

In Quest of Cosmic Reality

*An interpretation and commentary of
the great work by Bodhisattva Asvaghosha
on "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana".*

WONG KIEW KIT

Chapter 1

Introduction to Cosmic Quest

Readers are invited to share, if they so desire and find beneficial, some of the most profound wisdom found in Buddhism, and experience possibly the most noble and meaningful attainment man can ever achieve, namely spiritual fulfilment irrespective of the religion, or lack of it, they profess.

Cosmic Reality in Science and Religion

Since time memorial man has wondered where he came from and where he will go to. Questions touching on man's origin and destination have been keenly investigated not only in philosophy, metaphysics and religion, but also in the latest sciences. Listen to what one of the greatest scientists, Albert Einstein, has to say about Cosmic Reality:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us "Universe", a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion, of his consciousness. The delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires, and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures, and the whole of nature in its beauty.

Fritjof Capra shares with other great scientists like Julius Robert Oppenheimer, Neils Bohr and Werner Heisenberg the conclusion that:

The concepts of modern physics often show surprising parallels to the ideas expressed in the religious philosophies of the Far East.

Great teachers of ancient wisdom of both the East and the West have taught men about Cosmic Reality long before modern science reverts to viewing the universe from the concept of a gigantic machine to that of an organic unity. But while modern science seeks to understand Cosmic Reality by way of inductive, reductionist methods using elaborate precision instruments, ancient masters have always sought to experience this reality directly, an experience that transcends both our normal sensory perception and intellectual faculties. Such a direct, intuitive experience of reality is what Lao Tzu means when he says that:

The Tao that can be named, is not the real Tao. The name that can be so named, is not the real name. The nameless is the source of heaven and earth. The named is the mother

of all phenomena. Hence, those who have no attachment, can see the mystery of reality. Those with attachment can only see its illusion.

Lao Tzu explains that what we call the Supreme Reality or the Ultimate Truth is nameless, but for convenience he calls it "Tao". Lao Tzu knows what this Tao is because he has experienced it directly, but to his listeners who have not experienced this reality directly, they will not know what Tao is even when they hear and know its name. It is like someone who has not eaten an apple; no matter how much he reads about descriptions of the taste of an apple, he still will not know how an apple tastes.

So a Taoist master may describe what Tao is, or give names to any phenomena in the Cosmos, but unless his students have direct experience of Tao or of these phenomena, the subsequent concepts they form of Tao or of the phenomena, are different from what they actually are. This nameless Reality, which is called Tao for convenience, is the source of everything there is; it is omnipresent and omniscient. When we give a name to this nameless Reality, differentiation begins, with the result that we see countless phenomena as separate entities, to which we provide a name each. These phenomena, although they appear real to us because of our sensory and other limitations, are an imitation of reality, not reality itself. If we eliminate our attachment, such as purifying ourselves from selfish desires, we can remove the many layers of distortions to arrive at the mystery of reality. But if we are shrouded by layers of attachment, we can only see an illusion of reality.

Nevertheless, for those who are not yet adequately advanced in mysticism or spirituality to experience the Supreme Reality directly, or those who may lack the faith to practise unwaveringly the techniques taught by the great masters, an intellectual understanding of this Reality as well as the methods to experience it, will be exceedingly helpful, even though such an explanation provides only an imitation of reality, not the reality itself. Asvaghosha's "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana", of which this book is a translation, interpretation and commentary, achieves this and other related aims excellently. Although it is a fundamental Mahayana Buddhist text, it can be applied to any religion. Indeed, Rev. Timothy Richard, who has written one of the only four

available English translations of this great work, goes to the extent of saying:

If it be, as it is more and more believed, that the Mahayana Faith, is not Buddhist, properly so called, but an Asiatic form of the same Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in Buddhist nomenclature, differing from the old Buddhism just as the New Testament differs from the Old, then it commands a world-wide interest, for in it we find an adaptation of Christianity to ancient thought in Asia, and the deepest bond of union between the different races of the East and the West, viz., the bond of a common religion. ... The almost universal reception of the doctrines contained in this book by both the east and the west constitutes to my mind its highest claim to our attention.

Buddhism is a very liberal religion; some people even content that it is not a religion, but a philosophy of life. The Buddha himself compares Buddhism to a raft, ferrying humanity from the sea of suffering to the shore of Enlightenment. Once you have attained Enlightenment, you may even discard the raft; and if you have other means of crossing the sea of suffering, by all means do so, with full blessing from Buddhists. This means that if a person is already practising his religion rewardingly, Buddhists would not try to convert him into Buddhism, because as he is presently on his way, changing to another religion would actually slow down his spiritual progress.

"Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" provides invaluable knowledge not only to disciplines like religion, metaphysics and philosophy, but also to various branches of modern science like physics, psychology and cosmology. Modern scientists will be astonished to find advanced concepts concerning relativity, united energy field, different levels of consciousness, and the limitless expanse of the cosmos in this fascinating work written twenty centuries ago!

