

The Bodhisattva Ideal:

Wisdom and Compassion in Buddhism

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THE AWAKENING OF THE BODHI HEART

NOW WE HAVE A SENSE of who or what a Bodhisattva is, the next question is this: how does one *become* a Bodhisattva? How does one embark on the realization of this sublime spiritual ideal? The traditional answer is short and straightforward, though it requires considerable explanation: one becomes a Bodhisattva, and thus fully oriented in the direction of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, upon the awakening of the ‘bodhi heart’.

The Sanskrit term translated here is *bodhicitta-utpada*, and it is one of the most important terms in the whole field of Mahāyāna Buddhism. As we have seen, *bodhi* means Enlightenment or awakening. *Citta*, one of the multifaceted terms encountered so often in Buddhist Sanskrit, means mind, thought, consciousness, heart – all these things. *Utpada* is more straightforward; it means simply arising or, more poetically, awakening.

Bodhicitta-utpada is sometimes translated as ‘the arising of the thought of Enlightenment’,³⁸ but this is exactly what it is not. We can think about Enlightenment as much as we like. We can read about it, think about it, talk about it. ‘Enlightenment is both wisdom and compassion’, we say, as though just saying the words means that we know all about it. But whatever we say, whatever we think, the bodhicitta has not arisen. Thinking about Enlightenment has certainly not transformed us into Bodhisattvas. So the bodhicitta is not just a thought about Enlightenment; it is very much more than that. Guenther translates it as ‘Enlightened attitude’;³⁹ my own preferred translation is ‘the will to Enlightenment’ or, as here, ‘the bodhi heart’.

All these translations are considerably better than ‘the thought of Enlightenment’, but none of them is completely satisfactory. This isn’t the fault of the English language so much as the fault of language itself. In fact, *bodhicitta* is a very unsatisfactory term for the bodhicitta. The bodhicitta is not a mental state, activity, or function at all. It is certainly not a thought that you or I could entertain. It has nothing to do with thought. It is not even an act of will in the sense in which we understand the term – it is not one’s *personal* will. Neither is it ‘being conscious’, if by that one merely means being conscious of the fact that there is such a thing as Enlightenment.

The bodhicitta represents the manifestation, even the irruption, within us of something transcendental: the emergence within our ordinary experience of something of a totally different nature. The author of a short but profound work called the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* (said to be Nāgārjuna – though not the Nāgārjuna who is the famous philosopher of the Madhyamaka), describes the bodhicitta as being ‘free from all determinations, that is, it is not included in the categories of the five skandhas’.⁴⁰

The skandhas are the traditional categories according to which all phenomenal existence and experience can be classified and described. This categorization is crucial to Buddhist thought; to gain any understanding of Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics, one needs a clear idea of what the five skandhas are. *Skandha*, another more or less untranslatable term, literally means the trunk of a tree, and the standard translation (though hardly more helpful) is ‘aggregate’ or ‘heap’. The first skandha is *rūpa*, which means ‘bodily form’, anything perceived through the senses. The second skandha is *vedanā*, ‘feeling’ or ‘emotion’ – positive, negative, pleasant, painful, and so on. Thirdly there is *saṃjñā*, which can be roughly translated as ‘perception’: the recognition of something as being a particular thing, as when we perceive and label, say, a tree. The fourth skandha consists in the *saṃskāras*, translated by some scholars as ‘steering forces’, but better rendered ‘volitional activities’ or ‘propensities’ – acts of will and so on. And the fifth skandha is *viññāna* or consciousness: consciousness through the five physical senses and through the mind at various levels.

In the entire range of our psycho-physical existence, on all levels, there is nothing which is not included in one or more of these categories. The

Mahāyāna text called the *Heart Sūtra* begins with the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara coursing in the profound Perfection of Wisdom, looking out at the world and seeing the five skandhas – just that.⁴¹ He sees that the whole of psycho-physical, conditioned existence consists in just these five things. Nothing exists or occurs on the conditioned level of existence that cannot be categorized in terms of one or more of these five skandhas.

But the bodhicitta is not included in the five skandhas – which means that it is something altogether out of this world, something trans-cendental. Not a thought, not a propensity, not an idea, not a concept, but – if we must use words at all – a profound transcendental experience which reorients our entire being. As the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* goes on to say, the bodhicitta is characterized by perpetual emptiness.

An analogy can be drawn here – and it is *only* an analogy, with no suggestion of equivalence – with an aspect of the Christian tradition. If a Christian were to say that they were ‘thinking of God’, even if they were a pious churchgoer, that couldn’t be described as a spiritual experience. Whether they were thinking of God as an old gentleman seated in the clouds, or as Pure Being, or whatever, ‘thinking of God’ would just be thinking of God. But if they were to speak of having experienced the descent of the Holy Spirit, that would be something else entirely. If merely thinking about Enlightenment is analogous to thinking about God, the arising of the bodhicitta is analogous to the descent upon one, in full force, of the Holy Spirit.

This analogy is not meant to blur the distinction between the bodhicitta and the Holy Spirit as concepts. Comparing them, we find that the concept of the bodhicitta is psychological rather than cosmological in its origins. The differences between the concept of God in the orthodox sense and what is really meant by the bodhicitta are obvious. But there is no need to be pedantic about terminology. If one is using the term God in a general way to signify some sort of spiritual, transcendental element in the universe, then perhaps one’s idea of God does have something in common with the notion of the bodhicitta – though the two sets of concepts generally express quite contrary spiritual positions.

The arising of the bodhicitta is a profound spiritual experience. It is not, however, a personal experience. Another fundamental characteristic of the bodhicitta – also identified in the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* – is that it is not individual. It is possible to speak of the bodhicitta as arising in this person or that person, and one might therefore think that there were in existence a number of bodhicittas – your bodhicitta and her bodhicitta and my bodhicitta – like so many bright ideas that we might each independently have. It might sound as though there is a glorious plurality of bodhicittas arising in different people, making them all Bodhisattvas. But it isn't so. There is only one Bodhicitta, in which individuals participate, or which individuals manifest, to varying degrees.

This means that the bodhicitta is more likely to arise in a spiritual community, a situation of intense mutual spiritual friendship and encouragement. The spiritual community need not be a specific closed circle of people. And, of course, it is possible to make spiritual progress on one's own – many people do. Most of us, though, need the support of others who are following the same path of practice. Even when one is alone, on solitary retreat for example, one can remain in contact with other members of the spiritual community in the sense of being aware of them. It is this kind of contact that is most important, although the possibility of mental connectedness is no excuse for neglecting straightforward contact and communication.

The bodhicitta is supra-individual but not collective – a rather tricky concept to get hold of. Before one can realize a supra-individual experience one has to achieve some real individuality, and this is not necessarily easy. The development of true individuality has several clear stages. To begin with, there is no individuality, but only membership of the species or group. Then individuality begins to emerge, but only in relation to the group. Three kinds of individual can be distinguished here: the individual who is dominated by the group, the individual who dominates the group, and the individual – really an individualist – who rebels against the group, but still defines himself or herself in relation to that group. At the next stage, the individual stands free from the group altogether; and, at a further stage still, the individual enters into free association with other individuals – which could stand as a definition of the spiritual community.⁴²

But one can envisage something even beyond that. The arising of the Bodhicitta is an experience above and beyond the level at which a number of individuals are freely associating and co-operating. At the same time, it arises out of the intensive interaction of true individuals. It isn't individual in the way that the individual is an individual; but at the same time it isn't something collective which all those individuals have in common. At this level, in other words, it is very difficult to find words to express what happens; but basically one could say that, a higher level of consciousness having arisen in a number of individuals, the bodhicitta then arises.

