

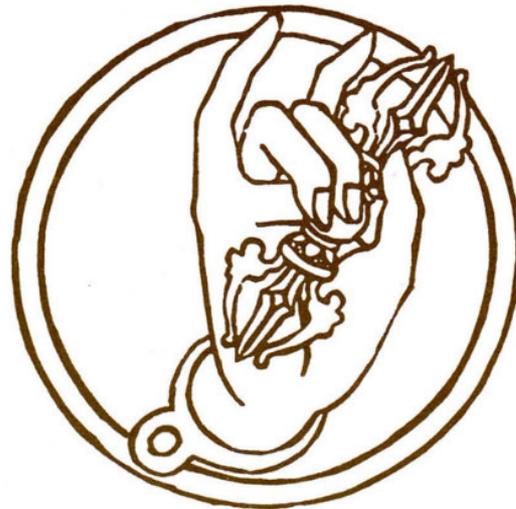
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# THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

1

The Buddha and  
the Bodhisattva:  
Eternity and Time



Series No. 15  
FEBRUARY 1988

**Mitrata 70 February 1988**

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 Samantabhadra, 'The Universally Beneficial'. In his right hand he holds the vajra or thunderbolt, symbol of Perfect Wisdom, which breaks through all false views.

# THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

## 15. The Buddha and the Bodhisattva:

### Eternity and Time - Part 1

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\*Indicates refer to Glossary

## Editorial

There is a chill crispness in the air. A stream of golden light pours in at my window. It is winter and the sun, though low and veiled in mist, is still brilliant to behold. My mind wanders off to warmer climes where, at this very moment, the glories of summer can be enjoyed.

The wheel of life spins round. The seasons come and go. We look from one to the next anticipating a better or a worse state of affairs. Many years ago, in India, a young man looked forward. It wasn't a summer holiday that he was imagining. He was not even content to dream of Utopia. His aim was to get away entirely, to transcend space and time altogether, to attain Enlightenment.

If we have the means by which to travel we can take a short cut to the sun. But a short cut to the dawning of Buddhahood, to Enlightenment, though in theory possible, is not so easy. We must strive within the limitations of time and yet be limited by nothing. Run like mad whilst standing absolutely still. Find what we are seeking without even looking for it.

And so we come to embark on the last lap of our journey into the realm of the Bodhisattvas. The way has been paved for us. We have simply had to pay a small fee and to read. Our travelling expenses have been minimal and we haven't even been anywhere! Let's hope that we too, like the Zen master in our final extract, will soon be laughing when we discover that we have been there all the time.

SRIMALA

## Lecture

Last week we began our lecture by permitting ourselves, for a few moments, a backward glance over the mountainous terrain of the Bodhisattva Ideal, terrain through which we have been travelling in the course of the last two months. As we looked back, we saw that one mountain peak stood out and dominated the landscape. This was the mountain peak of the Bodhicitta, the Will to universal Enlightenment. In retrospect we saw that all other aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal, some of which we had touched upon and even explored, seemed to group themselves around this particular aspect, just as lesser mountain peaks seem to cluster around one great peak that towers above them all.

This evening we are still concerned with the Bodhicitta, but whereas so far in the course of this series of lectures we have dealt only with the relative Bodhicitta, today we are going to deal with the Absolute Bodhicitta. Quite early in the series the distinction between the Absolute Bodhicitta and the relative Bodhicitta was introduced, but the Absolute Bodhicitta was mentioned just briefly (we also slightly anticipated this subject of the Absolute Bodhicitta last week in speaking of the Bodhisattvas of the *Dharmakāya*).

It is not easy to approach this subject of the Absolute Bodhicitta. It is difficult enough to deal with the relative Bodhicitta. If it is difficult to get a glimpse, even from far off, of the relative Bodhicitta, it is difficult even to get a glimpse of a glimpse of the Absolute Bodhicitta. So perhaps we should work our way into the subject gradually, little by little, until perhaps we have some perception, however remote or indirect, of the nature of the Absolute Bodhicitta.

In the course of listening to the previous lectures, you cannot but have received certain impressions. You may not remember very much of the lectures in detail, but some broad general impressions will have remained with you. You will surely think of the Bodhisattva as following a certain way of life: performing the 'Sevenfold Puja', making the 'Four Great Vows', practising the *Pāramitās*, and so on. In other words, you will think of him as treading a certain path. In the same way, you will undoubtedly think of him as aiming at a certain goal: Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, supreme Buddhahood. These at least are the sort of impressions with which you will be left after listening to this course of lectures. These impressions, though very general (not to say vague), are, as far as they go, perfectly correct — it is true that the Bodhisattva aims at the goal of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. But though these impressions are correct, there is a danger. The danger consists in the fact that these expressions, as when we speak of the Bodhisattva following a path or arriving at a goal, are in fact metaphorical.

We do not always realize how much of our thought and speech is metaphorical. It is not to be taken literally; it is suggestive. It is not meant to communicate in a clear-cut, scientific, quasi-mathematical fashion; it is meant to stimulate, even inspire. So there is the danger that we may forget this. We may start taking these metaphors — with the help of which we try to make clear what is going on in the spiritual life — somewhat too literally and may try to press them to logical conclusions.

Let us look into this a little more closely. Suppose that we're walking along a road. In due course, having covered a certain distance, we arrive at our destination, which is perhaps a house. This is a simple enough situation. But what are the facts of the situation? The facts are that we have changed our position, but we have changed it on the same plane, or level. The house therefore is, in a sense, a continuation of the road, because it is on the same plane as the road.

Now it is only too easy to think that the path of the Bodhisattva leads up to Buddhahood as though to the door of a house. We think of the Bodhisattva as going along step by step, until one day he comes to the door of Nirvana — perhaps we imagine a great gateway, glistening, pearly and golden — and he goes in. This is the way in which we think of these experiences; we cannot perhaps help thinking in this way. But it isn't really like that at all. When you come to the end of the Bodhisattva path, when you come in fact to the end of the spiritual path, you don't find a door or a gateway — there is no celestial mansion waiting for you. What do you find? When you reach the end of the path, you don't find anything at all. There is nothing there. The path just ends. You find yourself at the edge of a precipice (this is another metaphor, so again it

should not be taken too literally). You have walked along the path for mile after mile — you have counted all the milestones. You're expecting to arrive in comfort at the door of a great house. But instead you find that the path ends right at the edge of a precipice. And when you look down, you see that the precipice does not drop just a few feet, nor even a few miles: it drops down to infinity. So what are you to do?

In the Zen tradition leading the spiritual life is compared to climbing up a flagpole.<sup>1</sup> This particular flagpole is rather slippery, if not deliberately greased — by fate or circumstances. It is also very high indeed. Eventually, with a lot of effort, you struggle to the top of it. Then, however, you cannot go any further up — obviously. It is also impossible for you to come down. Why is this? This is because the Zen master is standing below with a big stick! Worst of all, at the top of the flagpole there is no cosy little platform on which, like St Simeon Stylites,<sup>2</sup> you can settle down — there is just empty space. Finally, of course, you're afraid to jump off. You can't go up, you can't go down, you can't stay there, and you can't jump off. So what are you to do? Well, it's quite impossible to say. No statement is possible. So I'm afraid I shall have to leave you on top of the flagpole!

Here we are not concerned with that particular predicament directly, only inasmuch as it illustrates the point that 'path' and 'goal' are discontinuous. Contrary to what we usually think, contrary to our usual metaphorical mode of description, Enlightenment is not reached by following a path — at the end of the path Enlightenment is not there staring you in the face. At the same time this does not mean that the path should not be followed. Paradoxically, one follows the path knowing that it doesn't lead anywhere. However, we're not concerned here with that either. The point I am trying to make clear is that the path and the goal occupy different dimensions, the dimension of time and the dimension of eternity, and therefore you will not arrive at the goal by the indefinite prolongation of the path; you do not reach eternity by the indefinite prolongation of time (it would be like trying to arrive at a two-dimensional figure by the prolongation of a one-dimensional line: however far you may go in that dimension, protracting the line, you never will arrive at a two-dimensional figure). Eternity, the goal, on the one hand; time, the path, on the other hand — these are discontinuous, discrete.

Now the Bodhisattva, about whom we've been speaking over the last few weeks, represents the dimension of time. This is because — obviously — the Bodhisattva path is followed in time; it has a past, a present and a future; it doesn't go beyond time. But the Buddha represents the dimension of eternity. The Buddha represents the goal, and the goal is gained out of time. One reaches the end of the path in time, but one does not attain the goal in time: one can say either that one attains the goal out of time or that the goal is eternally attained.

We usually — and up to a point quite justifiably — think of the Buddha as an historical figure. We think of his attainment of Enlightenment as an historical event. We say, for instance, that it took place two thousand five hundred years ago — we might name the year, or even the day. So we look upon the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment as something occurring in time, within the dimension of time. Now so long as we make it clear that we're speaking popularly, conventionally, then this is not altogether wrong. But only too often we go on to think of Buddhahood itself as existing in time. This is quite wrong. Though the Buddha, the historical person, may exist within time, Buddhahood itself exists outside time: it exists in the dimension of eternity. We can in fact think of the Buddha as existing simultaneously on two different levels: on the level of time, as a human, historical figure, and on the level of eternity, as Reality. We can think of him existing also on a further level, in an intermediate, archetypal realm. This brings us, as some of you may have perceived, to what is known in Buddhism as the *trikāya* doctrine, the doctrine which some scholars are pleased to call 'the Buddha's three bodies'.

This doctrine has been, and still is, much misunderstood. *Trikāya* does literally mean 'three bodies', or 'three personalities', or 'three individualities', but the literal meaning of the term is not to be taken too seriously. It is a doctrine not about three bodies, much less still about three Buddhas, but rather about one Buddha, or one Buddha-nature, functioning on three different levels.

The first of the so-called 'three bodies' is the *nirmāṇakāya*. This term literally means 'created body', or 'body of transformation'. It represents the Buddha as functioning on the human, historical level, as subject

to birth, old age and death. The *nirmāṇakāya* therefore obviously corresponds to Gautama the Buddha, Śākyamuni, whom we know as an historical figure.