The Universality of Religions

How is "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" applicable to other religions when it is a basic Buddhist text? Although the world's great religions appear to be vastly different in their beliefs and ceremonies, if we study deeply their fundamental philosophies as taught by their greatest teachers, we will find that they are basically similar. This perhaps has to be so, if there is only one Reality or Truth, even if it can be interpreted in and approached from different levels and perspectives. The following simple experiment can make this clear. Below are five descriptions of the basic philosophies of the world's great religions, but with their specific, telling terms replaced by the general term "Supreme Reality". Can you tell which description applies to which religion?

The Supreme Reality is all. From the Supreme Reality comes appearances, sensations, desires, deeds. But all these are merely name and form.

There is one Supreme Reality and Source of all mankind, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

The special purpose of our existence is to endeavor to work our way back to the Supreme Reality. Our objective in life is to regain union with the Supreme Reality.

The Supreme Reality permeates everything. Our aim is to be united with the Supreme Reality.

Avoid doing all forms of evil, practise all forms of goodness; ultimately let your heart return to the Supreme Reality.

It is not easy to match the above descriptions with their religions not because we do not know their religious philosophies, but because they are all quite similar. In the first description, the term "Supreme Reality" is used for "Brahman", and the passage is quoted from the Upanishads, one of the most sacred Hindu scriptures. In the second description, "God" and "Father" should be used instead of "Supreme Reality" and "Source" respectively, and the passage is quoted from the Bible. The first "Supreme Reality" in the third passage refers to "loving Creator", the second to "God", and the passage is quoted from Shaykh

Hakim Moinuddin Chishti, a Muslim master. In the fourth passage, "Supreme Reality" should be read "Tao", and it is a basic concept in Taoism. The fifth quotation is from Zhi Yi, a Buddhist master, and here "Supreme Reality" refers to "Void" or "Universal Mind".

Not only is the fundamental philosophy of the world's great religions similar, the spiritual ecstasy of their greatest masters during their direct experience with the Supreme Reality, as well as their methods to attain this ecstasy are similar too. Try to tell the religious affiliation of the masters who use the following methods to attain spiritual fulfilment.

External contemplation means the turning away of the five emotional senses from the world and all its creatures; and disengaging from them both in society, and from vainglorious and meaningless thoughts when alone.... And internal contemplation is nothing but the guarding of the heart. It is preventing the heart from thinking of anything whatsoever, keeping it free from all vain thoughts.

Once he is in meditation, he unites his mind with his breath, and eliminates all emotions and all cares, and just focuses on the void.

Not until the monk has so become cleansed and healed can he begin the proper practice of contemplation. Contemplation itself entails recollection and introversion. Recollection is concentrating the mind, banishing all images, thoughts, and sense perceptions. Having emptied the mind of all distractions, introversion can begin. Introversion concentrates the mind on its own deepest part in what is seen as the final step before the soul finds Reality.

In all time and at all places meditation is the only means to the attainment of final deliverance, the eternal happiness taught by the Teacher as spiritual fulfilment.

When the spiritual aspirant has achieved the highest degree of concentration upon a single object, he is ready to attempt the supreme feat – concentration upon consciousness itself. This is the state of perfect union, in which one passes beyond

mind and matter, beyond all object knowledge, into union with Reality – the undifferentiated universal consciousness.

The method in the first example is described by Mir Valiuddin, a Muslim master. The second is by a Taoist master, Wu Chong Xu. The third is a Christian method of spiritual fulfilment taught by Saint Augustine. The word "Reality" in this example should be replaced by "God". The fourth is by Paravahera Vajiranada Mahathera, a Buddhist master. "Teacher" and "spiritual fulfilment" should be replaced by "Buddha" and "Nirvana". The fifth example is by Swami Prabhavananda, a Hindu master. The first "union", "mind and matter" and "Reality" should be replaced by "yoga", "Prakriti", and "Atman".

Below are five descriptions of the masters' ecstatic experience of Reality. Can you tell their religious background?

Reality establishes himself in the interior of this soul in such a way, that when she returns to herself, it is wholly impossible for her to doubt that she has been in Reality and Reality in her.

The universe and I have always existed together; every phenomenon and I are one.

There is no real difference between the Essence and its attributes, or, in other words, between Reality and the universe created by Reality.

One night during the rest from meditation, I opened my eyes and suddenly there was a great radiance like broad daylight. I could see through everything, inside and out. ... In my whole life I had never felt such joy. It was like waking from a dream.

Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage and streamed out like a fluid piercing light from my every pore. The flesh was as though dead, yet in my intense awareness I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confirmed to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms. People on distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my remote periphery. The

roots of plants and trees appeared through a dim transparency of the soil. I discerned the inward flow of their sap.

