

God (Deva) Realm

Description

Objective

At the top of the circle we see the World of the Gods; we see heaven; we see a world of pleasures and delights; we see the Gods living in beautiful palaces, among beautiful trees, beautiful gardens, living in a place, in a world, where every wish is instantly gratified.

Psychological

The World of the Gods represents a sort of happy, pleased state of mind, a state we may say of relaxation, of content, of repose. It's the state in which everything seems to go smoothly, to flow smoothly, a state in which there are no obstacles, no difficulties. It's also a state of aesthetic experience, of artistic enjoyment. It's even the state of meditation in the more limited sense of the term, meditation as an experience of higher states or stages of consciousness, not directly accessible to the Transcendental. So this is the state represented, the state of mind represented by the World of the Gods.

God (Deva) Realm

The Buddha offers...

In the world of the gods there appears a white Buddha holding a lute, and he plays the melody of impermanence. This means that when we are in the state of aesthetic enjoyment, the next step for us is to remind ourselves that such aesthetic enjoyments, however great, are not to be mistaken for the Supreme Bliss of Enlightenment; to remind ourselves that though things seem to be going well now, though we seem to be happy, pleased, contented, joyful, delighted, we still have a long way to go; there still remains a long way to go.

In fact, prolonged happiness can be spiritually dangerous. If we're happy all the time, contented all the time, things go easily all the time, we have it our own way all the time, we tend to become self-satisfied, complacent, even unmindful, and we tend to forget that we are mortal, that time is precious.

The Titan (asura) realm

Description

Objective

The Asuras, the anti-gods, the Titans are all fierce and war-like beings. They're usually depicted as stoutly and strongly built, well-muscled and not to say heavily built, and they're engaged in perpetual warfare with the Gods and they're fighting especially for the possession of the celestial tree which grants all wishes, which fulfills all desire.

Psychological

The World of the Titans is the aggressive, competitive state of mind. Here there is lots of energy, maybe too much energy which all turns outward. There is restlessness, suspicion, jealousy. As they are fighting for possession of that wish-fulfilling tree, so this state of mind is one that strives after higher and ever higher standard of living, increased and yet more increased wages and so on. It's a state of assertive egotism, in which one wants always to be better than others, to control others, exercise power over others. Maybe it represents the world of politics or business.

The Titan (asura) realm

The Buddha offers...

In the world of the Asuras there appears an emerald green Buddha, and he brandishes a flaming sword and this is the sword of wisdom, of transcendental wisdom. This means that when we are in this state of competitiveness and aggressiveness, the next step for us is to develop intellectual insight, insight into truth and reality, and this brings us to a very interesting point.

The Asura-like person, the Titan, is dominated by Hate. But hate has an affinity for Wisdom, or even Wisdom has an affinity for Hate. If you've got lots of anger and hatred, strange to say in a sense, you're near to Wisdom, you can fairly easily develop Wisdom, Wisdom in the sense of intellectual penetration into truth and reality, as a spiritual experience, not just intellectual knowledge in the ordinary sense.

The Hungry Ghost (Preta) realm

Description

Objective

In the Preta realm, the World of hungry ghosts, they're all naked and all horribly deformed. They've got enormously swollen bellies, very thin necks and mouths no bigger than the eye of a needle. They suffer all the time from ravenous hunger and they grasp all the time at food and at drink and try desperately to cram in into their mouths, their needle-eye mouths, but as they grasp and as they cram, the food and the drink turns into excrement and into liquid fire so that they cannot eat and they cannot drink.

Psychological

This is the state of neurotic desire. Desire is neurotic when it seeks from its object more than the object by its very nature is able to give or even something quite different from what the object is able to give. For example, sometimes people gobble down huge quantities of food, especially sweet things. For they don't really want food at all. Food is a substitute for something else.

The Hungry Ghost (Preta) realm

The Buddha offers....