Secondly, there is the *sambhogakāya*, which literally means 'body of mutual enjoyment'. It is sometimes rendered more poetically (less accurately, but more truthfully) as the 'glorious body' of the Buddha, or as the Buddha's 'body of glory'. This is the archetypal Buddha form. This is the form under which the Buddha is perceived by advanced Bodhisattvas dwelling on a much higher level of consciousness, a much higher meditative (*dhyana* or *samadhi*) state, than that on which we usually function and operate. This archetypal form is the form of the Buddha under which the Bodhisattvas are said to 'enjoy' the vision of him.

The *sambhogakāya* has a number of different aspects. The principle aspects are five in number and are known as the 'Five Jinas', or 'Five Conquerors', or, more simply, the 'Five Buddhas'. They appear often in Buddhist art: sometimes individually, sometimes collectively. It is important to remember that they don't represent the human historical Buddha, but different aspects, or facets, of this glorified Buddha, this archetypal Buddha, existing on this higher, archetypal plane, in between the plane we usually experience and the plane of Absolute Reality. I will say just a few words about each of these 'Five Buddhas' in turn.

First there is Vairocana. The name Vairocana means 'The Illuminator'. He is sometimes called 'The Great Sun Buddha', because just as the sun illumines the physical cosmos, so the archetypal Buddha, Vairocana, illumines (as it were) the spiritual cosmos. He is represented in Buddhist art as being of a dazzling white colour. His hands are in the teaching *mudrā*<sup>3</sup> (more technically, the *dharmacakrapravartana mudrā*, which means the *mudrā* of turning the wheel of the law). He holds in his hands an eight-spoked golden wheel — obviously a sort of solar symbol. When Vairocana is represented in a mandala (a circle of archetypal forms),<sup>4</sup> he usually occupies the central position.

Secondly, Aksobhya. His name means 'The Imperturbable' — one who cannot be moved. He is represented as being of a rich, dark blue colour, the blue of the midnight sky on a clear night in the tropics. His right hand is in the earth-touching *mudrā* (the *bhūmisparśa mudrā*), or the *mudrā* of calling the earth to witness.<sup>5</sup> His emblem is the *vajra*, the thunderbolt.<sup>6</sup> It is a symbol of indestructible strength and power. It represents Wisdom, the Wisdom which smashes everything that opposes it, which destroys all error and illusion. Aksobhya is associated with the East.

Thirdly, Amitabha, which means 'The Infinite Light'. Amitabha is red in colour, usually a beautiful, deep, rich red, very much like the colour of the setting sun when, just before it actually sets, it is seen through a little mist. The *mudrā* of Amitabha is the meditation *mudrā*, in which one hand rests simply upon the other. His emblem is the lotus, which is a symbol of spiritual rebirth. He is associated with the West.

Fourthly, Ratnasambhava, 'The Jewel Born', or 'The Jewel Producing'. He is golden-yellow in colour. His right hand exhibits the *mudrā* of giving (the *varada mudrā* is the *mudrā* of the supreme gift, which is especially the gift of the Dharma itself). His emblem is the jewel. He is associated with the South.

Fifthly, Amoghasiddhi, which means 'Unobstructed Success', or 'Infallible Success'. Amoghasiddhi is a dark green colour. His right hand exhibits the *mudrā* of fearlessness: he says, as it were, "Fear not! Be free from fear!" His emblem is the double *vajra* (two *vajras* crossed). He is associated with the North.

These 'Five Buddhas' are different aspects of the *sambhogakāya*, the archetypal Buddha form. They are the five chief aspects, but are not the only ones. There are scores of other aspects, far too numerous to mention. All of them are archetypal: they all exist on this archetypal plane, intermediate between ordinary earthbound human consciousness and the level of Absolute Reality.

All of them are out of time as we usually experience it, but are not out of time altogether: they occupy (as it were) a time scale different from that of our normal waking consciousness. We ourselves are not altogether out of touch with this archetypal world of the *sambhogakāya*. We sometimes touch the fringes of it in very deep meditation, in some archetypal dreams, and perhaps in aesthetic experience of a more truly visionary

nature.

Thirdly and lastly, we come to the *dharmakāya*. This is usually translated as 'body of truth', though it is not indeed a very satisfactory translation. A more accurate rendering would be 'the aspect of Absolute Reality'. The *dharmakāya* represents Buddhahood as it is in itself, or the Buddha as he is in himself. The *dharmakāya* therefore represents the real, the true, the genuine, the ultimate, Buddha. This is not the human, historical Buddha, nor even the archetypal Buddha. Therefore we find the Buddha saying in the Diamond Sutra, in a verse which is very famous in the Buddhist world and often recited:

*Those who by my form [the human, historical form] did see me,  
And those who followed me by voice  
Wrong the efforts they engaged in,  
Me those people will not see.*

*From the Dharma should one see the Buddhas,  
From the Dharmabodies comes their guidance.  
Yet Dharma's true nature cannot be discerned,  
And no one can be conscious of it as an object.<sup>7</sup>*

So here the Buddha is saying that the Buddha is not really his physical body, nor even his archetypal form, but is the *dharmakāya*, is (as it were) Reality.

The message of another great Mahayana text, the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, or 'White Lotus of the True Dharma', is similar, in fact in a way is even more explicit. It's worth pointing out that this sutra employs the non-conceptual mode of communication. There are two modes of communication: conceptual and non-conceptual. In the former one speaks the language of abstract ideas, of concepts; in the latter the language of parable and myth etc. It is this language of parable and myth which the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* speaks predominantly.

I have in mind a particular episode, when suddenly, according to the text, millions of Bodhisattvas appear from the earth. You can imagine how staggered everybody was! There they were, somewhere in northern India, sitting round the Buddha on the top of a mountain, — monks, nuns, male and female lay devotees and so on, — when suddenly, out of the fissures of the earth, there came millions of Bodhisattvas — quite an extraordinary thing to happen, even during the lifetime of the Buddha.

The Buddha, when he saw all these Bodhisattvas, said, addressing the other ordinary human disciples, "Oh yes, these are all my disciples. I've taught and trained them all." The ordinary human disciples expressed their astonishment at this and said, "But you were Enlightened only forty years ago. We admit that you've been working pretty hard. You haven't wasted any time, and you have been teaching all sorts of beings. But these millions of Bodhisattvas? That is a bit too much to ask us to believe. How could you possibly have trained so many of them? What's more, some of them are not just ordinary novice Bodhisattvas, they've been following the Bodhisattva path for hundreds of lives, for *kalpas*, so how can they possibly be your disciples?" They said, "It's just like a young man of twenty-five pointing out a collection of centenarians and saying, 'They're all my sons.' It's just impossible."

So at this point, according to the sutra, the Buddha makes his great revelation, the one towards which the whole sutra has been building up, a revelation which is the keynote of the sutra. The Buddha says, "Don't think that I was Enlightened forty years ago. That is just your way of looking at it. I am eternally Enlightened."<sup>8</sup> When the Buddha makes that statement it obviously isn't the *nirmāṇakāya* speaking, nor the *sambhogakāya*: it's the *dharmakāya* speaking. In other words it's the real Buddha, the eternal Buddha, Buddhahood itself, speaking, not any particular individual, however great.

So when the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* speaks in terms of the eternal Buddha, one is not to understand the word 'eternal' in the sense of indefinitely prolonged in time, but rather in the sense of being outside time altogether. This means therefore that for the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, as for the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha

symbolizes the dimension of eternity, or symbolizes Reality as existing outside time. This is why also we speak, in the title of this lecture, of 'The Buddha and the Bodhisattva: Eternity and Time'. The Buddha here represents the dimension of eternity, the dimension above and beyond, or outside, time.

Similarly therefore the Bodhisattva represents the dimension of time, or represents Reality — even Buddhahood — as manifesting in time (this again is metaphorical). It is not difficult to understand how the Bodhisattva should represent the dimension of time, because, as we have seen, the Bodhisattva follows the path, engages in certain activities, originates a certain sequence of thoughts, words and deeds. This sequence is progressive (the Bodhisattva manifests the relative Bodhicitta to an ever increasing degree), and the whole process takes place in time. This process is the process of the Higher Evolution — at least in its upper reaches.

We can take a view even broader than this. We can regard the Bodhisattva as symbolizing the whole evolutionary process, the *whole* process of life going on to higher and ever higher forms, the Higher Evolution (the evolution of man from the unenlightened to the Enlightened state) *and* the Lower Evolution (evolution from the very beginnings of life up to man in his unenlightened state). We can regard the Lower and the Higher Evolution as being, in a way, one continuous process; or at least we can regard the process of the Higher Evolution as arising in dependence upon the process of the Lower Evolution.

This view is supported by the *Jātaka* stories. *Jātaka* are one particular branch of Buddhist canonical literature (there are also many non-canonical *Jātaka*; in fact whereas there are only about thirty canonical *Jātaka*, there are well over five hundred and fifty non-canonical *Jātaka*). Traditionally the *Jātaka* are stories of some of the previous lives of Gautama the Buddha (Buddhism traditionally teaches rebirth, and this of course applies to the Buddha himself). They show how, from life to life, the Bodhisattva, or the future Buddha, advanced in the direction of Enlightenment.

Scholars have had a look at these *Jātaka* stories — you know what scholars are like, they probe, turn over, ask awkward questions — and have discovered that quite a number of them are old Indian folk tales, which have been turned into *Jātaka* by the simple process of identifying the Buddha with the hero of the tale (this applies particularly to the non-canonical *Jātaka*; it doesn't apply in quite the same way to the canonical *Jātaka*). It is rather as though we in the West had taken *Aesop's Fables*, had identified Christ, five hundred years later, with the principal character in each fable, and had regarded the fable as telling the story of one of the previous lives of Christ. This is what the early Buddhists did, apparently, with a vast mass of Indian folk lore: they turned folk stories into *Jātaka* simply by identifying the Buddha with the story's hero.

