

EIGHT LECTURES ~ BUDDHISM IN PRACTICE

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BUDDHISM IN PRACTICE

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1. Becoming a Buddhist

The first step one takes in becoming a Buddhist is the taking of refuge. The act of taking refuge goes back to the very earliest period of the Buddhist community. The first record of this in fact comes from the weeks following the Buddha's Enlightenment when we are told that two merchants who were passing through the place where he attained Enlightenment took refuge in the Buddha and Dharma. At that stage it was a two-fold refuge as at that time the Sangha was not yet formed. Following upon this we find references to the taking of the three-fold refuge. This was shortly after the Buddha began his teaching career at Sarnath. We have the conversion of Yasha, the son of a wealthy family of Benares. After Yasa's conversion, we have the conversion of Yasha's family, and according to tradition, Yasa's family were the first lay followers to take the three-fold refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

The taking of refuge is extremely important within the Buddhist community both as a mark of entry into the Buddhist community for the laity, and also as a part of the ordination ceremony for monks and nuns. We know, for instance, that for a long time before the more elaborate ordination ceremony came into fashion, monks were admitted into the Buddhist monastic community with a relatively simple ceremony. The most important element of that ceremony was the recitation of the three-fold refuge formula thrice. From that time until the present, the taking of refuge has become a very important part of becoming a Buddhist. That is why the taking of refuge is the first formal step one takes in becoming a Buddhist.

What are the motivations for taking refuge? Traditionally there are three - fear, faith and compassion. The three motivations correspond to three types of individuals. The individual who takes refuge out of fear represents the least developed type of individual. The individual who takes refuge out of faith represents the individual of medium development. And the individual who takes refuge out of compassion represents the individual of greatest development.

Fear is a universal and well known motivation for all kinds of action. Particularly in the religious context, it is the basic motivation for most of the religious activities, indeed for the birth of religion itself. It is a fact that some of the earliest manifestations of religious behavior, for example, sacrifices, magical rites and so forth were performed out of fear. Believing that they were surrounded by forces that they could not control, men reacted with fear and tried to do something about it. In the context of refuge, it is the fear of rebirth and suffering.

Faith is a more positive motivation than fear because one is not simply driven in a negative way. One is instead drawn in a positive way because one sees special

qualities in the Triple Gem and has faith in those qualities. Faith in the Buddhist context is not blind faith. It is not reliance upon grace or the power of another. It is simply that positive attitude of the mind which believes that success is possible. In other words, we will not succeed in whatever we undertake with a negative attitude.

The highest of the motivations extends one's interest beyond one's concern for oneself to the concern for all living beings. This person goes to refuge out of compassion, to help all living beings from their suffering.

We can illustrate the working of these three motivations by means of a very simple example. Suppose you are walking down the street and you are suddenly caught in a very heavy downpour. Your first reaction will be one of fear, and you will look for shelter. Once you have been impressed with the necessity to find a shelter, you will look around for a shelter. In that situation, you will need to have faith in the shelter. You will not have much faith if it is just a temporary canopy because they may collapse or you may be electrocuted. But if you see a solid apartment block you will have faith in its ability to protect you. You will go into that building for refuge. This is analogous to taking refuge out of faith. Once you have decided to seek refuge in the building, you will want to call to other passers-by to take refuge in the same building. This is analogous to taking refuge out of compassion. This illustrates the different levels of motivation in taking refuge, from a very narrow and negative motivation to a positive one and finally to a universal motivation.

The three objects of refuge are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The Buddha is called the supreme Teacher of gods and men, the Enlightened One, the Arhat and so forth. These qualities of the Buddha make him a worthy object of refuge.

Similarly, the Dharma also has many qualities that make it an object worthy of refuge. The Dharma is taught without any selfish motivation. It is taught simply to benefit all living beings. The Dharma is intrinsically pure. It is like a light which dispels darkness. Specifically, the Dharma can be divided into two aspects — the Dharma which one becomes familiar with through indirect means like reading and listening, and the Dharma which one becomes familiar with through direct, personal realization through one's own meditative and living experience.

As regards the Sangha, some believe that it refers only to the community of monks, while others believe that it refers to the whole Buddhist community. While both interpretations are correct, in the context of the three-fold refuge, the Sangha refers to the Noble Community. This refers to either the four noble types of persons — Stream-winner, Once-Returner, Non-Returner and Arhat, or the community of irreversible Bodhisattvas.

One relates to the objects of refuge in particular ways. One relates to the Buddha as one's guide, the Dharma as one's path, and the Sangha as one's travelling companions. In this context, one can think of achieving Enlightenment as taking a journey to a distant place. In order to do so successfully, one would need a guide, a path and travelling companion to cheer one up when one is lonely or depressed. The Buddha is the ideal guide because he has traveled the path before. He can lead others to the goal as he has achieved the goal himself.

The Dharma is the ideal path laid down by the Buddha because it has been designed to overcome obstacles of various kinds. Just as one might build a bridge to cross a chasm, the Dharma supplies teaching regarding good conduct to get over unwholesome actions. Just as the path might provide handrails to keep us from being blown off by the wind, the Dharma provides us the techniques to overcome the distractions to meditation. And just as the path might provide street lamps to light the way, the teaching on wisdom lights the way so that we do not go astray from the path.

The Sangha are the ideal travelling companions because they share our general orientation, and because they have achieved certain mastery of the path, especially the Noble Sangha. They are in a position to help us along. Even the ordinary worldly Buddhist community can be a support because we tend to be discouraged and tired if we undertake to do anything alone.

The taking of refuge has traditionally been formalized in the form of a ceremony or ritual. This dates back to the very earliest period of the Buddhist community and has continued to function in that form till today. The taking of refuge has two functions. Firstly, it marks one's first and formal entry into the Buddhist community. After that we continue to take refuge daily as an indication of our commitment as Buddhists towards achieving Enlightenment by following the path. This act of taking refuge is usually performed before a monk, a master, or an image of the Buddha. It is an indication that we are following a continuous living tradition handed down from the time of the Buddha. The refuge formula is repeated thrice because the number three is the smallest plural number which symbolically stands for innumerable recitations.

Secondly, the taking of refuge brings about many benefits. As the first step on the path, it opens the door to all the practices in the Buddhist tradition. It gives one a definite positive direction in which to move. In this way, it creates the conditions for the realization of countless benefits. In as much as the taking of refuge is the first step on one's path to Enlightenment, all the benefits of Enlightenment result directly or indirectly from the taking of refuge. It also gives one safety from rebirth in the lower realms.

But the taking of refuge also requires some commitments, just as when you become a member of a club you have to observe certain rules and regulations, or when you become a citizen of a country, you have to follow the rules of the country. The rules and regulations of refuge are the five precepts. They embody the respect for life, property, personal relationship, truth and mental health.

The five precepts are ideals to strive for. They are not absolute. Just as a happy marriage or a good job is an ideal to strive for though we know that we may never achieve the ideal, similarly the five precepts serve as a guideline to good conduct which Buddhists are encouraged to strive for.

2. Buddhist Lay Practice

The Buddha's expression of his social consciousness is an important dimension of his teaching which is particularly relevant to the lay community though it is not as well known as the other dimensions like mental development and philosophy. There are several sermons which demonstrate his social consciousness. One of these is the Sigalovada Sutra in which he gave advice to the layman Sigala.

Let us look at the background against which the Buddha gave his advice to Sigala. We are told that Sigala's father was a devout follower of the Buddha, but Sigala himself was rather indifferent to the Buddha and to religion in general. There are a number of amusing descriptions of his attitude towards the Dharma. It is said that he did not like to listen to the Dharma because he would have to sit on the ground and his clothing would be dirtied. He did not like to visit monks because he would have to bow to them and that would give him a backache. Eventually he would have to invite them to his house and he would have to spend money on them. Hence, Sigala was not very interested in the Dharma.