In the World of the Pretas, in the world of the hungry ghosts, there appears a red Buddha and he showers the pretas, the hungry ghosts with food and drink, with food and drink that they can actually consume. Now what does this mean? It means that when we are in a state of neurotic desire the next step for us is to get back to objectivity, which also means getting back to the present. We must see what the desired object is actually able to give us, see what it is not able to give us, also see what it is we really desire, whether it is really the object or not and where the desire is coming from. And eventually we have either to give the desire its proper satisfaction or just resolve it.

The Hell realm

Description

Objective

In hell, (or purgatory, because it isn't a permanent state) we see people suffering various torments, torments in some cases so terrible that we can hardly bear to think about them, much less still to describe them. The sound of wailing and roaring and gnashing of teeth and lamentation fills the whole place. In the middle of the hell realm we see a fiercesome figure sitting enthroned and this is Yama-Raja, the King of Death, dark blue in colour, clad in a tiger skin and surrounded by flames and as he sits there he holds in his hand the mirror of karma.

Psychological

This is the state of acute mental suffering, of nervous frustration, of mental breakdown, the state even ultimately of insanity, and it's brought about in various ways. For instance by long continued frustration of natural human impulses. It's brought about by sudden unexpected bereavements, by unconscious mental conflicts and so on, all adding up to intense mental suffering. This is the state represented by the beings in Hell.

The Hell realm

What the Buddha offers...

In the World of tormented beings there appears a smoke coloured Buddha. And he regales the beings in hell with with Amrita, with ambrosia. There are two meanings here, a bit contradictory and one is rather profounder than the other. The less profound meaning is this: it means that when we're in a state of intense suffering the next step for us is simply to gain respite from suffering, to gain some sort of ease. For many people that's the best that they can do in the circumstances.

The more profound meaning is connected with this word amrita. Amrita is also a synonym for enlightenment itself. So the smoke-coloured Buddha gives the beings in hell, not just ambrosia, he gives them enlightenment. This means that when we are in a state of intense suffering, the next step is to gain nirvana. It's as though there's nothing left for us to do. All worldly hope has failed, there's nothing left for us to do about our suffering except go straight to enlightenment. It's as though there were an affinity even between intense mental suffering and susceptibility to higher spiritual attainment.

The world of the Animals

Description

Objective

This is the world of animals, wild animals, domesticated animals and they're shown all in pairs, male and female and they're shown living a very peaceful, a very idyllic existence.

Psychological

This is the state of purely sensual indulgence, the state in which one is interested in only food, sex and simple material comforts, pleasures and convenience of life. And when these are satisfied one is quite gentle, quite tame as it were, quite harmless, but when they are not satisfied, when they are frustrated, then one becomes rather dangerous, rather like the wild animal.

The world of the Animals

Description

In the world of animals appears a blue Buddha and he's showing the animals a book. This means that when we're in a state of barbarism and savagery, the state represented by the animals, the next step for us is simply to become civilised, to make ourselves acquainted with the arts and the sciences, with the cultural life of mankind, because these things have a refining influence, and it's difficult, if not impossible, to go from a state of barbarism, of mental savagery, straight into the spiritual life.

The world of Humans

Description

Objective

Here there are human beings, buying and selling, reading, talking, meditating under the trees and finally being carried as corpses to the cremation ground.

Psychological

This is the stage of distinctively human consciousness, the state of consciousness which is neither ecstatic nor agonised, neither fiercely competitive nor mindlessly sensual nor yet neurotically desirous, the state in which we're aware of our own self, aware of other people, a state in which we satisfy in a reasonable manner objective human needs, but at the same time see that they have their limitations; a state in which we may devote ourselves to spiritual development. This is the truly human state, but it's a state which most 'human beings' only intermittently or perhaps never experience.

The world of Humans

What the Buddha offers..

Here there appears a yellow Buddha, a saffron-coloured Buddha, and he carries a begging bowl and a three-ringed staff. These are the insignia of the religious mendicant and therefore of the spiritual life in general, and it means that when we find ourselves in a truly human state, the next step for us is to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the task of spiritual development. Once we've reached the human state, experience the human state this should be our main interest in life.