Some of the folk tales are in fact animal fables, and in these the Buddha is identified as having been the particular animal who is the hero of the story. Some scholars ask of course whether Buddhists take all this quite literally, and whether we are in fact to think that the particular hero, who might have been a hare, or a deer, or a lion, really represented the Buddha as he was in his own previous life. In some parts of the Buddhist East they are literal-minded and do quite honestly regard the *Jātaka* as really and truly depicting the actual previous lives of the Buddha. So, for instance, they often think that the hare *Jātaka*, in the course of which the Buddha is born as a hare and sacrifices his life, represents a real historical previous life of the Buddha. Simple-minded people everywhere take things in this way, but we need not be quite so simple-minded as that. We can say, adopting a more intelligent point of view perhaps, that the *Jātaka* quite clearly depict an evolutionary process. In each *Jātaka* there is a story involving a number of characters, one of whom is a hero. In other words there's someone, a man or an animal, who stands out from the rest, who stands above the rest, who is more advanced than the rest, and who therefore may be said to represent, in comparison with the rest, a more advanced stage of evolution. It is significant that this hero figure is identified with the Buddha. This means that this figure represents at that particular stage that same — in this context 'lower' — evolutionary urge which ultimately resulted in the 'production' of a (*nirmāṇakāya*) Buddha in the future. Just as the end result is symbolized by the Buddha, so this evolutionary urge itself is symbolized by the Bodhisattva, and therefore in the *Jātaka* the hero of the story is the Bodhisattva, in other words the Buddha-to-be.

To return to our main subject, we have therefore two principles: a principle of Buddhahood in the dimension of eternity and a principle of Bodhisattvahood in the dimension of time. In the principle of Buddhahood eternity is transcendent; in the principle of Bodhisattvahood the principle of growth, evolution, development, is immanent. The principle of Buddhahood represents perfection eternally complete, eternally achieved; the principle of Bodhisattvahood represents perfection everlastingly in the process of achievement, in the world order, through the evolutionary process. The two principles are discontinuous, discrete.

Now is this the last word that can be said on the subject, that on the one hand there is the Buddha, eternity, and on the other the Bodhisattva, time, and the two are discrete? According to the Mahayana, and especially according to the Tantra,\* it is certainly not. There's no question though of merging one into the other. The solution is not as easy as that. The solution does not consist in saying, "Time is illusory, merge it in eternity," or, "Eternity is illusory, merge it in time." No. They are both irreducibly there — Buddhahood *and* Bodhisattvahood, eternity *and* time — and they can't be merged, the one into the other.

The solution consists rather, according to the Mahayana and again especially according to the Tantra, in realizing both of them simultaneously: Buddha and Bodhisattva simultaneously, eternity and time simultaneously. It consists in seeing everything as eternally achieved and everything at the same time in process of achievement, and in seeing that these two do not contradict each other. One may say one has to see that everything moves but nothing moves. Sometimes, when one is walking perhaps or even running, one may have the feeling that one is moving but nothing moves. The two are both there and are (in a sense) contradictory — movement and no movement — but one can deny neither of them.

In the same way, one may say that the Buddha sits eternally beneath the Bodhi tree (the Buddha has always sat and always will sit beneath the Bodhi tree), that at the same time the Bodhisattva is eternally, life after life to infinity, practising the Perfections, and that these two, Buddha and Bodhisattva, represent different aspects of one, even the same, Reality. It is the realization of this — Buddha together with Bodhisattva, eternity together with time, no movement together with movement — that constitutes the arising of the Absolute Bodhicitta, though at the same time there's no question of 'arising'.

The essence of this Absolute Bodhicitta is very beautifully expressed, as far as it can be expressed, in certain Tibetan verses. These verses have never been published; they were privately translated in 1959 in Kalimpong. They are to be recited and meditated upon in a *sādhana*,<sup>9</sup> which is known as 'The Confounder of Hell'. The Confounder of Hell is one of the titles of Vajrasattva, and this *sādhana* is part of a form of the Vajrasattva Yoga.<sup>10</sup> These verses juxtapose in a single vision two different aspects of Reality: Reality existing out of time, in eternity, and Reality as progressively revealed in time.

Each of the verses starts with a mantra-like exclamation, *E MA O* (it is sometimes pronounced quickly as a single word). In the Tibetan tradition this comes at the beginning of certain things to be recited and is meant to express extreme wonder. Plato said that philosophy begins with a sense of wonder, so one might say that the spiritual life begins with a sense of wonder. When you come across anything numinous, transcendent, your reaction is one of wonder and astonishment, you're impressed, almost overwhelmed, by it. So each of the verses starts with this exclamation of wonder and astonishment at the vision of the Absolute Bodhicitta which is about to dawn on one.

E MA O  
*Dharma wondrous strange.*  
*Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.*  
*Within the birthless all things take their birth,*  
*Yet in what's born there is no birth.*

E MA O  
*Dharma wondrous strange.*  
*Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.*

*Within the ceaseless all things cease to be,  
Yet in that ceasing nothing ceases.*

E MA O

*Dharma wondrous strange.  
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.  
Within the non-abiding all abides,  
Yet thus abiding there abideth nought.*

E MA O

*Dharma wondrous strange.  
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.  
In non-perception everything's perceived,  
Yet this perception's quite perceptionless.*

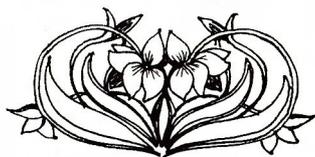
E MA O

*Dharma wondrous strange.  
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.  
In the unmoving all things come and go,  
Yet in that movement nothing ever moves.*

It's very difficult for the mind to go beyond this point. But this doesn't mean that the Absolute Bodhicitta is too remote for us to practise, at least to some extent. To begin with, we have to realize that however long time goes on, time never reaches eternity; time does not go beyond time. There's no question of getting nearer and nearer to eternity as time goes on, nearer to the Absolute, to Buddhahood, which is in the dimension of eternity. In a million years we'll be no nearer to eternity than we are now, no nearer to Buddhahood — no nearer at all.

This sounds pretty hopeless. But it is not really as hopeless as it sounds, because you can turn it the other way round and say that at this very moment we're as near to Enlightenment, to eternity, as we shall ever be. We might even say that even a Bodhisattva, on the very threshold of Enlightenment, just a minute before he gets it, is no nearer *really* than we are at this moment. This is really something to meditate upon, to ponder. Every moment is the last moment, whether it's this moment, or the next, or a moment occurring after a million years. Every moment is the last moment, and beyond the last moment there's only Buddhahood. There's only *this* moment, and after this moment there's only Buddhahood. So every moment in fact, only we don't know it (if we did know it what a terrible reaction there would be), we find ourselves at the top of the flagpole, and all that we have to do is ... well, what?

We've gone quite a long way tonight; at the same time we haven't gone anywhere. We've completed our journey along the Bodhisattva path; at the same time we've realized that the goal of the journey is eternally achieved and eternally in process of being achieved. The Buddha and the Bodhisattva, eternity and time, are one, or are not two. With that insight achieved, we bring to an end our exploration of aspects of the Bodhisattva Ideal.



## Seminar Extracts

### 1 Metaphorical Sense

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

Vessantara: Does the view of language as essentially metaphorical represent a 'middle way' between two extremes? One extreme would be the absolute identification that primitive man makes between language, or the word, and reality; while the other extreme would be a sort of correspondence theory, where you have two separate entities, the language and the ...

Sangharakshita (*interrupting*): Yes, you could certainly look at metaphor in that way, as being a bridge or middle way. But perhaps I should make one qualification here: when I speak of language as 'essentially metaphorical', I mean the language which we use with regards to *non-material* things is metaphorical. When one says that something is metaphorical, one means that terms which are derived from one's sensuous experience, one's *kāmaloka*\* experience, are applied to experiences which are not of a *kāmaloka* nature at all, which are *non-kāmaloka* experiences. In other words, one applies terms derived from one's experience of the material world to the world of thought, even to the world of spiritual experience. Such terms cannot be applied literally. They have to be applied in a metaphorical way. So *any* kind of language which refers to something beyond one's immediate experience of the material world is necessarily metaphorical.

Perhaps I should add a warning here. What I am saying assumes, of course, that language does have its origins in sense experience. But some traditionalists might disagree. They might maintain that language came from heaven, and that language has a divine origin. But that is another matter. [However it might be], one can say that to the extent that language is derived from one's experience of the material world, to *that* extent any use of language in connection with the non-material world, or one's experience of that world, must be metaphorical.

For instance — to give an example — when we speak of 'En-light-en-ment' we are applying the word 'light', which clearly denotes a phenomenon of our sense experience, to a realm or sphere which is non-material. Likewise, we speak of 'the light of Reality' or 'the light of Truth'. But here the term 'light' is used metaphorically. In the same way that [physical] light, in a manner of speaking, abolishes the darkness, so does the light of Truth abolish the darkness of ignorance. Even the most refined and sophisticated philosophical vocabulary will be found, on examination and analysis, to have a fairly earthly origin. In other words, both philosophical and religious language are inherently metaphorical. It cannot be otherwise. This leads to all sorts of interesting implications and consequences which we cannot pursue now. ....

Vessantara: Could you expand upon our earlier discussion where you stated: 'It is not that under certain special conditions a metaphor can be Reality, but that a metaphor is a case of Reality being under certain special conditions.'

S.: Can you slowly read it again. Start at the end — with what it *is* — and I will try to make that clear first.

Vessantara: 'A metaphor is a case of Reality being under certain special conditions.'

S.: In a metaphor you have got difference and you have got similarity. I can give you rather an interesting example. In a work by Heidegger that I was reading, I came across a line from a German poet which went something like this: 'With metal roof, the spire bloomed beneath the blue sky'. Here the basic idea, or metaphor, is that the steeple blooms or flowers. So what is the point of the metaphor? What is happening here? You have these two things. You have the steeple, which is an inanimate object, a piece of architecture; and you have a flower. The poet is not saying that the steeple is like a flower, or that it *looks* like a flower. No, he is saying that the steeple actually blooms. In other words, the two 'ideas' — of something animate and something inanimate, of something growing and something inert — have been

brought together and completely fused.

One could say, therefore, that one gained a much deeper insight into the real nature of that spire. Thanks to this image, or metaphor, or figure of speech, one had seen that the spire was not inert [or inanimate] as one had thought it to be; but that it was alive, as a flower is alive. It was blooming. By means of the metaphor one saw much more deeply into a particular thing, and thereby had a much deeper insight into its Reality. One could say that Reality had disclosed itself. In this case, the particular Reality of the steeple disclosed itself under the form of, or in the terms of, that particular metaphor. And that metaphor thus became a case of Reality appearing under certain special conditions.

The 'special conditions' are the bringing together of the concepts of the inanimate steeple and the animate flower, by way of the metaphor. The metaphor, however, is not something already existing underneath the conditions which then becomes manifest. I make this point in the previous line — could you read it again.

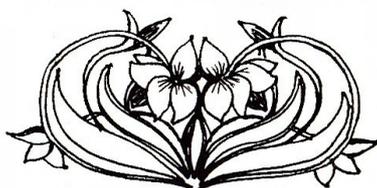
Vessantara: 'It is not that under certain special conditions the metaphor can be Reality'.