The first example is a record of Saint Theresa's spiritual experience. "Reality" in this quotation should be replaced by "God". The second example is from Chuang Tzu (Zhuang Zi), a Taoist master. The experience of Muhyyuddin Mohammed Ibn al-Arabi, a Muslim master, is described in the third example. The first "Reality" is to be replaced by "God", and the second by "Him". The fourth example is from Hsu Yin, a Buddhist master. Paramahansa Yogananda, a Hindu master, describes his experience in Cosmic Consciousness in the fifth example.

It is significant to note that all these examples are quoted from indisputable authoritative scriptures or masters whose teachings are unequivocally accepted as typical of their respective religions. If we replace characteristic terms like "Brahman", "Tao" or "God" with a neutral term like "Supreme Reality", any one of the quotations can easily be substitute for another, illustrating that the artificial difference between them is not fundamental nor ontological, but due to linguistic and cultural variance.

The experiences of these masters are timeless. Paramahansa Yogananda, for instance, is a present-day yogi, whereas Muhyyuddin Mohammed Ibn al-Arabi lived in the 12th century, while Chuang Tzu lived more than 22 centuries before us.

These experiences also provide us with great inspiration in our own endeavour, for they clearly show that spiritual realization can, and should, be attained while we are still living in this world. As Swami Vivekananda emphasizes, "realization is real religion, all the rest is only preparation." Swami Prabhavananda adds that "Religion is, in fact, a severely practical and empirical kind of research. You take nothing on trust. You accept nothing but your own experience."

This philosophy is in line with Buddhist teaching. Hence, while the material provided in this book represents some of the greatest product of mankind's finest minds, readers are requested not to accept anything based on faith alone, nor even on the reputation of established masters. Readers are invited to share, if they so desire and find beneficial, some of the most profound wisdom found in Buddhism, and experience possibly the most noble and meaningful attainment man can ever achieve,

namely spiritual fulfilment irrespective of the religion, or lack of it, they profess. Because of different cultural background, there may be ideas or opinions that some readers may find incredible or may even indignantly oppose, and as Buddhists truly appreciate the right to different opinions, readers are requested to discard such objectionable material as rubbish if they wish. But it should be noted that the great men who presented the information as reported in this book, sincerely believed it to be true, for it is against a principal tenet of Buddhism to tell lies.

Noble Truths and Noble Path

It was no historical co-incidence that many great Buddhist teachers were kings and princes who voluntarily renounced their luxurious ways of living to spread Buddhism. They were not forced to do so, nor were they deranged in mind. In fact most of them made their sacrifice of power and wealth for religion at the prime of their life. Why did they do so? It was because, although as Buddhist monks their worldly possessions were only their begging bowls and a few clothes, they led more rewarding and meaningful lives in Buddhism than even in their palaces, and they wanted to help other people to live rewarding, meaningful lives.

Besides Siddhartha Guatama Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, some of the great royal personages in Buddhist history include An Shi Kao, a Parthian prince who declined the throne to spread Buddhism to China; Kumarajiva, son of a Kuchean princess and a great translator of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese; Bodhidharma, a north Indian prince who founded Chan (or Zen) Buddhism in China; the prince and the princess of Asoka the Great, Mahinda and Sanghamitta, who brought Theravada Buddhism to Sri Lanka; Padmasambhava, the scholar-warrior prince of Udyana who declined the throne and spread Vajrayana Buddhism to Tibet; and Subhakarasinha, king of Orissa who was instrumental for the development of Vajrayana Buddhism. Even for this reason alone – to find out what is so compelling and beautiful in the Buddhist teaching that princes sacrificed the throne for it – it is worthwhile to learn more about Buddhism.

The gem of the Buddhist teaching is contained in the Buddha's own words:

Avoid doing evil,
Do good,
And purify the mind.

The basic philosophy taught by the Buddha can be summarized in the Four Noble Truths, which states that (1) there is suffering in life, (2) the cause of suffering is attachment, (3) to remove suffering, therefore we remove attachment, and (4) a way to do this is the Noble Eight-fold Path.

Due to insufficient understanding, some people mistakenly conclude that Buddhism is pessimistic, mainly because of the first Noble Truth. To say that there is suffering in life does not necessarily mean life is without joy. In fact the whole aim of Buddhism is to seek everlasting joy, not in indulgence of worldly pleasures, but in transcendental bliss of spiritual fulfilment.

There can be very few people in the whole history of humanity who can ever have a more carefree and happy life than the Buddha. Forewarned by a prophecy that his only son would one day leave the palace to be a monk, Siddhartha's father, King Suddhodana, went to the extent of forbidding anyone to breathe a sorrowful word or demonstrate the slightest grief in the presence of the lucky prince. There were hardly any physical needs that the prince found wanting. But Siddhartha later discovered that there was suffering which humanity could not avoid, such as the pain of birth, old age, sickness and death. Yet, such suffering was nothing when compared to the suffering of humanity in the endless cycle of birth and rebirth.

