becoming] a Bodhisattva are there. So [this stage] — which in Hinayana terms one could say is tantamount to Stream-Entry — isn't really all that far away. If your metta is constant and there is never any [hostile] reaction you have virtually entered the Stream. You can see how big a thing it is to be positive towards others [for] the greater part of the time, in spite of all their failings and your own failings, in spite of all the complications that may arise. (*Pause.*)

And then '*with reference to the nature of the whole of reality in Bodhisattvas who live practising good*'. That [last phrase] means Bodhisattvas who are practising the first six or seven stages of the Bodhisattva Path. They are capable of metta '*with reference to the nature of the whole of reality*'. That is to say there is a difference [between these two stages of developing benevolence.] You begin [in the first stage] by developing metta towards all sentient beings — which is difficult enough — but you maintain the concept of them as being separate from yourself. However, in this second stage you begin to overcome that feeling of separateness. It's not that you reduce everything to a monistic, metaphysical oneness, but the sense of difference and separateness definitely lessens. It's quite difficult to describe because one can only use words derived from dualistic experience. But it's as though the experience of self and others begins to be permeated by something which transcends both without, as it were, cancelling or negating them on their own level. It's as though the distinction of self and others is no longer absolute but is contained within a wider framework as a result of which the tension, so to speak, between self and others is lessened; it's not felt as so important. For instance, [with regard to giving,] at the beginning there might be a conflict — [you think], "Shall I take this object for myself or shall I give it to him?" and in the end, with a tremendous effort, you decide "I'll be really noble and give it to the other person." But once you reach this [second] level there isn't that sort of conflict. You feel "Whether I take it for myself or give it to the other person, what difference does it really make? In the end it just comes to the same thing." And you just give the object to

the other person quite freely and happily. [It's] not that you're both equally reduced to a sort of blank or void in the ordinary sense. You don't feel that there is such a real difference between you and the other person. It's more like that. So then there's not such an element of conflict or choice or sacrifice in the giving. (Pause.)

Then thirdly, *'without reference to any particular object in Bodhisattvas who have realized and accepted the fact that all entities of reality have no origin'*. This occurs in the eighth of the 'Ten Bodhisattva Bhūmis' or stages and, in a way, this is very metaphysical. It's 'anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti' — the patient acceptance of the non-arisenness of dharmas — the acceptance that dharmas do not in Reality arise, that they do not in Reality pass away. In other words you go beyond conditionality, you go beyond causality. You see that in Reality there is no conditionality, no causality and you patiently accept that. You are spiritually receptive to that sort of realization even though it goes against all your suppositions. It's connected with seeing the whole of existence as being like a mirage — a mirage does not really come into existence and therefore it doesn't really go out of existence — but nonetheless you're all the more compassionate. This is something quite difficult [for us] even to think about.

Thus one has got these three different stages. [First there is] the stage where you're benevolent and compassionate towards sentient beings, seeing them as sentient beings and [where] very often, therefore, there's quite a tension between you and others, quite a conflict of interests, which you try to overcome. Then on the second level the distinction between oneself and others is considerably relaxed. There isn't that sort of conflict. Preferring others' interests to your own isn't nearly so difficult; it becomes much more natural. On the third level you've arrived at a different stage, a different experience, altogether. [This is] when all worldly conventions and ways of looking at things are transcended and your Compassion becomes something which is very difficult indeed to describe, just because you see the whole of existence in a completely different way. The categories of self and others are completely transcended — they're part of the dream, they're part of the mirage — so you're not bothered any more. But it's as well not to think too much about this stage because, for most people, it's really of quite academic interest. Nonetheless sGam.po.pa lists these three for the sake of completeness, so that we shouldn't think that [the qualities of] benevolence and compassion for sentient beings as we actually experience them now represent the last word on the subject, however necessary they may be for us now. There are dimensions of experience beyond — but they'll be there, as it were, waiting for us when we're ready for them.