S.: Do you see the distinction that I am making? It is the 'conditions' — to use that language, though it is probably not the best language to use — which constitute the metaphor, rather than the metaphor appearing *under* those conditions. In point of fact it is Reality which appears under the conditions, — [the conditions which are none other than the metaphor itself] ....

Going back to our particular metaphor, we can see that the poet is not arbitrarily joining or juxtaposing two different things. He is not saying "Here we have the steeple which is made of metal, and there we have the flower which is a living and growing thing; and, yes, in certain respects the one is like the other". He is not saying that, because he doesn't see them in that way. He sees as it were the flower in the steeple, and the steeple in the flower. He sees them as interfused, and therefore can speak of the steeple 'blooming'. The steeple quite naturally assumes for him the attributes of the flower.

Padmavajra: Is this related to Coleridge's conception of the ideal poem, where he says that it is '.... the balancing or reconciling of opposite or discordant qualities ...', and proceeds to list the things that are fused.<sup>11</sup>

S.: I don't remember that quote, but it could be that Coleridge is on the same sort of track. It is not necessarily a question of opposites, though; because one could say that the steeple and the flower, although they are certainly different, are not opposites. But the differences, as we have seen, can be fused. So yes, Reality is revealed as a fusion of differences, or even of opposites. This is something that we need to follow up at some other time.



NB The line quoted at the bottom of page 18 is in fact by Holder line: '... In lovely blueness blooms the steeple with its metal roof ...' It is also quoted by Bruce Chatwin in *The Songlines*, Jonathan Cape, London 1987, p. 213.

## 2 Beating on the Wall

from 'Meghiya Sutta' (Udāna), New Zealand Men's Retreat, Padmaloka, February 1983

Sangharakshita: One has to beware of taking this illustration [of spiritual life in terms of the spiral path] too literally. Thinking in terms of a spiral — which is really quite a good way of thinking — suggests that you just carry straight on upwards. But, really, when you reach a certain point it's more like you come right up against a brick wall. Sometimes the Zen people speak in these terms. You come up against a brick wall and you just don't see how to go further. The brick wall seems to extend in all directions infinitely; you don't see any way around it. There's something else on the other side; but how you are to get to it, you just don't know. Or at least you suspect there's something on the other side, but you don't really know; you just reason by way of analogy. Usually there's something else on the other side of a brick wall. This feels like a brick wall; so there may be something else on the other side. (*Laughter.*)

So it's not that you come to this Point of No Return and you actually see where the spiral continues on the other side. No — it's more like you come up against a brick wall and don't know which way to go. And you have to be actually shown, though for obvious reasons the showing is not easy.

Prasannasiddhi: So you've got to move into a new dimension where the brick wall no longer exists. It's a bit like the Zen story of the goose in a bottle which can't get out. To free it you've got to transcend the level on which you're operating.

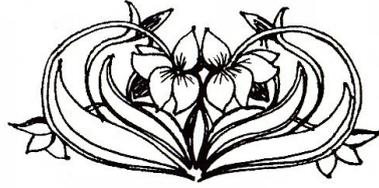
S.: Or, to put it another way and still use the same metaphor, you could say that here you are confronted by a wall, completely flat, completely smooth, exactly the same all over. Then someone comes up to you and says: "Just start beating there; that's the weak spot; that's where you can break through." So out of faith you start beating on that particular spot upon which perhaps you would never have thought of beating. But that's the spot you're told to beat on; so you do. And eventually you do break through. The spot you beat on is this fact, or idea, of impermanence.

Prasannasiddhi: And then perhaps you could say that practising meditation in terms of the *dhyanas* doesn't really apply any more, because you've broken through into a new ...

S.: In a sense it doesn't — though one has to be careful how one puts this. One might say that now there is a tendency for the dhyanic state to be a natural one for you, circumstances permitting.

Prasannasiddhi: And your perception of whatever lies beyond is not necessarily dependent on actual practice of *dhyana* in terms of higher states. It's something quite different.

S.: No doubt the Insight arises, at least partially, in dependence upon *dhyana* experience, but it cannot be explained or interpreted entirely in terms of *dhyana* experience. It isn't just an extension or a refinement of *dhyana* experience; it's something quite different. There is a sort of break in the spiral. It's as though that Point of No Return coincides with the edge of the wall. Maybe the spiral continues — in a sense — on the other side. But at that point, with the wall in front of you, you can't see.



### 3 Run Like Mad and Stand Absolutely Still

from Questions and Answers, Women's Order Convention, Wood Norton 1985

Sangharakshita: Among the writings ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus there is the so-called Smaragdine Table,<sup>12</sup> in which it is stated, 'What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below'. In other words, there is a correspondence between spiritual things and material things. This is a very basic mode of apprehension: an alternative to logical thought, in a way. We have this [type of thought] in Buddhism in the Vajrayana, where 'above' we have the 'Five Buddhas' and 'below', corresponding to those, the 'Five *Skandhas*', the five elements, the five colours and so on. Thus you have a [whole] system of correspondences. According to this 'Hermetic' principle everything that is above has its corresponding principle below, and everything that is below has its corresponding principle above. The one as it were reflects the other.

For this reason there is not only a general correspondence — in the Hermetic sense — between the realm of the conditioned and the realm of the Unconditioned; there is also a specific correspondence. If you divide the 'above' into 'Five Buddhas', the 'below' is automatically divided into 'Five *Skandhas*'. Not only that, but one particular Buddha corresponds to one particular *skandha*, and so forth. In that way you get a detailed set of specific correspondences, which is useful for purposes of meditation and reflection.

Some people's minds work in this way; I must admit my own mind works quite a bit in this way. I feel quite at home with sets of correspondences. Some people react quite strongly [against the whole idea]: they consider it all quite absurd and unscientific and so on. But the sets of correspondences provide a sort of grid, so to speak, on which you can operate. Therefore, in the case of the Vajrayana, you have got 'above' the 'Five Buddhas', the 'Five Wisdoms' or 'Awarenesses',<sup>13</sup> the 'Five *Dakinis*'. What else have you got above?

Vajrasuri: Colours [of the 'Five Buddhas']. A Voice: The five animals.

S.: The animals: do they really belong above? I suppose in a sense they do, because they are associated with the Buddhas as their mounts. Then 'below' you have got the five senses, the 'Five *Skandhas*', the 'Five Poisons'.<sup>13</sup> It is a way of making sense of existence, imposing a pattern on the chaos of existence. (*Break in recording.*)

Sanghadevi: [Or perhaps the pattern grows out of one's] experiences. A bit like what you were saying yesterday about the philosophy of non-violence. It wasn't that somebody [consciously] developed this philosophy: it is more an experience of empathy with nature; it's grown out of people's experience.

S.: Perhaps one could say that, though maybe [that relates to] experience of a rather different sort, because when you are talking about the 'Five Buddhas' you are speaking about Transcendental experience. Maybe people [at first] perceived correspondences in a rather limited way, but gradually saw a deeper and deeper significance in that and extended it to include even the Transcendental and the mundane as such, the conditioned and the Unconditioned.

Perhaps you can see, to begin with, a correspondence between heaven and earth, in a quite basic, simple way. The ancient Indians seem to have seen a correspondence between the fire in the sky, that is to say the sun, and the fire on earth, that is to say the kindled fire. Usually one starts with very simple beginnings, and you expand and you deepen at the same time.

Thus, as I think I have said before, there are two ways of looking at spiritual development: one [as] advancing from stage to stage and progressing, and the other [as] deepening your experience of what is already there. You could, if you wanted to introduce those terms, call one the more masculine and the other the more feminine. It's as though in the spiritual life you need to have both of them. You mustn't think one-sidedly of the spiritual life as a progression from stage to stage, otherwise you become too object-oriented or aim-oriented. You need to balance that with thinking in terms of deepening your present experience or unfolding from a deeper and deeper centre within you. But if you think only in *those* terms, you may become a bit inert. You need also to think in terms of progression. [You need to think in terms of both modes] at the same time, or at least to alternate between the two modes, as it were, at different times, different periods of your life.

[Here] again it is a question of 'as above, so below', because above there is the Bodhicitta, the Absolute and the relative Bodhicitta, where the Absolute Bodhicitta is Enlightenment itself but the relative Bodhicitta is the Bodhicitta everlastingly trying to attain that which is, in fact, already attained; so you have the two together. The two together is the ultimate realization. Thus in your spiritual life you are trying all the time to achieve that which, in fact, you already have; but you have to do both, realize that you already have it but at the same time go all out to achieve it. If you have one by itself it is unbalanced and you are out of balance.

Do you actually find this in the course of your own lives, that sometimes you just want to stay where you are and go deeper, unfold from a deeper centre, but that at other times you feel like going forward or going upward, going up the mountainside, as it were? These are two different phases of spiritual life, but they belong together, really. One cannot really, in the long run, have the one without the other.

Parami: Would ... seeing connections with one or other of these, particularly the staying put one, ... would that be penetrating something more deeply by seeing its connections above?

S.: Perhaps: yes. One is more spatial, the other more dynamic. If you think in terms of the mandala, putting everything in its proper place in relation to what is at the centre of the mandala, this is more 'spatial', therefore more static, therefore more related to the first mode I spoke of [ i.e. going deeper, or unfolding from a deeper centre], whereas the other [mode] is more dynamic. [In the other mode] you are moving forward, you are leaving one thing behind and advancing towards another: you are in movement; you are growing, you are developing. But although *that* is a very useful way of looking at things, we mustn't forget that it is not the only way. In fact it *shouldn't* be the only way of looking at things, the only way of looking at the spiritual life. On the one hand there is the achievement of a totally new level of being and on the other there is a deeper realization of what you already are, and in a sense always are.

Vajrasuri: It's very difficult to get [clear] about that.

S.: Maybe you have to engage separate lobes of the brain. (*Laughter.*) It is difficult to get into a single focus ideas which are, in a sense, contradictory. There is no really logical way of doing that.

Parami: It's almost as if you have to expand your frame of reference to [include contradictory ideas].

S.: Yes, you have to be running like mad but at the same time have the experience of standing absolutely still.