The fact that the bodhicitta is not somebody's individual achievement or possession is illustrated by an incident in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, a Mahāyāna text in which 500 Licchavi youths who desire to develop the bodhicitta present their 500 parasols to the Buddha, and he turns the parasols into one spectacularly huge canopy.⁴³ What actually happens is not, needless to say, quite so simple as this image suggests. You no longer have 500 units, but they have not been resolved into one unit. The one canopy represents a quite different order of experience, transcending the concepts of sameness and difference altogether. Buddhism sees reality as being essentially diversified, as having unity in difference and difference in unity. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* illustrates this with the simile of beams of coloured light going in all directions, intersecting and passing through one another. It is not that everything is reduced to one, but at the same time there is unity. Difference reveals unity and unity makes difference possible.

Another aspect of the nature of the bodhicitta is illustrated in the Mahāyāna by the image of the full moon: the same bodhicitta appears in different people just as the same moon is reflected in different pools and lakes and oceans. This, at least, gives an idea of a certain characteristic of the bodhicitta – like any image, it has its limitations. The bodhicitta is not literally a static object out there whose mere reflection appears in different people; in reality it is much more dynamic than that.

The Mahāyāna tradition takes account of the dynamic nature of the bodhicitta by making a distinction between the 'absolute' bodhicitta and the 'relative' bodhicitta. It should be admitted straightaway that there is very little that can be said about the absolute bodhicitta. In its ultimate essence it is beyond

thought and beyond speech. But some great teachers do, very provisionally, have something to say about it. They say, for instance, that it is of the nature of *sūnyatā*, emptiness – that is to say, it is identical with ultimate reality. It is imbued with the essence of compassion. It is not a blank, featureless, inert absolute; it pulses with the spiritual life and activity which we call compassion. And it is like pure light, radiant and immaculate. It cannot be touched, cannot be soiled, cannot be shaken. Furthermore, it transcends both space and time. Very mysterious! Suffice it to say that even the absolute bodhicitta, although identical with reality itself, and thus beyond change – or rather beyond the opposition between change and non-change – is not a static, fixed thing (in fact, not a ‘thing’ at all).

The relative bodhicitta is more comprehensible, more accessible. It is, one could say, the reflection of the absolute bodhicitta in the web of conditioned existence, the stream of time, the cosmic process. We still have to be careful to realize the limits of imagery here: whereas a reflection isn’t real – the moon isn’t actually in the pool – the relative bodhicitta actually is in the individuals in which it appears to arise by virtue of the reflection in them of the absolute bodhicitta. And it is an active force at work in the world. This is why the translation ‘will to Enlightenment’ seems appropriate (especially when one is referring to the relative, as distinct from the absolute, bodhicitta).

The fact that the absolute bodhicitta and the relative bodhicitta share the same name is confusing, given that they are so different in nature. Here again we are faced with the difficulty of finding appropriate terminology. There are two alternatives: either to use different terms and hence imply that the two are entirely different, or to use the same term and thereby suggest that they are the same. To speak of the relative and the absolute bodhicitta is to opt for sameness, while to give them two quite different names would be to go to the other extreme and opt for difference. The difficulty arises in part, perhaps, through the use of the word ‘absolute’. The translation of *paramārtha bodhicitta* as absolute bodhicitta is not meant to suggest a philosophical, unitary absolute into which everything has to be incorporated in a Hegelian sense. *Paramārtha bodhicitta* is literally translated ‘bodhicitta in the highest sense’, which makes things a little clearer.

These considerations are of great importance. One could say that the relative bodhicitta represents the path and the absolute bodhicitta represents the goal. To say that the two are the same – or to say that they are different – is a serious mistake; in fact, it is in effect to destroy the foundation of the spiritual life. They are neither the same nor different. To speak of a *samvṛtti* and a *paramārtha bodhicitta* is perhaps the best solution available to us, providing for both unity and difference – the unity reflected in the common noun and the difference in the different adjectives.

One effect of distinguishing between the absolute bodhicitta and the relative bodhicitta is to suggest that the reality towards which we are progressing is not, in the ultimate sense, foreign to us; nor are we, in the ultimate sense, foreign to it, even though for the time being we are progressing towards it, and appear to be different from it. You couldn't progress towards it if you didn't have some kinship with it. Angelus Silesius, the late medieval German mystic, following Neoplatonic thought, said something to the effect that the eye could not behold the sun if there was not something sun-like in the eye. Similarly, the bodhicitta could not arise in us if there was not already something like it in our being.

The *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (a fifth-century Chinese work) talks about what it calls the mutual perfuming of the real and the unreal.⁴⁴ Something of the absolute clings to you despite everything – it is not something that brushes off – just as when one is perfumed with something, some infinitesimally tiny particles of the perfume adhere to one's skin. So the goal towards which, as Buddhists, we are striving is not completely foreign to us; we have an inner kinship with it, however deeply hidden. Without that kinship, we couldn't arrive at the goal. In a sense the absolute bodhicitta is the absolute dimension of something that is already present within us and experienced by us in a relative or limited form. The gaining of insight into the transcendental is not an eruption of something which is totally alien to us, but a manifestation at the level of our conscious mental activity of something which, in a much deeper sense, we *are*.

This is to use the language of immanence, which should always come with a spiritual health warning. Buddhahood may perhaps be said to be immanent within us in potential, but to realize that potential, we will need to do more

than become aware of it: for most of us, it will be a process requiring a great deal of time and effort. The goal of Buddhahood can be understood in temporal as well as spatial terms. This is why Enlightenment is generally thought of as the culmination of a process, with the implication that Enlightenment itself is a process at some level.

The problem is that it is not easy to reconcile the language of time with the language of space. Absolute bodhicitta is bodhicitta not outside time in the literal sense, but conceived of in terms of space – that is, as fixed, permanent, unchanging. Relative bodhicitta is bodhicitta thought of in terms of time, which implies change. When one thinks of ultimate reality in terms of space, one thinks of it as the absolute bodhicitta. When one thinks of it in terms of time, that is the relative bodhicitta. But they are really the same – or rather, they are ‘not two’, as the traditional phrase has it, just as *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are said to be ‘not-two’. In one sense Enlightenment is eternally attained, in another sense it is eternally in the process of attainment, and these senses ultimately coincide.

So the bodhicitta is more than a simple ‘thought of’ Enlightenment. It has a transcendental, supra-individual nature. Its dynamic nature is reflected in the translation ‘will to Enlightenment’. But this will to Enlightenment is no more an act of anybody’s individual will than it is of anybody’s individual thought. We might – though here we have rather to grope for words – think of the bodhicitta as a sort of cosmic will. (It is very important not to take this literally; it is meant poetically, not scientifically.) The bodhicitta is a will at work in the universe, in the direction of universal redemption: the liberation, the Enlightenment, ultimately, of all sentient beings. We may even think of the bodhicitta as a sort of ‘spirit of Enlightenment’, immanent in the world and leading individuals to ever higher degrees of spiritual perfection.

This makes it clear that individuals do not possess the bodhicitta; if you possess it, it isn’t the bodhicitta – you’ve got hold of something else. It is the bodhicitta that possesses individuals. And those of whom the bodhicitta takes possession, as it were, those in whom this bodhicitta arises, or within whom it manifests, become Bodhisattvas. They live, that is to say, for the sake of Enlightenment; they strive to actualize, for the benefit of all, the highest potentialities that the universe contains.

