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THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life

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Cover Symbol:

The symbols on the covers of the issues in this series are from original lino-cuts by Dharmachari Aloka based upon the *mudrās* of the eight principal Bodhisattvas of Mahayana tradition. This issue features the *mudrā* of Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha, or 'Earth-Womb'. As the embodiment of spiritual optimism Kṣitigarbha enters the hell realms to save tormented beings. His left hand is shown here holding the wish-granting gem. His right hand grasps the ringed staff of the Sarvāstivādin monk.

THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

4. Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life

Part 1

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Editorial

The number of extracts that finally find their way into the pages of *Mitrata* is very small compared with the great pile submitted to me by the Lion's Roar research team. In this issue the number is even smaller as the lecture 'Altruism and Individualism in the Spiritual Life' is considerably longer than usual. Amongst the rejected extracts there was one which I couldn't altogether dispose of. 'It is hard to practise charity when one is poor'. The quotation comes from the *Sutra of 42 Sections*. In the seminar the Venerable Sangharakshita explains how one needs a healthy basis from which to give, whether it be the will to do so or the wherewithal.

Dāna or giving and *śīla* or morality are the first two perfections of the Bodhisattva. In the lecture *dāna* is described as being indispensable to the spiritual life. We are led on through the traditional classification of this *pāramitā* to imagine the tremendous 'demands' on the Bodhisattva in terms of altruism. When discussing *śīla* the Venerable Sangharakshita brings us down to earth as we look at attitudes and behaviour with regard to food, work and marriage. These three areas represent the focus of attention for most people. Unfortunately the attention is more often than not unskilful. A preoccupation with one's own individual satisfaction cannot be regarded as a truly human quality for it denies a real awareness of others. *Śīla* constitutes a healthy concern for ourselves, for our physical wellbeing, our livelihood, our relationships with others — not as ends in themselves but as the wherewithal to practise charity.

At the outset of our spiritual career one is, to put it bluntly, out to gain. However, as we proceed along the Path we begin to understand why the Bodhisattva strives for Enlightenment, not for himself alone, but the for the sake of *all* beings. The closer we get to the heart of the Bodhisattva Ideal the more we find the distinction between self and other breaking down. Eventually it dawns on us — the only thing we can hope to gain is an opportunity to give.

SRIMALA

Lecture

Last week we saw that the relative Bodhicitta has two aspects. We saw that there is a vow aspect and an establishment aspect. The vow aspect refers to the Bodhisattva's Vow itself (with which we were concerned last week). The establishment aspect refers to the practice of the 'Six *Pāramitās'*,[1] or 'Six Transcendental Virtues': Giving, Uprightness, Patience, Vigour, Meditation, and Wisdom. We shall be dealing with these 'Six Transcendental Virtues', these 'Six Perfections' as they are sometimes called, in the course of the next three weeks. Tonight we are dealing with the first two: Giving (*dāna*) and Uprightness (*śīla*). We are dealing with these two as expressions respectively of altruism and individualism — *dāna* being the expression of altruism, and *śīla* being the expression of individualism. In other words, we are dealing with them as the other-regarding and the self-regarding aspects of the spiritual life.

First, however, let us go back a little and make a few general observations. Let us go back to the first lecture on 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal'.[2] Those who were present will remember that the Bodhisattva Ideal originated, historically, in an attempt to do justice to two great aspects of Buddhism: the Wisdom aspect, as expressed in the Buddha's verbal teaching, and the Compassion aspect, as expressed not so much in the verbal teaching but — more abundantly at least — in the life and activity of the Buddha.

The Bodhisattva Ideal, we saw in that lecture, represents a union of opposites — to begin with, a union of Wisdom and Compassion. That the Bodhissattva Ideal represents a union of opposites is true of the beginning of the Bodhisattva's career, is true of the end of the Bodhisattva's career (where Wisdom and Compassion are united in their highest power, in Enlightenment itself), and is true of all the stages in between. So much in fact is the Bodhisattva's very spirit a union of opposites, that we can perhaps describe the Bodhisattva himself as a sort of living contradiction. This is one of the reasons why the Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva Ideal are so very difficult to understand. Generally speaking, we may say that the Bodhisattva synthesizes the sublimest heights and the profoundest depths of existence: the mundane and the Transcendental, samsara and Nirvana. More specifically, as we shall see today, the Bodhisattva synthesizes the altruism and individualism. (In next week's lecture we will see how the Bodhisattva synthesizes the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' approaches to the spiritual life.)

Now there is a misunderstanding to be cleared up. If you read books about Buddhism, especially popular books, and especially perhaps books about the Mahayana, you will find it sometimes said that the Bodhisattva is not concerned with his own salvation, but is concerned with the salvation of other beings. You may even read — people sometimes put it rather poetically — that the Bodhisattva postpones his own entry into Nirvana: he sees, as it were, the gates of Nirvana shining afar off, and he says, "No! I am not going to enter. I want to help others to enter first." Very often the Bodhisattva Ideal is presented in this quite appealing and attractive poetic form. And you will find that the Bodhisattva comes to be contrasted with the Arahant[3] (the Arahant is the perfect man, or the realized man, of the Theravada). The Arahant is said to be concerned only with his own salvation, and the Arahant Ideal is said, therefore, to be selfish. In contrast to this, the Bodhisattva Ideal is said to be unselfish. The Arahant Ideal is said to be individualistic; the Bodhisattva Ideal is said to be altruistic.

In this way you find, in some literature on Buddhism, that a sort of controversy develops, with people (even) taking sides. You will sometimes find that the followers of the Arahant Ideal criticize the followers of the Bodhisattva Ideal, or criticize even the Bodhisattva Ideal itself. Sometimes they point out that charity begins at home. Here, they say, is the Bodhisattva wanting to help others to gain Enlightenment, but he has not gained it himself. This, they say, is like a person trying to pull others out of the ditch when he is right in the ditch, in the mud, himself. They say, "This isn't possible. First you must get out yourself, and then you

can help others out."

Now the Arahant Ideal may or may not be selfish — I am not going to say anything about that this evening — but one can say that the Bodhisattva Ideal itself is certainly not one-sided. This is the misunderstanding to be corrected. The Bodhisattva Ideal does not represent altruism *as opposed* to individualism; the Bodhisattva is not concerned with saving others *as opposed* to saving himself. As I have already said, the Bodhisattva synthesizes opposites. In this case he synthesizes the opposites of helping oneself and helping others, individualism and altruism. He synthesizes these opposites in the spiritual life by practising *dāna* and *śīla*.

This tension between altruism and individualism, regard for others and regard for self, is not confined to the spiritual life: it occurs at every level of human existence. After all, we exist as individuals, but we also exist as members of society, that is to say, we exist in relation to other individuals. We have our own needs: material needs, psychological needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs — which obviously we have to consider. But others too have their needs (usually of the same kind as our own, at least in principle). And these needs too we have to consider, because we have to live with other people, in society. We cannot ignore altogether the needs of others.

But, often it happens that the two come into conflict: our needs as individuals and the needs of other individuals, the needs of society. This can happen in the wider life of the community or in our own very personal life; our needs come into conflict with the needs of others or at least with the needs of one other.

But at the same time, despite that conflict of needs — or at least that tension between needs — we continue to depend upon others and others continue to depend upon us. Thus it comes about that we find ourselves in a familiar and rather painful predicament. We find that sometimes we cannot live with other people, but at the same time we find that we cannot live without them. It is rather like the snake in the fable. The snake in the fable caught a frog. But the frog was so big the snake could not swallow it down. At the same time, owing to its curved front teeth, the snake could not vomit the frog out. So the frog was just stuck there with the snake, able to neither swallow it nor reject it. We are very often just like that with people. We cannot live with them — apparently; yet also, it seems, we cannot live without them. One might say that if we cannot live with people, we cannot live without them — I think that takes a little thinking over! And conversely, if we can live with people, we can live without them, and vice versa. This is paradoxical, but true. We can probably say that only those who can live without people -really without people — can live with them.

What we undoubtedly need is a social context which will enable us to do both: to live with people and also live without them; to regard our own needs and regard the needs of other people; to be altruistic and also individualistic. This perhaps is the meaning of living in community. However, this is probably taking us just a little too far afield and it is time we got back to *dāna* and *śīla*.

It is not without reason that *dāna* is enumerated first among these 'Six *Pāramitās*'. It seems that our natural human tendency is to take, to draw towards ourselves, *for* ourselves. If any new proposition comes up, whether it is in connection with our working life or our home life, our usual — maybe half-conscious — reaction is to think: "What is there in it for me?" There is always a self-reference. There is always this tendency of grasping. Those of you who have seen the Tibetan Wheel of Life[4] may remember that right at the hub there are three animals, one of which is a cock. This cock represents craving. It is right there at the hub of the Wheel of Life, right there in the midst (as it were) of our own hearts. It gives recognition to the fact that craving — not just ordinary healthy desire, but actual craving — very often dominates our life, at

least unconsciously. We are all in the grip of this craving, all impelled by this thirst. So everything that we do, everything in which we become interested, has a self-reference underneath.

The Bodhisattva, if he is to get anywhere near Enlightenment, has got to completely reverse this tendency, or turn it (as it were) inside out or upside down. Giving therefore comes first, because giving is the direct opposite of grasping.

It is as if the teaching said to us, "You may not be very moral — you may not be very strict about your observance of the Precepts; you may not be able to meditate for hours at a time — in fact even five minutes may be difficult; you may not be very learned in the scriptures — you may not have read very much: but if you want to lead a spiritual life, if you aspire to lead any sort of higher life at all, then the very least that can be expected of you is that you will give, that you will be a little bit open-handed." From the standpoint of the Mahayana (at least), if you are generous, then whatever else you may be — you may be a thief, you may be a murderer, you may be a prostitute, you may be anything else — there is, spiritually speaking, some hope for you. Conversely, the ungenerous person, the person who finds it difficult to look outward to the needs of others, cannot, at least not for the present, lead a spiritual life. Such a person may be rigidly virtuous, may strictly adhere to all the Precepts, may even be quite well versed in Buddhist philosophy, but, for the present at least, from the standpoint of the Mahayana, there is, spiritually speaking, no hope for him.

Now the Bodhisattva is the giver *par excellence*, the ideal giver. Giving is not just a question of transferring possessions. Giving, or generosity, is above all else an attitude of heart and mind. Indeed, it is an attitude of one's whole being. One does not just give with one's hand, one does not even just give with one's heart, one gives with one's whole being; one's whole being is involved in the act of giving. This is why Walt Whitman, in a very memorable line, says, 'When I give, I give myself.'[5] That does not mean "I give personally, with my own hand", but "I give my whole being when I give; I give myself, because nothing less than that will do." And this is very much the Bodhisattva's attitude. If we want to get away from Buddhist philosophy and technical traditional definitions, if we want to forget even about Enlightenment as a concept, and if we want to define the Bodhisattva in some original way which will mean something more to us, we may perhaps describe the Bodhisattva as the person who gives himself: gives himself all the time and gives himself to everybody.

The Buddhist scriptures have got much to say on this topic of *dāna*. It is also a very popular theme for discourses in the East. If you go, in the evening or on a full-moon day, to a temple, in any Eastern Buddhist country, and sit amongst the people listening to the sermon, and just listen to what the monk or the lama is saying, you will find, in nine cases out of ten, that he is speaking on this subject of *dāna*.