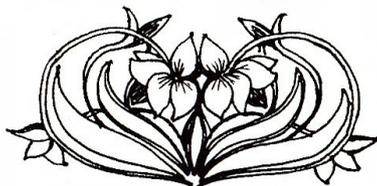
Parami: It makes me think of a *dakini* in flight.<sup>14</sup>

S.: Not even quite like that; that is more dynamic, one could say. It's impossible to combine the two ways of looking at things in a single visual image. You can't even combine them in a single thought; you've got separate thoughts, two different thoughts that you can sort of put side by side, but which you can't really synthesize; [for that your] higher faculty is required — Imagination with a capital 'I',<sup>15</sup> or Insight with a capital 'I'.

But I think you can also usefully consult your dream experience here. I don't know whether anyone has ever had this experience, but I have had it a number of times. In fact, in a way I have slightly cultivated it. You have a dream, and when you wake up you just have a flash, you remember the dream. Let me give you an example: you realize that you have been dreaming, say, about travelling in India, and it is a quite full, detailed dream that you remember. At the same time, the very same instant, you remember that what you have actually been dreaming is something quite different: you have been dreaming that you have been painting a picture, let's say, a picture of a flower. But at that same instant you realize that it would be equally true to say that you have been dreaming of travelling in India and that you have been [dreaming of] painting a picture of a flower. To your waking consciousness they seem two alternatives, but the dream experience was both, in a mysterious way that the waking consciousness cannot apprehend. That is really quite odd, isn't it? — that the dream should be both, whereas your waking consciousness says that it has got to be either [one or the other].

It is rather like that; that is an analogy. You have got to be racing forward all the time, moving from stage to stage, climbing up that mountainside. At the same time you have got to be absolutely still and just realizing more and more deeply where you actually are now.

Dreams are quite interesting in this way because they give us access to a completely different mode of consciousness, and we mustn't judge things entirely by the standards of waking consciousness. People who have had drug experiences know that their consciousness becomes altered in much the same way. That's one of the interesting things about psychedelic drugs and psychedelic experiences. They really do broaden your conception of consciousness, or conception of existence, or conception of life. We just think in such narrow and limited terms.



#### 4 Here and Now

from Women's Study Leaders Questions and Answers on the Higher Evolution of Man, Norwich 1984

Sanghadevi: I don't understand the relationship between Absolute Reality manifesting through the evolutionary process, and the involution/evolution which takes place within world systems, the spiritual influences, the material, and vice versa. In what sense is Absolute Reality influencing the spiritual and the material?

Sangharakshita: Perhaps I'll just say what Buddhism *doesn't* believe in, by contrasting it with some Hindu beliefs.

Many schools of Hindu thought believe that there is an Absolute Reality which to begin with remains in a state of non-manifestation. It's sort of sufficient unto itself. But then after a while, in a manner of speaking, it starts emanating the whole cosmic process, emanating the samsara. That [samsara] goes through a

period of development, a process of [first] involution and then evolution, over a tremendous period of time, and in the end [is] absorbed back into the ultimate reality; and the ultimate reality is again left as it were on its own. You see what I mean? This is a very common Hindu mode of thought. In modern literature, this line of thought is represented by Ken Wilber.<sup>16</sup>

This is not the Buddhist view, though. Not that the Buddhist view is very simple, but the Buddhist view is that the samsara goes back and back into the past, and one cannot perceive a point of first beginning, so that there is no point where the samsaric process can be as it were connected with Ultimate Reality as its first cause. Yes, Buddhism does see that same process of involution and evolution as the Hindu does, but according to Buddhism that absolute reality of Hinduism is not really Absolute Reality, it is simply the highest point of the samsaric process itself, so that you have an involution and evolution of the samsaric process. But — here of course we can't help using metaphorical language — over and above that is the Transcendental, which is not connected with the samsaric process as its cause. Nonetheless, though the Transcendental is not the cause of the samsaric process, escape, so to speak, from the samsaric process to the Transcendental is still possible.

Hence one could say [that] if Nirvana, as some Mahayana schools say, is some sort of principle, having an effect on the samsaric process, it is not having that effect as a sort of causative principle of the samsaric process itself. The effect which it has is to liberate sentient beings, or to help sentient beings to become liberated, from that samsaric process.

Now this involves quite abstruse questions with regard to perception and so on, because what is actually said [in the texts] is that, however far you go back, no ultimate beginning of the samsaric process can be perceived — which suggests that the whole of the samsaric process is in some way bound up with your perception or your consciousness. Do you see what I mean?

Dhammadinna: Because you'd still be operating in terms of space and time by trying to find the first cause, wouldn't you?

S.: Yes. You'd be trying to find, in effect, that which was by definition beyond space and time, *in* space and time. You can only find it as it were by not looking in that way. Or even just by not looking, by not searching.

Parami: Quite Zen-like.

S.: Yes.

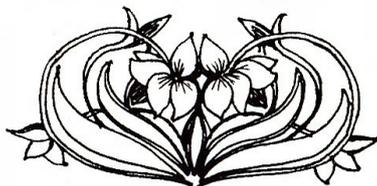
Parami: Because we reason, our subject/object framework is something which is used.

S.: Sometimes you end up with a sort of thought which thinks in terms as it were of experience, undifferentiated experience. Experience undifferentiated by the subject/object relation is Reality itself. It's Ultimate Reality, and in a sense it's here and now, because you have experience, you are experiencing things all the time, but that experience is overlaid, or distorted, by the subject/object duality. It's not that you've got to get to another experience, as it were; you've got to purify your present experience of that subject/object duality. That is, you've not got to see anything different: [to experience] any sort of Absolute Reality, you've just got to see whatever you are in contact with here and now without any illusion, without any craving, without any distorting factor.

In other words, Ultimate Reality is not something as it were above and beyond, but it is just whatever you happen to encounter — but seen completely free from presuppositions, completely free from mundane conditioning. In a manner of speaking, yes, you can speak of it as though it was a kind of separate principle, but that is only a manner of speaking.

Parami: When you were saying that there's the Transcendental over and above, so to speak, the samsaric, and that they are not connected, but that escape from one to the other is possible, is that why you say the Bodhisattva is the key to the Higher Evolution?

S.: I think I say that the Bodhisattva is the key to the Higher Evolution in the sense that in the Bodhisattva, who is so to speak the embodiment of the path, the nature of the whole evolutionary process can be seen most clearly, or seen in its most concentrated form.



## 5 Pink Elephants

from 'The Diamond Sutra' (*Buddhist Wisdom Books*), Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1982

*4. Furthermore, the appearance of this world is like a mock show, a magical illusion. Like a magical show it deceives, deludes and defrauds us, is false when compared with ultimate reality. Things, as Vasubandhu says, are not a trustworthy support. It is assumed that the world of conditioned things is manufactured by ignorance, and Nāgārjuna, in his great commentary, shows that ignorance and the products of the magician's art have the following attributes in common: They are neither inside a person, nor outside, nor both inside or outside; they can therefore not be localized with reference to persons; there is nothing real that has been either produced or destroyed; no real event, with an essence of its own, has taken place. And yet, although ignorance is not real, it is the condition for all kinds of activity. Similarly, the musical instruments conjured up by magic are empty, deceptive, without reality, without objective basis, and yet one can hear their music and can see them.*

*Buddhist Wisdom Books*, trans. E. Conze, Allen & Unwin, London 1970, p. 69

Sangharakshita: In other words, things are not what they seem — or, rather, they are what they seem to be but you simply misinterpret what you see. You're not wrong in seeing what you do see, but you're wrong in the way in which you interpret it. (*Pause.*)

This illustration of the mock show, the magical illusion, is a very common one in Indian literature. You know the sort of thing from which it is derived: a magician who conjures up some magical appearance and you see it — or you *think* you see it — but actually it's not there. It's not there in the *ultimate* sense. You see it but there is, in fact, no objective reality corresponding to what you see.

I did actually see one of these magical performances myself, in about 1951/2, when I was staying in Kalimpong. A wandering magician or yogi came along and performed on my veranda one of the customary tricks, whereby the magician takes a mango stone and puts it in a pot full of soil, covers it with a cloth, and then you see the cloth suspended [in the air, above the pot] like that; he whips the cloth off and there is a grown mango plant. (*Laughter.*) Now whether that's an example of an illusion which he produced or whether, by some magical means, he did actually make that mango stone shoot forth extraordinarily quickly, I don't know, but that is what happened, that is what I actually saw. Now, some magicians, according to literary accounts, [are able to] do [such] things on a much grander scale; they can conjure up elephants and musicians and things of that sort, at will. That is the reason for this particular comparison

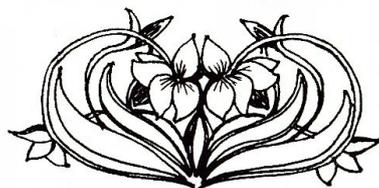
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Some people explain the rope trick in this way, as a sort of magical show. You know the famous rope trick: a rope is thrown up into the air and it hangs there; then a boy climbs up it and disappears; a man goes up after him and also disappears; then bits and pieces of the boy fall down; the man comes down and the master magician puts all the bits and pieces under a cloth, whips off the cloth and the boy stands up, makes his bow to the audience and finally, of course, they pass the hat round. Some say it's probably mass hypnosis but, anyway, that is the sort of performance that's behind this kind of illustration; that is the 'mock show', the 'magical illusion'.

The point is that all one's experiences of life are essentially the same [as this]. You see things, you hear things, things happen and you're involved in them, but ultimately they're no more real than is the mock show or magical illusion. As I said, it's not that relative reality and illusory reality, so to speak, are the same thing; it's not that there's no difference between them. You could say that relative reality stands to Ultimate Reality as illusory reality stands to relative reality.

Jinavamsa: In the case of a magician in India, I can see that he can create the illusion but if everything is like that, who actually makes it happen?

S.: Well, "You do!" is the answer. You and other sentient beings collectively 'hallucinate', so to speak. You have the same sort of karmas, you have a common sort of background, so you tend to see things in much the same way. You 'hallucinate' in much the same way, so you agree upon your hallucinations. That's why it's very difficult for you to realize that they are hallucinations, because they're hallucinations which everybody agrees do exist! I mean, if everybody in this room saw a pink elephant in the middle of the room, well the pink elephant would exist! It's only if *one* of you either sees or does not see the pink elephant that questions arise. So the Buddha is like the man who sees or does not see the elephant, depending on how you frame the analogy. He sets others wondering, either whether the pink elephant which they perceive and the Buddha doesn't, is really there, or whether the pink elephant, that the Buddha sees but which they don't, is in fact really there but they just can't see it. In the first case the elephant represents illusory reality and in the second it represents Absolute Reality. Questions about the nature of Reality only seem to arise when different people see things in different ways, or when one's self sees different things in different ways or even the same things in different ways at different times. Historically, as far as Indian philosophy is concerned, the comparison of the dream state with the waking state seems to have led to a lot of philosophical reflection about the nature of Reality. Anyway, *'the appearance of this world is like a mock show'*.