To help humanity overcome suffering and achieve everlasting joy, the Buddha taught the Noble Eight-fold Path, which comprises the following eight precepts: right speech, right action, right livelihood, right understanding, right intention, right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness. The eight precepts are of three parts: right speech, action and livelihood as moral purity; right understanding and intention as wisdom; and right effort, concentration and mindfulness as meditation.

These three parts should be practised simultaneously. In a condensed description, the Buddhist training prescribes that Buddhists must attain high morality in their words, thoughts and deeds; acquire the wisdom to differentiate between reality and illusion; and persist in purifying the mind in meditation to attain Enlightenment.

One should not be misled by the above very brief summary on the philosophy and practice of Buddhism to believe that Buddhism is simplistic. In fact the huge collection of Buddhist literature, generally known as Tripitaka, which is more than seven hundred times the size of the Bible, is the most extensive collection of religious works in the world. These works are mainly found in Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan. For some reasons, current western knowledge of Buddhism is

principally made through translation of Pali Buddhist literature, which mainly describes Theravada Buddhism. It is a pity that little translation is made from the Chinese, which provides an exceedingly rich and gigantic volume on Mahayana Buddhism.

Amazing Wisdom in Buddhist Philosophy

If you happen to think that the bulk of Buddhist literature is persuading people to be religious, you will be in for a big surprise. Much of Buddhist literature, including some of its most sacred scriptures, provides information that many scientists and philosophers will be amazed at but like to read. Indeed it is difficult to find another field of study that investigates reality more deeply and thoroughly than Buddhism does. For example, more than twenty centuries ago, Buddhist masters accurately described elements, atoms and sub-atomic particles. Their approximation of the atom's size, which works out to be about 10 to the minus tenth power cm, is close to what modern scientists estimate.

Buddhist knowledge of the infinite ocean of stars is equally astounding. Long before Galileo was imprisoned for telling us that our earth is not the centre of the universe, Buddhist masters taught about countless worlds separated by immeasurable distances in countless galaxies. And while our modern scientists debate if life exists anywhere else besides on our minute earth, Buddhist literature explains that life exists everywhere in the universe, and in more forms and at more planes that ordinary minds could imagine or ordinary eyes could see.

Centuries before Einstein's theory helps us to view our universe as a cosmic thought rather than a gigantic machine, Buddhist masters explained that time and space are unreal, but inter-relate to give as an illusion of phenomena. You will find in this book Asvaghosha's explanation on how illusory phenomena arise, and how we can overcome illusion to actualize Cosmic Reality.

Buddhist knowledge on mind is even more fascinating than on matter. Daniel Goleman was so impressed with the Visuddhimagga ("Path of Purification"), a summarized portion of the Abhidharma ("Treatise on Higher Wisdom"), which is only one of literally hundreds of important texts on Buddhist philosophy, that he modestly exclaimed, "Finally, I, a Western psychologist, was truly humbled intellectually. For I saw what psyche logos was really about." The Tibetan master, Chogyam Trungpa, commented that Buddhism came to America as a psychology.

The breadth as well as depth of Buddhist wisdom on consciousness is simply astounding. For example, the Abhidhammattha Sangaha (Compendium of Higher Wisdom) mentions four classes of consciousness,

namely, consciousness pertaining to the realm of senses (Kamavacaram Cittani, in Pali), to the realm of form (Rupavacaram Cittani) to the realm of non-form, (Arupavacaram Cittani) and to the supramundane (Lokuttara Cittani). The sense-consciousness class is further divided into fifty four types, the form-consciousness into fifteen types, the non-form consciousness into twelve types, and the supramundane consciousness into eight types, making eighty nine types.

Some of such amazing wisdom will be introduced in the next chapter as well as relevant parts in the commentary. Hence, although this book is meant to help people, irrespective of their cultural and religious background, in their quest for Cosmic Reality, others interested in the mysteries of man and the universe will also find this book useful.

Chapter 2

Before the Quest Begins

”Awakening of Faith in Mahayana” which provides the core for the development of different schools of Mahayana Buddhism, is invaluable not only for scholars of philosophy, metaphysics and religion, but also for scientists of various disciplines like nuclear physics, psychology and cosmology.

Three Vehicles for Enlightenment

If you ask Buddhist devotees how do they cultivate towards Enlightenment, some may say they meditate, some work fervently on a koan (or a seemingly illogical question, like what is your face before you were born), and others totally immersed in chanting mandras (or mystical combinations of special sounds, like Om mani padme hum). There are many other effective ways in Buddhist practice to realize spiritual fulfilment. This rich variety of cultivation methods, known as expedient means, often puzzles the uninitiated, but they provide the devotees with a wide choice according to their respective convenience, facilities, and levels of development. And when we know that there are not one, but three main traditions of Buddhism, we can appreciate the great variety.