The scriptures consider *dāna* under a number of different headings. Those of you who have done any study of Buddhist texts will know that they are rather fond of dividing and subdividing subjects. Sometimes you can get a little bit lost in this, but for serious study it is quite helpful. This evening, so far as *dāna* is concerned, I am going to follow that tradition, but let us remember that we are concerned with the spirit of giving, not just with the letter of the teaching — the technical details. The scriptures usually deal with *dāna* under the headings of: (1) to whom the gift is given; (2) what is given; (3) how it is given; and (4) why it is given. These four headings, with their sub-divisions, are believed to exhaust the whole subject of *dāna*.

First of all, to whom the gift is given. Ideally, or in principle, all sentient beings are the objects of the Bodhisattva's generosity. That is the ideal; that is the principle. But it is practically impossible: very, very few people are even in the position of being able to benefit the whole human race. Nevertheless one must

at least uphold the ideal.

The scriptures mention three classes of recipients to whom the Bodhisattva should pay particular attention. First of all, there are his own, or her own, friends and relations. It is no use the would-be Bodhisattva being very kind and friendly so far as strangers and people outside are concerned, if at home he is difficult, awkward, and an uncomfortable person to live with — if not actually cruel. Sometimes you find cases of this sort: someone has a wonderful reputation outside his or her home for being so kind, so generous, so good, but at home is a petty tyrant or something else equally unpleasant. Therefore the tradition says that the recipients of the Bodhisattva's generosity are, in the first place, his own kith and kin. Charity begins at home, but the emphasis is on the verb — it begins at home but does not by any means end at home. It is rather like the practice of the Metta Bhavana.[6] You start the practice of the Metta Bhavana by developing feelings of metta towards yourself, then towards a near and dear friend, and so on. In the last stage of the practice you extend the feelings of metta to all the people in the room, and all the people in the town, and the country, and the continent, till eventually you are feeling metta to the whole world, even to the whole universe. Generosity, giving, should be like this. It may begin right in your own home, but you should try to extend it wider and wider, in fact as wide as you possibly can.

The second class of people who should especially be recipients of the Bodhisattva's generosity are the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the helpless (among the helpless, tradition includes all animals). I dealt with this to some extent last week when speaking of the first of the 'Four Great Vows' of the Bodhisattva — the vow to deliver all sentient beings from difficulties — so I will say nothing more about it now.[7]

The third of the special recipients of the Bodhisattva's generosity are those who are leading a full-time religious life. Traditionally Buddhism considers it the duty of society to support all those who are engaged in any kind of higher spiritual life or higher creative work and activity. Usually it amounts to supporting the monks, nuns, lamas, spiritual teachers and so on, but ideally it should include all those who are engaged in any kind of higher creative work, including painters, musicians, writers etc. At the same time, there should be, on the part of society, no attempt to coerce either the religious person or the full-time artist into conforming to the ideas and ideals of the supporting society. Complete freedom is essential both for the religious person and for the creative person. Usually the (at least implied) condition of support from society is that one should support the status quo; if one supports the status quo one can, usually, be sure of some kind of support, but not otherwise. This, from a Buddhist point of view, is entirely wrong. The support should be a free support, whether it is given to the full-time religious person or to the artistically creative.

Now secondly, what is given as *dāna* — or what can be given. Potentially this is coextensive with whatever can be possessed; whatever you possess you can give away. But to assist us further, there is a six-fold classification of the kind of things that can be given as *dāna*.

Buddhism starts off right at the bottom with material things, like food, clothing, shelter. If one goes to the Buddhist countries of the East one sees in operation the Buddhist tradition of generosity and hospitality. I remember that I had abundant experience of this myself when I was in the East, whether it was in India or elsewhere. I remember that I used to come down from the hills, come down from Kalimpong, every winter, and usually make my first halt in Calcutta at the monastery of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. Usually when I arrived there, there would be a gathering, maybe of ten, or twenty, or thirty monks from different parts of the Buddhist world, many of whom would be known to me either personally or through correspondence or reputation. And it was often my experience that as soon as one walked in, someone would say, "Do you need anything?" One monk would say, "Do you want any new robes?" If you wanted them, they would be handed over at once. Or another — a more modern sort of monk — might say, "Do

you want a typewriter?" Or a monk might ask, "Where are you going? Do you want some money?" This was their attitude: to give, to share.

In the same say, if one went to any layman's house, they would consider it a disgrace if you sat down even for half an hour without being offered something to eat and drink. In this country, unfortunately, it is a little different. People usually hesitate to go along to the houses of other people at what they think might be lunch time or tea time, because then they would place the host in the embarrassing position of having to offer them something — embarrassing all round!

I remember a rather extreme example of the generous attitude of people in the East. I was staying for six months with a Burmese friend. He happened to be a member of the former Burmese royal family. He was very, very poor at that time, but was unstintedly generous. So generous was he that it was very difficult to stay with him; you had to be very, very careful. If you said, "Oh, I like that", he would say, "Take it!" It would be given on the spot. If you said, "Oh, this is an interesting book", he would say, "Take it!" Anything that you admired was given. This apparently was their custom. After a while you learned to be very careful, particularly because you could not refuse — it was very bad manners indeed to refuse anything. You *could* give him something back, or at least give him something later on (there was no question of giving *back*), but you had to accept at that particular time.

In some parts of the Buddhist world the lay people (especially) make a practice of giving something every day. After all, you are taking something every day, if it is only air or food; why not *give* something every day? Some Buddhist families in the East always look out for a beggar or a monk to whom they can give food, or a poor person to whom they can give a piece of cloth or something of that kind. In this way they are giving all the time. It may not be very much — it may only be a few coins or just a few spoonfuls of rice — but at least they are training themselves, they are getting into the habit of giving, and thus giving becomes an integral part of their everyday existence. Giving should not be something you do once or twice a year — at Christmas or at birthdays — but something that you are doing all the time. Thus there is a constant outflow to counterbalance the constant process of taking in that we do only too easily and readily.

The second thing that can be given — this may come as a surprise to some of you — is not material but psychological. It is called 'the gift of fearlessness'. As one goes about one finds that so many people are very, very worried and anxious: they appear strained and tense; they seem to have something on their mind all the time; they do not seem at ease or at peace; they do not seem happy. The Bodhisattva has to deal with this. He has to try to give people strength, encouragement, and freedom from fear by his very presence, by his personal inspiration. There is in Buddhist art a very famous representation of the Buddha (as well as of various Bodhisattvas) in what is called 'the *abhaya mudrā'*. The *abhaya mudrā* means the *mudrā*, the hand-sign, of fearlessness. The Buddha, by this *mudrā*, is saying, "Fear not. Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid, because essentially there is nothing to fear."

We can go so far as to say that fear is the great modern disease. It is not appendicitis, nor even cancer, nor even heart disease that most of the time kills us' prematurely: it is simply fear. I remember in this connection a very interesting little episode which was told me by a friend of mine in Kalimpong. He was a well known Russian Tibetologist. He happened to pay a visit to the United States of America. When he came back he told me that he had had a very interesting experience there. Apparently he was just disembarking when he paused and thought, "That is strange. That is very odd. There is a peculiar atmosphere here, like a fog — something clinging, something clammy. What on earth can it be?" He was a very sensitive person. He thought, "It isn't anything physical — it isn't coming from factory chimneys or the exhaust pipes of cars — so what is this grey, heavy, clinging atmosphere?" Then, he said, it suddenly struck

him that this was fear. He realized that this was fear exuding, as it were, from the people of that vast continent; they were all living in fear.

We have the expression 'to smell fear'. You can quite literally smell fear. If someone is afraid, you can smell it: a dog can smell it, and, very often, if their senses are sufficiently acute, a human being can smell it too. So when you have a whole nation living under the influence of fear, the whole psychic atmosphere is, as it were, poisoned. The fear becomes tangible, becomes perceptible, becomes like a great oppressive cloud over the land. In the midst of this cloud of fear — this darkness at noonday — people are living, working and all the time trying to breathe. This fear is like a dark pall, in Wordsworth's phrase, hanging over our spirits.[8] In modern life there is something more than just the threat of the atom or hydrogen bomb hanging over us: there is the fact that people seem unable to trust one another, have no confidence in one another, have no confidence in life itself. People are all the time shrinking as though they are about to receive a blow; they are all the time overpowered by fear.

Those who practise meditation will know that in meditation from time to time an experience of fear comes up very powerfully. At first it may be a fear coming from your childhood — or even earlier — but a stage may come, for some people at least, when a basic, primordial fear comes up. This is a terrible fear, but not a fear of anything in particular. It is an existential fear, a fear which goes right down to the bottom of one's being, right down to the roots of existence. It is a fear which one has to face and overcome.

The Bodhisattva, by his very presence, by his very example — by showing the example of a person who has himself conquered fear, transcended fear — gives freedom from fear. Thus the Bodhisattva gives fearlessness in the world of beings who are overcome by fear.

Thirdly, the Bodhisattva gives education and culture. We find that wherever Buddhism went in Asia, it was a carrier of culture — that is art, science, and knowledge of all kinds — not just a carrier of religious teachings and practices. The Bodhisattva spreads secular knowledge also, because through the arts and the sciences the mind and the heart — the intelligence and the emotions — are refined and become more closely attuned to spiritual things. This gift of knowledge, this gift of culture, this gift of education (even in the ordinary sense) is therefore, we find, one of the things which the Bodhisattva is to give.

Fourthly, the Bodhisattva may, upon occasions, give his life and limbs. This particular form of giving is the subject of many a *Jātaka* story (the *Jātaka* stories are stories about Gautama the Buddha's previous lives). Some of these stories will strike the Western mind, especially the modern Western mind, as rather lurid, not to say melodramatic. For instance, there is the story of the Bodhisattva giving away his wife and children.[9] Sometimes people get all het up about this and say, "Were the wife and the children the property of the Bodhisattva that he should give them away just like so many goods and chattels?" Some people get very excited over this, but the story is not to be taken this way. The story just illustrates how the Bodhisattva should give up, should renounce, even those things which are naturally nearest and dearest to him.

Nothing being dearer than one's own life and limbs, there are stories in the *Jātakas* of how the Bodhisattva, or the Buddha-to-be, gave them away too. There is a very lurid story of how the Bodhisattva on one occasion sacrificed his body to a starving tigress so that she could feed her cubs.[10] If you take that literally it raises all sorts of questions and problems (we won't go into them now). Perhaps a modern equivalent of this particular gift is donating one's blood (though perhaps we shouldn't go into that either). I understand there is quite a bit of controversy concerning the magnetism of different kinds of blood and whether,

therefore, from an occult point of view, donating blood is desirable.

One thing that we should not ever forget in this connection is that if we take the Bodhisattva Ideal seriously, if we take Buddhism seriously, if we take spiritual principles seriously, we may be required, under certain circumstances, to sacrifice our life for those principles and ideals.

