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THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

2

The Bodhisattva Vow



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Cover Symbol:

The symbols on the covers of the issues in this series are from original lino-cuts by Dharmachari Alokā based upon the *mudrās* of the eight principal Bodhisattvas of Mahayana tradition. This issue features the *mudrā* of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the 'Lord who looks down', the embodiment of Compassion. His left hand is shown here holding a lotus flower, the symbol of spiritual unfoldment.

THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

3 The Bodhisattva Vow

Part 2

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* Indicates refer to Glossary

Editorial

If you cross your fingers when you make a promise then, when the going gets tough you can say “I didn’t really mean it!” This is the way a child lets itself ‘off the hook’.

At the close of the ordination ceremony the new member of the Western Buddhist Order makes a sort of promise, a declaration of intent. He or she accepts the ordination ‘for the benefit of all beings’. However, the Order Member or the would-be Bodhisattva does not embark on his or her career with crossed fingers. By the time one is ready to formally Go for Refuge one should be prepared to meet with any situation which tries one’s commitment, without needing an escape route.

The ‘promise’ made at ordination is like a seed of the Bodhisattva Vow. The Vow itself is only taken when the Bodhicitta has arisen and one becomes a *real* Bodhisattva, a Bodhisattva of the Path. But, when one commits oneself to the Three Jewels one places no limitation upon that commitment. One Goes for Refuge not merely for oneself alone, nor even just for the benefit of one’s family and friends; one Goes for Refuge for the benefit of *all* sentient beings. And so this commitment is an anticipation of the Bodhisattva Vow, a prefigurement of what one must be prepared and willing to do. One must be prepared to keep one’s promise even if the going gets tough. One must be prepared to take literally a seemingly unrealistic aspiration. One must be prepared to help others according to their needs rather than one’s own. One must be prepared, like Milarepa in one of the concluding extracts in this issue, to rid oneself of all traces of greed, hatred and delusion. One must be prepared to learn new ‘languages’ enabling one to communicate the Dharma more widely and effectively. One must be prepared to lead all beings to Buddhahood.

SRIMALA

Seminar Extracts

1 No Beings to Help

From 'Rechungpa's Repentance' (*The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*), Men's Seminar, Padmaloka, November 1980

*Transforming on body into many
And many into one,
Proves I can benefit all beings
By miracles.*

The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, trans. Garma C. C. Chang, Shambhala, Boulder & London 1977, Vol. II, p. 447

Simon Chinnery: By performing these miracles is [Milarepa] also showing that nothing can impede him, and therefore he could truly practise helping everybody? [He's got] infinite freedom in that way.

Sangharakshita: Right, yes. In a way, [Milarepa] is saying that in order to be really able to help living beings you need to be Enlightened – you need to have no obstacles. Otherwise, if you're not Enlightened, the living beings that you are trying to help will themselves constitute obstacles for you. Do you see what I mean? For example, say you're in a study group and you're very patiently trying to explain something to someone – trying to help him, presumably. Supposing you feel he's deliberately not trying to understand, and putting up a foolish sort of resistance. You may start becoming quite irritated with him. So then he has become an obstacle for you. You may start reacting, which may be to the detriment of your helping him, and to your own detriment. So you can only really help others to the extent that you have no impediments. Otherwise, as I said, the people that you are trying to help may themselves become impediments for you. Maybe this is part of the significance of what the *Diamond Sutra* says about the Bodhisattva: he vows to help all living beings but at the same time realizes that there are no living beings. There are no living beings for him in the sense that living beings are not impediments for him: he goes straight through them. He doesn't regard them as entities. If you regard something as an entity you cannot go straight through it. If you regard a rock as solid you cannot put your hand into it. If you regard air as empty, you cannot sit on it or walk up and down on it. So to the extent that things are experienced as entities, to that extent there are limitations and impediments.



2 But She Didn't Want to Cross

from 'The Sutra of 42 Sections' (*The Sutra of 42 sections and Two Other Scriptures of the Mahayana School*), Women's Seminar, Padmaloka, May 1982

It is hard to help others towards Enlightenment according to their various needs.

The Sutra of Forty-two Sections and Two Other Scriptures of the Mahayana School,
trans. J. Blofield (Chu Ch'an), The Buddhist Society, London 1977, Section 133,
p.15

Sangharakshita: Well, why is it hard? What does it assume? What does it imply?

Stephanie Blythe: That we don't know what their needs are.

Marlene Halliday: It implies that you really know them.

S.: Yes. It implies that you have some spiritual experience yourself and then that you are aware of what the needs of other people actually are. *That* is very, very difficult to see, apparently even for a Buddha. I don't know if it was in this group that I referred to the incident of the Buddha teaching the meditation on death to people who, so to speak, didn't need that practise.¹

Carla Halstead: It's hard enough to help anybody in a very mundane way, much less on a spiritual level.

S.: I think one's help should be as simple and basic as possible. You can't go far wrong if you provide someone with a meal or give them their bus fare, unless they are going to commit a crime of course. It isn't easy to help others at all. It really needs a Bodhisattva to do that – '*to help others towards Enlightenment according to their various needs*'. So how can one help? Can one help at all? In what way can one help? What is help? I mean help doesn't mean telling people what to do, although sometimes people think that it does. Very often, if you are being yourself, if you're positive and inspiring yourself and just getting on with your own spiritual life then one can help others indirectly, so to speak. Being yourself in a truly spiritual sense, getting on with your own spiritual life, helping to contribute to the creation of a positive atmosphere – I won't say setting an example as that might be misunderstood – can help others sometimes very much without you even realizing it. People can sometimes be very moved and very inspired by what you are doing without you knowing it and without you even thinking of them. People do see, they do take notice. *(Pause.)* There are various simple ways in which you can help. Sometimes you can help people just by listening to them.

Trish Manders: It's quite an art, though.

S.: Some people are just desperate for a listener.

Carla Halstead: Listening is probably better than advice in almost any case.

S.: Yes. If you listen really positively it very often helps the person concerned to clarify their own thoughts. It helps them to put their own thoughts into some sort of order. Or it helps them even to become conscious of thoughts, conscious of their desires, conscious of their wishes, conscious of all the little factors that are involved in whatever situation it is that they are talking about. I mean, sometimes one has the experience of just listening to someone and at the end of the session, so to speak, they say quite sincerely, 'Well this talk has really helped me.' Perhaps you haven't said a word (laughter), but it's as though they've been given really good advice; you just allowed them to clarify their own thoughts so they've been able to see things more clearly.

Punya vati: It's like acting as a mirror.

S.: Right, yes. *(Pause.)* I think one should be careful not to be too prematurely Bodhisattva-like, flitting around helping people. Otherwise you'd be like the boy scout who helped the old lady across the road. You know that one don't you?

Chorus: Yes!

S.: Do you know it Sulochana?

Sulochana: No. What happened?

S.: What happened? Well (laughter), the boy scout, as the custom is apparently, reported to his scout master at the end of the day that he'd performed a good deed for the day. So the scout master asked him what he'd done. He replied, "I helped an old lady to cross over the road." And the scout master said, "Well

that's not much of a good deed. That must have been very easy." So he said, "Oh no it wasn't. She didn't want to cross the road." (*Laughter.*) Maybe that sort of 'good deed' – helping people to do what they don't want to do – is not very Bodhisattva-like. Some of the more forcible philanthropies are of that nature. But help doesn't mean persuading people or pressurizing them.

Eve Gill: Is it more encouraging?

S.: Yes, I suppose so – but even there you have to be a bit careful about what you are encouraging them in. Maybe you should just be yourself, encouraging by your very nature so if they want to do anything positive or skilful then the encouragement is there. Maybe if your encouragement is of a genuinely positive nature it will in fact encourage people to do only those things which are positive and skilful, without you taking it upon yourself to advise them what is, in your opinion, the right thing to do etc. etc.

Carla Halstead: Very often just thinking of a person at an important time in their life – when they're going away or coming back from somewhere or on their birthday or something like that – and wishing them well and letting them know that, are very important things to do.

S.: Right.

Carla Halstead: Just to let them know that you actually care about them as human beings. It's a very simple, practical thing.

S.: Almost irrespective of what they are doing. And of course, as you've mentioned we can help people very much just by thinking about them positively and developing metta towards them.

Elsie Kang: Rejoicing in their merits.

S.: Rejoicing in their merits too – yes indeed, and giving them appreciation. (*Pause.*) Sometimes, of course, one can help people by just keeping out of their way – or rather by not getting in their way. Sometimes people just need space and you can help them by giving them that space, or at least not taking away their space, not crowding their space. One might say that that's a rather negative sort of help, but it probably is quite important. Sometimes people get in one another's way quite a lot, don't they? Just to stay out of other people's way is quite an achievement so that they are not always tripping over you or bumping into you.

Carla Halstead: It's an art on a retreat like this. (*Pause.*)

S.: I didn't only mean it literally but even metaphorically [as well].

Teresa Fisher: I find the 'Five Tantric Positive Precepts' about energy,² – not blocking other people ... we were most talking about [the Tantric Precepts] in the café and most people could relate quite strongly to them in a situation where they were in very close touch with each other.

S.: Yes. (*Pause.*) If you can't help other people, at least don't hinder them



3 Spiritual Polygamy and Polyandry

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

Sangharakshita: If you want to help run an FWBO centre, or start an FWBO centre, it's important that you like people, otherwise you haven't a hope of doing this. Liking them has got to come first because otherwise, if you don't like them, you won't want to communicate with them and there will be no energy. If you see them sitting around [looking] all dull and listless, it's not even a question of whether you feel the energy to communicate or not. The question is: Do you like people? Do you *want* to communicate with them? If you don't you can do very little. You may know the Dharma backwards but you won't be able to start a real live centre. Some people don't like people very much. Others like them much more. This is why it is said in the case of a Bodhisattva that sins committed through attachment are not as serious as sins committed through anger – because at least attachment shows an inclination towards other living beings. (*Laughter.*) And this is what a Bodhisattva needs above everything else. Do you see what I mean?

Anne MacMillan: Maybe the ones who don't like people are the ones who remain spiritual 'bachelors'.

S.: Say that again! (*Laughter.*)

Anne MacMillan: If you don't like people maybe you'd remain a spiritual 'bachelor' – you wouldn't take on a wife.