His father was however anxious that he learn something of what the Buddha taught. So on his death bed, his father asked him to follow the practice of bowing to the six directions after taking his bath in the morning. The six directions are the four cardinal points (east, south, west, north), zenith and nadir. It was odd that Sigala's father

wanted him to honor the six directions after his morning bath as it was in fact a brahminical custom. However, Sigala's father knew that if Sigala did what he was told to do, sooner or later the Buddha or one of his disciples would observe him doing it and would undertake to explain the real meaning of honoring the six directions.

And this was exactly what happened. One morning the Buddha saw Sigala bowing to the six directions. He approached him and explained the real significance of honoring the six directions. He said that bowing to the six directions means fulfilling one's responsibility within the six social relationships -the relationship between parents and children, between husband and wife, between teacher and pupil, between friend and friend, between employer and employee, and between religious teacher and disciple. It no longer means honoring the gods which inhabit the six different directions.

Before we look at the responsibilities which the Buddha encouraged people to fulfill with respect to the six relationships, let us look at the general nature of these responsibilities. That general nature is their reciprocal nature. The principle of reciprocity is the foundation of Buddhist morality. In the context of the six social relationships, we find the principle of reciprocity specifically applied to particular social roles. This is why the Sigalovada Sutra is the quintessence of the Buddha's social philosophy because it is here that we find the general principle of reciprocity applied to moral conduct.

Further, the reciprocal nature of the responsibilities with respect to the six social relationships reflects the interdependent nature of society as a whole. If we hope to achieve harmony, happiness and prosperity in the family and the society, there has to be a degree of give and take. If one member is called upon to do all the giving while another would only like to do all the taking, there is bound to be disharmony and unhappiness.

The Buddha explained the importance of the family with the help of the simile of trees in a forest. He said that the tree that stands alone is more likely to be blown down by a powerful storm as compared to a tree that stands in a group of trees. Similarly, a person who stands alone by himself is more likely to be upset by the vicissitudes of life as compared to one who stands with his family. The Buddha suggested various actions that could be followed by the members of the family in order to foster this family solidarity. For example, children are asked to support their parents in their old age and conversely parents are asked to allow their children to inherit the wealth of the family at a suitable time.

The relationship between the husband and wife has also got to be a relationship of give and take. If you look at the injunctions proposed by the Buddha in the context of marital relationship, you will be struck by their lib-

erality especially since this advice was given to Sigala some two thousand five hundred years ago. He called upon the husband to treat his wife with courtesy, to be appreciative of her, to be faithful, to delegate authority to her and to reward her with gifts.

The responsibilities of the parents and children, and of the husband and wife have to be reciprocal, mutually beneficial. We can see from the Buddha's prescription for harmony in the family that if in fact these guidelines were followed, we would eliminate two major social problems of our time — the problem of desertion of elderly people and the problem of divorce.

Just as the harmony and prosperity of the family depends upon the fulfillment of one's reciprocal responsibilities, so too the happiness, harmony and prosperity of the society depends upon the fulfillment of one's reciprocal responsibilities. Within the social context, the first relationship is the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. The pupil is asked to respond to his teacher with courtesy, service and attention. In return, the teacher would have to relate to his pupil with sincerity, competence and genuine concern for his welfare. For example, the teacher is asked not only to impart intellectual knowledge, but also to be exemplary of the values that he teaches.

The next social relationship is the relationship between friends. The Buddha has often placed importance on the types of friends that one should have. Very often our attitude and behavior are influenced by our friends. The Buddha said that one ought to choose one's friends carefully. In this respect, there are four kinds of persons. The first is the person who may have unwholesome intentions but whose actions may appear wholesome. The second is the person who may have wholesome intentions but whose actions may appear unwholesome. The third is the person whose intentions are unwholesome and whose actions are also unwholesome. And the fourth is the person whose intentions are wholesome and whose actions are also wholesome. In choosing one's friends, we ought to choose those who have wholesome intentions and wholesome actions.

Once one has chosen the right friends, one should try to keep them. One has to keep cultivating the friendship as a friendship cannot survive without being nurtured. It must be nurtured with generosity, courtesy, helpfulness, with concern for the well-being of the friend. In addition, it is interesting to note that we are asked to look after the friend's well-being in a real and positive sense as, for example, to protect him when he is careless, to guard him against physical injuries and also to protect his property. Upon these principles, the seedling of friendship can take firm roots and grow to be enduring in the face of difficulties.

The relationship between employer and employee is a particularly interesting area of the Buddha's advice in

regard to social responsibilities. It is interesting because in his advice we have an anticipation of the spirit of co-operation. Much of the unhappy history of commercial and industrial relations that unfolded over the past century — of feudalism in which we saw the exploitation of agricultural laborers and the industrial revolution in which we saw the exploitation of industrial workers — could have been avoided had the Buddha's advice in regard to employer and employee relationship been heeded.

The employer is asked to assign to his employees tasks that are commensurate with their abilities. The employer is asked to grant his employees a fair, salary, a salary that is equal to their contribution. Moreover, he is asked to provide them medical benefits, to provide them with special benefits like bonuses and to share with them the prosperity of the company. He is asked to give them leave at suitable times. All these injunctions are quite reasonable guidelines for a co-operative attitude in industrial management. Conversely, the employee is asked to be punctual, to show initiative, to do his task thoroughly, to be honest, to be efficient, and to protect the reputation of his employer.

In the relationship between the religious teacher and the disciple, the disciple is asked to honor his teacher with affection of words, deeds and thoughts, to offer his teacher hospitality and material support. In return, the teacher is asked to correct his disciple when he makes mistakes, to be affectionate towards him, to teach him the truth and to show him the way to happiness and liberation.

The Sigalovada Sutra provides a formula for the well-being of the family and the society. The Buddha was far from being unconcerned about the needs of the lay community. Not only did he want the lay community to prosper, he also wanted them to stay prosperous and happy. This is because he recognized that material well-being is necessary for the cultivation of the higher values of life. A minimum of material well-being is necessary in most cases in order to practice the Dharma. It was no accident that many of the Buddha's foremost disciples were rich men.

In this respect, the Buddha suggested that we might all prosper by observing certain rules with regard to the expenditure of our income. In his advice to Sigala, the Buddha indicated that one's income ought to be divided into four quarters. Of these four quarters, only one quarter ought to be used for maintaining oneself. Two quarters ought to be devoted to investment. The final quarters ought to be saved in case of emergency. The correct allocation of income was for the Buddha a key to prosperity.

Similarly, correct conduct was also crucial to preserving one's prosperity. In this respect, the Buddha advised Sigala to avoid six activities which would lead to the loss of prosperity that is gained through the fulfillment of

one's social responsibilities and one's correct allocation of income. The six activities to be avoided are gambling, costly entertainment, associating with bad friends, laziness, consumption of intoxicants and sauntering in the streets at unseemly hours.

In the advice given by the Buddha in the Sigalovada Sutra, we have a formula to social well-being which, if followed, can result in the creation of a social environment that is conducive to the development of higher human values.

3. Buddhist Observances

When we speak of Buddhist observances we are concerned with two general categories of observances — personal observances and communal observances. Although they are not absolutely mutually exclusive, yet in general, certain forms of observance are practiced individually while others are practiced communally. By observances we mean the use of shrines and images, gestures of reverence, offerings, chanting and recitation, the observance of special festivals like Vesak, the new and full moon days, and the hungry ghost festival.

At this juncture, I would like to say something about the nature of religion and the role of observances within religious traditions. All religions, and Buddhism is not alone in this, include two traditions. One is the textual tradition and the other is the popular tradition.

The textual tradition tends to be conservative. Its primary function is to preserve the authenticity or purity of the religion. The guardians of the textual tradition are the scholars, monks, nuns and clergy. The popular tradition within a given religion is very different in its concern and attitude from the textual tradition. It tends to be very uncritical, ready to accept elements, practices and symbols from the cultural environment in which the religion finds itself. As a result, popular tradition tends to be very diffused, multi-faceted and diverse. If the textual tradition has a conservative influence, a controlling influence on the religion, the popular tradition has a diversifying, liberalizing, and decentralizing influence on the religion.