Here in this country we have it, in many ways, very, very easy. One of the great blessings we enjoy in this country is comparative religious freedom: in fact, almost complete religious freedom. Here we are free to profess and to practise Buddhism. If we want to be a Buddhist, there is nobody and no law that can stop us. We can study Buddhism, meditate, practise *dāna*, perform a Puja; we can do whatever we like. We are very fortunate that this should be so. It isn't so in all parts of the world. If you were to live, for instance, in a communist country — China, or Czechoslovakia, or Tibet — you would find it very, very difficult to practise Buddhism. Not just to single out the communist countries, you cannot be a Buddhist in a Muslim country. I have some friends who tried to follow Buddhism in Persia, which is a predominantly Muslim country, but it was just not possible. They were not preaching or propagating Buddhism, but as soon as it was known that they were Buddhists, they were stoned. In the end they had to leave. Not to speak of the Muslim countries, what about the Roman Catholic countries? It is very difficult to be a Buddhist in some of those countries. It is very difficult to send Buddhist literature into some Roman Catholic countries. I remember a friend of my own, a French woman, who crossed over from France to Spain a few years ago. When she passed through customs with a load of Buddhist literature — which she was studying — in her luggage, she was told: "Such literature is not allowed in our country." As far as I know, there has been no public lecture on Buddhism ever given in Catholic Spain. In fact, not to speak of an oriental religion like Buddhism, there you cannot openly preach Protestantism![11]

So we should perhaps recognize how fortunate we are in this country in being able to enjoy complete religious freedom and toleration; but also we should recollect that in this modern world, under some regimes, it might not be so easy for us, and we might have to be prepared even to sacrifice our lives for the sake of our principles and ideals. We have to ask ourselves the question: "Would I be prepared to sacrifice my life?" It is easy enough to come along to a lecture like this; but suppose you had to do it at night, in fear of being found out, with an eye open for the police or the informer. Would you come then? If, perhaps, you meditated in peril of your life, or read a book on Buddhism in peril of your life, or stood up and spoke on Buddhism in peril of your life, would you do any of these things? Or would you not perhaps be amongst the majority who thought, "Well, I'll be a Buddhist in my next life; it is too difficult in this one."

If we are to take the Bodhisattva Ideal seriously, if we are to think seriously in terms of *dāna*, then we have to be prepared for the giving, if necessary, even of our own life and limbs for the sake of the principles and ideals which we hold dear and in which we believe. This does not mean that we should throw away our life in a foolhardy, showy, and reckless manner, but we must ask ourselves whether, if the sacrifice was really necessary, we would be prepared to make it.

Then, next, there is the giving of merit.[12] The idea of merit is that if you do a good deed you get a certain amount of merit 'chalked up' to your credit; the more good deeds you do, the more merit you accumulate. The idea of merit is very prominent in the Hinayana. It is a good idea in a way, because it encourages people to perform good deeds. But there is another side to it: it tends to foster individualism. You think of the spiritual life in terms of accumulating enormous amounts of merit which are your personal property — *your* merit. In my *Survey of Buddhism* I have quoted the example of the Jain mendicant who performed austerities for years on end until he had a very large number of units of merit chalked up to his account. Eventually he got the idea that he didn't want to be a mendicant any more; he wanted to return to the lay

life and set up a business. So what did he do? There was another mendicant who hadn't got so much merit but had got some money. So the first mendicant sold his merit to the second one and with the proceeds set himself up in business — and lived happily ever after![13] This then is what happens when you take this idea of merit very literally, not to say literalistically.

Then the Mahayana came along. The Mahayana said, as it were, "We can't have this because this is individualism. But at the same time, people are very attached to this idea of merit: they believe in merit; they think they have got merit by performing these good actions. All right, we shall ask them to give up their merit, share their merit, transfer their merit." In this way the Mahayana counteracted the rather rigorous individualism of the previous approach.

If we want to consider it in non-traditional, non-technical, even non-Buddhist terms, we can say that this idea of giving up merit means that one should not hang on to one's virtues; one should not say to oneself, as it were, "What a nice little virtue I have got! It's mine!" If you have this attitude, you treat your virtue like the child that you've produced: you're proud of it; you're complacent; you stroke its head; it's your little pet virtue and it isn't anybody else's. The Mahayana, as I say, discourages this sort of approach and says, "Give it up! Share it! Spread it around a bit!" Francis Bacon said, 'Money is like muck — the better for being spread.'[14] One may say the same about merit: merit also is like muck — the better for being spread around among a number of people.

Lastly we come to Dharma *dāna*, the gift of the Dharma, the gift of the truth, the gift of the teaching. This is said to be the highest of all gifts. You can give a person material things, give them psychological security, give them education and culture, even sacrifice your life and your limbs, even share your precious merits, but the greatest of all gifts is the sharing of the truth that you have understood — perhaps after much toil, pain, and difficulty. This Dharma *dāna*, this giving of the gift of the teaching, by word, by precept, or by example, is traditionally the special duty of the monks, of the lamas, of the masters, and so on. But it is at the same time emphasized that all can participate in this great responsibility. In fact, one cannot help it. One is, in fact, giving all the time: you are giving out something all the time; something is radiating from you all the time. If you have imbibed anything of Buddhism, then inevitably — whether you like it or not — you must give out Buddhism ina your commerce with other people. This does not mean that on every possible — or impossible — occasion you just drag in the word 'Buddhism' and become a Buddhist bore. It does not mean that you should become like the ardent Roman Catholic in one of G. K. Chesterton's stories, who, whatever topic of conversation was started, would bring it round to the Roman Catholic Church. One day in a pub he met a man who was very fond of fishing, so said to him, "Oh, fishing? I'm interested in fishing too. There was a very famous fisherman once. His name was Saint Peter ... " In this way he got on to the Pope and the Catholic Church. This is not what is meant. In the course of a conversation what you have taken in of Buddhism should express itself naturally, without necessarily being labelled as Buddhism.

So much then for 'what can be given'. This is the most important heading of the four. Let me just summarize, by way of a list, the six things which can be given: (1) material things; (2) fearlessness; (3) education and culture; (4) one's life and limbs; (5) one's merit; (6) the Dharma.

Thirdly how should one give? There is no need to spend much time over this; it is very simple. First of all, we are told, one should give courteously. I am afraid that in the East, where beggars are concerned, people sometimes sin against this precept. They perhaps see a beggar begging in the street — maybe he is just squatting at the roadside — and they fling him a coin rather contemptuously. Buddhism, however, says that when one gives, to whomsoever, whether it is to a beggar or even to an animal, one should give courteously. And then, one should give happily — with a smiling face. This is of psychological importance.

What is the use of giving something if you give it with a frown? It undoes half the effect. And then, one should give quickly, without delay. This is especially important in the East where sometimes a person's life depends upon somebody else's prompt generosity. Then, do not give as though you are unwilling to give, as though you are being forced into it. Then, give without subsequent regret. Having given, feel happy that you have given; don't think, "I suppose I had to. It would have been better if I had not. What a pity I did."

And then, we are told, give without talking about it to other people — don't say anything. I remember once I was attending a meeting in South India. Before the meeting someone had sent along a very, very small sum of money — about fourpence — as a contribution. Then in the middle of the meeting he got up and in a loud voice asked the organizer, "Did you receive my donation?" This is the sort of thing which does happen. So one should give without drawing attention to one's generosity. Then, the Mahayana sutras say, give to friend and to foe: if your enemy comes along and is in need of help, give to him as much as to your friend. And then, give to good and bad: don't discriminate between the so-called good person and the so-called evil-doer. And further, we are told one should give everywhere and at all times, but observing due proportion (discriminating and giving to people according to their real needs, not according to their apparent wants).

Now fourthly and lastly, there is the question of why *dāna* should be given. This introduces the very important question of motive. Some people give — sometimes give on a grand scale — for the sake of reputation. I am sorry to say that this is very common in India: big business people, millionaires, multimillionaires, subscribe large sums of money for hospitals and dispensaries, but always say quite openly, quite blatantly in fact, "My name must be there!" — they insist that the hospital or dispensary be named after them. Sometimes they give on the express condition that if they donate so much money, then the building which is erected will be named after them — it is usually a very long name! Other more religious people may give with the idea that after death they will go to heaven, that they are 'laying up treasures in heaven' for themselves. According to Buddhism, this is not a very noble idea. Buddhism does teach that if you lead a virtuous life you will get the reward of it later on, but you should not lead a virtuous life with that as your motive. The Bodhisattva gives simply and solely so that he may be helped by his generous action (helped by the destruction of greed which it brings about) to gain Enlightenment — not just for his own sake but for the sake of all sentient beings.

This brings us now from *dāna* to *dāna pāramitā*, the Perfection of Giving, Transcendental Giving. The word *pāramitā* literally means 'that which conveys to the other shore', in other words, the other shore of Nirvana (the Unconditioned, the Absolute, the Void). Strictly speaking, there is only one *pāramitā* (we do speak of six or ten), which is *prajñā* (Wisdom) *pāramitā*. *Prajñā* is Wisdom in the sense of the direct realization of *śūnyatā*, the Voidness. *Dāna pāramitā* really means the practice of giving conjoined with the experience of *śūnyatā*. For this reason, true *dāna*, *dāna pāramitā*, is often technically referred to as *trimaṇḍalapariśuddha*, which means 'of a threefold circle of purity'. The threefold circle of purity is that in the act of giving there is no idea of self (no idea of *I* am giving), no idea of a recipient (that I am giving *to him or to her*), and no idea of the act of giving (*that I am giving*). This does not mean that there is a state of blankness, stupidity, unconsciousness; there is perfect, clear awareness. The giving is also natural, spontaneous, inexhaustible. It is a giving, one may say, out of the depths of one's own inner experience of Reality, one's own one-ness with the spirit of Compassion in accordance with the needs of sentient beings. So much, then, for *dāna pāramitā*, the Perfection of Giving, the embodiment of the altruistic aspect of the Bodhisattva's life and work.

Now we come to *śīla*, the second *pāramitā*, which embodies the more individualistic, more self-regarding aspect of the Bodhisattva's life. This, we may say, corresponds to the aspect of self-purification — not

exclusively so, but perhaps predominantly so.

In dealing with *dāna*, we made use of the traditional classification; but in the case of *śīla* I propose to adopt a different procedure. Traditionally, *śīla* is expounded in terms of (i) the 'Five Precepts', (ii) the 'Ten Precepts', which result in a threefold purification of body (through three precepts), speech (through four precepts), and mind (through three precepts), and (iii) also the special 'Sixty-four Precepts' for Bodhisattvas. This is familiar ground, and today I am going to take it all for granted.[15] Today we shall be concentrating on Buddhist ethics as applied to three different spheres of human life, which affect practically everybody: food, work, and marriage.

First, a word on *śīla* in general. A little while ago I rendered *śīla* as 'uprightness'. This is more or less the literal meaning. It is generally rendered — in fact I have myself rendered it in some contexts — as 'morality', but this evening I have deliberately avoided doing this. I've avoided this term morality because I find, especially when I am in conversation with my younger friends, that for many people it has rather unpleasant connotations. The word morality is associated with the traditional, the conventional, not to say the reactionary moral attitudes which many people believe are now outdated and outworn, in other words, those which are based on orthodox Christian doctrines, not to say dogmas.