S.: Or a spiritual 'virgin'.

Anne MacMillan: Or a spiritual 'virgin'.

S.: Yes, that's right, you don't take on a spiritual wife, That's a good way of putting it. That's what a *Pratyeka-Buddha*³ is – a spiritual bachelor. (*Laughter.*) So you could say – enlarging rather than restricting – if people come along to the FWBO and happen to be married and maybe don't want *not* to be married, then as a matter of tactics you shouldn't tell them that if they want to get anywhere in the FWBO they should leave their wife or their husband. Instead you should say, "Fine, just take everybody as your wife. Regard all sentient beings as your wife. Marry the whole universe." You may be saying in effect the same thing but you're putting it in much more positive terms and including their present situation rather than excluding it, so that they find it much more acceptable. We want everybody to be married. We want everybody to be married to everybody, because – Bodhisattva sense, of course – you take responsibility for all sentient beings. You do your best for them, and cherish them. Maybe that's better than saying, "Take all sentient beings as your children and care for them", because that might sound a bit patronizing. But if you say, "Take all sentient beings as your wife or your husband", then it doesn't sound so patronizing – it's more on a level, as it were. (*Pause.*)

But yes, this liking for people is very important if you're going to work with people. You *can't* work for them unless you like them. It doesn't mean that you've got to be sentimental or anything of that sort. It means having a genuine honest liking and caring and concern for people. And you must be able to show it. It must be evident. It mustn't be something you lock away in your heart, presenting a gruff, stern exterior. That won't do. [Your liking for people] has got to be tangible so people can feel it. *(Pause.)* And you mustn't like them because they are likeable – you've just got to like them.

Anne Macmillan: I think that's difficult. I think I've got a tendency to like people to begin with and I'm perfectly open to the fact that I might like them, but then as I get to know them I start to sometimes...

S.: You mean find out how stupid they really are!

Anne Macmillan: Yes, something like that ... sometimes it's quite hard to be consistently ...

S.: Yes. One has one's own limits. One has to recognize it's good to communicate, good to be with people, it's also good to be alone. If you start feeling overwhelmed by people, or oppressed by people, then you'll start feeling a bit of resistance or even disliking them. So you have to balance things out and spend some time away from people, on your own. I think this is necessary. Even if you do like people very much and very sincerely, it's not easy to spend all your time with them. [The time you can spend with people] also depends on the degree of intensity of communication. If you're just with them but not much happens in the way of communication – that can be a bit frustrating and you may get tired of them. But the chances are that if you like people you'll put a lot of energy into your communication with them. The communication will deepen and become real communication and you yourself will be nourished by it. [When that happens] you will be more and more glad to communicate with people and be with people and help people if you can. So in Buddhistic terms what I'm really saying is that I don't really think you can have a Buddhist movement, or run a Buddhist movement, unless you've got quite a large dose of Bodhisattva spirit. If you're working in or around an FWBO centre, this is what you've got to have. This is what works the magic, as it were: not your scholarly knowledge of the Dharma or anything like that, but just your liking for people, your ability to communicate with them and to put across the Dharma in a friendly and natural sort of way.



4 What Do they Really Need?

from *The Diamond Sutra*. Buddhist Wisdom Books. Pre-Ordination Retreat, Tuscany 1982

Sangharakshita: On the one hand the Bodhisattva should vow to save all beings, but on the other hand not be misled by the notion of a self. This is not, of course, very easy to understand.

Subhuti: For a relative beginner particularly.

S.: This also makes it clear that one can't take the Bodhisattva Vow literally: "I am going to do this or I am going to do that". You may say those words, in a sense you may even think that; but you don't really mean it literally. You see very clearly the need of beings and you form a wholehearted wish to devote yourself to the fulfilment of that need. You see the need so clearly that you can't do anything except devote yourself to the satisfaction of that need.

Therefore, if one is even thinking in terms of possibly becoming a Bodhisattva, the question arises: How does one see becoming a Bodhisattva, the question arises: How does one see beings at present and how should one be trying to see them? This is the fundamental question; and it is a practical question. It requires practical consideration, because however much the words of the sutra spring from the Buddha's spiritual experience they cannot but seem quite abstract unless one has advanced a little way on the Bodhisattva Path.

What is there about one's present way of looking at beings which is in need of correction, which is perverted; and how is one to put it right? Can one gain any clues from this passage about the way in which one looks at beings? To me there seems to be a very basic clue in it.

Shantiprabha: I got the impression when we were talking about the Vow earlier that one needs to go through a process of purification. We tend to project our own thoughts onto people; but if we had gone through a process of purification we wouldn't have those thoughts to project onto others.

S.: Perhaps we need to be even more basic in our approach.

Vessantara: We see people as separate, we judge their faults ...

S.: Well, people do have faults. Presumably one has to start off on quite an ordinary common-sense basis, because that is what one is like at present. What is one's overall predominant attitude towards other living beings usually?

Gerry Corr: That they are things.

S.: Does one really think that a person is like a chair or a tree or a car? Does one actually feel this? Does one not see any difference between a human being and a thing?

Vessantara: One sees both in terms of how to use them.

S.: Ah, this is the basic point here. Yes, do you think your attitude towards other beings is determined by what use you can make of them? It may not be very blatant, it may not be very conscious of course. It is almost an instinctive, unconscious tendency. You make use of them in one way or another, either practically, materially or psychologically; and you don't always realize what you are doing. In other words your attitude to beings is determined not by their needs but by your own needs.

Bringing it down to this level, the great basic point that the Bodhisattva Vow seems to be making is that one should try at least to see people not in terms of what you need but in terms of what they need. The Bodhisattva has seen that beings really need to be led to Enlightenment. Enlightenment is what they need. He's seeing beings in terms of their needs in the very highest sense.

Whereas our usual attitude towards beings is that we see them in terms of our needs, in terms of the extent to which they can fulfil or meet our needs of various kinds, not just our highest needs. So perhaps this is the basic point which we need to correct. Obviously, practising the Metta Bhavana comes in here. The development of metta and of *karunā** paves the way for the arising of the Bodhicitta. You are trying to develop love and good will to other beings for their own sake, irrespective of whether they fulfil or do not fulfil your particular personal needs. *(Pause.)*

If you are really a would-be Bodhisattva, then your first thought would not be “I will lead all these beings to Nirvana”, but “I shall try to see these beings as they are in themselves. I shall try to see what the needs of these beings are. I shall try to see what the needs of these beings are. I shall not be constantly seeking to see how they can fulfil my needs.”

Do you see this operating when you come in contact with people? When we meet people we are sort of thinking or trying to see how they can fulfil our needs rather than how we can fulfil theirs or what we can do for them. It sometimes happens in a relatively positive way. Maybe we have an objective need and we look around to find someone who can fulfil it. That’s all right perhaps but that tends to be too exclusively our preoccupation. We don’t think sufficiently in terms of other people’s needs and how we can meet their needs; or if we can’t meet them ourselves, helping them to meet their own needs. Clearly we feel our own needs much more strongly than we feel those of others.

On the ordinary, common-sense level this raises the point: To what extent can you concern yourself with fulfilling the needs of others when your own legitimate needs are not being fulfilled? At what point can you make that transition? Is it possible for you all at once to stop thinking in terms of other people’s? Is there any way of ascertaining that point when your own needs have been reasonably fulfilled and you can reasonably be expected to start preoccupying yourself more with the needs of other beings? Is this at all an identifiable point?

Chakkupala: It’s only when you are actually feeling in yourself that your needs are fulfilled that you can appreciate others and so maintain an altruistic attitude towards them. It’s not as if there’s a point in time, but rather an occasional condition ...

S.: When I said a point I meant a time when your condition of feeling your own needs to be fulfilled is more or less stabilized. They have been fulfilled so far, and as far as you can see they are going to continue to be fulfilled; so you can start thinking in terms of fulfilling other people’s needs. What are our own needs? How can one distinguish objective needs from subjective craving?

Subhuti: Objective needs can be fulfilled, subjective cravings cannot.

S.: But can it be said that when your objective needs are fulfilled you will quite spontaneously preoccupy yourself with the needs of other people? Or do you still need a push from somewhere? What are these objective needs that should be fulfilled, rather than *have* to be fulfilled first? Can one identify them?

Gerry Corr: You need some things just to survive.

S.: Yes, you need those. But even if you haven’t got them, it doesn’t always preclude helping other people. Someone will share his last halfpenny, whereas others would hesitate to share their last million. (*Laughter.*) There are people who would gladly share their last crust of bread, not bother what they would have for their next meal. Others would hesitate to share even though they’ve got a whole larder full.

A Voice: If you’re happy within yourself ...

S.: Yes, if you’re happy within yourself you can have peace of mind. So when you have peace of mind what needs are being fulfilled?

Vessantara: You are psychologically happy ...

S.: It would seem to be a matter of emotional positivity. You must be in a state of appreciating your own worth and feeling that your own worth is being appreciated by other people. You must be in a state of loving yourself and feeling that you are loved by other people. I think this is the basic requirement, before you can be expected to go out to other people, to concern yourself to some extent with their needs.

A Voice: You say that we need to appreciate our own worth and see that is appreciated. Why do we need the second?

S.: Looking at the development of a human being it does seem that unless there is a feeling of being loved you don't learn to love yourself. If you feel the absence of love in the environment and you feel that you are unworthy, that there is something wrong with you, then that may well make it difficult for you to love yourself. Or if as a young child you are deprived of affection, it does seem that your emotional development can be quite badly hampered.

It would seem that before you can really be outward-going and think in terms of helping others, you must be in quite a highly positive emotional state. This is brought about, as far as we can see, by the fact that you love yourself and have had the consciousness that you are or have been loved by others. You feel emotionally secure as well as emotionally positive.

In addition it would seem that you would need to have a certain amount of sensitivity, a certain amount of awareness, to be able to see other people. We are still on a common sense level: you must be able to appreciate other people's needs. I mean appreciating that their need is not simply for a better standard of living in the material sense, not for a car or a TV set, or more education. Their need is for something spiritual: a spiritual path that they can follow, a spiritual ideal to which they can devote themselves. *(Pause.)*

It also transpires from this particular chapter⁴ that the Bodhisattva is to think in terms of all beings. You are to think in terms of appreciating the genuine needs of a wider and wider circle of beings; not just people of your own natural group. Think of other beings in your own family; but don't confine yourself to your own family, your own tribe, your own nationality, your own race. You are to try to think eventually in terms of all beings and the needs of all beings; not just the needs of one particular section of humanity, the one that you happen to belong to.

