

Week 5 – Akshobhya & Amitabha

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – symbolic Dharma

ARCHETYPAL BUDDHAS

The so-called archetypal Buddhas symbolise a more essential aspect of the Enlightened person than simply their physical, flesh & blood body.

Buddhism addresses the whole of the individual: rational & emotional, conscious & unconscious, cognitive & intuitive. The faculty of **Imagination** perceives images or archetypes which are often encountered in dreams, myths, symbols and legends. eg:

- Lord of the Rings
- Star Wars

The world of Myth & Symbol is *not* a realm where there are fully defined meanings.

*The imaginal faculty is, in reality, the man himself, because when one truly perceives an image one perceives it with the whole of oneself, or with one's whole being. When one truly perceives an image, therefore, one is transported to the world to which that image belongs and becomes, if only for the time being an inhabitant of that world. In other words, truly to perceive an image means to become an image, so that when one speaks of the imagination, or the imaginal faculty, what one is really speaking of is **image perceiving image**.*

Sangharakshita

Some part of us “lives” in the archetypal dimension all the time:

When we are in the dream state, we exist, one might say, in the dream realm. But what happens when we wake up? We are not conscious of the dream state, but has that dream state ceased to exist? Are not those emotions we experienced in the dream state continuing until we descend into the dream state again? Isn't it like a sort of subterranean river that we descend into from time to time through a hole in the ground. It is flowing there all the time [whether you are in it or not]. So, in a sense, you are all the time living in that dream realm. You've only got to extend that to the realm of archetypal experience. You are, in a sense, existing in the realm of archetypal reality all the time.

Sangharakshita

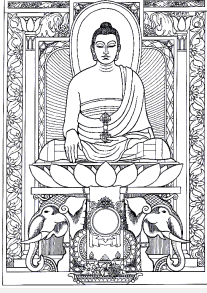

Could say that archetypal symbols govern our life. They give us sense of meaning & place in world – they structure our world.

PRINCIPLE OF CORRESPONDENCES

Tantric Buddhism developed a complex system of correlations which associated mundane things with transcendental qualities. By doing this, the Tantra achieved two aims. Firstly it reminded its practitioners that attaining Enlightenment does not mean going off to some other world. Rather we just have to bring about a radical change in our approach to our present experience. Instead of seeing mundane things as hindrances to be avoided, we recognise that, seen aright, 'this very place is the lotus paradise, this very body the Buddha'. Secondly, through correlating mundane and transcendental, the Tantra made it possible for anything mundane to serve as a reminder of Reality.

Vessantara, Meeting the Buddhas

AKSHOBHYA & AMITABHA BUDDHAS

	Akshobhya – the Imperturbable	Amitabha – Infinite Light
Quality	Clarity / wisdom	Love
Colour	Blue	Red
Wisdom	Mirror-like: completely objective, unsentimental, undistorted	Discriminating: notices the uniqueness of all
Poison	Hatred	Greed
Realm	Hells	Preta
Emblem	Diamond thunderbolt – Vajra	Lotus
Element	Water	Fire
Time of day	Dawn	Sunset
Direction	East	West
Animal	Elephant	Peacock
Mudra	Earth-touching	Meditation
		

HOME PRACTICE

Colour in the line drawings of the Buddhas if you wish.

Notice your emotional response to colours; in noticing colours red & blue see if you can bring to mind the Buddhas Akshobhya & Amitabha, or something of their qualities.

Maybe notice & reflect on the affinities between different qualities that we've talked about (eg. clarity & hatred, fire and love, objectivity & imperturbability, sunset & peacocks!)

FURTHER READING

The Symbolism of the five Buddhas 'Male & Female', Sangharakshita, CD 110 or in *The Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism*

Meeting the Buddhas, Vessantara, Windhorse (Part Two) – rich descriptions, and an invaluable reference work for Buddhist symbolism.

The Mandala of the Five Buddhas, Vessantara, Windhorse – a shortened version of the above.