The three traditions are Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. They are not three religions, but three main approaches to the same religion, and they all accept and practise the same basic doctrines. Theravada Buddhism, which means Buddhism of the Council of the Elders, is popularly practised in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia and Laos; whereas Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddhism of Great Vehicle, is popular in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

Vajrayana Buddhism, which means Buddhism of the Diamond Vehicle, and which is sometimes known as Tibetan or Tantric Buddhism, is popular in Tibet and Mongolia. Vajrayana Buddhism was developed from Mahayana Buddhism, and much influenced by Indian Tantrism and the native Tibetan Bon religion. Vajrayanists frequently employ mandras, mudras (mystical formations of fingers) and mandalas (mystical designs often in geometrical figures) in their spiritual cultivation. Some Vajrayanists regard sex, which the Theravadins and the Mahayanists categorically steer clear of, as a means to spirituality.

Soul, Sub-Atomic Particles and Cosmic Reality

The most notable difference between Theravada and Mahayana is their attitude towards Enlightenment. Theravadins believe that spiritual fulfilment is a personal affair, attainable only with one's own effort. Their aim is Nirvana, which is a state of perfect mind where the aspirant is liberated from the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, and not annihilation or extinction as some people wrongly imagine. Mahayanists believe that spiritual fulfilment is a universal accomplishment, whereby the more spiritually advanced can help their juniors, though personal effort is still important. Their aim is Buddhahood, a state of Enlightenment where one's mind becomes the Universal Mind.

Another fundamental difference between Theravada and Mahayana, possibly more significant than their different attitude towards Enlightenment though it is not as openly acknowledged, concerns what, for lack of a better English term, is called the "soul". Theravadins insist that there is no such thing as a permanent soul, and that the belief in the existence of the soul is one of the biggest mistakes man has ever made. What is transmitted from one life to another during rebirth, is not the soul, but the karmic force of the previous life. A common comparison is that when a rolling marble hits another marble and causes the latter to roll, what is transmitted is not an eternal part of the first marble, but its rolling momentum which is not its integral part.

Mahayanists, on the other hand, believe that there is a soul, or "zhen wo" in Chinese, meaning the "real me". The Chinese master, Hui Yuan (344-416), explained that while the physical body disintegrates, the soul does not; because of the indestructibility of the soul, the endless cycles of birth and rebirth are possible. His distinguished disciple, Tao Sheng (ca.360-434), asked: if there is no permanent self or soul involved in the cycle of birth and rebirth, then is there a permanent self in nirvana? If there is no self, what is it that enters nirvana? In fact, in Chinese Buddhist history, there was constant debate between the Buddhists and the Taoists or Confucianists on the question of soul.

Another decisive difference concerns their concept of the Buddha. Both the Theravadins and the Mahayanists accept the concept of the

triple body of the Buddha, namely the physical body (rupakaya), the transformational body (nirmanakaya), and the spiritual body (dharma-kaya). Both the Theravadins and the Mahayanists hold similar views regarding the physical and transformational bodies of the Buddha. The physical body is the one the Buddha uses to appear to men at any one time, and the transformational body is the many manifestations that the Buddha may employ to appear at different times and places. Hence, it is a common misconception to think that Theravadins regard the Buddha as all Siddhartha Guatama represents; and the statement that Siddhartha Guatama is the founder of Buddhism, which many Westerners regard as a historical truth, is actually incorrect according to Buddhist teaching. All Buddhists believe that there have been many Buddhas before Guatama Buddha, and there will be many after him. The triple body concept also refers to the transformational body, the reward body and the spiritual body, and will be explained in a later chapter.

The Theravadins and the Mahayanists hold different views concerning the Buddha's spiritual body. To the Theravadins, the dharmakaya or spiritual body of the Buddha is the summation of all the qualities and teachings of all the Buddhas that have come and will come to the world. To the Mahayanists, the dharmakaya of the Buddha is the Supreme Reality, omnipresent and omniscient. It is what Westerners would call the Almighty God. Guatama Buddha and all other Buddhas who have come and will come, are the personifications of this Eternal Buddha.

Another interesting difference, but little known to the public, between Theravada and Mahayana concerns their philosophical concept of the universe. Both the Theravadins and the Mahayanists, using their minds in deep meditation where our modern scientists would use sophisticated technology, have studied and analyzed all physical, emotional and mental phenomena in the universe into sub-atomic particles or forces called dharmas. At a time before scientists discovered (rediscovered?) physical sub-atomic particles, these dharmas were traditionally translated as elements. Emotional and mental sub-atomic particles or forces are still unknown in modern scientific vocabulary, though concepts like morphogenic fields and the exchange of not only energy but also information as a basis of life, proposed by far-sighted biologists like Rupert Drake and Lyall Watson, suggest an awareness of their presence.

The Theravadins contend that according to the principle of praitiyasamutpada, or the doctrine of dependent origination, there is a causal relationship between the temporal sequences of these physical, emotional and mental sub-atomic particles or forces, which they consider as real entities. The Mahayanist masters expound that because of praitiyasamutpada, the existence of these particles or forces, if any, is only relative and not real. Therefore, all phenomena which we may see as real because of our illusion, owe their apparent reality to these illusory sub-atomic particles or forces, but actually have no objective existence.