While we are on the subject, I cannot help observing, as a result of my own study not only of religion in the West but of the general history of the West, that orthodox Christian moral ideas and ideals, which are not necessarily those of the Gospels themselves, have probably done much more harm than good in the West. Amongst other things, they have been responsible for generating in millions of people feelings — in some cases very, very strong feelings indeed — of sinfulness and guilt. Such feelings have, I am sure, ruined the lives of countless thousands, even countless millions, of human beings in the West. I think it is only fair to observe that especially in the sphere of sexual ethics the influence of orthodox Church Christianity has been disastrous.

I emphasize this because all of us, having been born, brought up, and educated in the West, are to some extent influenced by these attitudes and assumptions. It is not a question of accepting or not accepting Christianity; even in the case of those who consciously reject Christianity (atheists, humanists, agnostics, and so on), they are often deeply influenced by Christian ethical assumptions. It is very important that we should try to understand this because if we do not understand it, if we are not aware of these processes at work in our own lives, we shall unconsciously carry Christian attitudes, especially in ethical matters, over into our Buddhist life, with resultant confusion and possibly chaos.

Not so very long ago, at a meeting, I did happen to remark that in my opinion Buddhism could become widespread in England only if there was first a revival of paganism. Everybody at the meeting thought this was a great joke and that I was pulling their leg. But there was just one man who thought I might be serious. So after the meeting he came to me and said, "What did you mean by that remark? What do you mean by paganism?" I said, "I mean by paganism an abandonment of Christian — that is to say, orthodox Church Christian — ethical attitudes; only if one gets rid of these can the way be paved for the introduction and practice of Buddhism on a wider scale."

Now let us come to the application of Buddhist ethics to the three aspects of life already mentioned. Here the treatment will be only suggestive, not exhaustive.

First of all, food. We had some not very long ago, because we all have to eat. In this country we have to eat several times a day; in some countries they eat only once a day, or sometimes once every other day. It is as

well we should be aware that we eat twice a day, or three times a day — some of us I believe eat four times a day, what with little snacks, or at least cups of tea and biscuits, in between meals! Obviously eating, the ingestion of this material we call 'food', occupies a very important place in our lives. I don't know how many thousands of hours per lifetime we spend in this fascinating activity, but it must be rather considerable. Being such an important activity, one to which we devote so much time, energy, and money, one for which we require special provision in our houses in the form of kitchens and utensils and so on, it requires to be brought within the influence of Buddhism: we cannot think to leave it outside, unaffected by our Buddhist ideals.

In this matter of food, there are several principles which can be applied. The most important principle, obviously, is that of non-violence, or, more positively, the principle of reverence for life. This means, in practice, abstention from flesh food; in other words, it means vegetarianism. Some of the Mahayana sutras say that the Bodhisattva can no more think of eating the flesh of living beings than a mother can think of eating the flesh of her child. This is how the Bodhisattva should feel.

In the Western Buddhist Order we do not make strict vegetarianism compulsory, but we certainly do expect that all our Members, and possibly all our Friends too, will make a definite step in the direction of vegetarianism. I know that sometimes at home circumstances may be difficult and it may not be possible to be strictly vegetarian, but at least one can give up certain things, or one can give up on certain days of the week or on certain occasions. After all, no-one is perfectly non-violent; it is comparative, a matter of degree. But in this respect we should certainly be as non-violent as we can, should reverence life as much as possible. We may say that vegetarianism of any degree is a direct application to our lives of the very important principle which animates the Bodhisattva: the principle of Compassion.

Even this, however, is not enough. One should also eat, in justice to oneself, food which is pure and wholesome. By 'pure' I do not mean refined to such an extent that there is no goodness left in it. That is not pure, not naturally pure, at all; that is simply chemically pure.

We should eat only as much as is necessary for maintaining good health. Sometimes we forget that the purpose of eating is just to keep the body going. If one is down to a subsistence level diet, as people often are in the East, one knows this very well; in the West, where we very often have an optimum diet, one does not always know this.

Then again, one should not eat neurotically. I mean by this that one should not eat using food as a substitute satisfaction for some other — usually emotional — need. This is what people do. Lots of people over eat, because they are using food as something to make up for a frustrated emotional need.

Then again, one should eat quietly and peacefully. I think this is very important. In a previous lecture I have referred to that abomination 'the business lunch'. At the business lunch you try to do business while you are at the same time supposed to be eating. I think that this is the height of uncivilization; this is grossly uncivilized conduct. Eating should be quiet and peaceful. Incidentally, to eat in a public restaurant or some sort of coffee bar, somewhere where there is a lot of noise — clatter and rattle, and loud conversation — is, I am sure, not good for any sensitive and mindful person.

Above all you should eat mindfully — with awareness of what you are doing. This is the great Buddhist principle here. You should not eat while trying to read a newspaper, or trying to discuss some business deal, or having an argument with your wife; you should eat mindfully, knowing what you are doing. Sometimes I have been asked whether Buddhists have a grace which can be recited before meals. In Tibet

and Japan, in some of the monasteries, they do have, but the original practice was not like this. Originally there was no grace to be recited by the monks before meals: the monks were simply asked to eat mindfully. To eat mindfully is a religious exercise in itself.

I cannot think of a more beautiful example which combines all these qualities than the Japanese Tea Ceremony. There, just a small group of people — two or three, maybe four people at most — gather together in some quiet corner of a garden in a little rustic hut. They sit around a charcoal stove and listen to the kettle simmering away. Very quietly, very peacefully, with very slow, graceful, delicate, mindful movements, the tea is poured out. It is handed round to the guests. People sip it. They are just there together, engaging in this very ordinary, everyday activity of drinking tea. I shudder to think how sometimes we drink tea in this country — slopping it in our saucers and so on. The Japanese Tea Ceremony does show to what a pitch of perfection, even these ordinary, everyday activities of ours can be raised if only we apply mindfulness. After all, you could eat your cornflakes mindfully ... I was going to add, "And you can eat your steak and onions mindfully!" I might risk a paradox here and say that it is better to eat your steak and onions mindfully than your nut cutlets unmindfully. I don't know. What you lose on the swings you seem to gain on the roundabouts. I think, though, that everybody can understand the principle involved: even eating, this quite ordinary activity, can be made into a sort of art, can be made even into a *do* ('way') in the Japanese sense of the term. I think I could say that if someone ate every day mindfully, drank tea every day mindfully, and could live eating and drinking mindfully year after year, then after a few years it might well be that they would have gained as much as other people might have gained from a sustained practice even of meditation.

Secondly, the Buddhist attitude towards work. I must begin by saying that in the West we have all got the wrong idea about work. To begin with, we think — and sometimes say — that everybody should work. We mean by this that everybody should work for money. We think and say that it is wrong not to work, that it is sinful not to work — not to be 'gainfully employed' as the phrase is. This attitude is undoubtedly a legacy from Protestantism (you can look up that very famous classic *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* by Tawney,[16] and find it all detailed there.) Most of us find that if we take a few days off and just not do anything, we have a bit of a bad conscience about it, not to say feel guilty about it — as though we *ought not* to have a few days off, *ought not* to be enjoying ourselves, *ought not* to be just not doing anything. Some people, because of the way they have been brought up and conditioned, cannot spend a few extra hours in bed in the morning without feeling horribly guilty about it. Sometimes, if we see people sitting down and not doing anything, we feel fidgety and uncomfortable: we want to get them moving and doing something, because it is almost a standing menace to us if they are sitting there quietly like that while we are getting on with it.

This attitude is not new; you find it in the Gospels in the story of Martha and Mary. Martha was bustling around getting everything ready; Mary was just sitting at the feet of Christ listening — actually listening — when there was food to be prepared and served, and washing up to be done! Christ, you may remember, said that Mary had the better part, or, more colloquially, she had the best of the bargain, while Martha had only the second best. In the West we tend to be very much Marthas rather than Marys. In fact, this feeling that we have to be doing something is, in the West, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries, including, of course, the United States of America, a sort of disease.

I remember when I lived in Kalimpong a very worthy French woman who had become a Buddhist nun, who stayed in Kalimpong for some time. She was a tremendous activist; she was always doing things. She had her cell in spic-and-span condition; she was always washing, and scrubbing, and wringing out, and rinsing, and putting out to dry, and taking in to scrub again; she was feeding cats and feeding dogs; she was

whitewashing things; she was climbing up ladders; she was carrying big buckets of water; she was studying Sanskrit, and consulting her Pali dictionary, and reading Tibetan; she was going to the bazaar: *she* was doing, morning, noon and night. One day she came to me for advice about her spiritual state! So I said, "My dear Anila," ('Anila' is how one addresses nuns; in Tibetan it means 'auntie') "there is one thing you must learn." She said, "Oh, what is that?" She was all agog to learn it! So I said, "You must learn to waste time." Her face fell. In fact it went scarlet — I am not sure whether with rage or indignation. And without another word she turned and went away. But she did come again, and I referred to this. I said, "Seriously, you must learn to waste time. Even though you have become a nun you have got a compulsive urge to work. Just look at these Indians and Tibetans. They sit around; they don't do anything all day. Look how wonderful it is!" When I said that she almost spat with contempt. Nevertheless there was a very great deal of truth, I am sure, in my advice.

Unfortunately in the West we only too often look down on those who don't or won't work. We call them by all sorts of rude names: 'social parasites', 'layabouts', and so on. We don't consider them at all respectable. Incidentally, it did occur to me while I was thinking over this lecture that the Buddha himself, so far as we know, never did a single day's work in his life. He was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family. He had lots of servants. He never did any work at home — not a stroke! According to the best accounts, he spent most of his time in three palaces with singing girls, dancing girls, and musical instruments. This is what the scriptures tell us. Then, after he left home, after he went out as a mendicant, he lived off other people: other people gave him food and clothing — he never did anything for those things. He preached of course, but he would have preached anyway, just as the sun shines anyway. He never did any work in the sense of working for money. So this is perhaps something to consider, that the Buddha, the Enlightened One, never did a single honest day's work in his life.

I have been speaking of work in the sense of employment; but there is such a thing as creative work. Creative work, we may say, is a psychological necessity. We do need to create; we do need to produce. It may only be in the form of cooking, or may only be in the form — I say 'only' but it is in fact a very important activity — of bringing up children. It may be in the form of writing or painting. It may be some constructive social venture. Whatever the particular activity, we do need to create: this is a human need. *But* satisfying the need to create need not be linked with employment.

If one thinks for just one moment of the ideal society, no-one should have to work for wages. I think that the ideal state of affairs would be one in which one gives to the community whatever one can in the way of one's labour, one's productivity, one's creativity, and the community gives to each person whatever he or she needs for his or her own life — not only needs materially but also needs psychologically and spiritually.

However, the day when that will happen is, I think, quite a long way off and meanwhile we do have to be gainfully employed in the ordinary sense. So here we have to apply the principle of Right Livelihood. I have often spoken about this so I am not going say very much about it on this occasion.[17] In brief, Right Livelihood means that through one's means of livelihood there should be no exploitation of others and no degredation of oneself. If one does have to engage for any reason in work which is non-creative, mechanical, repetitive, then try to work part-time; with regard to this sort of work, the principle to be applied is 'do as little of it as possible', i.e. as little as is compatible with one's existence economically in the world. In any case, however one is employed, there should always be time for meditation, for study, for contact with friends and other positive and creative things.

Thirdly and lastly, we come to the topic of marriage, which is another of those aspects of life affecting practically everybody in one way or another, formally or informally. The Buddhist conception of marriage is

very different from the traditional Western one, is very different, in other words, from the traditional Christian one. On this subject we really require a whole lecture, but this evening there is only time for a few salient points.