The Bodhisattva doesn't have to think in terms of the needs of all Buddhists; he is asked to think in terms of the needs of all beings. The Bodhisattva is not only asked to cultivate an interest in the needs of others rather than his own needs, but to cultivate a breadth and a width of outlook; not to distinguish between one class of beings and another, but to devote himself impartially to all. Your attitude shouldn't depend on the mode of their birth. You have to devote yourself to beings very different from yourself, beings who haven't even been born from a womb as you've been born but 'from an egg or from moisture or spontaneously'. In other words, you mustn't be put off by the difference amongst beings. You mustn't feel that they belong to a slightly different group from you and therefore aren't your concern. *(Pause.)*

So first of all one has a preliminary intellectual understanding of the whole matter. One understands that it is desirable that one should devote oneself to working for the spiritual progress of all beings. Then one understands that in order to do that you've got to think in terms of the needs of others rather than in terms of your own needs. Then of course you have to go one step further back and realize the necessity just to work on yourself to get yourself into a sufficiently positive state. When you have achieved this you can quite naturally start to think in terms of the needs of others and not just in terms of your own needs. You have come really right down to earth!

Vessantara: On a lesser scale, could you perhaps be helping yourself and helping others if you were to do social work for instance?

S.: I think social work is a highly suspect; very often it represents an escape from oneself. It seems from the reports in the newspapers that sometimes social workers actually do a great deal of harm. They interfere in people's lives without really understanding what they are doing. Have you got any comments to make on that, from personal experience or from observation, being an ex-social worker yourself?

Vessantara: A lot of the social workers I knew were people who had difficulties themselves. Rather than working on them directly they were working on them out there, through other people; therefore the

results often weren't very good. A lot of the ineffectiveness of social work is also to do with it being a formalized, legalized way of helping others. There is a lot of legislation that the social workers are meant to be carrying out, and so the individual person help is smothered.

S.: Perhaps one could say that if a social worker has genuine personal contact with people who are in difficulties then he might be doing a useful job. If you are communicating some genuine sympathy, at least giving people the opportunity to air their troubles and difficulties to you, and maybe putting them in touch with some means of getting help, you could be of use to them. You could perform a useful function for example informing people in financial difficulties of the benefits they could apply for. But there are cases reported in the papers of a social worker discovering that Mrs So-and-so isn't actually married; she's got three or four children and doesn't keep the house very clean. "Well yes, the children are happy but she doesn't keep the house very clean so we'd better take them away from her and put them in care." The well-meaning social worker thinks that it would be better for the children to be in a nice clean home with a foster mother rather than in a rather dirty and slovenly home with their own mother, who clearly loves them very much but doesn't know how to bring them up. The well-meaning social worker rushes into a situation and sometimes does harm, causing great confusion, not to say suffering.

Vessantara: If you were going out with a genuine vocation, could you not work on yourself and doing that ... ?

S.: It would certainly be good for you if you were doing that with a genuine motive: if you realized that it was helping you and you were helping other people in a clear-sighted way. But what happens with many social workers is that they don't realize that they are projecting their problems onto other people. They are not conscious of it; they think there's nothing wrong with them, they are all right. It's the other people who are in a mess and they've got to help them to try and tidy up the mess. If one really wants to help other people in that sort of way, perhaps one should avoid the organized social services and if necessary do it in one's spare time. There are plenty of people to help. Even if you go and work in an ordinary office you may find that people come to you with their problems, weep on your shoulder and all the rest of it. You may or may not be able to give them a bit of good advice. *(Pause.)*

The essence of the matter would seem to be to keep yourself in a sufficiently positive state so that you can quite spontaneously and genuinely be concerned with the needs of other people rather than so exclusively with your own. It's not that on this level your own needs are to be neglected; if they've found reasonable fulfilment then you will be able to concern yourself much more with other people. And see other people much less as instruments of your own needs and much more as ends in themselves.

It's very, very rare I think that people actually put themselves out in a completely disinterested way for others. They might do it for their own mother or their own father, wife or husband or boyfriend or girlfriend or child, because there is a personal tie, a personal interest. It's very rarely that people take trouble for someone from whom they can expect nothing, no fulfilment of their own personal needs in any way. *(Pause.)*

Well, one notices this even in little ways such as how people act at mealtimes on retreat or in our communities. They are more concerned to get what they need than to see that other people are getting what they need. You know the old Cockney expression 'to look after number one'. I wouldn't say it's the last thing a Bodhisattva would do; but he certainly wouldn't think only in terms of 'looking after number one'. It's interesting that 'number one' is called 'number one'.

5 Helping Others to Help Others

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

Mike Shaw: My question arises out of what you said about the first of the 'Four Great Vows': 'May I deliver all beings from difficulty.' In the lecture you emphasize that until we can give spiritually we should

concentrate on helping people in other ways. I expect that most people in the FWBO feel they have a long way to go before they can really give spiritually, and yet almost all FWBO activities are directed towards spiritual ends. Why is there not more emphasis on helping people in worldly ways as you suggest in the lecture, as this seems more appropriate to the stage we are at?

Sangharakshita: Well, perhaps I can also say that even helping people in a worldly way is not easy – not because you may not have the energy or the time, but because you may not have the knowledge. Even to help people in a worldly way you have to know, so to speak, what is good for them. To be a little paradoxical, I might even say that it is easier to help people spiritually than to help them in a worldly way, other factors being equal; because you could be absolutely sure that meditation would be good for people if you could only get them to practise it, and if you were yourself qualified to teach it. There is no doubt about that whatsoever. But whether it would be good, say, for Mrs Brown to move to Bournemouth or Mr Bloggs to marry a second time (laughter) could be quite difficult to sort out.

It is perhaps significant that in most Buddhist countries – especially in Theravada countries – it is only the oldest and most senior bhikshus who are usually permitted to advise the laity with regard to their worldly affairs. (*Laughter.*) You might think it would be the other way round but in fact it isn't.

Coming back to the actual question, I gave that lecture many years ago,⁵ and since then we have started helping people in a more worldly way to some extent, through for instance Aid for India.⁶ Nonetheless, whether or not we are qualified to give spiritual help or guidance, this is what people in the modern West need far more than anything else. If we ourselves cannot give that sort of help directly, we can give it indirectly, or at least help those who are in a position to give it; maybe by freeing them from other responsibilities, maybe by providing facilities of various kinds. You may feel that you are not in a position to help people spiritually; that may well be so, but there is quite a lot you can do indirectly, for instance by distributing literature. A lot of people who would not come to a Buddhist centre or think of learning meditation can be initially quite inspired by Buddhist literature, if they can get hold of it. That is something you could do. You could help by contributing to the financing, publication, printing, distribution, of our literature. It could certainly be spread around much more widely than it is at present.

The point is that if you do not feel you can do much to spread the Dharma or help people spiritually, not only can you perhaps help them to some modest extent in worldly ways, *but*, perhaps even more importantly, you can help them indirectly in a spiritual way by helping to provide the sort of facilities I have mentioned, and also by giving your support to those who are in a position to give spiritual help. Someone for instance might be a good writer; he might not only have spiritual knowledge, knowledge of the Dharma, but also he might be able to write, lecture, or conduct classes and seminars. What a pity if he had to go out into the world and earn his living. You might be better occupied supporting him by working yourself so as to free him for spiritual activities.

Mike Shaw: With regard to the four different kinds of people you suggest we could help – you said we could help old people, for instance, and that kind of thing – do you think that is a valid thing for people to do if they're involved in the FWBO?

S.: I think it depends where you are. For instance, it makes a big difference whether you are in England or in India. You have first of all to identify the area of greatest need, and then to assess your own qualifications and skills. I am not suggesting that everybody should do the same kind of thing or do it in the same way. Nevertheless, as I've said, probably the greatest need in the modern West is for some kind of spiritual life, which means some kind of spiritual knowledge, spiritual guidance and spiritual practice and so on. Therefore, if we possibly can I think it would be most productive first to direct our energies to those fields. If we do not feel able to do that, we can either direct them to the other fields that I have mentioned in this lecture – say, helping the sick or the aged – or we can help those who can give spiritual teaching and spiritual help to carry on that work by supporting them in various ways, and providing facilities of various kinds.

Sometimes people are drawn to this or that activity for no perceivable reason, on a quite subjective basis. I've sometimes told the story of the man I met in the train in India, years and years ago, when I was working among the ex-Untouchables.⁷ He thought that I was wasting my time working among the ex-Untouchables and trying to help them. According to him the people who really needed help were the lepers and I ought to be working among lepers. I could see his point, but he couldn't see mine. I certainly didn't feel that it was wrong for him to be working among lepers, or that he should be working among ex-Untouchables instead, but he could not see that working for the ex-Untouchables might be just as valid, and just as useful, as working for the lepers.

Thus we have to be careful that we do not develop a one-tracked mind – that we don't develop a sort of monomania and concentrate on one particular line, not only to the exclusion of other lines but to the point that we cannot even appreciate the need for other lines of work. If, say, a young Order Member decided that he was going to concentrate, as his particular mission, on visiting old people – trying to cheer them up, and wherever possible lending them books about Buddhism, maybe teaching them meditation in their own homes, or even just helping them with their shopping or listening to their complaints – I certainly would not attempt to dissuade that person, if that was what he *really* wanted to do.



6 The Necessary Equipment

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

Steve Webster: You say the Bodhisattva should master all the Buddha's teachings, in the numberless religious and philosophical systems, as well as the study of the secular arts and sciences, and various trades. I just thought that seemed quite a lot. (*Laughter.*)

Sangharakshita: One must bear in mind the cosmic perspective, and what I said the other day about tradition envisaging the Bodhisattva's career as covering three *asamekhyeya-kalpas*, so he has a lot of time to learn all those things! But the general principle is that if you want to be concerned with helping other people, especially with establishing a Dharmic connection with other people, then the more languages and means of communication you have at your disposal, the more effectively you can fulfil that task.