Both traditions are important to the survival of the religion. If the textual tradition is lost, the religion loses its identity, its integrity. For example, Buddhism no longer exists as an independent, identifiable religion in India because the Buddhist textual tradition disappeared in India some seven to eight hundred years ago. The loss of the textual tradition can mean the loss of a religion as an independent, identifiable tradition. Similarly, the popular tra-

dition is important for the perseverance of the vitality and relevance of a religion because if a religion loses its popular tradition, then it will cease to have any influence on the life of the people. It will become elitist and limited to a very small body of scholars and monks. Both traditions are therefore important to the existence and health of a religion.

One might use an analogy to illustrate this point. For a tree to thrive and grow, it needs to have its roots firmly fixed in the soil and its branches thrusting upwards into the air and sunlight. If a tree loses its access to the soil, if it is uprooted from the earth, it will not survive. Similarly, if its branches and leaves are eliminated, it will not survive. In the same way, for a religion to thrive and grow, it needs to have its roots in the soil of popular folk beliefs and practices, and its branches thrusting upwards into the clear air and sunlight of the textual tradition that contains its philosophy, psychology and ethics. There is a tendency to be over critical of the popular tradition, to regard popular observances negatively. This is an unfortunate tendency. We need to recognize that popular observances do not threaten the integrity of the Buddhist tradition so long as we are careful to preserve and respect the textual tradition.

Let us look at the use of shrines and images within the Buddhist tradition. During the first few hundred years of the Buddhist tradition in India, images of the Buddha were not in use. The presence of the Buddha was indicated merely by symbols like the wheel of the Dharma, or even by an empty seat. This is a reflection of the Buddha's statement that "Those who see my form and hear my voice do not really see or hear me", and that "Those who see the Dharma see the Buddha". Despite this early reluctance, within the few short centuries, images of the Buddha began to appear throughout India. This can be explained as a natural response to the common human need to represent in concrete form those values or persons which we revere or love. This is a natural human impulse, as after all it is common to keep a photograph of one's loved ones when they are far away from home, or of one whom one admires.

We have the image of the Buddha being used as a focal point of the qualities of the Buddha and the feeling of admiration for the Buddha. In addition to the image of the Buddha, you will find symbolic representation of the Dharma by a book of the scripture, and the Sangha by a stupa or by portraits of the Arhats and Bodhisattvas. There is also the use of gestures of reverence which is the natural expression of the human need to express in a visible way one's feeling of reverence. There are a number of common gestures of reverence in the Buddhist tradition. They include the joining of the palms, bowing or prostration and circumambulations. These gestures of reverence are religious dimensions of common human practices through

which we express in a concrete form our particular feeling for a particular object. There are parallels in our daily life to the use of gestures. For example, the gesture of the handshake which is a gesture of friendship, the gesture of removing one's hat or the gesture of rising to one's feet. They are expressions of a particular emotion, be it friendliness, respect or reverence.

Another common Buddhist observance is the making of offerings. If we observe the Buddhist shrine, we will usually see various offerings to the objects on the shrine. It is sometimes difficult to explain this practice of making offerings. This difficulty is further compounded by the fact that in primitive religions, offerings perform a kind of coercive function in that they are made in order that the person making the offering may be rewarded.

But all of us have the desire to give presents to those whom we hold in high esteem. This impulse continues to operate whether or not they stand in need of the gifts. So when we offer to the objects of veneration on the shrine, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha do not stand in need of the material gifts. What is important is the expression of our reverence. The making of offerings though, has a beneficial effect for the person making the offering. This is because the giving of a gift is a wholesome action which betokens generosity and detachment. Generosity has its inevitable karmic consequence without having recourse to any action of reward on the part of the objects to whom the gift is made.

Again, in the very objects that we offer, we have reminders of Buddhist values and ideals. For instance, we have offerings of incense, flowers and light, each of which like many other offering has a particular symbolic significance. The offering of incense symbolizes the purity of good conduct, the fragrance of wholesome actions which pervades one's mode of being. The offering of flowers symbolizes the truth of impermanence. The offering of lights symbolizes the wisdom which dispels the darkness of ignorance. The making of offerings can be explained in terms of a natural human tendency, and in addition to the symbolic function, it has a mnemonic function in that it reminds us of the qualities which the objects of offering symbolize.

The next important aspect of personal observance is the practice of chanting and recitation. Chanting and recitation can take several forms. Here again, we have parallels in daily life. For example, national anthems are verbal expressions of esteem and reverence. In the Buddhist context, the verbal expression of reverence can take the form of recitation of verses of praise of the Buddha and the other Enlightened Beings. They can also take the form of the recitation of discourses given by the Buddha, like the Sutra of Loving-Kindness and the Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom.

Chanting and recitation can take the form of the recitation of dharanis and mantras. Dharanis and mantras evolved through a process of condensation of some of the important ideas expressed in the teachings of the Buddha. For example, the Great Compassion Dharani expresses the quality of great compassion, and the Mantra of the Perfection of Wisdom expresses the quality of perfect wisdom. This process of condensation has enabled the Buddhist practitioner to recollect the essence of the vast and elaborate teachings of the Buddha within an abbreviated formula.

All these forms of chanting and recitation have several functions. Firstly, they are natural expressions of respect. In addition, they are aids to memory and to meditation. They help us to remember the essential teachings presented in the discourses and the qualities of the Buddha and other Enlightened Ones; and to concentrate our minds.

In addition to the practices of personal observances, there are the communal observances. There are a number of these observances, and the most important of these is perhaps the observance of Vesak which commemorates the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinirvana of the Buddha. Although there is no universal agreement as regards the precise date of this commemorative observance, the importance of Vesak lies not so much in the accuracy of the particular date upon which it should be observed. Vesak functions as an occasion on which to remember the life and career of the Buddha Sakyamuni and the values for which He stood, the teachings which he gave, and the path which He laid down.

Another communal observance is the observance of the eight precepts on the new moon and full moon days. This observance corresponds to the monastic observance of the Upasatha (posadha) ceremony which is held on new moon and full moon days during which the code of monastic discipline is recited. The purpose of this observance by the lay community is to enable them to achieve a new perspective of reality through disengagement for a limited time from the distracting activities of ordinary life. We all notice that in observing two persons at a game of chess, we are often able to see more clearly the right move that should be made than are those who are actually playing the game. It is usually easier for the observer to see the correct course of action than it is for those actually involved in the activity. This is the result of disengagement which clarifies one's perception. It is this clarity gained from disengagement which gives the observance of the eight precepts its particular meaning and significance for the lay community.

The observance of Ullambana within the Chinese and Japanese cultural context may be traced to the events described in the Ullambana Sutra. Though there is some doubt regarding the authenticity of this Sutra, we should not be overly concerned about this as the principles behind the observance of Ullambana are found in Buddhist texts

like the Sigalovada Sutra. In the Ullambana Sutra, we find the account of the Arhat Maudgalyayana's visit to the other realms of existence in search of his mother. He eventually found his mother in the realm of the hungry ghosts. He was distressed and went to the Buddha for advice as to how best to relieve his mother's suffering. The Buddha advised him to recite the scripture in the company of the other members of the Sangha, to make offerings to the members of the Sangha and to transfer the merit thereby gained to relieve the suffering of his mother. Following the Buddha's advice, according to the Sutra, his mother's unhappy situation was altered. This episode became the basis for the observance of the 'Festival of Hungry Ghost' within the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist communities.

This observance gained widespread popularity very quickly as a result of the fusion of the Buddhist observance with its foundation in the Buddhist textual tradition and the Chinese Confucianist practice with its foundation in the reverence for ancestors. This fusion also resulted in certain modifications of the observance in some communities, like the making of offerings directly to the ancestors instead of to the members of the Sangha. The observance of Ullambana is now celebrated not only as an observance of offering and transference of merit to one's parents but also to the beings who inhabit the realm of the hungry ghosts.