Traditionally in Buddhism, marriage is not regarded as a religious sacrament; in other words, God does not come into it. At the same time, it is not regarded as a legally binding and legally enforcible contract: marriage should not be something that you go to law about in order to coerce somebody — the married partner — into doing something or not doing something that you want them to do or do not want them to do.

According to Buddhist tradition, marriage is primarily simply a human relationship: a human relationship which is recognized by society (in the form of one's family and one's friends). You may be interested to hear that in the Buddhist countries of the East, whether it is Tibet, or Burma, or Ceylon, or Japan, there is no such thing as a wedding ceremony in the Western sense. We have become so used to thinking of the wedding ceremony — the wedding dress, the orange blossom, the church bells ringing — as something so essential, you may wonder how on earth Buddhists in the East get along without it. But in the Buddhist East one just does not have that sort of thing. If one has anything at all after the couple concerned have come together, one has a feast, which they give to their friends and relations, and an announcement: they call everybody together and say, on that occasion, after feasting them, "We are living together. We are man and wife." In this way it becomes known to everybody — then that is that!

Sometimes the feast is given after several years. I remember a quite amusing case between a Sikkimese friend of mine and his wife, who did not give their feast until they had been together for twenty years. They were not regarded, however, as living in sin in the interval. In the Buddhist East, living together and being married are regarded as the same thing. There is a little story I sometimes tell to illustrate this. A visitor came to Kalimpong and wanted to have a conversation with a certain friend of mine who didn't understand English, so I had to go along and act as interpreter. In the course of the conversation, the visitor wanted to put across to this Tibetan friend a remark about a certain couple whom he knew, to the effect that they were living together but weren't married. I translated this very carefully for the benefit of the Tibetan, but he looked puzzled and said, "But if they are living together, they are married!" This is the Buddhist view, that marriage consists in living together; it does not consist in the legal contract, nor in the social convention, nor even in the feast and the announcement. For Buddhism, the marriage is primarily the human relationship itself.

Now after the feast you may, if you like, go along to the monks at the temple or monastery and ask for a blessing, but this is not a wedding ceremony. The monks bless something that has already happened — the relationship; they do not make or create the relationship. The monks simply recognize the relationship and give their blessing that the couple concerned may live together happily in accordance with the spirit of the Buddha's teaching, helping each other to practise it.

With that background, it is only inevitable that in Buddhism divorce (by mutual consent) should be recognized. In all Buddhist countries, from ancient times, there has never been any difficulty about dissolving a marriage, if the persons concerned wish it.

Also one finds that in most of the Buddhist countries the wife after marriage retains her own name. We think we are comparatively emancipated in this country, but in this country if Miss Brown marries Mr Smith, she becomes Mrs Smith, whereas in the Buddhist countries of the East, the woman after marriage

retains and uses her own name — she doesn't just duplicate her husband's name.

One must also say that in the Buddhist countries of the East there is no one pattern of marriage relationship. This is perhaps rather surprising to us. Buddhism nowhere says that monogamy is the only possible form of marriage. It says that monogamy is possible, polygamy is possible, polyandry is possible. You will find all these institutions in most Buddhist countries. For instance, in practically all Buddhist countries you find polygamy recognized; in Tibet, in the old days, you found polyandry also recognized and accepted as a perfectly respectable form of marriage. It is not correct to say that in Buddhism monogamy is the norm and is good, but polygamy or polyandry is sinful. On the contrary, these are alternative patterns, and whether you follow this or that pattern depends on your social tradition, on you yourself and on the people with whom you are involved. One cannot label one way of living together as 'good', the other as 'bad': these are relative. What is important for Buddhism, what Buddhism pays attention to, is not the particular set-up, but the quality of the human relationship(s).

Now all this may sound very strange, even very revolutionary, to some people who have not really got into the spirit of Buddhism, and who are still, as I said earlier, carrying over into Buddhism Western, especially Christian, ethical assumptions. But we must understand that these ideas have been common in the Buddhist countries of the East for centuries past. For instance this way of looking at marriage: we think it is quite revolutionary if a woman continues to use her own name after marriage, but this has been the common thing in all Buddhist countries for centuries. So perhaps even in ordinary social matters like these, Buddhists in the ancient Buddhist East were more enlightened (in the common sense of the term) than even many people are in the West nowadays.

So much then for *śīla*, or uprightness, which represents the predominantly self-regarding aspect of the Bodhisattva's life. We must not forget however that it is *śīla pāramitā — śīla* as a Perfection, as a Transcendental Virtue, as conjoined with Wisdom — with which we are concerned. Uprightness, even the greatest uprightness, is not in Buddhism an end in itself, but a means to Enlightenment. If uprightness is regarded as an end in itself, then it becomes, according to Buddhism, a hindrance. *Dāna*, giving, too, if regarded as an end in itself, becomes a hindrance. *Dāna* as an end in itself is what we call humanitarianism or secular philanthropy: it is good, but isn't good enough -- it doesn't go far enough. *Śīla* as an end in itself corresponds to morality or ethics: sometimes morality is a good thing, but only too often it is harmful. The Bodhisattva practises *dāna* and *śīla* as means to Enlightenment. He practises them, that is to say, as Perfections. In this way, he fulfils the altruistic and the individualistic aspects of the spiritual life.

Seminar Extracts

1 Good is Beautiful

from *Dhammapada*, Ch. 9 Men's Order/Mitra Weekend, Padmaloka, March 1983

> *Verse 116. Be quick to do what is morally beautiful; restrain the mind from evil; he who is sluggish in doing good, his mind delights in evil*.[18]

Sangharakshita: Perhaps I should explain that the translation which we are using here is my own. I translated these two sections [on evil and on the self] from Pali some time ago. In a way that is important, because I have translated the first sentence of the first verse a little differently from the way in which it is usually translated, though at the same time not in any way eccentrically; I have translated it completely literally, which, for some reason, other translators have not done, as far as I know. I have translated it as '*Be quick to do what is morally beautiful'*. The word that I have translated as beautiful is simply *kalyāṇa* in the original. An even more literal translation would be 'Be quick in the beautiful'; that is the Pali idiom, but the meaning is to be quick in the doing of the beautiful, that is, that which is morally beautiful. This word *kalyāṇa* is really quite important. We get it again in that well-known phrase Kalyana Mitrata. In that context we usually translate it as spiritual; we speak of spiritual friendship. Perhaps 'beautiful friendship' or 'lovely friendship' would be even more accurate, more literal. So we could even translate here: 'Be quick to do what is lovely' — that is, that which is lovely in the moral sense.

What do you think is the significance of bringing out the fact that what is usually spoken of as the good is, in a sense, the beautiful? It means not so much the beautiful in the purely aesthetic or artistic sense, but the beautiful in the sense of morally beautiful. What is the significance of using this sort of term in an ethical context?

Chris Pegrum: If you use the word good, it demands some sort of judgement as to what is good and what is bad; whereas, if you say beautiful, I think most people appreciate and respond to beauty.

S.: I think the main point is that ethics is not a question of 'do's and don'ts'. Ethics is basically a question of being attracted towards an ideal, if you like, which is actually appealing. Of course, it assumes that you have some sensitivity to what is *kalyāṇa*, what is beautiful, or what is lovely or what is good, in the sense that you are capable of being affected by it and responding to it. If someone has no sense of what is morally beautiful or ethically lovely, he has to be restrained perhaps by do's and don'ts. But if one can simply feel the beauty of the ethical ideal, that is obviously a much better way of going about things.

But is this usually the way in which we think about an ethical ideal, or about anything of an ethical nature — that it is beautiful?

Vairocana: Most people don't.

S.: Most people don't. But there is also another question: What exactly do we mean by the morally beautiful?

Abhaya: I thought Ratnavira brought it up last night in the ideal of [Michelangelo's] *David*, the image; of summing up all those virtues as expressed by that figure. I know that was an aesthetically beautiful thing, but it also brought home the moral beauty of someone following an ideal ...

S.: But the question still arises: What exactly do we mean by moral beauty? In a sense, it raises even the question: What do we mean by beauty? Presumably an important element is that of attractiveness; we feel naturally attracted. The beautiful appeals to us; the morally beautiful appeals to what we can only call our ethical sense -- an action that seems to be a fine one, a noble one, a lovely one, a beautiful one. Think of some well-known ethical act — one could go back to ancient Greece and think of the voluntary death of Socrates for the sake of standing by the principles that he believed in,[19] as something ethically beautiful. But what exactly makes it ethically beautiful? Why does it impress us in that way? Why do we feel a quasi-aesthetic feeling when we read about the death of Socrates? What makes us say it was a morally beautiful death?

Chris Pegrum: It is quite moving to read.

S.: It is moving to read, yes; but it also seems fitting, it seems appropriate. And that fittingness and appropriateness have what one might even call elegance. Mathematicians sometimes talk about an elegant mathematical demonstration, because in that demonstration there is an element that appeals to the aesthetic sense; it doesn't appeal only to the sense of truth. In the same way, here, the morally beautiful action appeals not just to the moral sense but also to the aesthetic sense. It seems somehow elegant, fit, appropriate.

Chris Pegrum: It's as if there is some intuitive understanding ...

S.: There is something in human nature which derives deep satisfaction from contemplating the good, a satisfaction that is almost aesthetic in nature. It gives you the sort of satisfaction that you get from great art. It is as though a great ethical action has an artistic value. It is so appropriate, so fitting. But the Buddha in the verse says, '*Be quick to do what is morally beautiful*.' What does that suggest?

Abhaya: It suggests that the tendency to do the morally *un*beautiful is predominant.

S.: Not only that, but even if there is a tendency to do what is morally beautiful we don't do it — or tend not to do it — very quickly. It is as though you are attracted by the morally beautiful, inspired by the ethical ideal — that response is [indeed] there — but if you don't act upon it at once it dies away. Sometimes we have noble, ethical impulses. We may, for instance, have an impulse of generosity. But unless we act upon it immediately we may have second thoughts and decide that it is not such a good idea, after all, to be as generous as all that. We may reduce the scale of the generosity, or do something else of that kind. Very often our immediate response [to a situation] is of a quite noble, strongly ethical, nature; but unfortunately, we allow those second thoughts to come in and give them undue weight.

Abhaya: There is the famous example of the person who has the strong impulse at the end of the Metta Bhavana to buy someone a book, and goes to the bookshop, takes the book off the shelf and starts reading it, and keeps it himself. (*Laughter*.)

S.: What often happens with money is that someone may be in need of money and asks for help. Your immediate impulse is to give them ten pounds, but if you don't give it on the spot, after a while you start thinking, "Maybe they could manage with five." And then, if a further period elapses, you think, "Maybe they don't need it really all that much, but anyway I'd better give something," so you give two. That is what happens. You perceive the moral beauty of the ethical action when it appears before you; you quickly respond to it, but you do not act upon that response. And if you don't act, sometimes that has fatal

consequences. So you must be quick to do what you perceive as being the morally beautiful thing to do, otherwise it gives an opportunity for all sorts of other forces and factors to arise and eventually to prevent your carrying out your original intention.