That is not to say that you can't go about it more directly, but that is not easy. One might say that there are two possible approaches, and you can, I suppose, hover between the two. I remember talking some years ago to a young Order Member who wanted to spread the Dharma. I pointed out to him that there really only two ways in which he could do that, in a spiritual sense: either by (a) studying the Dharma and understanding it in as well as practising it, and being well acquainted with arts and sciences and having many means of communication with people, or (b) concentrating wholeheartedly on, for instance, meditation, to such an extent that he could by his sheer presence and personality, without even any words, have a tremendous effect upon the people with whom he came in contact. So you can imagine those two

possible ways or approaches – you could to some extent combine the two in varying ways or degrees – but there is no other possibility.

The Bodhisattva Ideal thinks in terms of the first of those possibilities: that you should be well equipped, you should speak the various languages spoken by other people, you should have all sorts of approaches to make to them in that way. But there is also the possibility that you don't have any means, or any way; that you yourself are the means, that you yourself are the way. There are a few people who can operate in that way, even on a comparatively human level, in a comparatively human sense. Their personality, even their unenlightened personality, is so attractive and so impressive – I was also going to say so 'charismatic' but that is a dangerous word; I am not talking about charisma in the ordinary sense – their personality is so fascinating that they attract people, and people listen to them. Even in the case of such people, unless they are experienced in meditation, and have actual genuine Insight, they may not be able to help those people very much, unless they have some knowledge of the Dharma also.

One might say that one method is that of the tortoise, and the other that of the hare; one is the method of slow and patient study, practise, and reflection over a period of years, and the other is the way of just doing things through sheer force of personality. But it is more than that. It is something more spiritual than that; but, in that case, usually, you are not born with that sort of personality. It is very difficult, if not impossible to actually develop it.

7 A Medium of Expression

from 'Rechungpa's Repentance' (*The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*), Men's Seminar, Padmaloka, November 1980

Sangharakshita: Let's go a little into this question of Wisdom and merits. Do you understand what is meant by merits? What is *punya* the result of?

Kulamitra: Skilful actions.

S.: Yes. So why is the accumulation of *punya* emphasized as well as of Awareness? The Mahayana especially speaks of *punya-sambhāra*, the accumulation of merits, and *jñāna-sambhāra*, the accumulation of Wisdom or Awareness – *jñāna* being Transcendental and *punya* being mundane. Now, one might say, why should the spiritual life be presented in terms of a gradual accumulation of Wisdom, Knowledge, Awareness, on the one hand, and merits on the other? Why should it not be presented simply in terms of an accumulation of Wisdom or Knowledge or Awareness – *jñāna*. What is the need for *punya*? Because, after all, it's the Wisdom that is going to give you Enlightenment, not the *punya*.

Jadyadeva: But the Bodhisattva is not concerned with self; he's concerned with others. He needs merit in order to acquire a means of imparting that ...

Devaraja: But, if you are accumulating *jñāna*, it must inevitably permeate through and affect and transform the mundane. And the expression of the mundane is merits.

S.: But that would only be when you had attained *jñāna*; here one is supposed to be at least accumulating merits even if one hasn't as yet accumulated any *jñāna*. *Jñāna* usually comes after *punya* do therefore there is no question of the *punya* being sort of expression of the *jñāna*.

A Bodhisattva not only tries to accumulate Wisdom but to accumulate merits because in his final life, when he becomes a Fully-Enlightened Buddha, he wants to have the equipment, especially the physical body, which will be the best and most suitable embodiment for the Enlightenment experience that he's going to attain. Do you see what I mean? Supposing in the course of his career as a Bodhisattva he'd cultivated Wisdom but not cultivated merits. What would happen? He'd gain Enlightenment, he'd be a Buddha, but he might have a misshapen unattractive body and a squeaky voice. So there would be the Enlightenment

experience enshrined in this unfortunate human body. Would he be able to function properly as a Buddha as well as he might have been able to function in a beautiful, fully-developed, handsome, attractive body with a pleasing speaking voice? This is what is meant in this context by achieving the best of the mundane and uniting it with the experience of the Transcendental. The Mahayana says that it's not enough to have just the Transcendental; you've got to have the best of the mundane too, and unite the two of them.

Devaraja: In a way, though, surely it would not really be possible to pursue one without achieving the other as well?

S.: The Mahayanists believe that it is possible. For instance, one way of looking at the Arahant Ideal is that an Arahant is one who has attained Wisdom – yes – but hasn't bothered so much about merits as the Bodhisattva has. Though he has, according to some interpretations, the same Enlightenment as a Bodhisattva, or even as a Buddha, he doesn't have the same equipment in the form of *punya*. Therefore he is not able to be so useful to humanity. And this is one of the reasons why a Bodhisattva has such a long career, as it were. It is not so much that he needs time to develop Wisdom, he needs time to develop or accumulate *punya*, so that in his final life he will not only be Enlightened but have a fully adequate vehicle for the support or expression of that Enlightenment. This is the Mahayana view.

Kulamitra: You can see this on a lower level with people who, say, have a good conceptual grasp of Buddhism and do a good practice of meditation, but are very ineffective in spreading the Dharma because they don't really understand people in their culture.

S.: Or perhaps they just haven't even got a good grasp of the language. Even that is sometimes a hindrance. You might for instance be a Fully-Enlightened being but if you go to a foreign country where you can't even speak the language you are much less likely to be able to spread the Dharma. There might be a beautiful aura emanating from you but that wouldn't be enough. So the Bodhisattva is concerned not only to have something to say, but to have the language in which to say it in the fullest possible sense.

Abhaya: So someone who takes the Bodhisattva Vow – in a small way, without Insight – makes a decision to develop all sorts of skills so that he will be much better equipped.

S.: Right. It does seem as though psychologically speaking it's very difficult to develop the interest to acquire those skills if you only want them as instruments. It's as though to be able to acquire them properly you need to go after them almost for their own sake. I mean, supposing you were Enlightened, I think it might be very difficult then for you, as an Enlightened being, to settle down to learn something which you could have learned when you were unenlightened – because the learning process requires a degree of real interest in that topic or subject which you, as an Enlightened being, are no longer capable of giving it. You are therefore more useful as an Enlightened being, or let's say a spiritually developed being, if in your childhood or your youth you had developed various interests or skills which you would then be able to go back to and utilize. But if you didn't do that when you were young, too bad; you would just have to remain an Enlightened being with a rather rough and ready means of communication with other living beings.

This is the classical Mahayana taking it quite literally, in purely traditional terms. The classical Mahayana says: Enlightenment as an Arahant is within your reach within this lifetime – but postpone it. Practise the *pāramitās*,⁸ the Perfections, over a whole series of lives, for three *kalpas*. If you can do that, then as a result of practising the first five of those 'Six *Pāramitās*', you'll end up with an enormous accumulation of merits which will give you a beautiful body, the ability to work miracles, etc., as well as the Enlightenment which would be the product of the sixth *pāramitā*, *prajñā*. You will then, with that unification of merits and Wisdom, be able to do much more as a Fully-Enlightened Buddha, or a fully-equipped Buddha, for humanity than you possibly could as an Arahant.

Abhaya: That seems rather silly. Why wouldn't it be better to become Enlightened and do all that throughout the career that you're building up? Then you've got your Enlightenment as a background to all this activity of building up a much better view.

S.: Ah, but it would seem, as I said, that once you are Enlightened it is difficult to generate the interest in learning those other things.

Abhaya: But why is that? I don't understand. I mean, if someone became Enlightened and felt outgoing to other people and found that other people couldn't understand him because his speech was very slurred, then surely he would have a really bright interest for improving his articulation?

S.: Oh yes, of course. But that is just an analogy. The actual Mahayana path of accumulation of merits is much more radical than that. It involves very, very much more.

The Mahayana might also say that once you have gained Enlightenment you disappear from the mundane. There is no question of you continuing to live on that level, accumulating more and more merits. Because all your other faults, all your unskilful roots, have been destroyed, you are not reborn again. The Bodhisattva has to be careful to go being reborn again so that he can go on accumulating merits and he limits his Wisdom for the time being. This is the traditional Mahayana teaching.

Abhaya: Is that how you see it?

S.: Yes and no. (*Laughter.*) One is just expanding the traditional Mahayana teaching to illustrate this distinction of *puṇya* and *jñāna*. One could transpose it into other terms and give maybe one's own interpretation but that would in fact be quite a big undertaking because that would involve a reassessment of the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. The Mahayana does teach quite literally that the Bodhisattva's career extends over three *kalpas*. That is the Mahayana's interpretation of the Bodhisattva Ideal insofar as it really does differ from the Arahant Ideal.

According to this interpretation, the Bodhisattva Ideal does reach a culminating point. When the Bodhisattva becomes a Buddha he achieves *parinirvāṇa* at the end of that life and he, as it were, disappears from existence, so far as the conditioned is concerned. So there is a certain point at which the Bodhisattva becomes a Buddha and does enter into final Nirvana. But one can go further than that; this further interpretation postulates that in fact that never happens. The Bodhisattva never finally attains Nirvana. And that then raises the question of whether Nirvana can in fact be attained by anybody; whether it is in fact the kind of thing which can be attained at all or whether that whole way of speaking does not represent a sort of operational concept,⁹ or a set of operational concepts. Do you see what I mean? So that would carry one into very deep waters indeed. But so far as this particular passage is concerned, one is just concerned to elucidate the distinction between *puṇya* and *jñāna* and the accumulation of them both.

The general point which emerges is the one I made at the beginning: that the Mahayana does not think in terms of rejection of the mundane. It's as though the Mahayana believes more in – not just the acceptance of the mundane as it is – but in the experience of the mundane *at its best* and in the union of that with the Transcendental in such a way that it provides a medium of expression for the Transcendental. The mundane at its best, its most refined, can be used to convey a Transcendental meaning. And this is what one means by the union of these two accumulations of *jñāna* and *puṇya*, of Knowledge or Awareness and of merits.

Simon Chinnery: I still don't understand how the two can really be separate; how somebody can practise Wisdom and not have the desire to express that Wisdom. And in expressing it they'd presumably gain merit. Just from their experience of communicating with other people they'd learn more; by coming out and experiencing they'd be learning. It would be a sort of two-way building up system.