To speak of the will to Enlightenment is perhaps rather like Christians speaking of the will of God. It's a very mysterious thing. You can say that your own will is blended with the will to Enlightenment. But it isn't that you have become a passive machine being operated from outside. The bodhicitta is *you*, but you have ceased to be something phenomenal. You have been transformed into something transcendental; or something transcendental has germinated in you, or come into you.

If you love someone very much, when they ask you to do something and you do it, is the carrying out of that task their volition or yours? It's hard to say. What happens is that you make their will your will. There is no question of their taking you over or using you as a kind of puppet. Their will becomes blended with yours. And if you believe that person to be more spiritually developed than you are yourself, when they ask you to do something which will bring about some new direction in your spiritual life, you genuinely take their will upon yourself. You are not just submitting. You genuinely embrace their will so that it becomes your own. It is not that you are doing what they want you to do; no, you are doing what *you* want to. It's just that the initiative came from the other person. In a way they showed you what you really wanted to do.

Taking this to its highest degree, suppose that the person asking you to do something is a Buddha. If you do the Buddha's will, make the Buddha's will your own, this comes very close to the manifestation of the bodhicitta in an empirical personality. It isn't a mechanical taking over; your will is transformed into the bodhicitta. Not only your will, but your thought and emotion too; *you* are transformed into the bodhicitta. To the extent that a transcendental dimension has entered into your existence, to that extent is your phenomenal being transformed into the being of the Bodhisattva, to that extent you become a being of Enlightenment. This change isn't a mere refinement; it's a complete shift. In a sense the bodhicitta isn't anything to do with you, even then. You provide the basis on which it manifests, but once it has manifested, it becomes curiously blended with you – or you with it. We really don't have the language to describe what happens.

The Mahāyāna sūtras are never tired of singing the praises of the bodhicitta. In the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, for example, there are hundreds of illustrations, com-

paring the bodhicitta to a gold mine, to the sun, to the moon....⁴⁵ You get the impression that for the author of the sūtra, the bodhicitta was absolutely everything; it is hymned and praised almost as though it were a deity. You certainly don't get the impression of someone's thought or idea. You get the sense of something vast, cosmic, sublime, which descends into and penetrates and possesses those who are receptive to it.

As Western Buddhists we need to learn to engage with the rich imagery of Buddhist tradition. At present, of course, for most of us the imagery of Christianity will be much more readily available. In our everyday language, even as Buddhists, we often use phrases of Biblical origin. For instance, we might say 'The prodigal has returned,' which comes straight out of the Gospels, although one doesn't consciously think of it in that way because the phrase has become such an integral part of our language and literature. But that has not yet happened with the images and figures of speech of the Buddhist scriptures; references to them have not yet infiltrated the language even of those of us who have been Buddhists for many years. At present we are not likely to refer, say, to the parable of the burning house, or the parable of the son who wandered astray and his skillful and compassionate father.⁴⁶ The images and symbols of the Buddhist scriptures haven't yet become part of our mentality. But there is a vast untapped store of material there. So it isn't enough just to read the scriptures; they have to become part and parcel of our whole way of thinking, feeling, and experiencing. That probably won't happen for generations, but perhaps we can make a start by looking out for images which bring our understanding of Buddhism – for example, our understanding of the arising of the bodhicitta – to life.

We should not take the bodhicitta to be a sort of doctrine or theory. It is a myth, in the sense that it refers to a transcendental experience that cannot be adequately described in conceptual terms. It is something that moves us, that stirs us on a much deeper level than that of the intellect or the ordinary waking consciousness.

The word myth, in the sense I intend it, does not mean something false or imaginary. A myth, one might think, is a story about gods and goddesses, and in a way this is so – but we have to ask what those gods and goddesses are, or what they represent. They are beings or powers or forces that exist on some

other level, some other plane of being. When our life is inspired by a mythic dimension, we are working out on the historical plane something that is of archetypal significance. The bodhicitta, one could say, is the myth that inspires the Buddhist spiritual community.

Whatever the rational, conceptual, historically-oriented consciousness may comprehend, there is an imaginative or archetypal dimension to life that will always elude that rational consciousness. An analogy can be drawn here with our dream life. We may have a rich and vivid dream life – more vivid, sometimes, than our waking life. If we are to give a complete account of ourselves, we must describe not only our waking life but also our dream life; but this, significantly, is for most of us very difficult to do. We often don't remember our dreams; and when we are dreaming we rarely remember our waking life. They go along more or less separately, occupying their different planes. Likewise, if one does a lot of meditation, not much may be happening on the material plane – one may be on retreat and therefore not 'doing' very much at all – but a lot will be happening on that other plane of existence which is meditative consciousness.

If one's inner experience finds a collective expression in some kind of spiritual movement, one could think of that movement as having a dream life, or a mythic life, of its own. Perhaps it does have an existence on another level. Indeed, if it did not, if it was merely an organization on the material plane, it would wither away very quickly. It needs to have very deep roots – roots in the sky.

A myth comes into being when people have very strong feelings about something, feelings which are not adequately supported by the existing state of affairs. The Mahāyāna Buddhists, it seems, felt a need to create a myth able to reflect not only their positive emotions but also the higher truths of Buddhism. Unable to nourish themselves on the dry bread – as they saw it – of the Abhidharma, they *had* to believe in the sort of Buddhism those myths represented. So one isn't to think that the Mahāyānists decided on rational grounds that it was about time there was a bit of myth in Buddhism. Their myths emerged out of spiritual necessity. The creation of these myths was, as with all myths, a collective rather than an individual process. And the myths were not created out of thin air; there were elements in the teachings going

right back to the time of the Buddha that the myth-makers could build on. The Pāli Canon is very rich in mythical and legendary material, although the modern Theravāda tends to ignore that aspect of its literature.

Indeed, in the Pāli Canon one may even see myths in the process of emerging. There is an episode in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha-Nikāya* in which Ānanda asks the Buddha if he is really going to gain parinirvāṇa in the little wattle-and-daub township of Kusinārā. Couldn't he choose a more distinguished place? But the Buddha says, 'Don't say that, Ānanda. Formerly this was the capital of a very great kingdom.'⁴⁷ Then another sutta of the *Dīgha-Nikāya*, the *Mahāsudassana Sutta*, gives what is clearly an amplified version of this same episode, including a lot of imagery along almost Mahāyānistic lines.⁴⁸ The *Sukhāvāī-vyūha sūtras* of the Mahāyāna may be said to carry on from where this Pāli sutta leaves off; certain references, for example to rows of jewel trees, are very similar indeed.⁴⁹

The question for us now is how we may renew this mythical dimension. How as Western Buddhists will we engage in the creation of myth? On the one hand we have the whole Buddhist tradition, together with the mythology of Western culture, to inspire us. On the other, we have so much theoretical knowledge getting in the way of that inspiration. The creation of myths will depend on our own very deep feelings and profound aspirations, feelings that go beyond our present personal situation, and even the existing world situation. If we have these feelings and aspirations, eventually there will be a need for them to be projected in an objective form, as myth. In the meantime it is important to recognize myths like the bodhicitta for what they are, and to appreciate what their mythical status means.

There are no images for the bodhicitta in the Pāli scriptures. In fact, the term bodhicitta doesn't occur in the Pāli Canon at all. The early Buddhists seem to have considered the experience of insight or awakening to have been fully described by another concept – and image: Stream Entry. This is the point at which the practitioner attains transcendental insight, and 'enters the stream' that leads to Enlightenment.⁵⁰ From this point, although one has to continue to make a spiritual effort, one has sufficient momentum behind one's practice to make one's progress towards Enlightenment assured.

The two traditions, it seems, are talking about the same thing. Or are they? How does the concept of Stream Entry compare with the Mahāyāna's conception of the arising of the bodhicitta?