Modern scientists must be astonished to find that many centuries before the bubble-chamber or even the simple microscope was invented, Buddhist masters have classified these dharmas or sub-atomic particles and forces in ways more profound and detailed than in modern physics, chemistry or psychology. For example, as early as the 6th century, the Kosa or Ju She school (Realism school) of the Theravada tradition taught that the whole phenomenal world of both mind and matter is comprised of dharmas, or sub-atomic particles, which are of three levels, namely paramaanu, anu and raja. Paramaanu is the finest particle, and cannot be further divided. Seven paramaanu form one anu, and seven anu form one raja. Kosa masters also stated that the shortest time measurable is the transition of one particle to another, and that space and time are relative.

In the Kosa school sub-atomic particles are classified into seventy five types, which are of two main categories, namely samskrta-dharmas (created particles) and asamskrta-dharmas (non-created particles). The samskrta-dharmas are further divided into four groups: rupani (form), citta (mind), caitasika (mental faculties), and citta-viprayukta-samskrta (neither sub-stantial nor mental). Kosa Buddhists believe that particles are real but they exist only momentarily or instantaneously. Therefore, all phenomena, including man and the universe, are fleeting; there is nothing that is constant for a moment.

It should be pointed out that Buddhism is very practical, and does not indulge in speculative philosophy. The amazing information mentioned above was not a product of imagination nor intellectual reasoning; but derived from the masters' direct experience in very advanced levels of meditation.

Mahayanists, on the other hand, regard the phenomenal world as

an illusion. This does not necessarily mean that phenomena are not real, but they appear differently at different levels of consciousness. The Avatansaka or Hua Yen school (Garland school) of Mahayana Buddhism, for example, teaches a totalistic approach whereby all dharmas simultaneously arise, co-exist and mutually penetrate to become one organic unity. Whether we experience dharmas as phenomenal manifestation or as transcendental reality, depends on our perspective and spiritual development. This point will be explained in some detail later when we study the "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana".

Another subtle difference between Theravada and Mahayana is their perspective on nirvana. Both have questioned whether nirvana is a transformational state of mind or another dimension of being, and both have emphasized it more towards a transcendental mental state rather than a metaphysical dimension. But the Theravadins regard nirvana as eternal, blissful and the opposite to phenomena, whereas the Mahayanists believe that attaining nirvana involves a subjective mental change of outlook, and not an objective transformation of phenomena.

The great second century Indian Buddhist master, Nagarjuna, who is frequently respected as the Second Buddha, explains that:

Nirvana is that which is neither abandoned nor acquired, it is neither a thing annihilated, nor a thing eternal; it is neither destroyed nor produced. ... Nothing of phenomenal existence (samsara) is different from nirvana, nothing of nirvana is different from phenomenal existence.

In other words, nirvana and samsara, or, in an imperfect analogy, heaven and hell, are two aspects of the same reality, which may be expressed in physical, psychological or other dimensions. Through spiritual development that brings about a subjective transformation of outlook, the same physical, emotional or mental situations that may be hell to other people, can become heaven to us. The change is psychological, not ontological; if the phenomena were ultimately, objectively real, no power can change them.

Thus, it is obvious that those who say that Buddhism is nihilistic chiefly because they think attainment of nirvana equates disintegration into the unknown, have not understood the Buddhist teaching adequately.

Many centuries after Nagarjuna, Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, expounds the same principle from a different angle when he says:

When a mortal is enlightened, he is a Buddha.

When a Buddha is unenlightened, he is a mortal.

Hui Neng's quotation suggests that every being, including non-human, has the opportunity to attain Buddhahood, or Cosmic Reality, which in Mahayana philosophy is even more worthy than attaining nirvana. In "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana", Asvaghosha provides a fascinating explanation of what Cosmic Reality is, and how we can experience it.

The Great Work of Horse-Neighing

What do you think of a teacher whose sermons were so inspiring that even horses neighed to show their gratitude? This, according to a popular legend, was how Asvaghosha got his name. Asvaghosha, or Ma Ming in Chinese, means Horse-Neighing.

There were six men with the same name of Asvaghosha who had significant connection with Buddhism, but the one credited to be the author of "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" probably lived in the first century in India. He was a great philosopher who took pride in deriding Buddhism, but after a debate with Parsvika, a famous Buddhist master of northern India, Asvaghosha embraced Buddhism and helped to propagate it. He was later valued as a national treasure.

Besides "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana", Asvaghosha also wrote many other important Buddhist texts, such as "Life and Work of the Buddha", "Developmental Stages of Bodhisattva", "Experiences and Methods of Miraculous Powers", and "Treatise on Non-Being".

"Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" is one of the most important works on Buddhism, providing the conceptual framework upon which most, if not all, Mahayanist schools derive their basic philosophy. It is called "Mahayana Sraddhatpada Sastera" in Sanskrit, and "Da Cheng Qi Xin Lun" (pronounced as "Ta Ch'eng Ch'i Hsin Lun") in Chinese. Its original Sanskrit version, however, is now lost, and the most authoritative source for reference at present is its first Chinese translation done by the eminent Paramartha (Zhen Ti in Chinese) in China in 550. There is another translation by Sikshananda in the 7th century, but this version is not as popular.

The immense importance of "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" can be seen from the fact that more than 170 major commentaries have been written on it. Indeed, it is amazing that for such a great work, only four translations in English (Dr. D.T. Suzuki, 1907; Rev. Timothy Richard, 1907; Bhikshu Wai-tao and Goddhard, 1937; and Yoshito S. Hakeda, 1967) are available.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been some controversy over the question whether Asvaghosha was genuinely the author of "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana". Some believe that this great work was actually written by one or more unknown Chinese writers

who generously assigned the authorship to Asvaghosha; others picking on linguistic features which they argue did not belong to Asvaghosha's time say this work was a forgery, compiled at a much later date than that purported; while a few question whether the translator, Paramartha, had sufficient command of the Chinese language for this formidable task.

While it is difficult to prove the case either way, the following points are pertinent. This controversy is a modern development; all along in the past there was never any doubt on Asvaghosha as the author. One should also bear in mind that among the countless Buddhists who accepted Asvaghosha's authorship without question were Enlightened masters of very high calibre, certainly not gullible dumb-bells ready to accept anything thrust onto them.

This great work was written in Sanskrit about twenty centuries before us, and first translated into Chinese about fifteen centuries ago. While keeping to the original as much as possible, subsequent translators or copy-writers, would often render archaic linguistic features into current grammatical usage for the benefit of contemporary readers. Hence, finding a Chinese expression typical of 6th century or even 16th century usage, does not prove that the original work could not be written in the 1st century in Sanskrit.

Paramartha, considered to be undoubtedly the most important translator of Buddhist works of the time, was a highly respected Buddhist master and scholar well versed in both Sanskrit and Chinese. Even if we presume that he were not learned in Chinese, he was definitely helped by capable Chinese scholars in the translation work.

One should also note the attitude of the Chinese and the Buddhists concerning authorship. Both the Chinese and the Buddhist paid little importance in the attachment to names. Many Chinese Buddhists, for example, do not even know the personal name of the Buddha; some may know him as Sakyamuni, his clan's name, but very few know his personal name, Siddhartha, or his family name, Guatama. It is not that they have little respect for Siddhartha, but that both the Chinese and the Buddhist value practical usefulness rather than nominal flattery. To them, what is important in "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" is not whether the author is Asvaghosha or someone else, but whether what the author teaches in the book is worthy of following. If it is not, even

if they know for certain that the author is the Buddha himself, they will leave it aside.

”Awakening of Faith in Mahayana” is certainly a worthy book. Many common queries concerning Buddhism, like whether it is polytheist or even atheist, or whether the adept is simply extinguished when he enters nirvana, will be clarified when this great work is understood. Many intriguing concepts like the external world is an illusion, the eternity is contained in a moment, as well as the seemingly illogical statements of Zen masters will become clear and meaningful when we grasp the great truth of Asvaghosha’s masterpiece.

Western readers may be astonished to find it exceedingly short, consisting of only a few pages in Chinese! But because both classical Chinese and its original Sanskrit are extremely concise languages, the knowledge and wisdom contained in this small volume is simply astounding. Because of its intrinsic profundity as well as the terseness of language, very few people today can understand it without the help of commentaries.

In presenting this great work, my first objective is to make it as clear and pleasant to read as possible. First, the original text in classical Chinese is given, so that those who can read Chinese will have an authoritative source for reference. Then, especially for those who do not know Chinese, the original Chinese text is given a literal translation into English, so that we can have, even as an imitation, some idea of the pregnancy of the original work. Because of the linguistic difference between Chinese and English, such a literal translation is likely to be problematic, and sometimes comical. The comical aspect is due to the literal translation, of course not due to its original meaning. Such problems are overcome in the interpretation that follows.

This interpretation is actually a figurative translation of the Chinese text, together with expansion of relevant information, which is often needed if the meaning of profound, esoteric concepts written in an immensely concise classical language is to be readily comprehensible to modern readers. This is followed by a commentary, where unfamiliar or interesting ideas, as well as background knowledge necessary for understanding the passage, are provided. This commentary includes important comments made by great masters in the past, like Hui Yuan, Yuan Xiao and Fa Zang (also known by his honorary title, ”Xian Shou”,

meaning ”First among the Wise”).

”Awakening of Faith in Mahayana”, as befitting a religious text, begins with an adoration and a prelude, and concludes with a prayer for the welfare of all humanity. The text proper is divided into five parts:

Part 1: Cause and Effect. Eight reasons for writing this work.

Part 2: Establishing the Meaning. Brief discussion on transcendental and phenomenal aspects of reality.