Glossary

Bardo (Tibetan) (Skt. *antarābhava*): lit. 'intermediate state'. Also translated as 'transitional state' or 'in-between state'.

Used somewhat loosely, the term '*bardo*' refers to the state of existence intermediate between two lives on earth. According to Tibetan tradition, after death and before one's next birth, when one's consciousness is not connected with a physical body, one experiences a variety of phenomena. These usually follow a particular sequence of degeneration from, just after death, the clearest experiences of Reality of which one is spiritually capable, to, later on, terrifying hallucinations arising from the impulses of one's previous unskilful actions. For the spiritually advanced the *bardo* is a state of great opportunity for liberation, since Insight may arise with the direct experience of Reality, whilst for others it can be a place of danger as the karmically created hallucinations can impel one into a less than desirable rebirth. This is described in the *Bardo Thödol* (*Bardo Thos-grol*), the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (lit. 'Liberation through hearing in the Intermediate State'). This work actually differentiates the intermediate state between lives into three *bardos* (themselves further subdivided): the *Chikhai Bardo* or '*Bardo of the Moment of Death*', the *Chönyid Bardo* or '*Bardo of the Experiencing of Reality*', and the *Sidpa Bardo* or '*Bardo of Rebirth*'. The *Chikhai Bardo* is the stage of experiencing the 'Clear Light of Reality', or at least the nearest approximation to it of which one is spiritually capable. The *Chönyid Bardo* is the stage of experiencing visions of various Buddha forms (or, again, the nearest approximations of which one is capable), whilst the *Sidpa Bardo* is the stage of karmically impelled hallucinations which eventually result in rebirth. It is interesting to compare the descriptions of the *Bardo Thödol* with accounts of certain 'out of the body' experiences described by people who have nearly died in accidents or on the operating table — these typically contain accounts of a 'white light', experienced as, somehow, a living being, and of helpful figures corresponding to that person's religious tradition.

The *Bardo Thödol* also mentions three other *bardos*: those of 'life' (or ordinary waking consciousness), of 'dhyana', and of 'dream'. Thus together the '*Six Bardos*' form a classification of states of consciousness into six broad types, and any state of consciousness is a type of 'intermediate state' — intermediate between other states of consciousness. Indeed any momentary state of consciousness can be considered a *bardo*, since it lies between our past and future existences; it provides us with the opportunity to experience Reality, which is always present but obscured by the projections and confusions due to our previous unskilful actions.

Around the FWBO the term *bardo* is also used to refer to times when our usual way of life is suspended, as, for example, when we are on retreat. Such times can be very fruitful for spiritual progress as there are few external constraints, although they can be very challenging because our unskilful impulses can come to the fore, just as in the *Sidpa Bardo*.

See *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, ed. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Oxford University Press, London 1960; and Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, Rider, London 1969.

Mandala: A mandala is a symbolic picture or diagram, usually based around the form of a circle divided into four segments, which may be used in ritual or other spiritual practices. In Buddhism, a mandala is usually a symbolic representation which depicts the qualities of the Enlightened Mind in harmonious relationship with one another. A mandala may also be used to represent the path of spiritual development. On another level a mandala can be a symbolic representation of the universe, as in one of the four foundation practices of the Vajrayana, in which a mandala representing the universe is offered to the Buddha. One important type is the mandala of the 'Five Buddhas', archetypal Buddha forms embodying various aspects of Enlightenment, the precise Buddhas depicted depending on the school of Buddhism and even the specific purpose of the mandala. Within the FWBO, the most common mandala of this type is that of the Five Jinas or Conquerors, the Buddhas Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha and Amoghasiddhi.

In the FWBO the term 'mandala' is also used to refer to the 'personal world' in which one lives, the various elements of the mandala being the activities and interests in which one engages, the most important being

at the 'centre of the mandala', and the least important at the periphery. Depicting one's personal mandala in pictorial form can give one a good indication of the state of one's spiritual life.

See Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, Rider, London 1969, Pt. 3, Ch. 8; Giuseppe Tucci, *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala*, Rider, London 1969; Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse Publications.

Refuge (Skt. *śaraṇa*, Pali *saraṇa*): 'refuge', 'shelter', 'protection'. The Three Refuges are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. They are refuges because they alone provide ultimate and lasting protection from the unsatisfactoriness of conditioned existence. It is only through experience of the Transcendental, of which Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are expressions, that one can pass beyond *duḥkha*. Nothing else can be anything other than a temporary, partial and illusory refuge from suffering.

The term 'refuge' also occurs in the expression 'Going for Refuge', which is the traditional term for the act of commitment to the path of spiritual development. Traditionally, one Goes for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (otherwise known as 'the Three Jewels'), usually in the context of a special ceremony. It is this action which makes one a Buddhist in any meaningful sense of the term. Within the Western Buddhist Order, Going for Refuge is given great importance, and is, in fact, synonymous with entering the Order. A person must be judged by Order Members to have sufficient understanding of the Three Jewels, sufficient motivation for spiritual development and sufficient emotional robustness before being accepted to Go for Refuge. This emphasis on the importance of Going for Refuge is seen by Order Members as a move away from the downgrading of the Going for Refuge in modern Eastern Buddhism (into a purely formal and ethnic procedure) and a return to original Buddhist practice.

Going for Refuge is not just a once and for all action, but a commitment which can be continuously strengthened and deepened by regular spiritual practice.

See Sangharakshita, 'Going for Refuge', Windhorse Publications; Sangharakshita, 'The Threefold Refuge', Windhorse Publications; Sangharakshita, 'Going for Refuge' available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/kfn5f6x>



Notes

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- ¹ See Sangharakshita, 'The Higher Evolution of Man', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/ozy3ypc> ; and 'Aspects of the Higher Evolution of the Individual', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/pzethfu>
- ² See sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H. V. Guenther, Rider, London 1970, Ch. 3, pp. 32-3.
- ³ See *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 1', Glossary.
- ⁴ See *Buddhist Wisdom Books: the Diamond Sutra and Heart Sutra*, trans. and explained by E. Conze, Allen & Unwin, London 1958.
- ⁵ See Glossary, 'Bardo'. There are two English versions of the text: a) *The Tibetan Book of the Dead or the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane*, ed. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Oxford University Press, London 1960; b) *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo*, trans. Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa, Shambhala, Boulder & London 1975.
- ⁶ See *Mitrata* 67 in this series, 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment - Part 2', Glossary.
- ⁷ See *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 1', Note 4; and Subhuti, 'The Buddhist Vision', Windhorse Publications.
- ⁸ See *Mitrata* 67 in this series, 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment - Part 2', Note 16.
- ⁹ See *Mitrata* 66 in this series, 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment - Part 1'.
- ¹⁰ The *Prajñā-pāramitā* or the Perfection of Wisdom is a very important group of Mahayana sutras composed during the period from 100 B.C.E. to the thirteenth century C.E. and associated with the Mahāsaṅghikas and with the great teacher Nāgārjuna. They are profound expositions of the teaching of śūnyatā (*Mitrata* 65 in this series, "Masculinity" & "Femininity" in the Spiritual Life - Part 2'Glossary). See *Mitrata* 66 in this series, 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment - Part 1', Note 7; also Sangharakshita, *The Eternal Legacy: An Introduction to the Canonical Literature of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications.
- ¹¹ See *Mitrata* 56 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 1', Note 4.
- ¹² See *Mitrata* 56 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 1', Note 4.
- ¹³ See *Mitrata* 66 in this series, 'On the Threshold of Enlightenment - Part 1'; also Sangharakshita, 'The Symbolism of the Five Buddhas, "Male" and "Female"', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/o6nmokt> or see Sangharakshita, 'Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism', Windhorse Publications; Lama Anagarika Govinda, 'Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism', Rider, London 1969, p. 108 ff; Subhuti, 'The Buddhist Vision', Windhorse Publications, Ch. 11.
- ¹⁴ In Tibetan Buddhism, the 'Four Foundation Yogas' form a sequence of practices to be completed prior to embarking on higher Tantric practice. Traditionally, one should have completed all four to qualify for full Tantric initiation. They are as follows: 1) Going for Refuge and Prostration Practice; 2) Generation of the Bodhicitta; 3) Meditation and Mantra Recitation of Vajrasattva; 4) Offering of the Mandala. These are common to all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, though variations are found. Sometimes a fifth practice, called the Guru Yoga, is added to the sequence. Traditionally, the requirement is that each of the practices should be performed 100,000 times, though this need not be taken too literally. '100,000' times means many times. See Sangharakshita, 'The Four Foundation Yogas of the Tibetan Buddhist Tantra', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/phml47k> or see Sangharakshita, 'An Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism', Windhorse Publications