One way of thinking about the history of Buddhism is as a process of the solidification and dissolution of concepts. A concept originally used to express a spiritual experience comes to be 'solidified', and then identified with its solidified form, to the extent that it no longer really refers to the spiritual experience it was originally meant to express. When that happens, there is inevitably a protest, which results in a new conceptualization. But the protest is radical in the true sense of going back to the roots; it is really affirming just the same thing that the solidified concept was originally intended to affirm.

If one thinks in historical terms, Stream Entry can be identified as a concept which solidified and was negated by the protest of the Mahāyāna, which then came up with the concept of the arising of the bodhicitta. Looking at it this way, and in the Mahāyāna's terms, the arising of the bodhicitta as a spiritual experience comes at a later and higher stage of one's spiritual career than Stream Entry. But this arises from the devaluation of the goal of Arhantship, and thus of Stream Entry as an important point on the path towards that goal.

Not all Mahāyānists view Arhantship in the same light. Some see it as a stage on the way to supreme Enlightenment: the idea is that, having become an Arhant, one awakens to the possibility of a further stage of development and progresses, as a Bodhisattva, to Buddhahood. But other Mahāyāna schools see Arhantship as a sort of spiritual cul-de-sac. They warn that from the very beginning one should be careful not to follow that path because, while one may become Enlightened through following it, one has permanently precluded the possibility of gaining the higher transcendental realization of a Buddha. In effect they are saying that to become an Arhant is a mistake. More simply, we can say that at every stage of the path it is important to beware of spiritual individualism.

The path of the Arhant can also be seen as an attenuated version of what was presented more fully in the Mahāyāna's path of the Bodhisattva. We can think of the 'Hīnayāna' and the 'Mahāyāna' not end to end, so to speak, but side by side, the one being a terser and the other a fuller description of the same

spiritual path. Spiritual individualism is certainly not the message of the Pāli Canon. Indeed, one could regard the *Mahāgovinda Sutta* of the *Dīgha-Nikāya* as suggesting something like the bodhicitta. It places particular emphasis on the practice of the four *brahma-vihāras*, which in Mahāyāna practice often precedes the development of the bodhicitta.⁵¹ In particular one can regard the *mettā bhāvanā* meditation practice, the development of loving-kindness, as a seed out of which the bodhicitta can develop. Mettā is essentially the wish that all living beings should be happy; and the greatest happiness is Enlightenment. To feel mettā is therefore ultimately to wish that others will gain Enlightenment, and do all one can to make it happen. The *mettā bhāvanā* thus implies the bodhicitta, and can be seen as indicating the shape of things to come in the Mahāyāna.

In short, the evidence we have suggests that from a purely spiritual perspective, as far as we can tell, what was originally meant by Stream Entry is more or less the same as what is meant by the arising of the bodhicitta. It is impossible to resolve the numberless differences, real and apparent, between the ‘Hīnayāna’ and the ‘Mahāyāna’ without an understanding of this difference between the historical perspective and the spiritual perspective. The expression ‘the arising of the bodhicitta’ cannot be separated from the historical circumstances in which it arose. It has around it all the associations of the Mahāyāna, which brought out the universalist, even cosmic, implications of Buddhism much more fully than the original form of Buddhism.

This is why in certain circumstances it seems appropriate to use the expression ‘bodhicitta’ rather than the term ‘Stream Entry’. Even though in a sense the two ideas are interchangeable, they have come to express different aspects of the same experience, partly because of their historical associations. Their denotations are the same, but their connotations are different. In the course of Buddhist history many terms have acquired an additional richness of connotation, so that one term ends up being more appropriate than another in a certain context or with regard to a certain aspect of the spiritual life. One cannot ignore the historical doctrinal development; at the same time, one should not take it literally or on its own terms.

The connotations of the term Stream Entry are in a sense more individual, even individualistic, because it seems to refer to an achievement of the self –

even though this ‘achievement’ is a liberation from the sense of ego. The bodhicitta is more explicitly unegoistic; as the will to Enlightenment for the sake of all, it has reference to other living beings. But it is only for historical reasons that one term seems to refer to a certain aspect of the overall experience better than another. All these different terms – for these are only two of many – pertain to and revolve around one spiritual experience. Just as Stream Entry represents your entering the Stream, but there is no ‘you’ to enter it, the bodhicitta represents working for the benefit of all sentient beings, while realizing that in reality there are no sentient beings to be benefited.⁵² Both, in other words, involve a transcendence of the concepts of self and others.

There is little point in trying to correlate all the details of the two paths as worked out in Buddhist tradition; they developed separately, without reference to one another, over many centuries. We have to be satisfied with a general correlation, an understanding of the underlying principle or spirit that is being expressed. For instance, the Mahāyāna stresses that wisdom and compassion are inseparable. That seems to be in direct contrast to the traditional teachings of the ‘Hīnayāna’, which sometimes appears to describe a path of wisdom with little or no reference to compassion, but it is quite consistent with the records of the Buddha’s own life and teaching.

We may not be able to correlate the teachings of Stream Entry and the arising of the bodhicitta point by point, but we need to be able to correlate them to some extent in the interests of our own spiritual life and development. Otherwise we find ourselves in the impossible situation of having to choose between the ‘Mahāyāna’ and the ‘Hīnayāna’, the Bodhisattva ideal and the Arhant ideal, as though they represented distinct paths. In fact there is only one spiritual path for all, as the *White Lotus Sūtra* stresses.⁵³ The path of the so called Arhant and the path of the so-called Bodhisattva are simply different ways of looking at that one path.

One can think of the experience as being multifaceted, Stream Entry being one of the facets and the arising of the bodhicitta being another. For one person, Stream Entry might be the first aspect of the total experience they contact, while somebody else might start with the arising of the bodhicitta and work their way round to Stream Entry.

And Stream Entry itself is a multifaceted experience. According to tradition there are ten fetters which keep us from Enlightenment, and when one breaks the first three of these, one attains Stream Entry.⁵⁴ But Stream Entry is also described in terms of developing insight into the transcendental. So do you break the fetters and thus develop insight, or develop insight and thus break the fetters? It's impossible to say: the two are different aspects of the same thing. You may go from insight to breaking the fetters, or from breaking the fetters to developing insight, depending on which aspect you give attention to.

This is the nature of following the spiritual path at any stage. If you start by developing faith, sooner or later you will have to develop the balancing quality, wisdom, and vice versa.⁵⁵ And if you have developed a lot of faith but not much wisdom, you will seem very different from someone who has developed a lot of wisdom but not much faith. Eventually, as you both develop the balancing faculty, it will become more obvious that you are on the same path, but until then you may seem to be on completely different paths (traditionally called the path of the doctrine-follower and the path of the faith-follower).⁵⁶

The danger of comparing people in terms of their spiritual progress is that one may compare one person's strength with another's weakness. One must be especially careful not to attach too much importance to whatever happens to be one's own particular strength. It is impossible to understand people quickly or easily. We all work on different aspects of ourselves at different times, and it may take years to work out what is going on. The main thing is that each of us should be developing some aspect of ourselves.

So – to return to our main theme – how does one go about this kind of development? How does one become a Bodhisattva? It happens through the arising of this glorious bodhicitta –but how does the bodhicitta come to manifest within us? This is a very mysterious thing. In his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva says that it is like a blind man finding a priceless jewel on a dunghill at night.⁵⁷ It is so wonderful, so unexpected. Who would think that a blind man poking his way round a dunghill in the middle of the night would find a priceless jewel? In the same way, who would have thought that – living in the midst of the world, earning our living, raising our families, perhaps going along to meditation classes once a week – the bodhicitta could ever arise in us?