Regardless of its modification, the observance of the Ullambana still performs a number of important psychological and symbolic functions. It is psychologically and symbolically significant because it answers the human desire to provide for the needs of and to relieve the suffering of one's ancestors. It is an expression of gratitude to one's parents and of compassion for those suffering in the unfortunate realms. In the context of intentional actions, it is of a wholesome character. It has a positive application even in the conventional sense as the offerings go to the Sangha or to the lay community at large.

All the observances, personal and communal alike, contribute to the vitality and the popular relevance of the Buddhist religion. In so far as they do that, they support and sustain the Buddhist tradition as a whole and complement the textual tradition. If we can see Buddhism as an integrated tradition that combines both the popular and the intellectual dimension, we will have a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of what Buddhism is in reality.

4. The Four Immeasurables

It is a principle of Buddhist social philosophy that society is interdependent, that social relationships are reciprocal. The interdependent nature of society means that the goal of happiness which we all have in common cannot be achieved in isolation. In the context of the family, the happiness of one member affects the happiness of the whole family. For one to be happy it is also necessary for all to be happy. In a wider context, the unhappiness of the community will soon impinge upon the happiness of the whole nation leading to civil unrest, crime and so forth. And in the global context that is also the case.

How are we to achieve the happiness of society? So long as our unwholesome inner attitudes of aversion, cruelty, jealousy, attachment and so forth are prevalent, we are going to have external manifestations of these inner attitudes. We are going to have violence, exploitation and so forth. The most effective method to develop positive wholesome attitudes is through the deliberate and systematic cultivation of the mind. Once these attitudes are developed, they will transform unwholesome actions into wholesome actions. This is the key to the importance of the four Immeasurables as means of achieving the goal of happiness. They are particularly efficacious means of achieving our own happiness and that of others.

The four Immeasurables are called immeasurables by virtue of two facts — by virtue of the fact that sentient beings, their objects, are countless, and by virtue of the fact that the merit accrued from the meditation on the Immeasurables is immeasurable. Sometimes they are also called the four Stations of Brahma because, if they are practiced dis-associated from the Enlightenment Thought, they will lead to a state of mind that is similar to the state of mind of the gods and also to rebirth in the form Sphere of Brahma.

The first Immeasurable, loving-kindness is defined as the wish for all living beings to be happy. We extend this germinal wish by wishing also that all living beings may have the cause of happiness. The wish for all sentient beings to be happy implies that they must have the cause of happiness i.e. wholesome action for, if they do not have the cause of happiness, they cannot enjoy happiness. By extending this initial wish we are reminded of the law of karma.

We can see the ordinary attitude of loving-kindness exemplified in our daily life. We can see the attitude of loving-kindness in the attitude which a mother has towards her newborn child. Naturally a mother wishes happiness now and in the future for her new born child. This attitude is also reflected in our feeling towards our loved ones, the wish that they be happy. For this attitude of loving-kindness to become immeasurable, it has to be ex-

tended not only to those whom we care for but also to strangers, enemies and all living beings without exception.

The cultivation of loving-kindness counters aversion, ill-will and anger. In this sense the attitudes of aversion, ill-will and anger are the clear opposites of the attitude of loving-kindness. They are the distant opponents of loving-kindness. But loving-kindness also has its near opponent, and that near opponent is sensual attachment. In cultivating loving-kindness we launch a frontal attack on the unwholesome attitudes of aversion, ill-will and anger. But in doing so, we must be careful to guard from being subverted by the near opponent.

If loving-kindness is a wish for all beings to be happy and to have the cause of happiness, compassion is the wish for all living beings to be free from suffering and from the cause of suffering. Loving-kindness and compassion complement each other. They constitute the positive and negative dimensions of happiness and well being in general. Just as with loving-kindness, in the case of compassion we not only wish that all living beings be free from suffering, but also to be free from the cause of suffering, that is unwholesome actions. It would be inconceivable for sentient beings to be free from suffering without being free from the cause of suffering. Besides, the recollection of the necessity of having freedom from the cause of suffering reminds us of the law of karma and this enables us to add weight to our cultivation of compassion.

Again, as in the case of loving-kindness, we have the attitude of compassion exemplified in an attitude that we encounter in our daily life. Just as a mother has the wish for her only child to be happy and to have the cause of happiness, similarly, if the child were to fall ill, she would naturally wish for the child to be free from suffering and the cause of suffering. We all have at one time or another had the experience of a loved one or a pet suffering from illness. Without any particular effort, the feeling of compassion naturally arises. You would wish that this individual be free from suffering.

For this attitude to be immeasurable it has to be extended to all living beings. It has to be extended not only to those to whom we are committed but also to those to whom we are indifferent, and to those towards whom we have aversion. Here too, there is the distant opponent which is cruelty, and we have also the near opponent which is the attitude of looking down on others. We extend our attitude of compassion towards all living beings, even to the gods who are the most powerful and fortunate beings of all the realms of existence. This is because in so far as the gods are sentient beings, they are subject to suffering. In this context therefore, compassion cannot be a feeling of superiority.

Appreciative joy is the rejoicing in the happiness of others. As in the case of the mother and child, when

that child grows up and achieves success, the mother will experience appreciative joy. We often see that those who care for us are even more happy than ourselves when we achieve success.

In order for appreciative joy to be immeasurable, it has to be extended beyond the limits of those towards whom we are naturally inclined. Here too, we have a near and a distant opponent. The distant opponent is jealousy and envy. The near opponent is interested joy. For example, if you rejoice in your friend's acquisition of a new car and your feeling of joy is influenced by the consideration that you may be able to borrow it, then this feeling is interested joy and not appreciative joy. So in cultivating appreciative joy you need to be aware of the near opponent and the distant opponent.

Equanimity is an attitude which is higher than the first three Immeasurables. This is indicated by the fact that the cultivation of equanimity leads to a higher level of meditative absorption. Equanimity means the ability to regard all living beings, whether they are close to us or whether they are far removed from us, free from attachment and aversion. We should distinguish equanimity in this context from the equanimity in regard to the worldly dharmas. Equanimity in the latter context is cultivated with regard to objects while equanimity in this context is cultivated with regard to sentient beings.

Once again, we might liken this attitude to the attitude of a mother towards her child once that child has achieved maturity. In order for equanimity to transcend its limited character and become

immeasurable, it has to be extended to all sentient beings without exception. In doing so, one would do well to remember the changeable character of human relationships. Friends can become enemies, enemies can become friends. Relatives can become enemies, enemies can become relatives. The different positions of sentient beings is the result of past deeds. We should therefore not regard sentient beings with aversion or attachment. We should regard all living beings with equanimity, free from clinging to those whom we love and free from aversion toward those whom we dislike.

Here again, we have the distant opponent and the near opponent. The distant opponent is attachment and aversion. The near opponent is indifference. Equanimity is not indifference, an uncaring attitude. It is an attitude of mental balance, not a mental stupor.

One cultivates the four Immeasurables by means of particular techniques of meditation. Although the techniques employed by the different Buddhist traditions differ slightly, all of them have one principle in common. All of them begin where it is easy and natural to begin and are then extended to all living beings without exception.

In regard to loving-kindness, one begins with oneself. One can easily cultivate the wish for oneself to be happy and to have the cause of happiness. One then goes on to extend this attitude to one's loved ones, to one's friends and relatives, to strangers and finally to those towards whom one is averse. Eventually one would extend this qualitatively to all sentient beings in our community, in our nation, in our world and in all the world systems. We extend this wish gradually until it becomes a universal orientation on attitude.

In the case of compassion, it is suggested that we begin with an unfortunate person. As we saw in our consideration of the common attitude of compassion which naturally arises when we witness the suffering of another sentient being, we then extend the attitude of compassion to loved ones, to friends, strangers, to enemies and eventually to all beings without exception.

In the case of appreciative joy, we begin with a fortunate friend. This attitude of appreciative joy which naturally and spontaneously arises is then extended first qualitatively to different categories of sentient beings towards whom we differ in emotional commitment and then quantitatively to all living beings without exception.