S.: Well, you can accumulate merits without any Wisdom at all. For instance, if you were brought up in a strongly traditional society where it is customary to do certain things, to perform certain actions, that might be called meritorious. And you don't think what the meaning of it is at all. You've no awareness or consciousness of that.

A Voice: So do you get reborn as a god?

S.: Yes, you could say that, as regards his appearance, the Bodhisattva is, in a way, a god. So if, by accumulating merits, you accumulate or you experience all that a god accumulates or experiences, then by cultivating Wisdom, you could say that you experience all that an Arahant experiences. And a Bodhisattva, or a Buddha, experiences the two things together – here god representing the peak of the mundane and the Arahant representing the purely spiritual. That’s simplifying it a bit because according to some schools or some interpretations a Bodhisattva’s or a Buddha’s Wisdom – or even his Enlightenment – differs a bit from and surpasses that of the Arahant. According to other schools and other interpretations, not so. But you can see the general idea nonetheless. It does seem that behind many of our interests and pursuits there’s a psychological need, and in the absence of that need that interest is not there and can’t be artificially stimulated. I think in fact it is very difficult to cultivate a particular interest for purely objective reasons because the need is the motivating force and if that need isn’t there you can’t really cultivate that particular interest.

Kulamitra: Also, for interests to be useful, you have to put a lot into them over a period of time and if you just *thought* something was a good idea you might do it for a day or a week, but not over a period of ten years or so.

S.: What keeps you going is your need. That is the basis of the interest. For instance, you might think it would be a good *idea* for you to know all about money. But why is that people take the interest to learn all about money? It’s need; if you like, greed. If that is absent, if due to your spiritual development you’ve transcended that, it is very difficult for you to learn all about money, because that need isn’t there. I think a so-called ‘objective’ need isn’t enough.



8 Up Against a Wall

from ‘Rechungpa’s Repentance’ (*The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*), Men’s Seminar, Padmaloka, November 1980

In his pride, Rechungpa thought, “My guru has now become very bitter and egoistic. He has affronted me sorely. Should I return to Dipupa and stay with him again or should I go elsewhere?” Thinking thus, Rechungpa lost all faith in the Jetsun. He sat there deadly quiet for some time. Then he said, “I was watching the wild goats at play, that’s why I was late. Now the gold you gave me and the hardship I underwent in India have all become meaningless and wasted. I am leaving for another country now.” Saying this, Rechungpa became hostile and disdainful to the Jetsun out of his bad faith toward him.

The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, trans. Garma C.C. Chang, Shamhala, Boulder & London 1977, Vol. II, p. 443

Sangharakshita: Milarepa had permitted Rechungpa to go to India; and he went there and obtain Formless *Dākinī* Dharmas,¹⁰ at least in book form. In other words, he had his own way. But when Milarepa burns the books it’s as though Rechungpa has not had his own way after all. It is the check to his self-will that is upsetting him so badly.

Kulamitra: But when Rechungpa left for India Milarepa told him that he should at least obtain the Formless *Dākinī* Dharmas, because Milarepa hadn’t been given all of them by Marpa.

S.: Yes, Milarepa had been given only four out of nine.

Kulamitra: Milarepa seemed to be saying that the Formless *Dākinī* Dharmas were the only thing that he couldn't give to Rechungpa. If Rechungpa was going to leave, the only point in his leaving was to obtain something that Milarepa couldn't offer him.

S.: Milarepa also says that if Rechungpa is able to obtain the remaining five Formless *Dākinī* Dharmas, it will benefit many sentient beings. Not only would they be offered to Rechungpa, but also to others.

But even though Milarepa hasn't received those remaining five Formless *Dākinī* Dharmas, he has gained full Enlightenment. It is not as though these teachings represent something which is essential to the attainment of Enlightenment for all. However, they certainly are teachings which can help quite a lot of people, even though it cannot be said that they are not duplicated, essentially, by other teachings.

A Voice: It would seem that Rechungpa hasn't quite got the Bodhisattva spirit.

S.: Yes, because when he left for India Milarepa reminds him that if he gets these Formless *Dākinī* Dharmas they will benefit many sentient beings. It is as though Rechungpa had not looked at it in that way before; and so Milarepa reminds him of that way of looking at it.

'Saying this, Rechungpa became hostile and disdainful to the Jetsun out of his bad faith toward him.'
Rechungpa's self-will goes very deep! It's a sort of obstinacy. Everybody has got something of this in him, and it is only when this obstinate self-will starts 'coming up against it' that any real spiritual progress begins. Usually one does not come up against it, because one is having one's own way all, or most, of the time. You are doing the things that you want to do, living the way you want to live, and thinking the thoughts that you want to think. But when you are really deeply frustrated, and your self-will is frustrated, then you really 'come up against it', and you experience how self-willed you are. You experience how bitter and egoistic you are. Rechungpa attributed those qualities to Milarepa, but really they are Rechungpa's own qualities. Because his self-will has been frustrated, he is actually experiencing how bitter and egoistic he himself is.

Mike Chivers: But doesn't self-will have its place at the beginning of one's spiritual life, when one is applying positive conditioning to oneself?

S.: But that is not self-will. Self-will is the urge, the wish, the determination, just to go on as you are; without making any progress, and without developing. You want to remain, indefinitely, as you are now. Anything that you do is done because it is what *you* want to do. *(Pause.)*

People are very rarely brought up against their own bitterness and egoism by having their self-will really frustrated. It happens in the Zen tradition sometimes, when the Zen Master 'frustrates' his disciple. You could say that the *koan*¹¹ is a sort of mechanism for frustration, because everything you do with it, all the solutions that you offer, are all rejected. Your self-will is thereby 'beaten down' in a positive way.

But usually we simply do what we want to do. Sometimes we might come up against conditions and circumstances that do not permit us to do what we want to do – at least not just yet, or not in the way that we want – but we manage to circumvent them eventually. Or perhaps we try to ignore the inhibitive conditions, by pretending that they are not there. This is often how we deal with objective limiting factors, like death for instance. We don't usually think about death, because if we did we would really find our self-will and egoism 'coming right up against it'. We don't really want to die. And so we alleviate the situation by not thinking about death. If we did not think about death, we would firstly realize that we did not want to die; and then realize, nonetheless, we had to die.

Mike Chivers: What aspect of ourselves is it which denies the grosser aspect of ourselves? For example, you might feel violently angry towards a person, but you consciously stop that anger erupting. Is that self-will again in operation?

S.: It is usually fear of the consequences that prevents one giving vent to anger. Very often you want approval from the person towards whom you feel the anger; but you can't afford to show your anger, just in case you lose their approval. Or, simpler still, you might be afraid of the other types of consequence, such as the law.

Mike Chivers: When we have not, as yet, developed the transcendent qualities which overcome conditioned existence, what aspect of ourselves practises the precepts?¹²

S.: First of all, you see the desirability of controlling yourself and developing. You might see this in a detached sort of way, having no urge to actually act or behave with more self-control. But then it gradually dawns on you that development is not simply something to be thought about, or theorized about; but is, in fact, something to be actually done. You then have to face the question of how to get your energy flowing in accordance with what you see to be the truth. How you will do that depends upon your own particular constitution, and the conditions in which you find yourself. You may find, by the method of trial and error, that meditation helps you do it. You may find that participation in the Arts helps you do it. But, in one way or another, you have to find some means of putting your energy behind what you actually see. Eventually that seeing can become an actual Vision [of inspirational nature]; and then, of course, you can put your energy more and more behind what you see, behind the Vision as it has now become. This is, broadly speaking, the distinction between the Path of Vision and the Path of Transformation:¹³ we see first, but then we have to bring the rest of ourselves, our energies and emotions, into harmony with what we see (*Pause.*)

At the present moment Rechungpa cannot even see. He is quite blind. That is why he is so obstinate, and is struggling against Milarepa. You notice this blind obstinacy in animals sometimes. For instance, have you ever tried to stop a cat jumping on a table and taking something that it should not take? Supposing that the cat jumps on the table, and before it can take what it wants you put it down on the floor: very often what does the cat then do?

Simon Chinnery: It will come back a second time.

S.: Yes, it will come straight back. And again you put it down, and again it jumps up. The cat is not able to consider the significance of your action, and you have failed to communicate to it the fact that you do not want it to take whatever it wants to take. Owing to its blind obstinate will, you have to physically prevent the cat. In the end it either gets tired, or loses interest in that particular item, or you inflict some punishment upon it which it finds painful. But even though it no longer tries to get that particular object, it doesn't learn not to do it again. The cat is unteachable, because you are up against its blind unaware obstinacy.

In children, in women in some respects, and also in men in other respects, you come up against this blind unreasoning, unthinking obstinacy and self-will. You cannot circumvent it, but only forcibly obstruct it. This is what Rechungpa has come up against in himself. For the time being, at least, there is nothing that Milarepa can do about it. Rechungpa's self-will has been frustrated by Milarepa, and this has reduced Rechungpa to a state of '*deadly quiet*'. It is almost as though he could murder Milarepa: it goes as deep as that. It is not that a particular wish or desire of Rechungpa's has been frustrated; but that his whole egoistic being has been arrested and frustrated. So he has gone deadly quiet, and feels this deep terrible resentment. He wants to leave Milarepa. He feels very bitter, because he thinks that his efforts over so many years have all been wasted.

This blind obstinate self-will is in everybody. From a certain point of view one could say that one doesn't really start evolving until one comes up against this self-will, recognizes it, and starts to do something about it.

Kulamitra: Does this self-will have different degrees? For instance, in your work situation you might get into a narrow immature state of mind, directed onto a particular object. If someone, even a friend, happens to

get in the way, your immediate urge is just to push through them, without taking them into regard as a person.

S.: Your example seems to involve only one aspect of your being, one particular interest. It is comparatively superficial. But in Rechungpa's case, one seems to have come into contact with something which is much more basic, even primordial.