Wonderful and unexpected though it is when it happens, the arising of the bodhicitta is no accident. It is the most fundamental principle of Buddhist thought that whatever arises in the universe at any level does so not by chance, fate, or the will of God, but in dependence upon natural – and in Buddhist terms even the ‘supernatural’ is natural – causes and conditions.⁵⁸ This applies also to the emergence, the breaking forth, of the bodhicitta within us. It depends upon the creation of certain mental and spiritual conditions.

This draws attention to a crucial area of the spiritual life: the need for preparation. We are usually in far too much of a hurry. In our anxiety to get results quickly we often neglect the very conditions upon which the results depend, and so, very often, we don’t succeed. But if we make sufficiently careful preparations, we can leave the results to look after themselves; indeed, we find that we succeed almost without noticing.

This very much applies to meditation. If you want to meditate, it’s no good thinking you can just sit down and do it. In the East the tradition is that first of all you go into the room in which you are going to meditate and, very slowly and carefully, sweep the floor, tidy up, and if necessary dust the image of the Buddha on the shrine. You do it all slowly, gently, and mindfully. Then, in a meditative mood, you throw away the old flowers (in some Eastern countries you are meant to throw them into running water if possible, not on the dust heap) and cut fresh ones. You put them in a vase and arrange them thoughtfully, taking your time over it. Then you light a candle and a stick of incense. You look around to see that everything is in order – perhaps you need to open the window for a bit of fresh air, or shut the door to keep out disturbances. Then you arrange your seat – making sure it is placed square – and then you sit down. You adjust your clothing, and put your feet and hands into the proper posture. Even then, very often, you won’t begin the meditation. First you’ll recite the Refuges and Precepts, and chant a few invocations to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Then – and only then – you start meditating.

Paying attention to the preparations in this way, one is much more likely to succeed, not just in meditation but in all activities. If one wants to write a book, or paint a picture, or cook a meal, the secret lies in the preparation. And it’s just the same with the arising of the bodhicitta. One shouldn’t even think of

becoming a Bodhisattva. It isn't something one can become; one can't go into it as a kind of career move, follow a course, or get a certificate – though I'm sorry to say that in the East there are establishments that give certificates of this sort for people to frame and put up on their wall. One shouldn't even think of developing the bodhicitta. It's out of the question, a waste of time. But one can certainly think of creating within oneself the conditions which will enable the bodhicitta to arise.

Traditionally the assumption is that all the factors required for the arising of the bodhicitta are within one's own control. One might object that there are factors – like whether or not one is born in a country where the Buddha's teaching is known – about which one has no choice. But the Buddhist might reply that under the operation of the law of karma one has set up that particular condition for oneself – in that one has been born in that country – so that it reflects a choice that one made at some time.

But aren't some of the conditions upon which we base our spiritual practice outside our control? For example, a strong theme in Buddhism is the value of friendship to one's spiritual life. Isn't that an instance of an outside influence having an effect? Yes, in a way – but no one can live our spiritual life for us. Our spiritual friends may help to set up the conditions for it, but it is our receptivity to those conditions that makes the difference, not the conditions themselves.

Receptivity works a little like a lightning conductor. If one is able to harness the power of the lightning flash when it comes, that doesn't happen by mere chance: one has set up the conditions to make it possible. But one won't get any electricity flowing through the lightning conductor unless a storm passes overhead and lightning strikes it. Of course, when it comes to the bodhicitta there is always a lightning storm going on, so to speak. But the point is that we, as we at present are, cannot force anything to happen. All we can do is set up the conditions and wait, or act as though we are just waiting. We can choose the right place for the lightning conductor, make it the right shape, right material and so on. But we can't pull the lightning down from the sky.

To say 'When you make the appropriate preparations the bodhicitta will arise' is simply to use the word 'will' in the future tense. It isn't that the bodhicitta

must arise. At present you just don't know in detail all the conditions that are necessary or how long you will have to keep maintaining them. It isn't like making a cake: you can't assemble the ingredients and be sure what the result will be. This is where the element of freedom comes in. As we are now, we cannot provide for or dictate to our future selves, or even anticipate who we will be in the future.

This is why Śāntideva says – admittedly he is exaggerating – that the arising of the bodhicitta is like a blind man on a dark night finding a jewel in a dunghill. In a way you don't know what you're looking for. You may have a rough idea, just as the blind man may know that when he catches hold of the jewel it will feel hard and a bit sharp; but he could just as easily pick up a pebble or a walnut. Similarly, there is always an element of blindness in following the path. If you knew exactly what the goal was like and what you had to do to reach it, you would be there already. We tend to anticipate conceptually and think we know what we are talking about when we can only have a very vague, approximate idea. Not really knowing what the bodhicitta is like, we can't know with scientific precision what conditions we will need to set up for it to arise. We are going to have to juggle the conditions a bit until we get the right combination.

Different texts recommend different methods designed to cultivate the arising of the bodhicitta, but all aspects of one's practice, pursued intensively enough, can be thought of as leading to that goal. In a way it doesn't matter which one you start with; the crucial thing is to give yourself to it wholeheartedly. It's all too easy to end up just jogging along with one's spiritual life in a comfortable, easy, undemanding way. To avoid this, one needs all the time to be making a definite effort in some particular area of practice, whether it's ethics, meditation, study, work, generosity, or whatever.

Apart from the specific bodhicitta meditation practice taught in Tibetan Buddhism, according to Buddhist tradition there are two particular ways of establishing the conditions in dependence upon which the bodhicitta can arise, one associated with the name of Śāntideva, and the other with the name of Vasubandhu. Both were great Indian masters of the Mahāyāna – Śāntideva in the seventh century, and Vasubandhu probably in the fourth century – and

both are traditionally recognized as having been themselves Bodhisattvas. Though different, their two methods are complementary.

Śāntideva's method is more frankly devotional. It is known as *anuttarapūjā* – 'supreme worship' or even 'supreme adoration' – and it consists in a series of what could be described as seven spiritual exercises, seven acts which are each expressive of a certain phase of religious consciousness, even a certain mood. The recitation of verses corresponding to these different phases is known as the Sevenfold Worship or Sevenfold Puja.

The first of these seven phases is what is simply called worship. This is addressed principally to the Buddha: not just the human, historical figure, but the Buddha as the symbol of the ideal of Enlightenment. Adopting an attitude of worship within our hearts, we recognize with deep devotion and reverence, even awe, the sublimity of the ideal of attaining Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Feeling powerfully and profoundly filled with this devotion, we just *have* to make offerings, to give something. The most common offerings are flowers, candles or lamps, and incense, but there are many other things that can be offered. These are placed before the Buddha image, representing one's feeling of devotion for the ideal, as yet so distant, of supreme Enlightenment.

Secondly there is what is known as the obeisance or salutation. Obeisance literally means 'bowing down', and this stage consists in paying outward physical respect. It is not enough to experience something mentally. We are not just minds – we don't just have thoughts and feelings – we have speech and bodies too, and for any spiritual exercise to be effective, all three must participate, at least implicitly. So one folds one's hands and bows in reverence and salutation – and also humility. We not only see the ideal; we recognize that as yet we ourselves are far from attaining to it. The ideal is like the Himalayan peaks gleaming in the distance. All we have done so far is step out on to the path: there's a very long way to go.