## 6 The Buddha: Dead or Alive?

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

Bob Jones: Something I have wondered is why the Buddha didn't get reborn, out of Compassion, into the world.

Sangharakshita: Well, if the Buddha didn't get reborn into the world, what happened to him [after his *parinirvāṇa*]?<sup>17</sup>

Bob Jones: [I'm speaking] more in the context of the Bodhisattva Ideal. If he has so much Compassion for the world, wouldn't he want to come back as soon as possible?

S.: Well, the Mahayana answer to that would be, how do you know that he hasn't? (*Laughter.*) Buddhas are around all over the cosmos. He might have gone off post-haste to some other world that needed his attention. That is the sort of theoretical answer [you might get from the Mahayana], which, of course, is not very satisfactory. But maybe the question isn't very satisfactory either. Again [we find ourselves concerned with] this difference of school, or different approaches of different schools. Of course the Theravada doesn't teach the Bodhisattva Ideal in the way that the Mahayana does, so for the Theravada it is not a question. It is only a question from the Mahayana point of view. In a way [the answer to] it involves the reconciliation of the difference between the Theravada and the Mahayana approaches. The Theravada clearly says — and this *seems* to be the view of the Buddha himself — that on the extinction of the physical body, the state of the Tathāgata cannot be declared. This is one of the *avyākṛtas*<sup>18</sup> [which state that] you cannot say of him either that he exists or that he does not exist or both or neither. Your question presupposes that after the death of his physical body he either exists but is indifferent to the welfare of the world or that he does not exist. Both of those possibilities are excluded by the Theravada [in stating that] he neither exists nor does not exist nor both nor neither. His state cannot be declared. So the Theravada doesn't really have to answer the question. The Theravada is in some ways very wise. It leaves unanswered the questions which cannot be answered. (*Laughter.*) The Mahayana [on the other hand] is more enterprising and tries to answer those questions which in fact cannot be answered directly. It does it, [however], entirely as a skilful means. Some Mahayanists remember this, some Mahayanists forget it and get [themselves] into difficulties, philosophically speaking. All right, [let's take the Mahayana point of view], that you accept the Bodhisattva Ideal. You accept that the Bodhisattva doesn't want to gain Enlightenment just for himself. He wants to come back again and again and again. So what about the Buddha? Well, the Mahayana says he only *pretended* to withdraw into Nirvana. That is what the *White Lotus Sutra* says: that had he remained on earth among his disciples they would have become dependent upon him, so he deliberately withdrew. He allowed the physical body to drop off. But do you imagine that having acted like that out of Compassion he [would not continue to be] active in *some* other way out of Compassion? Do you imagine that because he is no longer on this earth he has [really] left behind his Dharma, left behind his Sangha? [No.] He has merely withdrawn his physical presence but he is certainly operative in other ways, on other levels. In fact he is preaching the *White Lotus Sutra* on a high spiritual plane all the time uninterruptedly. If you ascend into a high level of meditation you can actually listen to that. This is what the Mahayana would say. You see [it's] a somewhat different point of view. It doesn't really answer the question but it clarifies the area within which the question arises.

If one wants to look at it in a more down to earth way, one mustn't imagine that after the death of the physical body the Buddha continued to exist as an unchanged ego identity — [which is the view out of which] the question of his descending out of Compassion or not descending really arises. I mean, if the Buddha acted in a compassionate manner during his lifetime, he will not cease to act in that manner simply because the physical body has dropped off. He will continue to act in the same manner, assuming him to exist or speaking of him as existing only in a poetical way. But the modes in which he will do that, the physical body being absent, are not really imaginable.

Murray Wright: Speaking poetically, then, you could almost say wherever the Bodhicitta manifests — say through the FWBO — there the Buddha manifests.

S.: Yes, you could say that. The Buddha himself says, 'He who sees the Dharma sees me.' Where the Dharma is, there the Buddha is. Or where the Sangha is — certainly where the *Āryasaṅgha*<sup>19</sup> is — there the Buddha is.

Mike Sherck: That comes back to [the question of what was the] true nature of the Buddha even when he had a human form?

S.: Well, the Buddha says that even in his lifetime his nature cannot really be fathomed, what to speak of after the disappearance of the physical body. So if we ask, why doesn't the Buddha do this or do that, it really means that we are expecting the Buddha to behave in a determinate way according to our understanding. Perhaps this [expectation] isn't really justified. If during his lifetime the Buddha is compassionate, he will surely not be uncompassionate after his death, assuming that we can in a manner of speaking continue to speak of him poetically as existing after death. To the extent that he *exists* he will be compassionate, but to what extent he exists, even before he dies, it is not easy to say.

I referred a few days ago to an argument which, I heard, took place on the occasion of a meeting in Burma in 1952 at the World Fellowship of Buddhists between Dr Ambedkar and a friend of mine called Dr Irene Bastow Hudson. She was a real old battle-axe, a Theosophist and would-be Buddhist and all that. (*Laughter.*) Ambedkar asserted in the course of the discussion that the Buddha was dead. She asserted that the Buddha was alive and they had a real ding-dong battle about it. Is the Buddha alive or is he dead? In a way they were both right and both wrong. Ambedkar was right in the sense that the Buddha's physical body was no longer in this world. But he was wrong if for that reason he concluded that the Buddha who existed when the physical body was there, was no longer there, or no longer existed when the physical body was not there. Dr Hudson was right and wrong because she took the opposite view. She rightly perceived that the Buddha was not dead merely because his physical body was dead. But she wrongly thought [that because] he was not dead [simply] because his physical body was not there he was therefore alive — which is another of the possibilities that is excluded by the formula of *avyakrtas*. They were both rather unversed in Buddhist thought, I might say, and adopted a naive, pseudo-commonsense approach to a rather subtle question. Dr Ambedkar had a very powerful mind but not a subtle mind. But Dr Hudson was just an obstinate old lady who had read a little bit about Buddhism.

Bob Jones: Are the two traditions, the Mahayana and the Theravada, mutually exclusive?

S.: In a way. Though if you take the different traditions literally, the Theravada and the Mahayana traditions (in fact there are several Hinayana and several Mahayana philosophical traditions), there are all sorts of contradictions on the intellectual level. You just have to see those contradictions within a much wider, supra-intellectual, purely spiritual context. The beginner doesn't allow you to do that. He wants a [literal answer] to the question, "Who is right and who is wrong?" You cannot always give that. The beginner might want to know, was Ambedkar right or was Hudson. One of them must be right. [The Buddha] cannot be both alive and dead. He's got to be one or the other. But you cannot really answer the question in that sort of way. You cannot say, Ambedkar was right, the Buddha is dead. This is what many Theravadins say: the Buddha is dead. But that goes against their own scriptures. [But then nor] can you say with some Mahayanists — like the more naive followers of the Nichiren school<sup>20</sup> — that the Buddha is alive. That is the opposite extreme. He is not dead, nor is he alive. You cannot state the matter in those sort of terms.

## 7 Flowing into Buddhahood

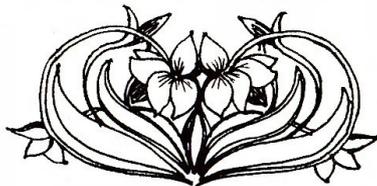
from 'The Precious Garland' (*The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses*), Men's Mitra Seminar, Padmaloka, August 1984

*Though enlightenment is limitless,  
How could he not attain it  
With these four limitless collections  
Without being delayed for long?*

*The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses*, Nāgājuna and the 7th Dalai Lama, Allen & Unwin, London 1984, v. 220

Sangharakshita: In other words, how could he not attain it quickly? One way of looking at the Bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva is in terms of a river, a river that flows into the ocean — the ocean being Buddhahood. The Bodhisattva — or, if you like, the Bodhicitta — is constantly flowing into the ocean [of Buddhahood].

The Bodhisattva is, as it were, *constantly* realizing Buddhahood *outside* time, whilst *inside* time he's always *in process* of realizing it. These two together are called the Absolute Bodhicitta.



## 8 A Harmonizing Influence

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

*In the Varmavyūhanirdeśa-sūtra:*

*A Bodhisattva puts on armour  
In order to gather all beings around him.  
Since beings are infinite  
So is his armour.*

sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H. V. Guenther, Rider, London 1959, Ch. 15, p. 184

Sangharakshita: This is quite interesting. The armour is, of course, motivation. '*A Bodhisattva puts on armour*'. He develops that motivation to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all, 'In order to gather all beings around him.' What do you think is the significance of that?

Paula Turner: (*Inaudible.*)

S.: Yes, one can certainly say that, because, after all you haven't got the power mode, you've only got the love mode. Yes, you attract all beings — but it says *around him* — '*to gather all beings around him.*' What does that suggest?

Anne McMillan: A mandala.

S.: A mandala, yes. It's as though the Bodhisattva is at the centre of the mandala, potentially, and another aspect of his leading all sentient beings to Enlightenment is gathering them all around him, not in a group as it were but in what we can only call a mandala. A mandala is also a Sangha. A mandala is a spiritual community, a spiritual community is a mandala.

We talked about your individual mandala — about organizing all the elements of your own being in a harmonious way around the centrepiece, around your basic aspirations, your basic ideal, and giving every part of your being its due place. But one can also think of the spiritual community in terms of a mandala, with the Buddha or the Bodhisattva at the centre, [and] the Arahants, the goddesses, the ordinary human beings arranged all around the Buddha or the Bodhisattva [at] different places in the mandala. It suggests the harmonious creative effect that the Bodhisattva has.