¹⁵ See *Mitrata*s 60 & 61 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 1 & 2'.

¹⁶ This lecture was given in 1969. Since then the four degrees of ordination have been consolidated into the one Going for Refuge or Dharmachari/Dharmacharini ordination – the Bodhisattva Vow and the arising of the Bodhicitta between them constituting the altruistic dimension of the Going for Refuge. The Bodhisattva precepts are regarded as a positive expansion of the ten Dharmachari/Dharmacharini precepts.

¹⁷ See Sangharakshita, 'Discerning the Buddha', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/ospqw2b>

¹⁸ See *Mitrata* 65 in this series, '"Masculinity" & "Femininity" in the Spiritual Life - Part 2', Glossary.

¹⁹ See *Mitrata* 61 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 2', Glossary.

²⁰ The *ārya-pudgalas* are the members of the *ārya-saṅgha*. See *Mitrata* 58 in this series, 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart - Part 1', Note 11. The four classifications of *ārya-pudgalas*, in ascending order of hierarchy, are Stream-Entrants, Once-Returners, Non-Returners, Arahants. For a detailed explanation, see Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse Publications, Ch. 15.

²¹ See *Mitrata* 61 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow - Part 2' Note 7.

²² *Sahāyaka* means 'helpers'. In India, the FWBO TBMSG, Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka, Windhorse, is known as Gana, which means 'The Society of Helpers of the Buddhist Order of the Three Worlds'. It was decided to use the word 'helpers' rather than 'friends' since the Indian word for friend is 'mitra'. The use of the word 'mitra' would have caused confusion in India, because, in the Movement, a clear distinction is made between Friends and Mitras.

²³ This is a reference to the *Mahāgosiṅga Sutta*, *The Middle Length Sayings* (Majjhima Nikāya), trans. I. B. Horner, Pali Text Society, London 1967, Vol. I, no. 32.

²⁴ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a Jesuit priest who was also a biologist and distinguished palaeontologist. His philosophy attempted to reconcile the scientific theory of evolution with Catholic theology. His most famous work was *The Phenomenon of Man*, Collins, London 1959.

²⁵ See Note 1.

²⁶ See Sangharakshita, *Travel Letters*, Windhorse Publications, pp. 217-8.

²⁷ The Point of No Return marks the beginning of the Transcendental Path; it is the point beyond which continuing spiritual development and eventual Enlightenment are assured, because from that point the gravitational pull of the Unconditioned remains stronger than that of the conditioned and regression is impossible. See *Mitrata* 57 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 2', Glossary, 'Stream-Entry'. Notice that the text says that the negative state envisaged is only 'like' a Negative Point of No Return; that is, it is 'like' a point beyond which a downward negative spiral is irreversible. No such point is spoken of in the traditional teaching.

²⁸ For an explanation of the significance of Avalokiteśvara's descent into the various realms of existence, see Subhuti, 'The Buddhist Vision', Windhorse Publications, Ch. 12.