In the pictorial Tibetan Wheel of Life, which depicts symbolically the 'Twelve *Nidānas*'¹⁴ (links), the first *nidāna* of spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) is represented by a blind old man with a stick. He is walking and feeling his way forward with a sort of blind egoistic obstinacy; and it is that obstinacy which keeps the whole samsaric process going. It is the essence of the reactivity which you sometimes come up against in people. Sometimes, when arguing with someone, you can come up against a sort of wall of rock – their deeply ingrained conviction which is intimately connected with their deepest conditioning – and you just cannot break through it. There is nothing you can do about it.

Mike Chivers: How can one eradicate that aspect within oneself?

S.: But it isn't an aspect. It is you as you *totally* are, and it has to be totally transformed. You start off by recognizing what is happening, seeing and being aware of it; and then you gradually try to enlist the energies which are keeping the reactive process going. You enlist them in the interest of a more create development.

Kulamitra: So it is not force *per se* that is wrong: it's merely the fact that it is a blind force.

Devaraja: So, to reiterate: self-will has to be recruited into transforming oneself?

S.: Yes.

Simon Chinnery: The way that I have experienced it is that, in the end, that blind self-will gets so tight and obstructed, that you have no choice but to get out of it. Otherwise, you become so ice-like that it is incredibly painful. You have to break through it, maybe by talking to someone, because it feels so crushing.

S.: One has to be careful, though, that you don't just break out of one aspect of yourself. It must be a total thing; and that is, of course, much more difficult.

9 A Shred of Clothing Fluttering in the Breeze

from 'The Red Rock Jewel Valley' (*The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*), Men's Mitra Retreat, Padmaloka, August 1976

Once the great Yogi Milarepa was staying at the Eagle Castle of [Red Rock] Jewel Valley, absorbing himself in the practice of the Mahāmudrā meditation. Feeling hungry, he decided to prepare some food, but after looking about he found there was nothing left in the cave, neither water nor fuel, let alone salt, oil, or flour. "It seems that I have neglected things too much!" He said. "I must go out and collect some wood."

He went out. But when he had gathered a handful of twigs, a sudden storm arose, and the wind was strong enough to blow away the wood and tear his ragged robe. When he tried to hold the robe together, the wood blew away. When he tried to clutch the wood, the robe blew apart. [Frustrated], Milarepa thought, "Although I have been practicing the Dharma and living in solitude for such a long time, I am still not rid of ego-clinging! What is the use of practising Dharma if one cannot subdue ego-clinging? Let the wind blow my robe off if it wishes!" Thinking thus, he ceased resisting. But, due to his weakness from lack of food, with the next gust of wind he could no longer withstand the storm, and fell down in a faint.

When he came to, the storm was over. High up on the branch of a tree he saw a shred of his clothing swaying in the gentle breeze. The utter futility of this world and all its affairs struck Milarepa, and a strong feeling of renunciation overwhelmed him. Sitting down upon a rock, he meditated once more.

The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, trans. Garma C. C. Chang., Shambhala, Boulder & London 1977, Vol. I, p. 1.

Sangharakshita: So here we seem to encounter Milarepa at a comparatively early stage in his career, just staying in a cave. He is meditating according to his guru's instructions, and he is still wearing at least some clothing. But he has become so absorbed in meditation that he has forgotten all about food and drink and fuel and so on. He therefore starts collecting some wood but when he tries to hold the robe together the wood blows away, and when he tries to clutch the wood the robe blows apart. *'Frustrated, Milarepa thought, "Although I have been practicing the Dharma and living in solitude for such a long time, I am still not rid of ego-clinging!"* Why do you think he thought that? What made him think that?

Sagaramati: He still wanted these things – the wood and the clothing. It's a simile perhaps of ...

S.: Yes, he almost instinctively clung to his robe: it was his robe. That means there was a feeling of 'mine', there is a feeling of 'I', there is a feeling of ego, and Milarepa realized that. So what does this suggest – the fact that Milarepa realized that so quickly? What sort of stage does it seem that he has reached?

Padmapani: Objective thinking.

S.: Well first of all it shows he is very mindful. He is keeping a very close watch over himself. There is this very trivial occurrence – the wind blows his robe apart, but when he clutches his robe he loses the wood. Most people would think nothing of this, but in Milarepa's mind there is a definite feeling of frustration. He can't clutch the wood because he has to hold on to his robe, and he can't hold on to his robe because he has to clutch the wood. Then it dawns on him, 'Why am I doing this? What is making me cling on to my robe in this way? It is because I feel that it is mine – that it is my robe, it has to cover my body. Because this feeling of 'mine' is there, the feeling of 'I' is there too. I have been meditating all this time, but that subtle 'I' feeling, that subtle 'I' experience, is still there.' This shows us two things. Firstly, it shows us how close a watch Milarepa was keeping over himself, and secondly it shows that it can be very small things that show our true state of mind, our true attitude, and give us – and other people – away.

So what sort of stage does Milarepa seem to have reached? He has been meditating, in fact practising the *Mahāmuḍrā* meditation,¹⁵ he has been living in solitude for a long time, and has no doubt made a good deal of progress; but a subtle feeling of 'mine', and [therefore] a subtle feeling of 'I', is still there. He is able to recognize it as soon as it manifests, and is able to take the necessary action, which in fact is all that can be asked of anybody. We are not expected to be perfect all at once, or even for a very long time. All you are asked to do is to keep wide awake, to keep watch over yourself, paying attention especially to seemingly trivial, insignificant things and, understanding their significance, to then take action immediately. This is perhaps why the Buddha concluded his farewell address to his disciples – at least according to one tradition – with the words *appamādena sampādeṭṭha*,¹⁶ which were [subsequently] used in the [novice monk's] ordination ceremony. *Appamādena sampādeṭṭha* translates as: 'with mindfulness strive' or 'with mindfulness exert (yourself)'. It is as though only these two things are expected [of you]. Remain mindful, keep a watch over yourself, know what you are doing, see what you are doing, even pay attention to very trivial, seemingly insignificant thoughts, words and actions. And, if you see any vestige of anything unskillful, [if you see] any ego-clinging, any attachment, any experience of 'mineness', take immediate action to put the situation right. That is all that can be asked of anybody – but of course, that is everything. So Milarepa, as it were, takes immediate action. At once there is a sort of realization and he says, *'What is the use of practicing Dharma if one cannot subdue ego-clinging? ... Let the wind blow my robe off it wishes!'* Now he is ready to give up both of them. At first there was a conflict as to whether to lose the wood and keep the robe, or lose the robe and keep the wood. But now he says, *'Never mind, let them both go. Let the wind*

blow the wood away, let it blow the robe away also if it wishes.’ ‘Thinking thus, he ceased resisting. But due to weakness from lack of food, with the next gust of wind he could no longer withstand the storm, and feel down in a faint.’ Not only did the storm apparently blow away the wood, it nearly blew away Milarepa as well.

‘When he came to, the storm was over.’ He must have remained in a faint for a long time. *‘High up on the branch of a tree he saw a shred of his clothing swaying in the gentle breeze.’* You can just imagine him: he is lying on the ground and has not even got his robe on anymore, and he has been in a faint. The first thing that he sees as he opens his eyes is the branch of the tree and fluttering from the branch is a shred of his clothing. There is just that little shred fluttering in the breeze. Then, *‘The utter futility of this world and all its affairs struck Milarepa, and a strong feeling of renunciation overwhelmed him.’* Why do you think the sight of that shred of clothing fluttering in the breeze affected him in this way?

Padmaraja: The absurdity of it.

S.: The absurdity of it. *(Pause.)* It is as though that shred of clothing represented all worldly attachments, all worldly things. After all, the robe he was wearing was the last thing he had left and even that has been blown away and the last shred of it is fluttering from the branch of a tree. It is as though that shred stands for all worldly possessions – everything you could cling on to. It is just a shred of clothing, but in it Milarepa can see houses and lands, wives and children, friends and relatives, gold and silver. He can see all these things [and he knows] that they are liable to be taken away – or torn away – from us at any instant. So all [conditioned] things are like that. They can be blown away at any instant, just like a shred of clothing. Therefore, *‘The utter futility of this world and all its affairs struck Milarepa, and a strong feeling of renunciation overwhelmed him. Sitting down upon a rock, he meditated once more.’* We find incidents like that in the lives of some of the Zen Masters. A very simple, seemingly insignificant occurrence really sparks off something. We find this in the Pali texts. Someone is sitting in the forest meditating and he sees a yellow leaf fall – just a single yellow leaf – and this gives him an actual insight into the transitory nature of everything. There is also a *Jātaka* story¹⁷ about a king who, on seeing his first grey hair, reflected that he was growing old and that it was time for him to give up everything and retire to the forest. In that one grey hair he saw old age, disease, death and all worldly possessions. In the same way, Milarepa saw all worldly possessions fluttering from the tree in that one shred of clothing, all about to be blown away. Therefore, *‘a strong feeling of renunciation overwhelmed him. Sitting down upon a rock, he meditated once more.’*



10 Received with Thanks

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

Sangharakshita: *‘A mother’s kindness is immeasurable’*¹⁸ – that point is regarded as established: you ought to be overwhelmingly grateful to your mother for everything that she has done for you, but don’t forget what it said at the beginning: *‘the root of benevolence lies in the memory of benefits received’*¹⁹ – it all

develops out of that. You have received so many benefits from your mother that you ought very easily to be able to develop metta towards her out of sheer gratitude. But all beings have been your mother at some stage or other, therefore you ought to feel that overwhelming gratitude, and hence benevolence and compassion, towards all living beings. Therefore, you ought to reflect: since she has done so much for you, what can you do for her? What would make her most happy? – to become Enlightened. Therefore, to repay your debts to all beings who have all been your mothers, you should try to lead them to Enlightenment; therefore, you should be a Bodhisattva.

For traditional Tibetan Buddhism this is a very strong sentiment which recurs perpetually. Could you perhaps generalize that line of reasoning – dissociate it from that exclusive emphasis on mother? You could say that you have received so much from life, from the human race, from your own society. They have enabled you to be what you are now. Surely you should now make some return to the highest degree that you can. Should not that be trying to improve things even further? Now, things can be improved only in the direction of individuality, so the best return that you can make is by helping as many beings as possible to become individuals, and thus to carry the whole process on a stage further. You have been helped to come so far, so out of gratitude you would like to help others to go to an even further, higher stage of development.

Parami: It has a sort of feeling of inevitability. It seems almost common sense like that. Like evolution has gone this far and therefore ...