Finally, in the case of equanimity, we begin with a stranger, a person towards whom we are naturally free from the attitude of attachment and aversion. We then go on to extend this attitude until it encompasses all living beings without exception. In this way, we cultivate the four Immeasurables and in doing so, we can in our daily life transform our relationship with our fellow beings both within the social microcosm of the family and within the social macrocosm of society.

The cultivation of the four Immeasurables have both an immediate short term effect on the quality of our experience here and now, and a long term effect on the quality of our experience in the future. It will result here and now in social interaction which is characterized by freedom, away from excessive anger, violence, greed, exploitation and the like. It will result in the future in the accumulation of merit which can lead either to rebirth in the realm of the gods, or to rebirth in fortunate conditions where one will have the opportunity to practice the Dharma. The Immeasurables have these beneficial effects now and also in the future. If practiced correctly, the Dharma will ensure the provisional goal of happiness and prosperity, and the ultimate goal of liberation.

In regard to the Buddhist lay practices, the Buddhist observances, and the four Immeasurables, we have considered practices which are relevant to the realization of the first provisional goal of Buddhism. In the following sessions, we will deal with practices which lead to the ultimate goal of liberation.

5. The Buddhist Monastic Community

The monastic community is of considerable importance in the Buddhist tradition as it constitutes one of the three gems of Buddhism and it was to the monastic community that the Buddha entrusted the task of preserving and disseminating the Dharma. There is however a tendency to underestimate or neglect its importance. It is for this reason that we are devoting a session to this topic.

If we examine the origins of the Buddhist monastic community, we find that they go back to the very first occasion on which the Buddha proclaimed his teachings. The first members of the monastic community were the five ascetics to whom the Buddha delivered his first sermon on the Four Noble Truths in the Deer Park near Benares after his Enlightenment. At first the Buddha ordained all those who came to him to join the community. Later he delegated the authority to ordain the newcomers to the other monks. This delegation of duty soon led to such a tremendous growth of the community that by the end of the Buddha's career, the monastic community of both monks and nuns had achieved considerable size. It continued to increase after the Parinirvana of the Buddha and it was during this period that the task of ordination became a collective task performed by groups of monks.

In its very early days, the monastic community lived a strictly homeless life. It involved dwelling in the open, at the most seeking shelter under trees. It also involved wandering from place to place. This homeless wandering life style was interrupted only once in a year during the monsoon season. During this period, not only was travel difficult, it also involved substantial damage both to living creatures and to crops. This was the period when many creatures were washed to the surface by the rain, and the fields on which the crops were grown were made soft by the rain.

This homeless wandering life style however began to undergo some changes even during the time of the Buddha. This was the result of the donation of parks to the community by laypeople like Anathapindika, Vishaka and King Bimbisara. Initially, the monks returned to the parks during the rainy season, later the monks made the parks their permanent residence. This change in life style was advantageous in that it made easier the interaction amongst the members of the monastic community, and between the monastic community and the lay community. As a result of this, over the course of the first one hundred to two hundred years after the career of the Buddha, elaborate monastic institutions rapidly began to develop. These institutions had extensive permanent facilities like lecture halls, hostels, bathing facilities, kitchens and the like. They became self-contained, independent campuses in which the monks and nuns carried out their activities. Eventually, they grew into very sizeable institutions like the Nalanda University that we find in the Middle Ages in India.

One of the most characteristic aspects of the life of the monastic community is the rules of discipline by which the community lived. There are in this context two sets of disciplinary literature — the Vinaya Pitaka which comprises one of the three divisions of the Buddhist Canon, and the compendium of rules called the Pratimoksha. These set out the rules that governed the daily life of the community. The rules contained in the Pratimoksha are still recited today by the monastic community on the new moon and full moon days of the month. This twice-monthly recital provides an occasion for not only refreshing one's memory regarding the rules of monastic conduct but also for the admission of any transgression of rules that might have taken place during the preceding fortnight.

There are more than two hundred rules enumerated in the Pratimoksha. Of these, four are of utmost importance, the prohibition of - engaging in sexual intercourse, theft, the taking of human life and the false claim to the ability to perform miracles. Transgression of these four rules entails automatic and permanent expulsion from the monastic community. The majority of the rules covers the social relationship between members of the monastic community and the lay community, the appropriation and use of various articles like food, clothing, medicine and shelter. In general, the rules of monastic discipline are designed to enable the monks and nuns to lead a disciplined life of moderation which is more conducive to study and meditation.

Entry into the monastic community is marked by the ordination ceremony. This entails a number of symbolic acts which express the spirit of renunciation. The removal of the hair, for example, is one such symbolic act. So too is the donning of the robe which signifies the abandonment of any pretension towards worldly status. While the monks and nuns abandon possessions and wealth with the entry into the community, they are guaranteed a safe and secure life so long as they uphold their monastic commitments. In exchange for the secure environment, they need to perform a number of tasks. They spent a considerable proportion of their time in study which is in keeping with the very high premium which the Buddhist tradition places on education. The rest of their time is spent in the maintenance of the monastic institutions, in observances like the recitation of the Pratimoksha and in performing ritual acts for the lay community.

Very early monastic education seems to have focussed upon instructions on the Buddhist doctrines, on the rules of discipline and on the accounts of the previous lives of the Buddha. Gradually, as the monastic institutions grew in size and complexity, the pattern of education also expanded so that by the beginning of the Christian Era, monastic education had become very comprehensive. Subjects that were taught in Buddhist monasteries included philosophy, grammar, composition, logic, math-

ematics, medicine and even the fine arts. The comprehensive syllabus prepared the students not only for a successful life within the monastic community, but also to interact on the same level with the most highly educated segments of the society.

The Buddhist monastic educational system is in fact a prototype of the mass educational system of later centuries. Before the evolution of the monastic educational system, the pattern of education in India had been what one might call domestic. The teacher would invite one or two students to his home. The students would perform certain tasks for the teacher who in return would teach the students. The pattern of education was very small in scale centered around the teacher and his students.

In the case of the Buddhist monasteries the picture was very different. Full-fledged academic teaching procedures were used. The students were instructed on various areas of discipline. They often numbered in the hundreds or thousands. It was a mass education system. In a time when education was not the responsibility of the state, the Buddhist monastic institutions performed a very valuable function in uplifting the educational standard of the community. These institutions not only produced many outstanding Indian scholars, but many notable scholars from other parts of Asia also studied in these institutions.

In the context of the roles performed by the monks and nuns within the wider social environment, we need to recognize a number of areas in which the monastic community has played important roles. First and foremost, they are the preservers and disseminators of the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha had indicated that the survival of the teachings depended upon the survival of the monastic community. In addition to this primary role, the monks and nuns also play roles that are in direct relation to the lay community. For example, they function as counselors to the laity. An early precedent of this was the Buddha's advice to the daughter-in-law of Anathapindika. The monks and nuns help the laity to overcome their problems and they do this particularly well because, having disengaged themselves from the world, they are in a better position to see the situation more objectively. They can help to alleviate suffering through their advice and also through the performance of ritual acts.

The justification of the use of ritual acts can be made along two general lines — firstly, the mind has a very powerful influence over external phenomena like sickness and so forth. Secondly, an action that is undertaken with intention has a karmic force which is capable of exerting an influence upon circumstances.

Today, as it was in the past, the monastic community fulfills a number of important roles. They are an important and integral part of the society. This is particularly important to remember because we sometimes find

that the monks and nuns are looked upon as unnecessary members of society. This is unjustified in as much as we cannot measure the well being of a society strictly in material terms. It has also to be measured in terms of its spiritual and intellectual well-being.

6. The Way of the Arhat

If we look at the accounts of the Buddha Sakyamuni's career, we find that during the course of the forty-five years of his teaching, many of his disciples achieved the goal of Arhatship. Among them were the five monks converted by the Buddha at the Deer Park near Sarnath, his son Rahula, his cousins Nanda and Ananda and his own father Shuddhodana. This last is particularly significant because it shows that it is not impossible, though it is rare, for a layman to achieve the goal of Arhatship.