Thirdly, there is the Going for Refuge. We began by recognizing the ideal, just seeing it, venerating it, responding to it emotionally. Then we recognize how far we are from it. Now, in this third stage, we commit ourselves to realizing that ideal. Having recognized that the ideal is way out there and that we are

here, we resolve to go forward from here to there. We commit ourselves to the Three Jewels so central to and so beloved of the whole Buddhist tradition: the Buddha, the realization of the ideal; the Dharma, the path leading to that realization; and the Sangha, the company – the spiritual fellowship – of all those who have walked the path to Enlightenment before us.

Then fourthly, confession of faults. Some people find it hard to relate to this, perhaps because the word ‘confession’ carries negative associations for them. In this context it represents a recognition of the side of ourselves that we would rather other people didn’t see – that we ourselves would rather not see – but that is always pursuing us, as Mephistopheles pursues Faust in Goethe’s great poem. Through confessing our faults we recognize our little weaknesses, our backslidings – and even sometimes our plain wickedness. This is not a matter of breast-beating, but merely a realistic appraisal, together with the resolve that in future we shall do our best to act differently. Our faults are just so much extra weight, making the journey to Enlightenment much more heavy going, and they must be unloaded.

Confession figures quite prominently in the Theravāda, especially as a part of monastic life. It is normal practice for a Theravāda bhikkhu or sāmanera to make a regular confession morning and evening to the teacher with whom he is residing, asking for forgiveness for any faults of body, speech, or mind that he may have committed, especially against the teacher, during the preceding day or night. Even if he has thought ill of his teacher in a dream, he confesses that. On top of this, there is the confession that, in theory at least, precedes the recitation of the *prāṇimokṣa*, the code of monastic law.

So confession is not specific to the Mahāyāna, or especially associated with the Bodhisattva ideal. Nonetheless, inasmuch as the Bodhisattva ideal represents, if anything, a more difficult ideal (if one is choosing to distinguish it from the Arhant ideal), any lapse from that ideal represents a more serious failure, and thus needs confession to a greater extent. Perhaps for this reason, there is an emphasis on confession in the Mahāyāna that we don’t quite find in the Theravāda. In the Theravāda it is an acknowledgement of offences committed, but in the Mahāyāna it becomes a heartfelt pouring forth of one’s regret, and a fierce determination not to commit that unskillful action again. This determination is strongly expressed in Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, in which

confession is made in vivid and emotional tones;⁵⁹ in the *Sūtra of Golden Light* also, the confession has a poetic quality that one rarely finds in the Theravāda.⁶⁰

The fifth stage of the puja is ‘rejoicing in merits’. This involves thinking of the lives of others, bringing to mind good, noble, virtuous, and holy people. One can think of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, saints and sages, great poets, artists, musicians, scientists, even people one knows (or has known), who exhibit, or used to exhibit, outstanding human and spiritual qualities. We can derive tremendous encouragement and inspiration from thinking that in this world, where one encounters so much meanness and misery, people like this do appear, at least from time to time.

So one rejoices that good and holy and enlightened people have lived in every age of human history, in every part of the world, helping the rest of humanity in so many different ways – whether as saint or sage, teacher or mystic, scientist or administrator, hospital worker or prison visitor. Anybody who has helped others is to be rejoiced in. Instead of denigrating or debunking, as now seems to be the fashion, one appreciates and enjoys and feels happy in the contemplation of other people’s good qualities and deeds.

The sixth stage of the Sevenfold Puja is called entreaty and supplication. We request those who are more Enlightened than ourselves to teach us. This isn’t to suggest that they have to be cajoled into teaching. What we are doing here is expressing our own attitude of receptivity and openness, without which we can gain nothing at all – certainly not the bodhicitta.

The seventh and last stage is the transference of merit and self-surrender. According to Buddhist tradition, when one performs any skillful action, one acquires a certain amount of puṇya or merit, so one of the benefits of performing the Sevenfold Puja comes in this form – as merit. Puṇya has a double meaning: it means ‘merit’, and it also means ‘virtue’. It is the karmic credit, so to speak, that one has in one’s ‘account’ as the result of ethical actions. Thus the idea of puṇya is very closely connected with the idea of karma. If one performs skillful actions – puṇya in the sense of virtue – at some time in the future one will experience good and pleasant things, because one has accumulated puṇya in the sense of merit.

At the end of the puja, having accumulated all this merit, one gives it away. One says, in effect, ‘Whatever merit I have gained in doing this, let it be shared by all.’ Rather than keeping the merit gained by one’s actions for the sake of one’s own individual emancipation, one chooses to share it with all other beings. At the highest level, this aspiration becomes the Bodhisattva ideal itself.

So this is Śāntideva’s method for preparing the conditions in which the bodhicitta can arise. The ritual, the recitations, the ceremony, are all there to support the inner core of the exercise, which is essentially a sequence of devotional and spiritual moods and experiences. If our hearts are filled with sublime feelings of reverence and devotion and worship; if we really feel the distance that separates us from the ideal; if we are truly determined to commit ourselves to the realization of that ideal; if we clearly see the darker side of our own nature; if we honestly rejoice in the good deeds of others; if we are really receptive to higher spiritual influences; and if we wish to keep nothing back for ourselves alone – then, in dependence upon these states of mind, the bodhicitta will one day arise. This is the soil in which the seed of the bodhicitta, once planted, can grow and flower.

In his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* Śāntideva says that the effect of giving, of puja – in short, of committing yourself to the spiritual life – is that you become ‘without fear of being or becoming’.⁶¹ The would-be Bodhisattva has no more worries. You just give yourself to the spiritual life. You aren’t bothered whether you are going to live or die, be rich or poor, be praised or blamed, or anything like that. You are just on the spiritual path and that’s that. So long as you are still wondering what to do with your life – perhaps weighing up how much time to give to spiritual things and how much to worldly things – you remain unsure, unclear, and therefore unconfident. But once you have made up your mind and committed yourself, in a sense everything is looked after and there’s nothing to worry about.

Our tendency is perhaps to think of spiritual life as difficult and worldly life as easy, but there is no objective reason for this view. Sometimes it is less trouble just to lead a spiritual life than to try to put things right in the world or even to try to have a successful and happy worldly career. In a way, it takes less effort

to gain Enlightenment. It's very difficult to be successful in the world – there are all sorts of factors that might upset one's plans – but if one follows the spiritual path one knows that, if one makes the effort, sooner or later success will come.

However, while making offerings and dedicating oneself – surrendering oneself, even – is important, it is only the very beginning of the spiritual life. One is anticipating rather than experiencing the arising of the bodhicitta. One is wishing to be – rather than actually being – possessed by that higher spiritual force. So in the puja one says to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, at least in one's own mind, 'Take me over. Instead of doing what I want to do, from now onwards I'll do what you want me to do.' At this stage, there has to be this kind of dialogue. But when the bodhicitta arises, one is taken at one's word, as it were. Then there is no question of deciding what one will do. To put it rather mechanically, one starts to function as an instrument of the arisen bodhicitta. Until that happens, one makes oneself receptive to its happening, first of all by making offerings and then by offering oneself, saying 'Take me over. Let me be directed not just by my own egoistic will, but by the will to Enlightenment. Let that motivate me, let that carry me along.' Puja becomes an important and demanding practice if one approaches it with this understanding of what one is doing.

According to Vasubandhu's method, which is more philosophical, the arising of the bodhicitta depends upon four factors.⁶² The first of these is the recollection of the Buddhas. One thinks of the Buddhas of the past – Śākyamuni, the Buddha of our own historical era, and his great predecessors in remote aeons of legend, Dipaṅkara, Koṇḍañña, and so on.⁶³ Then, in the words of the sūtras, one reflects:

All Buddhas in the ten quarters, of the past, of the future, and of the present, when they first started on their way to enlightenment, were not quite free from passions and sins any more than we are at present; but they finally succeeded in attaining the highest enlightenment and became the noblest beings.