S.: With the individual, it is a voluntary process. It has to be an individual choice and decision. The individual [person] can block or frustrate the whole process. That is what most people do. But if you can only awaken gratitude to the human race, to human culture, to society, for having brought you to this point, where you are reasonably healthy, fed, clothed, warm and comfortable, able to support yourself, with inspiring books to read – if you can only realize that you have not created all this, but that it has been laid on for you by other people, whether individuals or not – then you will naturally feel like making some return, not in a *quid pro quo* sort of way but because you have received so much. This return can be made only by carrying the whole process one stage further and making it possible for others to be individuals, if they want to be, by providing them with the facilities.

One can look at it in more general terms rather than “Because you were born millions of times in the past, all beings have been your mother and therefore you ought to repay all these mothers for what they’ve done for you, with Enlightenment.” For the modern mind, that is a bit too specific, or even exclusive. However, you can certainly feel a genuine gratitude towards the human race and towards all those people in the past who contributed to your cultural and spiritual enrichment. Therefore, out of that gratitude you try to perform a similar function, at least to the extent of transmitting to others what you yourself have received, even if you can’t add to it. You might intensely enjoy reading Shelley. You can’t add anything to that – you can’t write anything like that – but at least you can tell others, “Here’s a wonderful book. Read these poems.” You can pass it on; at least you can do that. You may not be able to teach anybody meditation, but at least you can say, “There are classes; come along.”

It all seems to hinge on gratitude – a sense that, if you have received so much, how should you not in your turn give or at least pass on? The sense of gratitude seems very important, and that seems to stem from the sense that you have received.



11 The Bodhisattva Brings Joy

from 'The Precious Garland' (*The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses*), Men's Mitra Seminar, Padmaloka, August 1976

*Just as farmers are gladdened
When a great rain-cloud gathers,
So one who gladdens embodied beings
When he encounters them is good.*

The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses, (The Buddhism of Tibet),
Nāgārjuna and the 7th Dalai Lama, Allen & Unwin, London 1984, v. 173

Sangharakshita: Presumably Nāgārjuna²⁰ is referring to the beginning of the monsoon. If the monsoon is even a few days late it means a very bad crop, a very poor harvest. So the farmers usually very anxiously watch the sky for the first monsoon clouds. If they come at the right time, then they're very, very happy.

And this is a very strong emphasis of Buddhism, especially of the Mahayana: that you should gladden beings, that you should make them happy, that you should generate positive emotion in them. This is one of the main functions of the Bodhisattva: just to make people happy, to gladden people – not in a foolish, frivolous, hilarious sort of way, but by arousing genuine joy. And this means helping them overcome their fears and anxieties and worries. If you enjoy creating fear in others, that suggests you want power over them. But if you want to simply make people happy, to make them glad, what does that suggest?

Hridaya: Willingness to give to others.

S.: Willingness to give, to be open – which is the opposite to power. You're giving yourself to them instead of trying to control them for your own purposes.

Hridaya: Like the rain-cloud, you give what they want.

S.: In a way, it's one's duty to be happy; one's duty to be joyful. You obviously can't gladden others unless you're glad yourself. You can't put others in an emotionally positive mood unless you're in an emotionally positive mood yourself to begin with. So the Bodhisattva spreads confidence and happiness and gladness wherever he goes among people. If you're a wet blanket, you're not a Bodhisattva. If you're a prophet of gloom and disaster, you're not a Bodhisattva.



Glossary

Dāna: ‘A gift’, ‘the act of giving’, or ‘generosity’. *Dāna* is the basic Buddhist virtue. In the Theravada tradition *dāna* is often spoken of as preceding *śīla* (Pali) (morality) as the first step in the ‘Threefold Way’. In the Mahayana it is the first of the ‘Six or Ten *Pāramitās*’ (Perfections) which the Bodhisattva must cultivate. Even if one is engaging in no other spiritual practice one can give. In acting generously we overcome our tendency to be concerned only with our own needs and desires and take a step towards the selflessness of a Bodhisattva. The objects of generosity are traditionally classified as: one’s immediate friends and relations, those who are afflicted and in need, and the spiritual community. One can give material things, confidence, education and culture, one’s life, merits, and the greatest gift of all, the Dharma.

In the FWBO *dāna* is very much stressed and people are encouraged in personal generosity such as giving of presents. A charity, Aid for India, has been set up to help the ex-Untouchable community towards those in need both by giving money and by helping to raise funds. All centres have ‘*dāna* bowls’ so that donations can be made toward the upkeep of the centre and the spread of the Dharma. The co-operative business enterprises are an opportunity for giving because no-one works for money but simply for their support, the principle being ‘Give what you can, take what you need’. The profits of any such enterprise are put toward the spreading of the Dharma. All Order Members try to take whatever opportunities they can to communicate the Dharma.

Karuṇā: ‘Compassion’. With metta (loving-kindness), *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekṣā* (equanimity), *karuṇā* is one of the ‘Four *Brahma-vihāras*’ - the ‘Divine Abidings’ or ‘Illimitables’. These are highly positive spiritual states of great emotional refinement and sensitivity which are potentially universal in their scope. *Karuṇā* is the emotion we experience when our positive feelings of love and good will (metta) are directed towards being who are suffering, particularly those less developed than ourselves. It is no mere pity or ‘feeling sorry’ for the other but a very intense empathy accompanied by a very strong desire to alleviate their suffering.

As with all the ‘Four *Brahma-vihāras*’, *karuṇā* begins as an emotion based upon one’s own self-love and ability to identify with others. As it is developed it expands to become *mahā-karuṇā*, the Great Compassion which is suffused with Transcendental Wisdom and in which no distinction is made between self and other. Compassion is often spoken of as the counterpart of Wisdom (*prajñā*), two qualities which are inseparably united in the Buddha. *Karuṇā* is the moving spirit of the Bodhisattva and it is embodied in the figure of Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Muditā: ‘Sympathetic Joy’. With metta (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *upekṣā* (equanimity), *muditā* is one of the ‘Four *Brahma-vihāras*’ – ‘Divine Abidings’ or ‘Illimitables’. These, together with *śraddhā* (faith and devotion), are the supremely positive emotions which are cultivated in the course of spiritual development. *Muditā* is the emotion we experience when our feelings of love and good will (metta) are directed towards someone who is happy.

Prajñā (Pali *Paññā*): ‘Wisdom’. Three levels of *prajñā* are distinguished in the Pali Canon (Digha Nikāya XXXIII):

1. *suta-mayā-paññā* – ‘the wisdom which comes through hearing’ i.e. knowledge which is learned from others.
2. *cintā-mayā-paññā* – ‘the wisdom based on thinking’ i.e. intellectual understanding which one has achieved by thinking about what one has ‘heard’ or which one has thought out for oneself.
3. *bhāvāna-mayā-paññā* – ‘the Wisdom based on mental development’ i.e. Transcendental Insight which comes about on the basis of spiritual practice.

It is this latter that is the goal of the spiritual life and it is in this sense that the term is more commonly used. It is ‘seeing things as they really are’, a direct Insight into the nature of Reality. Wisdom is not, however, a narrowly cognitive faculty but direct, intuitive understanding, beyond concepts, which is also

suffused with Compassion and Bliss and with aesthetic appreciation. It could be said to be Imagination at its highest reach.

Prajñā has an important place in most Buddhist schools. In the Theravada it is the third term of the 'Threefold Way' or the 'Three Trainings': *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (meditation) and *paññā*. On the basis of moral rectitude one can develop higher states of consciousness, and on the basis of these higher states Wisdom can arise. Wisdom here is understood as Insight into the nature of all conditioned *dhammas* (objects of cognition): that they are all impermanent, insubstantial, and unsatisfactory.

In the Mahayana *prajñā* is one of the 'Six or Ten *Pāramitās*' (Perfections) which the Bodhisattva must cultivate in fulfilment of his Vow. *Prajñā-pāramitā* is the most important of the Perfections for it is by being conjoined with *prajñā* that the rest are transformed from mundane qualities into Transcendental Perfections. From the Mahayana point of view, *prajñā* consists in seeing the *śūnyatā* or Void-nature of all *dhammas*. The Mahayana tradition also stresses the co-equality of Wisdom and Compassion as two aspects of one Enlightened experience. In the Tantra the image of a male and female Buddha in the sexual act symbolises this perfect interfusion of *prajñā* and *karuṇā* – the two figures representing aspects of one Enlightened mind.

Śīla (Pali *sīla*): Usually translated as 'ethics' or 'morality', *śīla* also includes behaviour in the broader sense of 'manners'. *Śīla* is, in the Theravada tradition, the first stage of the 'Threefold Way' of *sīla*, *samādhi* (meditation) and *paññā* (Wisdom). It is only by developing skilful behaviour that one can truly begin to master the higher states of meditation. *Śīla* is also the second of the *pāramitās* which the Bodhisattva must perfect.

Śīla as moral behaviour consists in actions (of body, speech, or mind) which are performed on the basis of the wholesome mental states of generosity, loving-kindness, and clarity. Such actions are termed 'skilful'. 'Unskilful' actions come from a mind dominated by greed, hatred and delusion. Buddhist morality therefore stresses intention and is directed towards the production of healthy and positive mental states. Morality emerges naturally out of our developing self-consciousness: because we are self-aware we are able to identify with others and to enter imaginatively into their sufferings and joys. Because we wish happiness for ourselves we wish it for them. Thus one who is completely positive and healthy will naturally act in a morally skilful way because he will be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others as much as he is to his own.

Buddhism distinguishes between natural morality which is based upon positive and friendly feelings and conventional morality which is simply the customary behaviours of a particular culture or set of people. It is the former alone which is *śīla* properly speaking. Furthermore *śīla* is not an authoritarian morality imposed by fear and maintained by guilt but the attempt to cultivate those happy and lucid mental states in which one feels such sympathy and concern for others that one cannot do them any harm.

Śīla sometimes refers specifically to the formulated principles of ethical conduct – 'The Precepts'. These are by no means commandments but are guides to acting in a way which is expressive of wholesome mental states. By approximating one's actions to those training principles one will begin to experience the mental state of which they are the natural expression. Several different lists of precepts are given; the most used in the FWBO are the *pañca-śīla* ('Five Precepts') and the *daśa-śīla* ('Ten Precepts'), the latter being taken by Dharmacharis and Dharmacharinis at ordination. All of the Precepts are the working out of the basic principle of non-violence.

See Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse, London 1984.

Upekṣā (Pali *Upekkhā*): 'Equanimity'. The word has three ranges of meaning.

1. In some contexts (e.g. *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* Dīgha Nikāya II, 299) *upekṣā* means 'hedonic neutrality' – a state intermediate between pleasure and pain.

2. With metta (loving kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *muditā* (sympathetic joy), *upekṣā* is one of the 'Four *Brahma-vihāras*' – 'Divine Abidings' or 'Illimitables' which are the basic positive emotions which the spiritual aspirant must cultivate. *Upekṣā* represents the other three *Brahma-vihāras* raised to their highest degree so that they have become completely universal and impartial. Even though positive feelings of empathy and love are at their most intense there is no bias for or against anyone in particular. One's feelings are equally strong and positive no matter towards whom they are directed. It is this lack of bias that we try to cultivate in the fifth stage of the Metta Bhavana meditation practice when we cultivate metta equally towards ourselves, our friend, neutral person and enemy.
3. *Upekṣā* is sometimes used to denote the Enlightened state itself (e.g. the 'Seven Factors of Enlightenment', see Sangharakshita, *Mind Reactive and Creative*, Windhorse, London 1985) in so far as it is one of complete equipoise beyond all dualities whatsoever.

Notes

¹ On one occasion the Buddha recommended to his monks the *aśubha-bhāvāna* or 'Meditation on the Impure', a practice involving the contemplation of corpses in various stages of decomposition. This meditation is intended as an antidote to sense craving and excessive attachment to one's body. It is a very powerful practice which, under the right circumstances, leaves to a very exalted and positive mood, free from the turbulence of craving. Shortly after praising the *aśubha-bhāvāna* the Buddha retired into solitude. Some monks then took up this practice but misunderstood its import and, becoming filled with loathing for their bodies and for life, they got another wanderer to kill them. Discovering what had happened on his return the Buddha condemned their action and recommended the Mindfulness of Breathing in place of the *aśubha-bhāvāna*.

See Vinaya III, Vol. I; Parajika III, trans. As *The Book of the Discipline* by I. B. Horner, Pali Text Soc., London 1983, pp. 116-123

² The Tantric Precepts are a version of the 'Five Precepts' (see Mitrata 46, Windhorse, London February 1984), composed by the Venerable Sangharakshita, reflecting the spirit of the Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism:

1. Do not obstruct the energy of any other person.
2. Do not drain the energy of any other person. Give freely of your own.
3. Do not misuse energy
4. Use for any given purpose the energy appropriate to that purpose, not one which is inappropriate.
5. Do not allow energy to become turbid. Keep it clear and bright

³ According to Buddhist tradition there are three kinds of Enlightened being:

1. *Samyaksambuddhas* (Pali *Sammāsambuddhas*) (Fully and Perfectly Awakened Ones) who gain their Enlightenment by their own efforts, unaided by a teacher, and who proclaim the Dharma to others.
2. *Arahants* (Pali Arhats) (Worthy Ones) who gain Enlightenment after having heard the teaching of a Buddha.
3. *Pratyeka-Buddhas* (Pali *Pacceka-buddhas*) (Solitary Awakened Ones) who gain enlightenment by their own efforts alone and who do not then proclaim the Dharma.

The concept of a *Pratyeka-Buddha* is rather obscure and even contradictory. Since Enlightenment consists in the full realization of both Wisdom and Compassion, an Enlightened One who does not manifest his Compassion by teaching others does not seem possible. It is perhaps significant that there are no contemporary examples of anyone attaining the state of *Pratyeka-Buddha* in the various canonical sources. The concept may be later importation into the Buddhist tradition, based on memories of the *ṛishis* or Vedic Sages of Ancient India.

⁴ See *Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond Sutra and Heart Sutra*, trans. and explained by E. Conze, Allen & Unwin, London 1958, Ch. 3, pp.25ff, and Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words*, Windhorse Publications.

⁵ See Sangharakshita, 'The Bodhisattva Vow', available on FreeBuddhistAudio – <http://tinyurl.com/nm7ntytr> – or Mitrata 60 in this series.

⁶ Aid for India (AFI), now called The Karuna Trust, is a registered charity, established in Britain in 1980 by members of the Western Buddhist Order to raise funds for medical and educational self-help projects amongst the economically and socially deprived of India, particularly in the ex-Untouchable community, many of whom have become Buddhists. Many Order Members, Mitras and Friends have participated in the two month long door-to-door fund-raising ventures organized by Karuna. These have proved very successful both financially (in excess of one million pounds has been raised so far [in 1986]) as well as in

bringing the plight of the ex-Untouchables to public attention. Workers are always needed for AFI's projects. For more information contact Karuna – www.karuna.org

⁷ In the orthodox Hindu view society is divided into a number of castes which are arranged hierarchically. Relations between the castes are rigidly defined by a complex system of taboos. Untouchables are regarded by Hindus as being beneath this caste system and therefore as virtually sub-human. Merely to touch, directly or indirectly, an Untouchable causes a caste Hindu pollution, necessitating ritual purification. Untouchables are therefore excluded from all normal social and religious life. In this century the Untouchables began to reject the social position assigned to them by the Hindus and, from 1956 onwards, a movement of conversion to Buddhism began under the leadership of the great Dr B. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution, himself born an Untouchable. Following Dr Ambedkar's sudden death soon after his conversion, the Venerable Sangharakshita became involved in this movement and spent part of each year teaching amongst the ex-Untouchables of Maharashtra. The FWBO (known in Indian as the Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana) has now taken up this work again and has established several centres in Western India as well as organizing educational and medical welfare projects (see note 6).

See Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications (also available for free on Sangharakshita's website - www.sangharakshita.org/online_books.html)

⁸ See *Mitrata 59* in this series, Glossary.

⁹ The term 'operational concept' draws attention to the fact that all language used to talk about Ultimate Reality is essentially practical. We must not be misled by such language into thinking too concretely or literally. Language can never adequately convey the true nature of Reality. However, language can give us some understanding which will help us in our attempts to develop spiritually. As *The Awakening of Faith*, (trans. Yoshito Hakeda, Columbia University press, 1967) says, 'We use words to get free from words until we reach the pure wordless Essence.' An operational concept thus has practical value for the purposes of our development but no ultimate metaphysical meaning must be attached to it. It could be said that in a sense all concepts are actually operational but the term is used specifically to apply to such terms as Nirvana, Ultimate Reality, The *Dharmakāya*, etc.

¹⁰ Vajrayana Buddhism is characterized by an oral communication or 'transmission' from the teacher to disciple of the essence of the teacher's experience, often within a ritual context. Due to the profound and subtle nature of an accomplished teacher's experience such transmissions are not really reducible to written form. However, the Vajrayana gurus did occasionally commit some of their teachings to writing but they usually did so in a deeply symbolic language which is virtually meaningless without the aid of a suitably qualified teacher. The 'Nine Formless *Dākinī* Dharmas' are a collection of such teachings initially transmitted by Nāropa, a great Vajrayana teacher of eleventh-century India. Marpa, Milarepa's teacher, was one of Nāropa's disciples.

¹¹ A *koan* (Japanese) (Chinese *kung-an*) is a kind of paradoxical conundrum utilized in Ch'an and Zen schools as a method of getting the disciple to go beyond concepts to a direct experience of Reality. The pupil is given a problem which has no rational solution such as 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' or 'What was your original face before you were born?' The pupil meditates upon this problem until his teacher is satisfied that he has grasped its essence. These *koans* are usually taken from the recorded encounters of great Ch'an and Zen Masters with their disciples (hence *kun-an* which means 'public case').

See Sangharakshita, *The Essence of Zen*, Windhorse Publications (also available for free on Sangharakshita's website - www.sangharakshita.org/online_books.html ; *Alternative Traditions*. Windhorse.

¹² The precepts are the principles of ethical conduct which are used by Buddhists as guides to developing more skilful behaviour.

See Glossary 'Śīla' below, and *Mitrata 46*, Windhorse, London, February 1984.

¹³ The Path of Vision (*darśana mārga*) arises when we glimpse with Right View (the first stage of the mundane 'Eightfold Path') the possibility of spiritual growth. The Path of Transformation (*bhāvāna mārga*) consists in following the remaining limbs from Right Emotion up to Right Concentration and then again from (Transcendental) Perfect Vision up to Perfect Samadhi. The Path of Transformation thus represents the process of transformation based upon our initial spiritual insight until full realization dawns.

See *Mitrata*s, 40–55 (in particular *Mitrata 40*, 'Perfect Vision 1' *The Noble Eightfold Path*), Windhorse, London 1983-5, and Sangharakshita, *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path*, Windhorse Publications.

¹⁴ The 'Twelve Nidānas' here are the twelve cyclic links in the chain of human birth and death (as opposed to the twelve 'spiral' links). They are a conceptual expression of the Buddha's Insight into the conditioned nature of all phenomena as applied to human life. They are depicted in the outer ring of the Wheel of Life.

See Subhuti, *The Buddhist Vision*, Windhorse Publications.

¹⁵ The *Mahāmudrā* (Great Symbol or Gesture) meditation belongs to the highest level of vajrayana teaching. It is not a formal technique but consists in being fully aware of whatever arises in one's experience, seeing everything as Ultimate Reality. In order to undertake this practice Milarepa must have attained a very high level of spiritual awareness.

¹⁶ See *Mahā-parinibbāna Suttanta* in *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part II, trans. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids, Pali Text Soc., London 1959, p. 173.

¹⁷ See *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Vol. I & II, trans. E. B. Cowell, Pali Text Soc., London 1895 reprinted 1973, No. 9. 'Makhādeva-Jātaka', p. 30.

¹⁸ sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H. V. Guenther, Rider, London 1959, Ch. 7, p. 94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Ch.7 p. 92.

²⁰ Nāgārjuna, the author of *The Precious Garland*, 'flourished' in second-century India. He is credited with establishing the doctrinal basis of the Mahayana and in particular is regard as the founder of the Mādhyamīka School.