

Week 5 – Receptivity to the Truth

Buddhism Level 2 – Ritual & Devotion

ENTREATY & SUPPLICATION

Easy for Buddhism to keep providing the answers – you turn up and get a few more ideas, a few more answers, each evening. But what's **your** question? The one that's really meaningful to you.

It's probably not static or single; important thing is to be in touch with what's meaningful. What are you really trying to do or discover that's bringing you here. Having that connection will imbue your searching with direction & power. When you have that sense of urgency then you really want to know the answer, and will be on the lookout for the answer – you'll be receptive. "When the pupil's ready, the teacher will appear"

Receptivity isn't passivity. In receptivity we bring this passionate desire to know, to learn, which is the essential basis for communication and learning.

So we're entreating the Buddha's to make shine the lamp of the Dharma. We can see this in two ways depending on our understanding of the Buddha:

- We're opening to the truth arising from our "Buddha nature" – from within – from the ever present reality.
- Or being open to the influence of the Buddhas seen as being external than ourselves.

In either case, we're acknowledging the existence of truth & understanding beyond our current experience, so it doesn't really matter whether we see it as external to us, or as within a hidden part of us – all a question of where we draw the line "us"!

What closes us off to receptivity?

Eg. Preconceived ideas, lack of interest, lack of curiosity

Of course, we need concepts, so we'll have preconceived ideas. Secret is to realise that they're all relative – ie none of them are **it** – and moreover, many of them will be plain wrong, or at best incomplete, even at the relative level. So we hold to our ideas & judgements lightly, willing to modify them or even completely drop them, if something better comes along.

This involves being receptive to other people – because they will be presenting us with different worldviews, value systems, ideas etc. None of those things exist in isolation.

HEART SUTRA

So having made the entreaty, the truth arrives; may not be quite what we had in mind, but this is what we're given – the words of the Heart Sutra. Sangharakshita inserted it at this point, as a representative text conveying perfect wisdom.

Not heart in "emotional centre" sense, but heart of perfect wisdom in sense of essence; condensation of some huge bodies of work. It's a Mahayana sutra – with corresponding emphasis on perfect wisdom & compassion.

It's trying to undermine reliance on concepts of Buddhism, pull the rug from under feet, pointing to sunyata – the lack of inherent existence of any categories of our experience.

In this course we've been dealing with concepts of relative truth: lists, concepts, ideas. Also there's what we may call "absolute truth" – what actually "is", that can't be pinned down. If you think about this moment now – any moment – it's too rich, too multifaceted,

too intangible to be fully described by concepts – by language. The map isn't the same as the territory it describes.

Key player is Avalokitesvara – the Bodhisattva of compassion. Interesting it's not Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom. He's meditating deeply – corresponds to insight meditation, looking with insight at components of existence.

Skandhas - meaning "heaps" – a list of five components of "selfhood" – elements of experience that tend to pass themselves off – whether individually or collectively – as a fixed self. They are: form (*rupa*, the apparently objective aspect of experience), feeling (*vedana*), apperception (*samjna*), volition / emotion / thoughts (*samskara*), and consciousness (*vijnana*).

By reflecting on them, we realise how they're all in flux & in relation to the world outside of self, and so none of them can be said to be self; none of them exist from their own side. Avalokitevara starts off by reminding us of this – they are all empty, *sunya* – but also this emptiness isn't empty of content – emptiness is that very collection of physical and mental experiences. *Sunyata* is the characteristic of all conditioned phenomena – a Mahayana extension of the concept of *anatta* (lack of fixed selfhood): because phenomena are conditioned – ie. Have other conditions as precursors and supporting factors – they can't be said to have a separate existence of their own. This is true of ourselves, of any "object" we can point to, and true of any ideas or concepts.

Avalokitesvara disposes not just of philosophy but of religion, even Buddhism. In other words, disposes of religion considered as an end in itself. He makes it clear that religion is not an absolute, not ultimate. He enumerates various well-known categories of Buddhist thought - for instance, the five skandhas, the six sense organs, the eighteen elements, the twelve links of the chain of dependent origination which we see depicted in the outermost circle of the Wheel of Life, then the Four Noble Truths, then knowledge itself, then attainment itself, and even non-attainment. Avalokitesvara declares all these categories sunyata, void - in other words, not ultimately valid. Buddhism itself is only a raft to take us to the other shore, it is only a finger pointing to the moon. If you want to realise perfect wisdom you have to go beyond Buddhism and realise that in reality there is no such thing as Buddhism.

The Heart Sutra, Sangharakshita

In other words the sutra is trying to break down our preconceived notions of what we think we understand, and showing us that in fact we don't "own" any of this understanding. We can't stand on it, it gives us no security.

So know that the Bodhisattva / Holding to nothing whatever / But dwelling in Prajna wisdom / Is freed of delusive hindrance / Rid of the fear bred by it / And reaches clearest Nirvana.

HOME PRACTICE

Can you think of a situation with some person(s) where tension habitually arises due to different viewpoints? Can you bring a greater openness to the other view point without necessarily agreeing it, but at least trying to understand the viewpoint, empathise with the people who hold it.

FURTHER READING

The Heart Sutra in *Wisdom Beyond Words*, Sangharakshita or CD 074

Chapter 11 in *Ritual & Devotion*, Sangharakshita