2 No Morality, No Society

from *Vasala Sutta* (*Woven Cadences of the Early Buddhists*), Men's Order/Mitra Seminar, Glasgow, June 1982

Sangharakshita: The point [has been] made that many of these verses are concerned with breach of human relations, breach of trust, breach within society, breach within the family. The outcast man, the *vasala*, the truly despicable person, is seen as the person who is guilty of that sort of breach. I suggested that he might be called the individualist. This connected up for me with some of the subjects with which I was concerned in India. They are much in my mind because I have been editing the transcripts of some of my Indian lectures.

One lecture which I gave in Pune dealt with *'Śīla*, the Basis of the New Society'. I quoted a saying of Dr Ambedkar — the leader of the ex-Untouchables,[20] under whose guidance they became Buddhists — to the effect that religion, in the sense of morality, is the sanction of society, that society cannot exist without morality. He says that force is not enough to hold society together. Society can be held together only by morality. You can employ, according to him, a certain amount of violence within society, to keep in order those people who are not kept in order by morality, who do not accept the sanction of morality; but the majority of people in a society, in a state, have to accept the sanction of morality. You cannot keep all the people in society or in a state in order simply by force. The majority have to accept the sanction of morality. Therefore, without morality, there is in fact no social life, no society, no human community. This is why, according to him, Buddhism was so necessary. You couldn't just exist without a religion. Having given up Hinduism you have to adopt another religion, and he chose to adopt Buddhism. Because, without religion, at least in the sense of morality, there would not even be any social life.

Developing that along the lines we have just been following one might say that a breach of morality is a breach of society itself. That is taking society in a more ideal sense, a more normative sense: society in the sense of the positive group. So morality is not just a question of your personal morality. It is not just a question of yourself personally; avoiding unskilful action for your own personal sake. There is this social other-regarding, positive-group-oriented aspect of morality; inasmuch as if you are guilty of a breach of morality in the sense that we have been discussing it, a breach of *śīla*, not only does that have a harmful effect upon you personally, but it constitutes a breach in the fabric of society itself. So morality is doubly important. It is important for you as an ethical individual — an individual who is trying to grow and develop — and it is important also for society as a whole. This aspect of morality comes forward rather prominently in the verses that we have been considering: that if you are an outcast, a vasala, the actions that you perform not only result in your personal degradation but also bring about some weakening of the fabric of society itself, inasmuch as they weaken the feelings of trust and confidence between the members of that society, or some of them.

Dharmapriya: I've always understood the 'other-regarding' aspect as a care or love for, or interest in, other individuals as individuals, but you're also suggesting, it seems to me, that it's a care for others as *group* members.

S.: Not just that, but a care for those positive structures in society which help to sustain the individual and even help the individual to be an individual, or which at least do not make it more difficult for him to be an individual. For instance, if you're concerned with children, you're concerned not only with children as individuals but with the educational structures within which they will receive their education. You have to ensure that those structures are as positive and helpful as possible. It is not sufficient to care about the needs of the individual child independently of the structures within which the child will be brought up. You need to care about the nature of those structures as structures.

Darren DeWitt: It's getting to be a much broader picture.

3 The Healthy Pagan Uncovered?

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

Abhaya: You have said that Buddhism could become widespread in England only if there was first of all a revival of paganism. And you defined paganism there as an abandonment of Christian, that is to say orthodox, Church, ethical attitudes.

Sangharakshita: Yes, though that is putting it only in negative terms, and that by itself is not enough. I meant in this connection not paganism in any specific sort of cultic sense — I wasn't thinking of say Classical paganism or Teutonic paganism — but something more like unspoiled human nature or healthy, happy human nature undeformed by traditional orthodox Christian ethical concepts. Do you see what I mean? I meant something more than simply the absence of Christian ethical standards. I wasn't implying of course the complete absence of ethical standards but in a way a more natural ethical standard, one which was actually closer to the realities of human life and human experience.

Abhaya: Do you think a pagan attitude is developing in our Western post-Christian culture?

S.: No, I don't. I think some people would like to think that. I think we're being deformed in other ways — perhaps even worse ways in some respects. It would be nice to think that as people freed themselves from traditional Christian ethical attitudes, or at least those ethical attitudes that were having a negative influence on them (I'm not prepared to say that they were all bad or wrong), their natural, straightforward humanity just blossomed. But that just isn't happening. All sorts of new factors have arisen. There is the whole question of nuclear war that confronts us. That in itself has changed the whole ethical situation dramatically.

Devamitra: Could you explain in what way?

S.: I think the mere fact that nuclear weapons exist means that there's been a failure of ethics on a very great scale somewhere, with regard to some people. The very fact that corrinunities could produce those weapons with their quite terrible potential, that people would even think of using them, surely represents a tremendous ethical failure. Some of the things that one reads in this connection are really quite horrifying. People are quite cold-bloodedly doing calculations as to whether it would be necessary in certain circumstances to kill 150 million people or only 100 million.

It would be naive to suppose that the abolition of Christianity would leave you with a pure, clean, sweet-smelling humanity — no, unfortunately not, because there are many negative things in the modern world

apart from poor old Christianity, now on its last legs. So the decline of Christian ethical standards doesn't necessarily mean that we automatically have superior ethical standards in their place.

It could be argued — just for the sake of argument — that events have shown that the Roman Catholic Church was quite right in trying to shut up scientists like Galileo. After all, look what science has led to! We might have the Inquisition but what is that compared to the possibility of nuclear holocaust?

Phil Shann: I wonder whether there is actually a happy, healthy human state outside the spiritual life, whether there is actually a distinction between the two ...

S.: Well, in a way, the happy, healthy human individual is a figment of one's imagination, because one doesn't actually encounter anybody who has not been conditioned in some way, positively or negatively, by the country in which they were brought up.

In the eighteenth century they were fond of speculating what would happen if you put a child on a desert island and let him grow up by himself. What sort of a human being would you have? But we can't know, because we can't bring up a child in that way. You'd have to have some contact with him. By the very nature of the experiment you could not succeed. So actually the concept of the happy, healthy human individual who has not been conditioned by any sort of culture is a figment of the imagination, a sort of hypothetical construct which we use for the purpose of communication and exposition and so on. It doesn't actually exist. And I think it can't exist on the psychological level. It can only exist on the spiritual level, as a result of spiritual life and spiritual training and development.

Perhaps you may very occasionally encounter someone who is somewhat like that, someone who has grown up in some remote part of the world or who has grown up under exceptionally positive conditions, but such people are rare.

Prasannasiddhi: Don't we also have to bear in mind that pre-Christian pagans were by no means perfect themselves?

S.: There is that too. One can read really horrible things about the morals of ancient Rome. Pagan culture wasn't all beautiful Greek statues and young men walking around in flowing white garments and things of that sort. There were also some quite dreadful things — slavery, for instance. In certain respects Christianity was an advance on all that.

So again I don't think the mere subsidence of Christianity and the decline — sometimes fortunate — of its ethical values' automatically means that healthily pagan attitudes have taken their place. If anything more deleterious attitudes have, in some cases, taken their place. After all, the Nazis were in a sense pagan. Some of them looked to the old pagan gods. They even revived some pagan festivals. Was that sort of paganism any improvement on Christianity?

Phil Shann: So we shouldn't romanticize pagan culture?

S.: No, I think we shouldn't. There were certain very positive elements in it, elements which were positive at the time and which we can draw on ourselves, but I think it would be a great mistake to paint a glowing picture of a noble paganism, even of a noble Classical paganism contrasted with a very dark picture of, say, medieval Christianity. That wouldn't be fair or historically correct. But I sometimes do feel that, on balance,

in many important respects, Classical culture was preferable. But no doubt Classical pagan culture had some very black spots and medieval Christianity had a few bright spots.

Abhaya: And can the FWBO help to bring about some of these healthy former pagan attitudes?

S.: Well, if one means by that can the FWBO help in resolving whatever in our Christian ethical conditioning is negative or has had a negative effect on us, the answer is clearly yes. And if the FWBO can help in replacing those relatively negative or unskilful ethical Christian values by ethical values of a more positive nature derived from Buddhism — but which would be practised perhaps even outside the Buddhist circle — then again the answer is clearly yes.

4 A Structure for Living

from 'The Working Basis' (*The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*), Women's Seminar, Padmaloka, May 1982

> *'To have confidence in the foundation of spiritual life' is to believe that the Disciplinary Code (Vinaya) of the Noble Doctrine proclaimed by The Teacher (Buddha) is the foundation of all positive qualities.*
>
> sGam.po.pa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H. V. Guenther, Rider, London 1959, Ch. 2, p. 16

Sangharakshita: What does Vinaya mean here?

Vajrapushpa: Would it be the ethical basis?

S.: Yes, it's the ethical basis. The word *'vinaya'* is usually said to be based on the word *'vinayati'* which means 'to lead away from evil'. It is that discipline and way of life which leads you away from unskilful mental states.

But this raises the whole question of discipline. Is discipline helpful? And what is discipline, anyway?

Rosie Ong: Isn't it more like 'training'?

S.: Yes. But what does the training consist of?

Marion Monas: Following the Precepts.

S.: Yes.

Debbie Seamer: Directing one's energies.

S.: It's not just seeing the need to direct your energies and doing it. It's directing your energies with the help of a regular disciplined systematic way of life.

Vajrasuri: A framework.

S.: Yes. It's helpful to have a framework in a community, for example. You all meditate together in the morning at such and such a time; meals are at a certain time; every week you have a house meeting; every week you have a study session. It is your discipline to adhere to this framework even when you don't feel like it. You undertake to adhere to it, because it helps you to acquire skilful habits. It helps you to stay in an overall skilful state. You don't have to rely only on your minute-by-minute inspiration, which might be very weak. This is one of the reasons why we have a spiritual community at all.

Rosie Anderson: It gives you a foundation.

S.: Yes. It is in fact called '*the foundation of spiritual life'* in our text. It's the opposite of sloppiness, the happy-go-lucky, careless, heedless, unmindful attitude. If you say, "It doesn't matter when I meditate. I can meditate anytime", this usually means you don't meditate at all. (*Laughter*.)

Discipline in this sense is an important part of the spiritual life. You build upon this foundation. It's not just a question of *personal* ethics, of trying to observe the Precepts without considering the whole framework of your life. It means adopting a particular kind of life style, or modifying your life style, so that you are being influenced all the time by meditation, study etc. It suggests regularity: regular meditation, regular meals, regular study, and so on.

Not that you need be like this necessarily all the year round. You might live like this most of the time, but maybe once a year you would have a couple of weeks living in a completely unprogrammed way [or go on a solitary retreat where you can follow a 'personal' program]. Perhaps this is important, so that you don't become rigid. But broadly speaking, people who are just beginning to develop spiritually need discipline in this sense.

For some people discipline is a rather nasty word these days. We have to be careful how we use it. Who doesn't like the word 'discipline'?

Annie Fowler: I don't.

S.: What does the word 'discipline' convey to you?

Annie Fowler: Somebody having power over me, making me do something I don't want to do.

S.: Well, clearly that isn't the case in the spiritual community, because you have joined it of your own free will. You are sisters, you discuss things among yourselves. This is the pattern we want to create.

Annie Fowler: I think one has to be very careful to remember that; and not project authority onto other people.