The Arhat may be defined as the Perfected One, the one who has overcome the afflictions of greed, anger and delusion. He is no longer reborn when he has finished his present life as he has achieved freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

We have mentioned the provisional goal and the ultimate goal that the Buddhist path offers. The provisional goal can be achieved through some of the practices that we have mentioned previously. The goal of Arhatship is qualitatively different from this provisional goal as it implies freedom from rebirth. It implies transcending the six realms of existence. When one aspires to become an Arhat, one makes a qualitative leap from the essentially worldly standpoint of desiring happiness and prosperity to the supramundane standpoint of seeking freedom from rebirth. When one realizes that rebirth anywhere in the six realms of existence is characterized by suffering, one produces a great renunciation of any lingering desire for rebirth in the six realms and one resolves to strive for the goal of Arhatship. This goal is however not the only ultimate goal of Buddhism. In addition to this goal which implies a freedom from rebirth for oneself there is the goal of Buddhahood which implies not-only freedom for oneself but also freedom to help others to achieve Enlightenment.

Even in our consideration of the practices leading to the provisional goal of happiness and prosperity, we saw that good conduct and meditation played an important role, for example, the observance of the five and eight precepts, and the meditation on the four Immeasurables. In the path leading to Arhatship, a third component is added, and that component is wisdom. This three-fold division of the Buddhist path — good conduct, meditation and wisdom applies both to the path of the Arhat and also to the path of the Bodhisattva though there is a slight corre-

sponding modification. It is through the cultivation of these divisions of the path that the Arhat achieves the purity of body, voice and mind which is the goal of liberation.

In the context of good conduct, the Arhat observes very strictly the five precepts and scrupulously avoids the ten unwholesome actions. The five precepts are also observed by the Buddhist lay community. They are the precepts of avoiding killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and consuming intoxicants. We can see how observing the five precepts and avoiding the ten unwholesome actions can lead to the purification of body, speech, and mind. In the case of the five precepts, the first three precepts pertain to the purification of the body, the fourth to the purification of speech, and the fifth to the purification of the mind. Similarly, in the case of the ten unwholesome actions, we need to avoid three unwholesome actions of body — killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, four unwholesome actions of speech— lying, slander, harsh speech and idle gossip, and three unwholesome actions of mind — greed, anger and delusion. By observing the five precepts and by avoiding the ten unwholesome actions, the Arhat purifies his body, speech and mind and he creates the foundation for the higher practices of meditation and wisdom. In the context of meditation, we will here focus on the cultivation of the second and third component of meditation — mindfulness and concentration (the first component being right effort). In the context of mindfulness, we can focus on two applications of mindfulness which are particularly popular and effective — mindfulness with regard to the body, and mindfulness with regard to the breath. For the purpose of simplicity, we will consider them separately.

Mindfulness with regard to the body means awareness of the physical postures, of the limbs of the body, and the activities of the body such as walking, sleeping, eating, lying down and so forth. Mindfulness with regard to the breath means the observation of the process of inhalation and exhalation of the breath.

Mindfulness with regard to the body and breath have an obvious and proven effectiveness in calming the mind, in improving efficiency and in stabilizing one's emotion. This can be verified in one's daily life and in fact these practices have been promulgated by physiotherapists, physicians and psychologists. For example, awareness of the postures of the body is an integral part of most skilled activities, such as the discipline of sportsmen and dancers who need to cultivate a high degree of awareness of the positions of their bodies. When we are angry, and make a conscious effort to breathe calmly and slowly, we find that this has an immediate effect of calming our mind. This principle of employing the influence which breathing has on the physical and mental states has also been used by physicians who have recommended a controlled pattern of breathing during natural child birth. Mindfulness with regard to body and breath are two techniques which have

long been employed in the Buddhist tradition of mental development and which have also been employed in other secular and religious traditions.

There are forty topics of meditation traditionally taught in Buddhism. They include amongst others the ten Supports (Kasinas), the ten Impurities, the four Immeasurables, and the four Formless Meditations. Instead of looking at each individual topic of meditation, and how they may be employed in a given program of cultivating single-pointedness of mind, it might be more useful to look in general at the means for the selection and application of these topics and how the selection and application eventually lead to the development of single-pointedness and entry into the absorptions.

The Buddhist tradition identifies six types of meditators — meditators with lustful temperaments, intellectual temperaments, discursive temperaments, hateful temperaments, devotional temperaments and indeterminate temperaments. On the basis of the distinction of these different temperaments, meditators are assigned different subjects of meditation to suit their temperaments. For example, the meditator with a lustful temperament is assigned the meditation on the impurities. Those of a discursive temperament, meditation on the four elements, and those with a devout temperament are assigned meditation on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Once a meditative topic has been assigned, the meditator tries to make it the object of his concentration. He focuses his mind upon the object. In the process of developing single-pointedness and achieving the absorptions, we can distinguish three stages — the preliminary, the proximate and the accomplished stage. In general, these three stages express an abstraction, conceptualization and internalization of the objects of meditation. The meditator progresses through the stages of meditation, achieves the various states of concentration and finally achieves singlepointedness of mind.

The meditator is then ready to join this single-pointedness with wisdom. This in fact is what is going to take him beyond the cycle of birth and death because so long as one's meditation is not joined with wisdom, one will remain a prisoner in samsara. This is because when the power of that meditative development which results in rebirth in a higher realm is exhausted, one will again experience rebirth in the lower realm. For the wise therefore, the acquisition of exalted and developed meditative states of absorption itself is not desirable. Meditation by itself only performs an instrumental function. It has to be joined with wisdom in order to lead the meditator to liberation.

The importance of joining meditation with wisdom is demonstrated by the Buddha himself on the night of his Enlightenment. In order to achieve insight into the

true nature of things, we have to steady the mind. But steadying the mind by itself will not gain us freedom. We need to use this concentrated and steady mind as a kind of penetrating tool, as an axe to cut through the net of ignorance in order to see things as they really are. Only having achieved the stage of single pointed absorption is the meditator ready to make the contents of wisdom the object of his meditation.

What are the contents of wisdom? They are the three universal characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self. With his mind concentrated and free from distraction, the meditator directs his mind to the understanding of the three characteristics. This understanding leads to the opening of the three doors to freedom — the signless, the wishless and the empty. Through comprehending the universal characteristic of impermanence, the meditator opens up the door to freedom known as the signless, the ineffable; through comprehending the universal characteristic of suffering the door of freedom known as the wishless, and through comprehending the universal characteristic of not-self, the door of freedom known as the empty.

Having opened up these doors of freedom, the Arhat-to-be embarks upon the four transcendental stages of Arhatship. These four stages are measured against the ten fetters.

The first stage is the stage of Stream winner. At this stage the Arhat-to-be overcomes the three fetters of belief in the existence of an independent self, doubt in the ability of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to provide a way to liberation, and belief in the sufficiency of rules and ascetic rites as the sole means of achieving ultimate liberation. The Stream-winner will no longer be reborn in states of woe, his progress towards ultimate freedom is guaranteed, and he will be reborn for no more than seven times before achieving ultimate freedom.

The second stage is the stage of Once-Returner. At this stage, the Arhat to-be weakens the two fetters of attachment to the senses and ill-will in addition to having overcome the first three fetters. The Once-Returner will be reborn only once as a human being and in his subsequent life he will achieve Arhatship.

At the third stage of Arhatship, the two fetters of attachment to the senses and ill-will are totally removed. With the total eradication of the five fetters, one achieves the stage of a Non-Returner. The Non-Returner will be reborn once only in what are called the pure abodes and he will achieve Arhatship on that plane of existence.

Finally, on the stage of Arhatship, the last five fetters are overcome.

They are the desire for rebirth in the realm of form, desire for rebirth in the formless realm, conceit, restless-

ness and ignorance. The goal of Arhatship is achieved once all the ten fetters have been overcome. One is no longer reborn as one has achieved freedom from rebirth in the six realms of existence.