Here is this mass of human beings all fighting and quarrelling, all trying to subdue one another, all trying to amass wealth. The Bodhisattva comes amongst them, and he gradually transforms this chaos into a

cosmos; this confusion into a beautiful mandala; or ordinary society into a spiritual community. This is quite a nice way of putting it: '*A Bodhisattva puts on armour/In order to gather all beings around him.*' It's not gathering them all around him in a group-like way, in a little huddle. That's the impression you get from conventional religious groups. The Bodhisattva is trying to create a mandala of beings. One could ask oneself: 'What is my place in the mandala?' This gives rise to all sorts of quite important considerations. Perhaps it's better to think in terms of your place in the mandala rather than your place in the hierarchy. There are all sorts of places, all sorts of positions, all sorts of functions in the mandala. You may be a guardian of the gates, you may be an offering goddess, or whatever. So "What is my place in the mandala?" You are in the mandala, to the extent that you are in the spiritual community, to the extent that you are making a spiritual effort.

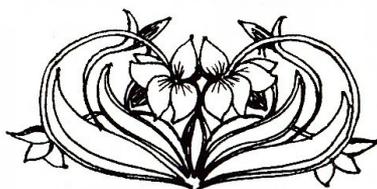
Anne McMillan: It suddenly brings to mind Indra's Net,<sup>21</sup> because everybody in their place in the mandala has their own mandala, [and everybody's mandala is reflected] in everybody else's mandala.

S.: Yes, the whole mandala is reflected in your mandala and your mandala is reflected in the whole mandala, and in all the other mandalas. All these things are suggested by these lines: '*A Bodhisattva puts on armour/In order to gather all beings around him.*'

It's as though the suggestion is that, as soon as you decide you are aiming at Enlightenment for the benefit of others, at once a sort of vibration is set up and you start, as it were quite spontaneously, organizing the people in your immediate environment into a sort of mandala. This is the harmonizing creative effect that you have on all of them.

Let me give you an example. Supposing a retreat has been organized, and supposing turning up for this retreat you get just new people, people who have not been to any Centre before, haven't practised meditation before; [they have] all sorts of different ideas but they've turned up for this retreat. In other words, it's a sort of chaos. And then supposing *you* are the sole person turning up to lead this retreat, without any assistance, just to lead these ten or twenty, or forty or fifty people. What effect do you have on them, in the course of leading or organizing a retreat? You are the unifying and integrating and harmonizing factor. You organize them around you because this is what you have to do in order to have the retreat at all, and where there was chaos, you create, for that particular week, a sort of little cosmos. You create a mandala. This illustrates the sort of effect that the Bodhisattva has — the effect that *you*, as a person aiming at Enlightenment, should have on your surroundings, wherever you go. The Bodhisattva does it on a .grand scale, but you can do it on a smaller scale, too.

Of course, there are often all sorts of other factors and forces at work counteracting you, so you may have only a very partial success, but nonetheless you do have an influence of that sort. Ideally, also, you at the same time have your place in a genuine mandala which is seen and experienced as a mandala, so that when you step outside that mandala you still have the memory, the lingering influence of that mandala, to help you create another little mandala wherever you happen to be, whether it's at your office, at home, away on holiday, or wherever. You have that harmonizing influence, that mandala-creating influence on your surroundings, by virtue of the fact that you are dedicated to the attainment of Enlightenment; so you tend to gather beings around you to that extent.



## 9 What a Silly Buddha I Was!

from 'Yogis Joy' (*Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*), Men's Seminar, Padmaloka, July 1978

Sangharakshita: It's as though there are three stages of practice. Let's take, at least for the moment, the 'Ten Virtues' to be the 'Ten *Kausalya-dharmas*',<sup>22</sup> (Pali *kusaladhammas*). '*One arises in the power of practising the ten virtues,/One consists in purity while abiding amidst the ten evils.*' The first might be an instance where you're practising the 'Ten Virtues' and everyone else is practising them [as well]. There's no opposition from your environment, but in the second place one practises them, one remains pure with regard to them, even while abiding amidst people who are following the 'Ten Evils', who are doing the exact opposite to what you are doing. So this is surely a higher stage of practice. Then what about the third? '*One is the pure void unaffected by adversity.*' There you've gone beyond even self and others, so that's a higher practice still. You're unaffected by surroundings altogether. You can't be influenced. In the case of the second, though, you're rather like the lotus growing up singly out of the mud.

*'Now if for the fruit three points are explained,/Nirvana is not gained as something distinct,/Samsara is not avoided as something distinct,/One's own thought is confirmed in the Buddha-state.'* What does this suggest? What has one transcended now by the time one reaches this stage?

A Voice: Dualism.

S.: Dualism, yes. One gains Nirvana, one achieves Nirvana, but not as something distinct. One is away from the samsara, one has escaped from the samsara but one doesn't avoid it as something distinct. '*One's own thought is confirmed in the Buddha-state.*' What does the use of this word *confirmed* suggest?

A Voice: Irreversibility.

S.: Yes, but even more than that?

Graham Stephens: Rooted.

S.: Rooted. That really it was that all the time. You're really being confirmed. You're in that state all the time, you just didn't know it. It's *that* that makes all the difference. Like the man [in the parable in the *White Lotus Sutra*] who had the jewel in the corner of his robe all the time but didn't know it.<sup>23</sup>

Sagaramati: Do you reckon that's what somebody [who gained Nirvana] would feel like?

S.: Oh yes, definitely. Because it's outside time. When you come to the point as it were outside time, then you cannot but realize that you have been there *all* the time. Therefore, necessarily, when you've gained Enlightenment you realize that you always were Enlightened and therefore that you were never unenlightened. This is why — so we are told — some of the Zen masters at this point just let out a laugh, because they saw how absurd it was, how ridiculous, that they'd ever imagined that they were anything but Enlightened. (Laughter.) It was such a silly mistake! (Laughter.) Especially as they had to suffer so much on account of it, all completely unnecessarily.

Sagaramati: Is it as light as that? (Laughter.)

S.: It isn't light at all. You know how it is in ordinary life if you've been worrying a lot over something, really worrying, and then you suddenly realize or you get a sudden piece of information [which tells you] you didn't need to have worried like that and you think you were so silly, so absurd to have worried when you just didn't need to. So it's rather like that, raised to the highest power as it were. You say, what a fool I was, worrying and struggling along and thinking I was this and thinking I was that but it wasn't so at all. Of course not. Well, you can afford to laugh when you get to that point. (Laughter.) What a silly Buddha I was! (Laughter.) So '*One's own thought is confirmed in the Buddha-state.*' It's not anything that you really come

into possession of. Your possession is simply confirmed.

*'Of all these three points there's one point we drive home,/And that is the point of absolute voidness./It is done by a master who is skilled at the task./If you speculate greatly it's not driven in,/But if you comprehend all at once, the point's driven home.'* So this is the most important thing quite clearly. *'Of all these three points there is one point we drive home,/And that is the point of absolute voidness.'* So why is that so important do you think? [Voidness] is of course the Mahayana and also the Vajrayana term for Ultimate Reality. But why is it so important under that particular aspect? What does Voidness imply or suggest? [It implies] there's no limitation, [it implies] not being tied down to any one particular thing, any one particular form or stage of development. So it suggests complete openness. I think Guenther sometimes translates this [term *sunyata* not as Voidness but as] 'openness of being'. It means that you can develop in an unlimited fashion, in any direction as it were. It's the Absolute Voidness which is the guarantee of your absolute freedom to develop, so that's the one point we drive home.

*'It is done by a master who is skilled at the task./If you speculate greatly it's not driven in.'* [That is to say] it's only too easy to speculate about the Void, especially if you're acquainted with Mahayana philosophy. I think I've mentioned before how I once asked a Tibetan friend of mine in Kalimpong, a layman who was very interested in Buddhism, who always used to frequent the monasteries in Lhasa and spend a lot of time with the monks, what was the favourite topic of discussion among them and he said, "Oh, the thirty-two kinds of Voidness." I can't imagine that that discussion was always free from speculation and intellectuality. But if you comprehend all at once it's not serial. Reasoning is serial. Seriality is, first this point and because of that point [you come to] such and such point. But Vision, Transcendental Vision isn't like that. It's *'all at once'*. *'But if you comprehend all at once, the point's driven home.'* You just see it. You know of course which scriptures devote themselves mainly, almost exclusively, to Absolute Voidness: the *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures.<sup>24</sup> That's their one point. *Prajna* being the subjective counterpart, as it were, of *sunyata*.<sup>25</sup>

*'This crest-jewel of all who practise the Dharma./The yogin has won it when it shines in his mind./So you my pupils, let your heart rejoice!'* What is this crest-jewel?

A Voice: The Voidness.

S.: It's the Voidness itself. The culminating achievement, the highest achievement, the crowning achievement as we would say. *'The yogin has won it when it shines in his mind.'* Not when he thinks or speculates about it. But is it a thing? Is there a thing shining in the yogin's mind? No. It's the yogin's complete state of openness and freedom. *'So you my pupils, let your heart rejoice!'*<sup>26</sup> Let your heart rejoice because if you practise faithfully this is what you will experience in the end.

## Glossary

**Kāmaloka**, (Pali and Skt.): lit. 'world', 'realm' or 'plane' (*loka*) of sense desire (*kāma*). It is the lowest of the three principal planes into which Buddhism divides the totality of phenomenal existence, the other two being the *rūpaloka* or 'world of form' and the *arūpaloka* or 'formless world'. Each of the planes has its subjective counterpart in a state of consciousness and each has numerous subdivisions or sub-planes. The *kāmaloka* is a very mixed realm in the sense that in it both pleasure and pain are experienced. Its lowest sub-planes are occupied by tormented beings, *pretas* or hungry ghosts, animals and *āsuras* or titans, states of existence which are either exclusively or predominantly painful. The highest sub-planes of the *kāmaloka* are occupied by various classes of *devas* or gods, whose experience is blissful. The Buddha, however, is always intent on reminding the gods that the pleasures of the *kāmaloka* (and indeed of the two higher realms) are transient, giving no permanent satisfaction.

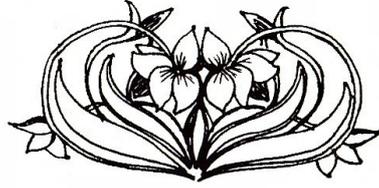
Human beings can be said to occupy, temporarily, any of the sub-planes of the *kāmaloka* and to pass from one to another in dependence on their state of consciousness. According to Buddhism, the purpose of the spiritual path is to develop the higher, more blissful states of consciousness corresponding to the highest planes of the *kāmaloka* and to all planes of the two higher *lokas* and, on the basis of accumulated and sustained positive experience, to develop Insight into the nature of Reality.