S.: Yes. Sanghadevi is not a 'strict' Order Member in that sense. (*Laughter*.) It's what you yourself have agreed to do [i.e. adhere to the framework].

Annie Fowler: But sometimes it feels as if authority was there. I've felt like that.

S.: Well, you have to ask yourself, "Is this just a subjective feeling? Am I just 'projecting' or is it actually there?"

Jenny Roche: On the mundane level, discipline is very helpful in family life, too. Particularly for the children.

S.: Yes. I think it does help to give them a structure with definite times and so on; unless it's an exceptionally happy, creative family. Sometimes you see families where the mother does not bother about regular meals etc. It seems to work with some families, but I think not with many.

A Voice: I think letting children do what they want is a modern attitude which doesn't work. There is a chaos if kids don't have a structure.

S.: They may not be very happy without one.

A Voice: Children appreciate structure; sometimes they make their own.

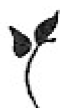
S.: Children's games represent structures created by them.

Dhammadinna: I think the same thing applies in a community. Often people want to live quite freely together, and this can work with a small number of people. You can co-operate easily on how you share the necessary tasks. But once the community has more than four or five people in it, there will have to be agreed principles and a clear structure.

S.: Yes, and everybody has to be responsible. If someone is irresponsible, someone else has either got to do their share for them or remind them that they haven't done it. Often, when someone is reminded in this way, they feel they are being told what to do and others are being heavy with them — when they have themselves simply been irresponsible. I think they must not be allowed to get away with this sort of thing.

Dhammadinna: When Megha and I lived together in a community there was trouble in this area because the others were very young and felt that any kind of structure was an imposition ...

S.: Well, put it this way. People who want to have structures shouldn't live with people who don't. People who don't want structures should live with people who don't want structures. They'll soon learn! (*Laughter*.)



5 Unethical Manners

from *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (*Long Discourses of the Buddha*), FBS Workers' Retreat, Padmaloka, July 1982

Sangharakshita: We don't have, broadly speaking, generally acknowledged figures standing apart from society — though still in contact with it — to whom we can look up and go to in time of need. Sometimes it is said that the psychologists, especially the psychoanalysts, have taken over from the priests; but you can't have the same sort of confidence in them because they're a profession and stand to make something out of it. It does seem a little suspicious that psychoanalysts make quite a strong point of the fact that it actually helps the patient to pay the psychoanalyst!

Ratnaketu: So what then is the essential difference between [somebody who practises] an ordinary profession and a hermit, who is not 'in' the world?

S.: Well, to put it in [Right Livelihood] Co-operative terms, the 'hermit' takes what he needs and gives what he can. [Likewise] the *Śrāṃaṇa* (Pali *Samaṇa*) [in India] take what they need — they just accept food and clothing — and they give what they can, in the way of advice, instruction and help. But the professional person, by contrast, is out to make as much as he can for himself and his family. He doesn't simply take what he needs, he takes what he *wants*, and tries to get as much as he possibly can by exploiting his particular skills. Therefore you have doctors and lawyers becoming millionaires; they don't need all that money, but they've got skills which are in great demand [and so they can make it].

Ratnaketu: You see religious churches becoming multinational, big money organizations.

S.: Yes! But I think this is inevitable when the person concerned has got a family to support. It's through the family, mainly, that you enter into this sort of economic structure. Samuel Johnson — Dr Johnson — said, 'A married man will do anything for money'. (*Laughter*.) Well, he has to! Samuel Johnson knew, because he was a married man himself, don't forget, for twenty years, and he had very great difficulty making both ends meet. I mean, if your children are hungry, what can you do? You might be willing to let *yourself* starve, if you were very strong-minded, but you feel, "How can I let my family starve? I've got to do anything to feed them", even if it means stealing. So 'a married man will do anything for money'. That's putting it pretty strongly, but in a way Johnson was hitting the nail on the head. This is why Bacon says that a married man, with wife and children, has given hostages to fortune — and fortune then has power over you. If it is just yourself you don't have to bother — you think, all right, if it means giving up your life, never mind! But it is not so easy to sacrifice your family; you might feel you've no right to sacrifice *them*.

So I think this is the essential difference: [if you are] a 'hermit', a *śrāṃaṇa*, or a person working in a [Right Livelihood] Co-op you take what you need and give what you can. You give as much as you can. You're not thinking just in terms of taking as much as you can from society for you and your family, through the exploitation of your particular skill [as the professional person does]. So when you see spiritual teachers becoming incorporated into the social structure and the so-called religious profession becoming a career just like any other, you can be sure that corruption has really set in. [After all], it isn't so long ago that the Church was a professional career, along with the Army and the Law. In a respectable upper middle-class family if you had three sons, one went into the Army, one into the Church, and one into the Law — all in the same sort of spirit! ....

This sort of thing happened in the case of Buddhism in India, even by the time of Aśoka.[21] Some of the brahmins, we are told, saw that the bhikshus, the followers of the Buddha, were well-supported and looked after: people respected them and provided them with fine *vihāras* to live in, and plenty of food. So brahmins started becoming bhikshus — joining the Sangha and getting ordained — so that they could participate in this support. The brahmins' own support was beginning to fall off, so they climbed onto the Buddhist bandwagon. I've had people coming to me in India wanting to become my disciple for the same

reasons. [For them] it meant that they joined you, and you taught them the tricks of the trade; then they would support themselves. This is how they saw things.

In other words, it's the ministerial career — a career in the Church. There was a lot of this in Europe during the Middle Ages. Officially, priests weren't married, but ninety per cent of priests — from the Pope downwards — kept concubines, and no one bothered very much about it. And even if they didn't have concubines, they supported their sisters' families and aggrandized their nephews by making them princes and giving them lands. You read of this sort of thing all the way through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period, right down into the present century. For instance two nephews of Pope Pius XII — who lived not all that many years ago — were made princes as a result of his influence. So why should a religious figure want to make his own nephews into princes? He's just aggrandizing his own family.

Anyway, [enough of] that point. I was going to say something about this question of refined and cultivated manners coexisting with the fact that you're the sort of person who disposed of his own father. (*Laughter*.) You see, cultivated manners are all very well, but they are no substitute for ethics. In Buddhism the two tend to go together. Guenther points out that the term *'śīla'* in Buddhism covers not only ethics but also 'good manners' or 'etiquette'. [Of course], it's something if you've got manners; they mustn't be neglected. But ethics are much more important. Buddhism does stress that you should have both if you possibly can! But, very often, people who have long since abandoned ethics retain their good manners. In a way this creates quite an odd situation: they're so polite and courteous, but they may really be complete rogues, or even criminals.

I remember one instance of this that a Tibetan friend of mine told me. He belonged to the highest circles of the Tibetan aristocracy, and I knew him in Kalimpong, [where] he was my next door neighbour, so we became very friendly. He was also quite a staunch Buddhist. He had been in Lhasa during some political disturbances or intrigues and had been thrown into prison for about three weeks. While he was in prison he'd been tortured — not very badly, but badly enough. One of the people from the opposition party, so to speak, had been there in the dungeon, supervising the torture. [After a time] he was released because nothing was proved against him. A few weeks later he found himself at a party — one of those big Lhasa gatherings — and he happened to meet the man who had been supervising his torture! (*Laughter*.) [The supervisor] acted as though nothing had happened, and said, "Hello, how are you? I haven't seen you for such a long time!" (*Laughter*.) Apparently this story is quite characteristic of these Tibetan aristocrats. So here you see manners becoming completely divorced from ethics. That is quite a dangerous thing, because good manners can sometimes cover up a lack of ethics.

6 Conflict Will Arise But Never Mind

from The Endlessly Fascinating Cry (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), Mixed Retreat, Abhirati, December 1973

> *Whoever, having been enlightened, commences to act, ought to think of nothing else. Insofar as this can be accomplished it is by means of applying one's entire being.*
>
> *This way, everything is well done. Otherwise, both [of the conflicting interests of* dāna *and* śīla*] may not be achieved. And the flaw of non-awareness (*asaṁprajanya*) will attain further development.*

Entering the Path of Enlightenment, The Bodhicaryāvatāra of the Buddhist Poet Śāntideva, trans. Marion L. Matics, Allen & Unwin, London 1971, p. 166, vv. 43-4[22]

Sangharakshita: Śāntideva is on the whole just stressing the great importance of doing everything mindfully, with real thought, real reflection, real care, real awareness. If your awareness and mindfulness is strong enough any conflict between the respective claims of *dāna* and *śīla* will be resolved almost automatically. Suppose a monk encounters a woman who is seriously ill. Suppose he wants to give her medicine and look after her: that's *dāna*; he wants to practise *dāna*. But after all she's a woman, so he ought not really to have anything much to do with her: that's *śīla*. Thus there arises, within the context of his monastic life and practice, a conflict between *dāna* and *śīla*. But never mind. If the monk really keeps up his awareness and mindfulness all the time, whatever he does, he'll resolve that conflict just by being very aware and very mindful. This is the sort of situation that Śāntideva seems to have in mind. He's saying, as it were, "Leave aside *dāna*, leave aside *śīla* (the first two *pāramitās*). Be mindful, be aware in everything that you do, and then everything will work out all right with regard to these two perfections and everything else, even." Historically speaking it does seem that, in some sections of the Sangha, a certain tension was experienced between the demands of *dāna* and the demands of *śīla*. Some of the monastic rules were quite strict and seemed to get in the way of the Bodhisattva's activities, if he was a monk. For instance, there are the rules about not preaching the Dharma to people wearing turbans or swords. The Bodhisattva, out of the strength of his feeling for giving the doctrine, giving the teaching, might well disregard these rules. Technically he would be breaking certain *śīlas* of the monastic law, but Śāntideva is as it were saying, "Such conflicts may arise" (perhaps they did arise in the monastic and spiritual life of his day), "but never mind. Keep up your mindfulness and awareness and they will sort themselves out." This is certainly what I found when I was going around among the exUntouchable[20] Buddhists in India, especially when I went with my Thai bhikkhu friends, who were normally very strict in their observance of the monastic rules. Often there was a genuine conflict between the monastic rules and the requirements of the situation. For instance, some good people would arrange for you to give a lecture, but they'd arrange the meeting for 10 o'clock in the morning and it couldn't possibly finish before one — so when are you going to eat? You are not supposed to eat after 12 o'clock, and for a strict monk this is a very important point and he feels very bad about eating after 12 o'clock, thus breaking a rule. So we would discuss the matter among ourselves, because within the terms of that particular tradition, or convention, there was a definite conflict. Should we cancel the meeting so that we could observe the 12 o'clock rule, or should we have the meeting and ignore the 12 o'clock rule or even, maybe, fast until the next morning? Some very strict monks were quite prepared to fast, though others — healthy young monks — didn't feel very happy about it. After quite a bit of discussion, we did sometimes all agree that we'd take our meal an hour late, and the Thai bhikkhus themselves said, "Never mind, it's for the sake of the Dharma!" Though they were strict Theravadins they adopted the more Mahayanistic approach, and I'm sure this sort of thing happened quite a lot in India as social conditions changed and the Mahayana Ideal arose and as, maybe, some of the monastic rules became a bit too strict or were interpreted a bit too narrowly. I think it was this sort of situation that Śāntideva was concerned with, and so he says, "Be sincere, be mindful, and everything will be all right." In this way you resolve the conflict, and I think that this is what my Thai bhikkhu friends and I did on that particular occasion. At other times we had to ride in bullock carts, which again is against the monastic rule, but there was no other means of transport. We could of course have walked, but then we would have got to the meeting too late to give our lectures. Quite a few Theravada monks in modern times experience a conflict between their desire to propagate the Dharma and the requirements of the monastic rule, which sometimes gets in the way of their Buddhist work. Śāntideva, however, is reassuring, and says that provided we are mindful and aware at all times such conflicts will not only be resolved, they won't be conflicts in the same way.