If you look at the ten fetters, you will see how they constitute an Inventory of the emotional and intellectual impediments to liberation. So naturally, as the Arhat-to-be progresses propelled by the cultivation of good conduct, meditation and wisdom, he progresses through the four stages of nobility. Progress along the path of Arhatship is, like progress along the path of Buddhahood, a gradual process. Just as one would remove impurities from silver little by little, so too one should purify oneself step by step in order to progress towards one's goal. This is indicated in both the progressive nature of the tradition of discipline — from good conduct to meditation and to wisdom; and in the four stages of Arhatship.

At this point, one might perhaps consider a question which has often been raised in regard to the issue of whether the attainment of Enlightenment is a gradual or a sudden process. We can see this issue reflected even in the biographies of some of the disciples of the Buddha who achieved Arhatship, for example, in the case of Shuddhodana. His progress through the four stages of Arhatship was distributed over a relatively long period. He achieved the stage of Stream-winner upon the Buddha's first return to Kapilavastu and Arhatship at the end of his life. In this case, the progress through the four stages is gradual. But then there are other cases like those of the first five converts of the Buddha, and Queen Kshema who achieved Arhatship almost instantaneously. Their achievements seem to be sudden.

The achievement of Arhatship or Enlightenment must be sudden. But the progress towards the sudden achievement has to have been gradual, just as one might tip a scale by gradually adding small weights until finally the addition of a very small weight can tip the balance; or just as in the case of water which freezes suddenly when the temperature reaches 0 degrees C but after the temperature has been gradually lowered. It is this gradual accumulation of the potential for achieving Arhatship that is manifested suddenly in some cases.

7. The Way of the Bodhisattva

Just as the goal of Buddhism can be divided into the provisional goal and the ultimate goal, likewise, the ultimate goal can be divided into the goal of Arhatship and the goal of Buddhahood. Respectively, the goal of Arhatship and of Buddhahood refer to freedom from the suffering of

samsara for oneself and freedom to liberate other sentient beings from the suffering of samsara. This goal of achieving Buddhahood in order to liberate all living beings from suffering is the goal of the Bodhisattva.

We can see the way of the Bodhisattva exemplified in the career of the Buddha Sakyamuni and in the accounts of his previous lives. The career of the Bodhisattva begins with the awakening of the Enlightenment Thought, the thought to free all living beings from the suffering of samsara. In the case of the Buddha Sakyamuni, he first awakened the Thought of Enlightenment many lifetimes before he attained Buddhahood when in a certain life he was a merchant who had a blind mother. He had to go to a distant land on a business trip, and as he did not wish to leave his mother unattended, he took her with him. They had to travel across the ocean and in the course of their journey their ship sank in a storm. Finding themselves in the water, the Bodhisattva looked about for his mother and eventually with the aid of a plank saved her from drowning. In the course of saving his mother, he awakened the thought to free all sentient beings from suffering. This awakening of the Thought of Enlightenment marks the beginning of the Buddha Sakyamuni's progress along the way of the Bodhisattva.

After the awakening of the Enlightenment Thought, the next step of the way of the Bodhisattva is the formal articulation of the vow and the reception of the prediction to Buddhahood. In the case of the Buddha Sakyamuni, this took place in the time of the Buddha Dipankara when he had already achieved the eighth of the ten stages of Buddhahood. According to one account, on seeing Dipankara one day in the city, he had a compelling desire to become a Buddha like Dipankara. He articulated his vow to become a Buddha and he received a prediction from Dipankara to the effect that in a future life he will become a Buddha by the name of Sakyamuni.

This event of the articulation of the vow and the reception of the prediction functions more as a confirmation of his resolve and progress towards Buddhahood than as an instrumental cause of his Enlightenment. It is perhaps for this reason that they have received somewhat less attention than the other steps of the way of the Bodhisattva within the living Mahayana tradition. In fact we do have a formalization of the articulation of the vow and reception of the prediction in the Mahayana tradition. This functions as a kind of imitation of the events of the career of the Bodhisattva. Today, one who wants to follow the Bodhisattva path could articulate the vow before a living spiritual master and receive from him the prediction to Buddhahood.

In terms of one's practice and progress towards Buddhahood, the practice of the perfections is more important than the others. This constitutes the essence of the way of the Bodhisattva and it occupies the largest

amount of time and energy in the course of Bodhisattva practice. The practice of the perfections of generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation and wisdom are exemplified in the former lives of the Buddha Sakyamuni. For example, we have the account in which having saved a pigeon from a crow, he then gave his own flesh to the crow in order to compensate him for the loss of his meal. This story is interesting as it suggests the difficulty of practicing the perfections. It requires a real and total commitment to the benefit of all living beings, not just for some to the exclusion of others.

In the career of the former lives of the Buddha Sakyamuni, we see his gradual accumulation of merit and knowledge through the practice of the perfections which culminated in his birth as Prince Siddhartha. The events of his last life — his renunciation, practice and achievement of Enlightenment are paralleled in the life of the other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. They are standard stages in the career of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and they are the awakening of the Enlightenment Thought, the vow, the prediction, the practice of the perfections and ultimately the attainment of Buddhahood. Those who wish to follow the way of the Bodhisattva need in general to follow these steps.

In awakening the Enlightenment Thought, the first step is to consider the

sameness and equality of all living beings. This is the foundation of the universal altruism of the Mahayana just as it is the foundation of Buddhist ethics and morality. What this means is that all living beings are alike in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. This is true of the highest of the gods, of the tiniest of the microscopic organisms, and of the most miserable of beings in the hells.

In the context of Buddhist ethics, this forms the basis of good conduct because just as oneself would not like to be beaten or robbed, so all living beings would also not like to be beaten or robbed. And just as oneself would like to be spoken to with courtesy, so all living beings would also like to be treated in the same way.

In the case of the aspiration for Enlightenment, this sameness and equality of all living beings is also fundamental as it leads us to think that in so far as we are all alike in wanting happiness and freedom from suffering, it is improper to wish for our own happiness and freedom from suffering while neglecting the happiness and freedom from suffering of others. This consideration leads one to aspire for Buddhahood.

This consideration of the sameness and equality of all living beings is amplified by considering the very close relationships which are shared with all human beings. We have recourse to the emotional commitment that one feels towards one's mother. Here we consider the fact that at one time or another all sentient beings have been our kind mothers. We consider the kindness of our mother, the in-

debtedness which we owe to our mother. At birth, each and every one of us is totally helpless and incapable of surviving. It is only through the kindness of our mother that we gradually grow to become independent, taught to function successfully in the world and so forth. Each and every one of us owes a tremendous debt to our mother. The debt that we owe to our mother in this life is similarly owed to all living beings.

The Buddha once said that even if one were to carry one's parents on one's shoulders for the whole of one's life, one would not be able to repay the debt one owes them. But through striving for the happiness and freedom from suffering of all living beings, one can repay the debt. If one were to see one's mother drowning in the ocean of samsara, and if one had the capacity to save her, surely it would be an ungrateful act not to rescue her. Similarly, seeing all sentient beings suffering in the ocean of samsara, knowing that at one time or another they have been our kind mothers, surely it is befitting that we should strive to rescue them. This is done through the attitude of the cultivation of great love and great compassion, the altruistic wish for all living beings to be happy and free from suffering.

The real driving force of the Enlightenment Thought arises out of the conflict between the objective of great love and great compassion and the reality of our present situation. Presently, we are not even able to secure our own happiness and freedom from suffering let alone the happiness and freedom from suffering of all living beings. We also recognize that even though we may be able to do so marginally by making material gifts and encouragement, only by achieving Buddhahood are we able to secure the ultimate happiness and freedom from suffering of all living beings. Only the Buddha with his infinite qualities of wisdom, compassion, skilful means and so forth has the ability to achieve this.

The awakening of the Enlightenment Thought has a totally transforming effect on the nature of one's experience. Shantideva said that by the mere power of the awakening of the Enlightenment Thought a wretch living in a prison is transformed into a son of the Buddha. The awakening of the Enlightenment Thought destroys previous unwholesome karma. It secures one against depression and fear. It is able to do this because of the greatness of the intention embodied in the Enlightenment Thought.