All the Buddhas, by strength of their inflexible spiritual energy, were capable of attaining perfect enlightenment. If enlightenment is attainable at all, why should we not attain it?

All the Buddhas, erecting high the torch of wisdom through the darkness of ignorance and keeping awake an excellent heart, submitted themselves to penance and mortification, and finally emancipated themselves from the bondage of the triple world. Following their steps, we, too, could emancipate ourselves.

All the Buddhas, the noblest type of mankind, successfully crossed the great ocean of birth and death and of passions and sins; why, then, we, being creatures of intelligence, could also cross the sea of transmigration. All the Buddhas manifesting great spiritual power sacrificed the possessions, body, and life, for the attainment of omniscience (*sarvajñā*); and we, too, could follow their noble examples.⁶⁴

In other words, the Buddhas all started off with the same ignorance and weaknesses as we do. If they could overcome them, so can we, if we make the effort. Apart from the obvious benefits of this practice for the development of faith and confidence, it has a very positive effect simply in that if one is thinking of the Buddha, one is mentally occupied with something positive and thus turning the current of one's thoughts away from unskillful actions. Occupying one's mind with thoughts of the Buddha, one is very unlikely to have an unskillful thought or commit an unskillful action. Instead, one will experience positive, skillful emotions: faith, joy, serenity, peace.

The second of Vasubandhu's factors is 'seeing the faults of conditioned existence'. 'Conditioned existence' refers to phenomenal existence of every kind: physical, mental, even spiritual – whatever arises in dependence upon causes and conditions. And the first 'fault' to be seen is that all conditioned existence is impermanent. It may be an idea or an empire, it may arise and disappear in an infinitesimal fraction of a second or over billions of years, but whatever arises must, sooner or later, cease. And – because everything conditioned is transitory – conditioned existence can never be truly satisfactory; this is the second fault to be reflected upon. Sooner or later the wrench of separation comes, and in its wake comes suffering. And thirdly,

everything is, in a sense, unreal, insubstantial. This is a subtler ‘fault’ to find with conditioned existence. It is not that things do not exist – clearly they do. But nothing exists independent of its constituents, all of which are impermanent and liable to change. This book, for example – take away the typeface and the pages, the cover and the spine, and where is the book? It has no inherent existence; there is nothing ‘underneath’, nothing substantial about it. And all things are like this, including ourselves. There is no ‘I’ apart from my constituent parts, my *skandhas*. This is the famous *anātman* doctrine.⁶⁵

So one sees that conditioned existence as a whole has these faults: it is impermanent, it is riddled with unsatisfactoriness, and it isn’t ultimately real. One further reflects – one knows in one’s heart of hearts – that nothing conditioned can fully satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. We long for something permanent, something beyond the flux of time, something blissful, something permanently satisfying, something of which we never become weary, something which is fully and entirely real and true. But such a thing is nowhere to be found in mundane experience. Reflecting in this way, seeing the faults of conditioned existence, one pierces through the conditioned to the Unconditioned beyond.

The third factor is ‘observing the sufferings of sentient beings’. And what a lot of sufferings there are. One has only to open a newspaper to encounter a whole host of them: people hanged, shot, burned to death – people dying in all sorts of painful ways, from disease, famine, flood, or fire. At this very moment, people are suffering in all sorts of agonizing ways, and one doesn’t need much imagination to realize this. There are volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and plane crashes, to say nothing of war – sudden death in so many fearful and horrifying forms. And, of course, there are many deaths on the roads: we have become almost inured to this phenomenon, but it is still truly horrible if we consider the reality behind the statistics.

Even apart from such horrors, simply getting on in the world, making ends meet, leading a happy human existence, is sometimes a tremendous struggle. We strive to do the decent thing, to be upright and honest, to lift our heads above the waves; but then a great wave comes along and overwhelms us again. Down we go, then up we come again; and so it goes on. This is human life.

Then there's the suffering of animals: all those animals that are trapped for their fur, or slaughtered for human consumption, or pursued for 'sport'. If one looks at it objectively one sees that in many ways life is a painful and miserable thing: 'nasty, brutish, and short'. This is only one side of the picture, but it is a side which we very often ignore, and which we need to bear in mind.

Worse still, in a way, are the sufferings we bring upon ourselves through our own mental states. It is not just that we are afraid of growing old or dying; we do absolutely nothing about our predicament. Full of anxiety, most people have no spiritual orientation to their lives, no real clarity. The bodhicitta starts arising when one sees what a mess we are all in. One can't begin to see that until one is a little way out of the mess oneself, but then one does begin to appreciate what a miserable time people have of it.

The great danger is that, having freed oneself to some extent, one may start looking down on others and pitying them. This sort of elitism – 'Oh you poor people! Have you never heard of Buddhism?' – does no good at all. At the same time, though, one can see that most people *do* need a spiritual path, and one wants to help – not just to alleviate or palliate, but help in a far more radical fashion, helping people to see that there is some spiritual dimension, some higher purpose, to life.

Tennyson speaks of having a 'painless sympathy with pain',⁶⁶ and it is this sort of sympathy that Bodhisattvas feel. They are keenly conscious of the suffering of others, but they don't suffer themselves as others do. If one were literally to experience the sufferings of others, it would be completely incapacitating: it would be too much. If one gets too personally caught up in someone else's predicament, one can end up simply joining them in their suffering. One needs a basis within one's own experience which is so positive that even though one is fully aware of other people's suffering and one is doing what one can to alleviate it, one is not overwhelmed by that suffering.

The last of Vasubandhu's four factors is the 'contemplation of the virtues of the Tathāgatas' – the Tathāgatas being the Buddhas, the Enlightened Ones, and virtues here meaning not just ethical virtues but spiritual qualities of all kinds. As we have seen, in the Pāli scriptures there are many instances of people being tremendously inspired by encountering the Buddha. They haven't heard

a word about Buddhism; they are simply inspired by the presence, the aura even, of the Buddha himself.

We ourselves can have this kind of encounter in a sense when we do puja. Puja is essentially just thinking about the Buddha: not thinking in a cold, intellectual way, but keeping the ideal of Buddhahood in the forefront of one's consciousness. When one does a puja, the Buddha is there in front of one, either in the form of the image on the shrine, or vividly present in one's own mind through visualization and imagination. Through puja and the whole devotional approach – making offerings, arranging flowers, and so on – one becomes more open and sensitive to the ideal of the Buddha, and this in turn paves the way for the breaking through of that highest spiritual dimension which is the bodhicitta. One doesn't stop doing devotional practices when the bodhicitta has arisen. According to the Mahāyāna sūtras, no one makes more offerings than the Bodhisattvas; they are always doing pujas, praising the Buddhas and so on. Some Bodhisattvas, we are told, have a vow that they will worship all the Buddhas in the universe. They spend all their time – millions and millions of years – going from one part of the universe to another, worshipping all the Buddhas that exist. This is typical Mahāyāna hyperbole, but it does bring home the importance of acts of devotion.

Another way of contemplating the virtues of Enlightened beings is to read accounts of their lives, whether the life of the Buddha himself or, say, that of Milarepa, the Enlightened yogi from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. One can also contemplate the spiritual qualities of the Buddhas by means of visualization exercises, as developed particularly in Tibetan Buddhism, by conjuring up a vivid mental picture, a sort of archetypal vision, of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva. What one does in these practices – to summarize very briefly – is to see this visualized form more and more brightly, more and more vividly, more and more gloriously, and then gradually feel oneself merging with it, one's heart merging with the heart of the Buddha or Bodhisattva, the heart of Enlightenment. In this way one contemplates, one assimilates, one becomes one with, the virtues of the Tathāgatas.