Glossary

Asura (Skt. and Pali): anti-god or titan. According to Indian — Hindu and Buddhist — mythology, *asuras* are beings of a warlike mentality, filled with hatred and anger arising from jealousy; they occupy a separate realm of existence from human beings, their realm being one of the six mundane realms it is possible for sentient beings to be born into (see *Mitrata* 60, 'The Bodhisattva Vow', Windhorse, London 1968, Note 2, p. 48). The *asuras* are continually at war with the devas or gods, rather like the titans who fought against the Olympian gods in Greek mythology.

The realm of the *asuras* is also one of extreme psychosexual polarization. Male *asuras* are fierce, ugly and brutish in appearance and manner, while female *asuras*, though of beautiful appearance, are dangerous seducers who devour the males. Clearly there is much in the appearance and behaviour of the *asuras* that we can recognize in ourselves and the world around us, perhaps especially in the modern West, with its emphasis on materialism, crude power, the escalating arms race and the prevalence of unhealthy sexual attitudes and behaviour.

We must eschew the *asura* in ourselves by renouncing all forms of violence and coercion, including the subtler form of sexual manipulation and game-playing. In the FWBO, a healthier attitude to sexuality and a more integrated attitude towards the masculine and feminine aspects of our own psyche is encouraged through living and working in single-sex situations, thus facilitating a state of spiritual 'androgyny'.

See Subhuti, T*he Buddhist Vision*, Windhorse Publications; Sangharakshita, 'The Symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life', available on FreeBuddhistAudio http://tinyurl.com/l7rlkxo or Sangharakshita, 'Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism', Windhorse Publications.

Faith Follower/Doctrine Follower (Skt. *śraddhā-anusārin/dharma-anusārin*): Different temperaments necessarily involve different approaches to spiritual life and practice. The distinction between Faith and Doctrine Followers reflects a temperamental inclination towards a more devotional or a more 'intellectual' (in a creative sense) approach, respectively. A Faith Follower, for example, may be so inspired by his teacher and his trust in him may be so great that he finds his teacher's precepts sole and sufficient spurs to practise. The Doctrine Follower's chief source of inspiration, on the other hand, might be the systematic study of the Dharma as formulated in the canonical texts. Milarepa, the great Tibetan yogi, exemplifies the Faith Follower's approach, while Tsong-kha-pa, the great Tibetan teacher and guru, exemplifies the approach of the Doctrine Follower.

Both types are technically classified as belonging to the *Āryasangha*, according to the Theravada tradition: in other words, both types have attained a degree of Transcendental Insight. One type gains liberation through Faith, the other through Wisdom, but this does not mean that there is a real difference in their attainment of Enlightenment. The distinction reflects a difference in approach, not content. Both gain Enlightenment, which consists of both Wisdom and Compassion at the highest level. One cannot become one-sidedly Enlightened! Thus we must adopt a balanced, integrated approach to our spiritual life and practice.

Māra (Skt. and Pali): lit. 'death-bringing' or 'the destroying'. In Buddhist cosmology, Māra is personified as the embodiment of unskilfulness, the 'death' of the spiritual life. He is a tempter, distracting us from practising the spiritual life by making the mundane alluring or the negative seem positive. The early Buddhists, however, regarded Māra in a way that might surprise those brought up as Christians. Rather than seeing Māra as a demonic, virtually all-powerful Lord of Evil, he was regarded as more of a nuisance.

Many episodes concerning his interactions with the Buddha have a decidedly humorous air to them.

Traditionally four senses of the word *'māra'* are given. Firstly, there is *Kleśa-māra*, or Māra as the embodiment of all unskilful emotions. Secondly, *Mṛtyu-māra*, or Māra as death, in the sense of the ceaseless round of birth and death. Thirdly, *Skandha-māra*, or Māra as metaphor for the entirety of conditioned existence. Lastly, *Devaputra-māra*, or Māra the son of a god, that is, Māra as an objectively existent being rather than as a metaphor. Early Buddhism acknowledged both a literal and 'psychological' interpretation of Māra. Whichever way we ourselves understand the term, we should remember that Māra only has power to the extent we give it to him.

Śamathā (Pali *samatha*): Buddhist meditation practices can be divided into two distinct types, *'śamathā'* or *'vipaśyanā'* (Pali vipaśyanā). *Śamathā* practices aim at a profound psychological integration and the development of intensely positive mental states by overcoming all physical and, especially, mental distractions, resulting in a deeply pervasive sense of calm and lucidity.

Having thoroughly practised *śamathā*, perhaps for many years, one can then turn to *vipaśyanā* meditations, which aim at the development of Transcendental Insight. *Śamathā* is therefore the indispensable prerequisite for the practice of *vipaśyanā*, despite the contrary impression created by some modern schools of so-called *vipaśyanā* training. To attempt *vipaśyanā* practices without a proper foundation and training in *śamathā* can lead, at worst, to severe psychological alienation, and, at best, to a purely intellectual grasp of the teaching as formulated, without any actual realization of its import.

Thus, in the FWBO, we lay great stress on the cultivation of positive mental states combined with an ethical life style as the foundation for spiritual progress. In our public centres, we teach traditional *śamathā* practices, the Metta Bhavana and the Mindfulness of Breathing (See *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow', Glossary). Members of the Order, having practised these meditations for some time, may then combine them with some *vipaśyanā* meditations, such as the Six Element Practice or the Contemplation of the Twelve *Nidānas*, as well as their own visualization practice. (See *Mitrata* 57 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal', Glossary)

Vipaśyanā (Pali *vipassanā*): Insight. *Vipaśyanā* meditations are all those practices that are designed to lead to the development of Insight or Transcendental realization. That is, they are intended to produce Insight into the nature of Reality. Insight is traditionally threefold: Insight into a) the impermanence of the conditioned, b) the unsatisfactoriness of the conditioned, and c) the unsubstantiality of both the conditioned and the Unconditioned. By developing Insight, a permanent, radical transformation of our psycho-physical being is affected. Being Transcendental the transformation is permanent, and therefore one can never fall back from it. This attainment of irreversible change is called Stream-Entry. (See *Mitrata* 57 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal', Glossary)

Vipaśyanā meditations are only undertaken after extensive practice of *śamathā* (see above), since it is only on the basis of a highly positive and integrated mental state that Insight can arise. As a result of *śamathā*, consciousness is extremely receptive and becomes a highly effective 'conductor', as it were, which the blinding flash of Insight can strike, illuminating the darkness and enabling us to see that which we could not see before.

In the FWBO, members of the Order practise some *vipaśyanā* meditations while continuing to practise *śamathā*. Every Order Member has a personal visualization practice which combines elements of *śamathā* and *vipaśyanā* and has recourse also, if he or she so wishes, to other *vipaśyanā* methods such as the Six

Element Practice.

See *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow'.

Notes

[1] See *Mitrata* 59 in this series, 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart', Glossary.

[2] See *Mitrata* 56 in this series, 'The Origin and Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal'.

[3] Ibid., Glossary.

[4] See *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow', Note 4.

[5] See W. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 'Song of Myself', The Nonesuch Press, London 1967, (1st Edition 1855).

[6] See *Mitrata* 60 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow', Glossary.

[7] Ibid.

[8] The reference is, in fact, to Keats. Speaking of fear, Sangharakshita here borrows the poet's phrase, from the lines

> *... yes, in spite of all,*
> *Some shape of beauty moves away the pall*
> *From our dark spirits.*
>
> Keats, *The Complete Poems*, 'Endymion', ed. Miriam Allott, Longman Group Ltd., 1970, BK. I, 11. 11-13.

[9] See The *Jātaka* Book XII, *Jātaka Stories*, Vols. V & VI, trans. E. B. Cowell, Pali Text Society, London 1973, no. 547 *'Vessantara Jātaka*'.

[10] See The Sutra of Golden Light (*Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*), trans. R. E. Emmerick, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Vol. XXVII, Luzac & Co 1970, Ch. 18, pp. 85-97.

[11] The position now is that the Freedom of Religion Law passed in 1983 guarantees the right of every citizen to practise any religion.

[12] See *Mitrata* 58 in this series, 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart', lecture and Glossary.

[13] Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse Publications; *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse, London 1977; Ch. IV, Section III.

[14] See Francis Bacon (1561-1626), *Essays*, No. 34 'Of Seditions and Troubles', Everyman, 1962. Bacon's exact words are: 'Money is like muck, not good except it be spread'.

[15] For a discussion of the 'Five Precepts’, see Sangharakshita, *The Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path*, chapter four, 'Perfect Action', Windhorse Publications, also available on FreeBuddhistAudio - http://tinyurl.com/ov8qffv . There is an exposition of the 'Ten Precepts' in Sangharakshita's *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse, London 1984.

[16] R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study*, The Holland Memorial Lectures 1928. Published in Pelican Books 1938 and subsequently.

[17] The application of the basic ethical principles of Buddhism to this whole area of 'gainful employment' or working for a livelihood is known as Right Livelihood. The essential principle underlying this is that such livelihood, in order to be ethical, must be non-violent, non-exploitative, and as far as possible related to the spiritual goal. For a detailed discussion of this subject see, Sangharakshita, *The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path*, chapter five, 'Perfect Livelihood', Windhorse Publications, also available on FreeBuddhistAudio - http://tinyurl.com/kpquejg .

[18] From Sangharakshita's, *The Dhammapada*, Windhorse Publications.

[19] Socrates (469-399 BCE), the famous Greek sage and teacher, was condemned to death on charges of heresy and of corrupting the minds of the young. His chief disciple, Plato, has given his account of the last hours of Socrates in his famous dialogue *Phaedo*. See Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, Penguin Classics, 1977.

[20] See *Mitrata* 61 in this series, 'The Bodhisattva Vow', Note 7.

[21] Aśoka was a great Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty, who ruled from about 268 BCE until 232 BCE.

H. G. Wells refers to him in *An Outline of History* (Vols. 1 & 2, George Newnes Ltd., London), as the only military monarch on record to have abandoned warfare after victory. This he did when he experienced a strong moral revulsion on seeing the great suffering his conquest had inflicted on people. He came to see that the only true conquest was conquest by the Dharma. He propagated the Dharma by publishing it in imperial edicts inscribed on rocks and stone pillars at key points in his realm. These are known as the 'Edicts of Aśoka'. He also sent missionaries of the Dharma to Ceylon, Nepal, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Aśoka is a very important figure in the history of Buddhism because he repudiated violence and subsequently implemented policies of non-violence: also because he is the greatest example of the *Dharmarāja* (lit. Dharma-King), that is, one who strived to realize the Buddhist ideal of government, by making ethical and spiritual values the basis of his political policy.

[22] See *Mitrata* 59 in this series, 'The Awakening of the Bodhi Heart', Note 3.