We can understand the greatness of the Enlightenment Thought by comparing it with other resolutions. For example, if we resolve to give food or clothing to an orphanage for one year, or if we resolve to be a physician in order to care for the physical ills of others, these resolutions are considered meritorious. However, in both cases, only a limited benefit for a limited number of beings for a limited length of time is involved. In the case of the awakening of the Enlightenment Thought, what is involved is

the ultimate and permanent happiness and freedom from suffering of all living beings without exception. In comparison to those lesser yet meritorious intentions, one can understand the greatness of the Enlightenment Thought. It is said that nowhere in the world, not among kings nor among parents is there any thought equal in greatness to the thought of achieving Buddhahood.

The aspiring Enlightenment Thought that we have discussed so far is itself a great marvel. Nonetheless, it needs to be utilized. This is just as if one were to come across a great jewel one would be greatly overjoyed by one's discovery; or if one were to dream of visiting a distant country and one would be elated by the thought, and yet one would not make any progress simply by the discovery or wish alone. Similarly, the awakening of the Enlightenment Thought is a source of great joy in itself. But the intention by itself is not enough. It has to be coupled with practice. The aspiring Enlightenment Thought has to be coupled with the applied Enlightenment Thought to enable the practitioner to reach the goal of Buddhahood.

8. The Practice of the Perfections

The applied Enlightenment Thought specifically means the practice of the perfections. Through the practice of the perfections, particularly the six basic perfections, one can achieve Buddhahood. One can transform the conventional Enlightenment Thought into the ultimate Enlightenment Thought, into the mind of the Buddha. It is the mind in which all the dualistic conceptions, all distinctions between subject and object, between Enlightenment and ignorance, between samsara and nirvana disappears. One can only accomplish this transformation by practicing the perfections.

Achieving Buddhahood implies achieving certain qualities. Foremost

amongst these qualities are the qualities of perfect wisdom or knowledge, great compassion and skill-in-means. The practice of the six perfections leads to these qualities because it results in the two accumulations, the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of knowledge. These two accumulations are needed to attain Buddhahood just as a bird needs two wings to fly. Through the practice of the perfection of generosity, morality and patience one achieves the accumulation of merit, while the practice of the perfection of meditation and wisdom enables one to achieve the accumulation of knowledge. The term accumulation here is used figuratively. It is not really accumulation, but rather a state of clarity, of penetrative insight. The fourth perfection, the perfection of energy is necessary for both these accumulations, just as one would need energy in order to be successful in whatever endeavor one

wishes to attempt.

In achieving Buddhahood, one achieves the qualities of freedom from the cycle of birth and death and also freedom to help all living beings to achieve liberation. These two freedoms are reflected in the two accumulations. The accumulation of knowledge results in a Buddha's 'freedom from' as it is through his wisdom that he is free from samsara, and the accumulation of merit results in his 'freedom to' as it is through his merits that he achieves the ability to help all sentient beings.

The two qualities of 'freedom from' and 'freedom to', and the two accumulations of knowledge and merit also imply the two dimensions or bodies of the Buddha — the truth dimension (Dharmakaya) and the form dimension (Rupakaya) because the accumulation of knowledge results in the Buddha's truth dimension and the accumulation of merit results in the Buddha's form dimension.

The form dimension has two aspects — the apparitional dimension (Nirmanakaya), and the celestial dimension (Sambhogakaya). The apparitional body appears in the world and is accessible to all sentient beings, whereas the celestial dimension appears only to those of advanced spirituality, who have purified their vision through morality, meditation and wisdom. In other words, while the ordinary body appears to everybody, the heavenly body appears only to advanced Bodhisattvas.

When we read the accounts of the former lives of the Buddha, we are inclined to regard his practice of the perfections as altogether unattainable. How, for example, can we hope to follow the example of the great monkey who sacrificed his life in order to save his comrades, the ascetic Kshantivadin whose limbs were cut by the wrathful king and yet did not produce any hostile reactions, and the Bodhisattva who sacrificed his life in order to feed a hungry tigress. These stories only make sense if we bear in mind that they have a symbolic and pedagogical meaning which illustrates a certain extraordinary state of mind.

The practice of the perfections becomes perfect only through the perfection of wisdom. It is the understanding of emptiness that turns all the first five perfections into perfections. Without the understanding of emptiness, the five perfections are only ordinary wholesome actions. The term perfection (Paramita) means going beyond the limit. It means transcendental perfection. It implies an understanding of emptiness. The perfection of wisdom is the understanding of emptiness, the understanding that all phenomena are devoid of independent existence because their existence is interdependent, is conditioned. The perfections are not perfections by themselves. It is with this understanding of the empty nature of all phenomena that the practice of the perfections becomes perfect.

Specifically, the perfection of wisdom implies the purity of the three circles. This means the purity or emptiness of the three components of all actions — subject, object and action. For example, the application of the perfection of wisdom to the practice of generosity means that we understand the emptiness of the giver, the recipient and the gift. It is the understanding of emptiness that makes this practice a transcendental perfection because ordinarily we are bound up in all kinds of notions about the giver, the recipient and the gift, in the notion that I 'so and so' am making 'such and such' a gift to 'such and such' a person. It is bound up with all these ideas, making the practice mundane. For example, we can become rich in a future life by practicing generosity. We can become a god by practicing meditation. But without the perfection of wisdom, without that liberating element of the understanding of emptiness, all these practices do not lead one out of samsara. It is only when we introduce the perfection of wisdom into the other perfections that they become causes of Buddhahood.

That is why so much attention is devoted to the practice of the perfection of wisdom in Mahayana literature. The perfection of wisdom is like the wings of a bird, or like the baking of an earthenware vessel. The Bodhisattva who does not practice the perfection of wisdom is like an unbaked earthenware vessel which is easily broken. Again, it is said that the other perfections are like blind men. No matter how many blind men there are, they will never reach their destination, whereas if they have a single sighted guide they will reach their destination easily. With the perfection of wisdom, we arrive at the Enlightened mind, at the level of understanding where we have transcended all the dualistic conceptions, of self and other, of subject and object, of existence and non-existence, of Enlightenment and ignorance, of samsara and nirvana, and so forth.

But, if there is really no self and other, no happiness and suffering, and so forth, what need is there to liberate all sentient beings since there are in actuality no sentient beings, no liberation? How can there be any place for compassion? The necessary and spontaneous association between wisdom and compassion can be illustrated by means of an example. Suppose you are asleep and dream that you are being pursued by bandits. Naturally you will be terrified of the ensuing suffering, and just as the bandits are about to catch you, you awake and feel relieved that all the suffering in the dream was an illusion and is unreal. Suppose on the next evening you see your wife, child or husband thrashing about in their sleep moaning "Save me, save me. Bandits are going to kill me". What would you do? Would you sit back and laugh because you know that it is unreal, or would you spontaneously move over to wake them up because you recognize that although the suffering is unreal, to that person in the dream, the suffering is indeed real? Similarly, would you do nothing to pacify your child who suffers greatly because she has lost a balloon, the loss of which to adults is a very insignificant

matter?

This compassion which flows spontaneously out of wisdom manifests itself in skill-in-means — in the understanding of the peculiarity and capability of sentient beings and in the production of countless expedients in order to liberate all these sentient beings. The skill-in-means of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is expressed in countless expedients — in the presentation of the various traditions of Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana, or more specifically in the recitation of the Mantra of the Buddha Amitabha, in the stark unritualistic techniques of Zen, and in the rich and elaborate devices of the Vajrayana.

From the six basic perfections flows the four secondary perfections — the perfection of skill-in-means, resolution, power and knowledge. These four perfections are concerned with how best to help sentient beings. Through practicing the ten perfections over many life times, one become a Buddha whose multi-dimensional being continues ceaselessly and spontaneously to work for the liberation of all sentient beings.

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