Even without going into the traditional details too closely, it isn't difficult to understand how the bodhicitta might arise in dependence on these four factors. Through recollecting the Buddhas we become convinced that

Enlightenment is possible. They have gained Enlightenment; why shouldn't we gain it too? Through this kind of reflection, energy and vigour is stirred up. Then, through seeing the faults of conditioned existence – seeing that it is impermanent, basically unsatisfactory, and not ultimately real – we become detached from the world. The trend, the stream, of our existence begins to flow in the direction of the Unconditioned. Next, through observing the sufferings of sentient beings – whether in imagination or in actual fact – compassion arises. We don't think only of our own liberation; we want to help others too. Then, by contemplating the virtues of the Tathāgatas – their purity, their peacefulness, their wisdom, their love – we gradually become assimilated to them and approach the goal of Enlightenment. As these four – energy, detachment, compassion, and 'becoming one', as it were, with the Buddhas – start to coalesce within our hearts, the bodhicitta arises; the awakening of the heart is achieved; a Bodhisattva is born.

FOOTNOTES

- 38 Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., p.59.
- 39 See s.Gam.po.pa (Gampopa), *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H.V. Guenther, Shambhala, Boston 1986, pp.112ff.
- 40 Quoted in D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Schocken, New York 1970, pp.297–8.
- 41 See, for example, Edward Conze (trans.), *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, Buddhist Publishing Group, Totnes 1993, pp.140–1; or *Puja: The FWBO Book of Buddhist Devotional Texts*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2008, pp.50–3.
- 42 Sangharakshita’s definitions of the group, the individual, and the spiritual community are explored in detail in a book on the sangha published by Windhorse in 2000.
- 43 See *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, op. cit., p.12.
- 44 Aśvaghōṣa (attrib.), *The Awakening of Faith*, trans. Yoshito S. Hakeda, Columbia University Press, New York 1967, pp.56ff.
- 45 See Thomas Cleary (trans.), *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, Shambhala, Boston and London 1993, p.1478.
- 46 These are parables from the *White Lotus Sutra*.
- 47 See sutta 16 of *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, op. cit., p.266.
- 48 *ibid.*, sutta 17,1.2 et seq.
- 49 See *The Larger Sukhāvati-vyūha Sūtra*, section 16, pp.33–6, in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, ed. E.B. Cowell et al., Dover Publications, New York 1969.
- 50 Stream Entrants or Stream Winners are to be found in various contexts in the Pāli Canon; see, for example, *Samyutta-Nikāya* 55, the *Sotapatti Samyutta*, About Stream Entrants’. And for more on Stream Entry, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, op. cit., pp.99–100.
- 51 See *Mahāgovinda Sutta*, in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha-Nikāya)*, op. cit., p.312.

- 52 This touches on some quite complex aspects of Buddhist thought. All schools of Buddhism teach ‘insubstantiality’; from the impermanence of all phenomena, it follows that nothing has a fixed, enduring, unchanging identity. There is no continuous self underpinning all the changing elements of one’s existence; absolutely everything about one’s ‘self’ is subject to change. Early Buddhism expressed this in terms of the famous *anātman* (Pāli *anattā*), or ‘no-self’ doctrine. Mahāyāna Buddhism saw it in terms of *śūnyatā*, literally emptiness. From an absolute point of view all things are empty of *svabhāva*, own-being; hence, there are ‘no beings to save’. It is on the basis of this realization that the Bodhisattva engages in compassionate activity. And all schools of Buddhism, one way or another, see their purpose as to overcome what is sometimes called the dichotomy between self and other.
- 53 This is the point of the parable of the burning house in the *White Lotus Sūtra*; see *The Threefold Lotus Sūtra*, op. cit., pp.85–99; and see also Sangharakshita, *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*, op. cit., [chapter 3](#), Transcending the Human Predicament.
- 54 The ten fetters are: (1) Self-view or self-belief, (2) Doubt or indecision, (3) Dependence on moral rules and religious observances as ends in themselves, (4) Sensuous desire, in the sense of desire for experience in and through the five physical senses, (5) Ill will or hatred or aversion, (6) Desire for existence in the plane of (archetypal) form, (7) Desire for existence in the formless plane, (8) Conceit, in the sense of the idea of oneself as superior, inferior, or equal to other people, i.e. making comparisons between oneself and others, (9) Restlessness, instability, (10) Ignorance – that is, spiritual ignorance in the sense of lack of awareness. (Canonical references can be found at *Majjhima-Nikāya* 64:1.432–5 and *Dīgha-Nikāya* 33: iii.234.)
- On breaking the first three of these fetters one becomes a Stream Entrant. The fourth and fifth fetters – sensuous desire and ill will – are said to be particularly strong. On weakening – not breaking, but just weakening – these two, one becomes a Once-Returner (all these terms come from the Theravāda tradition). As a Once-Returner you have before you only one more birth as a human being, according to tradition, and you will then gain Enlightenment.
- On actually breaking the fourth and fifth fetters, one becomes a Non-Returner. According to tradition, a Non-Returner is reborn in one of the ‘pure abodes’, whence the Non-Returner gains Enlightenment directly, without the necessity of another human birth.
- These first five fetters are known as the five lower fetters, and they bind one to the plane of sensuous desire, as it is called. The sixth and seventh fetters refer to the ‘plane of (archetypal) form’ and the ‘formless plane’. Once the five higher fetters are broken, one is completely free; there are no more rebirths. Such a person is known, in the traditional terminology, as an Arhant – a ‘worthy one’ or ‘holy one’.
- 55 The ‘balancing’ nature of spiritual qualities is especially evident in the formulation of the Buddhist path called the five spiritual faculties, in which two pairs of qualities – faith and wisdom, and energy (*vīrya*) and meditation (*samādhi*), are balanced, the fifth faculty being the stabilizing one of mindfulness. For more on this, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, op. cit., chapter 9.
- 56 The doctrine-follower (*dhammānusārī*) and faith-follower (*saddhānusārī*) are among the seven kinds of ‘noble disciple’ enumerated in the *Puggalapaññati* of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. See Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1998, pp.133–4.

- 57 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, [chapter 3](#), verse 27.
- 58 This is the law of conditionality, which is the conceptual expression of the insight into reality that constituted the Buddha's Enlightenment experience. Conditionality includes the law of karma, although karma (i.e. the truth that one's actions, skilful and unskilful, will have consequences) is only one of five kinds of conditionality, the five *niyamas*. For more on conditionality, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, op. cit., [chapter 1](#), 'The Essential Truth'; and for more on karma, see Sangharakshita, *Who is the Buddha?*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1994, [chapter 7](#), 'Karma and Rebirth'.
- 59 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, [chapter 2](#), verses 27–66.
- 60 See R.E. Emmerick (trans.), *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, Pali Text Society, Oxford 1996, pp.8–17.
- 61 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, [chapter 2](#), verse 9.
- 62 These four factors are enumerated in the second chapter of Vasubandhu's *Bodhicittotpāda-sūtra-śāstra*.
- 63 According to Buddhist tradition, in this world-aeon – an unimaginably vast expanse of time – Śākyamuni, 'our Buddha', the historical Buddha, was preceded by twenty-four other Buddhas, beginning with Dipaṅkara.
- 64 D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, op. cit., p.304.
- 65 For a more detailed discussion of the faults, or marks, as they are often called, of conditioned existence (the three *lakṣaṇas*), see Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, op.cit., chapter 11.
- 66 Tennyson, 'In Memoriam' LXXXV.