**Tantra** (Skt.): lit. 'something woven or elaborated'. In Buddhism a Tantra is a particular type of discourse or text distinct from the more commonly known 'sutra'. 'Tantrism', 'the Tantra' and 'Tantrayāna' are alternative titles for 'The Vajrayana' or 'Diamond Vehicle', the third of the three '*Yānas*' of Buddhism, because it is the Vajrayana which is intimately associated with the use of the Tantras. Generally speaking, the Tantras were the last Buddhist discourses to be committed to writing; it is probable that even now many are only in oral, and not written, circulation. Tantras are intended only for the eyes and ears of those who have reached a certain level of spiritual development and who have received the appropriate 'consecration' (*abhiṣeka*). A typical feature of the Tantras is a symbolic language which is often cryptic and unintelligible without a traditional commentary. Hence they are among the more esoteric Buddhist texts. They are concerned with spiritual practice rather than doctrine, in contrast with the sutras which are often concerned with doctrinal principles more than with the specifics of practice.

Perhaps more nonsense has been written about Tantrism than about any other form of Buddhism, on account of its esoteric nature and its use of apparently 'magical' practices and its employment of aspects of sexuality as symbols for higher spiritual realities. Though in some quarters it is even seen as a degenerate form of Buddhism, the fact is that Tantrism has, doctrinally speaking, a sound basis in the Mahayana. It is concerned with making every practical effort to utilize actions of body, speech and mind for the realization of the highest spiritual goal, Enlightenment itself. To this end it makes full imaginative use of the visualization aspect of meditation practice (see *Mitrata* 57 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 2', Glossary) and in its devotional practices, sets great store by the use of ritual implements and *mudrās* (ritual gestures) and the recitation and chanting of mantras.

One very important aspect of the Vajrayana is its special emphasis on non-duality, on the interpenetration of conditioned existence with unconditioned Reality, or of the immanence of the Transcendental within the world. The two are not seen as separate; every aspect of conditioned existence reflects, and is capable of being transmuted into, the Unconditioned. It is for this reason that the mundane can be sacramentalized and transformed by means of Tantric spiritual practice. One example of this is the use of sexual symbolism within the Vajrayana. Enlightenment is the union of Wisdom and Compassion; this is symbolized in Tantric iconography as the sexual union of male and female Buddha forms, the male representing Compassion and the female representing Wisdom. Moreover, sexual union is seen as the faint reflection, on a very mundane level, of the union of Wisdom and Compassion; hence, through spiritual practice, sexual energies can be transmuted into aspects of the Enlightened mind. It is this aspect of the Tantra which excites the misunderstandings of the moralistic and the prurient. In effect, it is an instance not only of the Tantra's metaphysical profundity but also of its concern with the crucial issue of how even the grossest of psychophysical energies can be transformed and integrated into the spiritual life.

See Sangharakshita, 'The Eternal Legacy', Windhorse Publications, Ch. 16; Sangharakshita, 'A Survey of Buddhism', Windhorse Publications; Sangharakshita, 'Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism', Windhorse Publications and in talks available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/onr59yr> ; Lama Govinda, 'The Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism', Rider, London 1975.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> One version of the flagpole story appears in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, comp. Paul Reps, Penguin, London 1986, pp. 128-9.

<sup>2</sup> In 423 C.E. St Simeon Stylites the Elder took refuge on the top of a column to escape from crowds that followed him. This apparently formed a precedent, for in the fifth century a sect of anchorites emerged who took to living on top of pillars. The 'Stylites' were the 'pillar saints' (*stela* is Greek for 'pillar' or 'post').

<sup>3</sup> See *Mitrata* 63 in this series, 'Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life - Part 2', Glossary.

<sup>4</sup> See *Mitrata* 68 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Hierarchy - Part 1', Glossary.

<sup>5</sup> See Sangharakshita, 'The Symbolism of the Five Buddhas, "Male" and "Female"', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/o6nmokt> or Sangharakshita, 'Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism', Windhorse Publications.

<sup>6</sup> See *Mitrata* 64 in this series, "'Masculinity" & "Femininity" in the Spiritual Life - Part 1', Glossary; and Sangharakshita, 'The Symbolism of the Sacred Thunderbolt or Diamond Sceptre of the Lamas', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/k8wybok> or Sangharakshita, 'Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism', Windhorse Publications.

<sup>7</sup> See *Buddhist Wisdom Books: the Diamond Sutra and Heart Sutra*, trans. and explained by Edward Conze, Allen & Unwin, London 1970, p. 63; or Sangharakshita, 'Wisdom Beyond Words', Windhorse Publications.

<sup>8</sup> See 'The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law', (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*), trans. Bunno Kato, Yoshiro Tamura, and Kojiro Miyasaka, Weatherhill/Kosei, New York/Tokyo 1984, Chs. XV & XVI, pp. 237-256.

<sup>9</sup> In Vajrayana Buddhism, *sādhana*, (Skt.) literally 'an efficacious spiritual practice' consisting, in many cases, of the visualization of a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva form (or forms), the repetition of the appropriate mantra and the recitation of verses of praise. The *sādhana* is usually 'given' or recommended by a spiritual teacher in accordance with the disciple's individual needs.

<sup>10</sup> The Vajrasattva Yoga is one of the Four Foundation or 'Mula' Yogas in Tantric Buddhism. See *Mitrata* 68 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Hierarchy - Part 1', Note 14.

<sup>11</sup> See Coleridge, 'Lectures and Notes 1818' (*Coleridge*), Selected by Kathleen Rainer, Penguin, London 1986, p. 227.

<sup>12</sup> Hermes Trismegistus was the reputed author of numerous works which gave rise to a whole philosophical-cum-religious literature and phase of human thought, supposedly emanating from Egypt. The name 'Trismegistus', meaning 'thrice great', was given to Hermes in view of his reputation as prophet, king and priest. Some scholars say he flourished before Homer in Greece, others that his works were those of some half Christian half Platonist in the early part of the second century C.E. The doctrines of Hermes are so many and various that it is doubtful if they all come from the same mind. Many of them are mainly of a magical, astrological or alchemical nature.

The Smaragdine Tablet or Table, Latin: *Tabula Smaragdina* (*smaragdina* lit. 'made of emerald') is an ancient alchemical document ascribed to Hermes and detailing important alchemical doctrines. In its original form it is said to have been found in a cave inscribed on a plate of emerald held in the hands of the corpse of Hermes. A famous quotation from the text states the 'Hermetic correspondence' between higher and lower levels of reality: 'That which is above is like that which is below and that which is below is like that which is above, to accomplish the miracles of one thing'. (Quoted by E. J. Holmyard in *Alchemy*, Penguin, London 1957.)

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- <sup>13</sup> The Buddhas, known as the 'Five *Jinas*' or 'Conquerors', which form the Mandala of the Five Buddhas in Tantric Buddhism embody the 'Five Wisdoms': the Mirror-like Wisdom, the Wisdom of Equality, and so on. See Sangharakshita, 'The Symbolism of the Five Buddhas, "Male" and "Female"', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/o6nmokt> or Sangharakshita, 'Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism', Windhorse Publications. The correspondences of the Wisdoms with the five senses, the 'Five Skandhas', and so on, are explored by Lama Govinda in his *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, Rider & Co, London 1975, Part Three, Section 8.
- <sup>14</sup> See *Mitrata* 65 in this series, '"Masculinity" & "Femininity" in the Spiritual Life - Part 2', Note 7.
- <sup>15</sup> See *Mitrata* 69 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Hierarchy - Part 2', Note 33.
- <sup>16</sup> See Ken Wilber, *Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1983.
- <sup>17</sup> See *Mitrata* 56 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal - Part 1', Glossary.
- <sup>18</sup> *Avyākṛtavastūni*, lit. 'undetermined questions', questions which the Buddha declared could not be answered by means of any form of logical predication and therefore to which no answer ought to be made. See Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism, Its Doctrines and Methods through the Ages*, Tharpa, London 1987, pp. 83, 95-6.
- <sup>19</sup> The *Āryasaṅgha* or 'Sangha of the Noble or Worthy' is the Spiritual Community at its very highest level, consisting of all those who have passed the Point of No Return — i.e. all those in whom Transcendental Insight has become the dominant force.
- <sup>20</sup> Nichiren Shoshu, a form of Japanese Buddhism, founded by Nikko (1 246-1332), a disciple of the Buddhist reformer Nichiren (1222-1282), who broke with the other five chief disciples of Nichiren and founded his own temple at the foot of Mount Fuji. Over the centuries, Nichiren Shoshu has split into many different organizations, some monastic, some lay. Soka-Gakkai is a contemporary lay branch of Nichiren. The function of the monastic or priestly branch of Nichiren Shoshu is to preserve and transmit the teachings and rituals associated with Nichiren. The chief spiritual practice is the honouring of the *White Lotus Sutra* by the repetition of a mantra.
- <sup>21</sup> Sangharakshita explains this as follows: 'Since every object in the universe is devoid of self-nature, every object in the universe neither finds nor offers any impediment to penetrating or any impediment to being penetrated by every other object. Interpenetration, though involving loss of separateness, does not mean extinction of individuality. The idea is elucidated by means of a number of illustrations, one of the most famous of which is Indra's Net. Indra, the king of the gods, has a wonderful net made entirely of strings of jewels. Each jewel in the net both reflects and is reflected by all the other jewels. Thus all the jewels, though participating in one another's existence, mysteriously retain their own identity.' See *Sangharakshita, 'A Survey of Buddhism'*, Windhorse Publications.
- <sup>22</sup> See Sangharakshita, 'The Ten Pillars of Buddhism', passim, Windhorse Publications.
- <sup>23</sup> See 'The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law', (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra*), trans. Bunno Kato, Yoshiro Tamura, and Kojiro Miyasaka, Weatherhill/Kosei, New York/Tokyo 1984, Ch. 8, pp. 177-9; or Sangharakshita, 'The Jewel in the Lotus', available on FreeBuddhistAudio <http://tinyurl.com/pam4x6h> or Sangharakshita, 'The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment', Windhorse Publications.
- <sup>24</sup> See *Mitrata* 68 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Hierarchy - Part 1', Note 10.
- <sup>25</sup> See *Mitrata* 65 in this series, '"Masculinity" & "Femininity" in the Spiritual Life - Part 2', Glossary.

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<sup>26</sup> See 'Milarepa and the Novices', (*Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*), ed. Edward Conze, Harper & Row, New York 1964, pp. 262-3.