Part 3: Explanation. Basic concepts of Mahayana teachings, and the philosophy and methods in achieving spiritual fulfilment.

Part 4: Faith and Practice. Beliefs, approaches and practice in realizing cosmic reality.

Part 5: Benefits. Benefits from spiritual development.

For the convenience of modern readers, this present book is arranged into conventional chapters. Nevertheless, Asvaghosha’s original arrangement of his work into five parts is closely followed, except that Parts 3 and 4 are presented in many chapters. The correspondence between Asvaghosha’s five parts and the chapters in this book is as follows.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Before the Question Begins

Chapter 3 – Adoration

Chapter 4 – Prelude

Chapter 5 – Part 1: Cause and Effect

Chapter 6 – Part 2: Establishing the Meaning

Chapters 7 to 26 – Part 3: Explanation

Chapters 27 to 29 – Part 4: Faith and Practice

Chapters 30 and 31 – Part 5: Benefits and Blessing

Chapter 32 – From Samsara to Nirvana

Each passage from the original Chinese text is given a heading as well as numbered for easy reference, and the numbering system is based on Asvaghosha’s five parts. Then a summary of the great work is provided.

The gist of "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" is traditionally summed up by past masters into a comprehensive phrase. When translated literally, this phrase is "One heart, two gates, three bigs, four faiths, five movements", which is of course quite non-sensical to the uninitiated. The meaning and beauty of the Chinese expression become apparent when it is translated figuratively: "One Reality, two ways of manifestations, three dimensions of universal application, four aspects of faith, and five areas of practice".

In a nutshell, it means that the one and only Supreme Reality is manifested in two principal ways, as transcendental Absolute or phenomenal world. The Reality, manifested transcendently or phenomenally, is applicable universally, and is expressed in three dimensions. Spatially it expresses itself in limitless forms, limitless characteristics, and limitless uses; temporally, it stretches back to the beginningless past, operates in the timeless present, and extends to the endless future. To attain realization of Cosmic Reality, we must have unwavering faith in the Absolute Truth, the Teacher, the Teaching, and the Discipline, which are the four aspects of faith. And in our training for spiritual realization, we must practise devotedly in the five areas of charity, morality, tolerance, perseverance, and meditation.

"Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" which provides the core for the development of different schools of Mahayana Buddhism, is invaluable not only for scholars of philosophy, metaphysics and religion, but also for scientists of various disciplines like nuclear physics, psychology and cosmology. But most important of all, it presents to us, whether we are scholars, scientists or otherwise, a highly remarkable and comprehensive understanding of Cosmic Reality, and offers us, irrespective of our individual religious conviction or even lack of it, practical ways to experience this Reality directly. Such spiritual fulfilment, when one is ready for it, represents man's greatest achievement, for what accomplishment can be more meaningful and rewarding than that of realizing our transcendental origin and destiny? So let us with hope and inspiration, turn the page to begin our quest for Cosmic Reality.

Chapter 3

Adoration

Return life to ten directions
To the most beautiful wisdom

Original Text in Chinese

歸命盡十方，最勝業徧知；色無礙自在，救世大悲者！
及彼身體相，法性真如海；無量功德藏，如實修行等！
爲欲令眾生，除疑捨邪執；起大乘正信，佛種不斷故。

Literal Translation

Return life to ten directions
To the most beautiful wisdom
Without form He is omniscient
The Saviour and the Great Compassionate

And to the characteristics of form
The phenomena and the reality
Limitless receptacle of merits
And to the devotees

Vow to save all sentient beings
Eliminate doubts, evils, attachment
Awake the faith in Mahayana
The Buddha nature in endless fulfilment

Interpretation

I take refuge in the Buddha, the omnipresent,
The know-all of perfect wisdom, the most glorious,
The formless, the Tathagata, the omniscient,
The universal Saviour and the Great Compassionate.

I take refuge in the Dharma, the teaching,
Manifested as phenomena in cosmic reality,
The limitless receptacle of excellent merits,
And in the Sangha, the Monastic Order.

I vow to save all sentient beings
To discard their doubts, desires, and attachment,
To awaken the right faith in Mahayana Buddhism
So that all will attain spiritual fulfillment.

Commentary

In this adoration, the author takes refuge in the Buddhist Triple Gem, that is, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and makes a vow to save all sentient beings.

In Buddhist context, "to take refuge" does not mean hiding under some protection and running away from responsibilities. In many ways, it is the opposite of what the English term "refuge" connotes, as it demands much courage, effort and perseverance. The classical Chinese term "gui ming" – literally translated as "return life" in the poem above, and usually termed "gui yi" in modern Chinese – is more appropriate than "take refuge". It suggests giving one's life to a noble cause. The Sanskrit term is "namo".

The concept of the Buddha in the first verse is typically Mahayanistic. The Buddha is omnipresent and omniscient, transcending both time and space. Mainly because of inadequate understanding, and of reading Theravada literature which emphasizes morality, some people contend that Buddhism is not a religion, but a way of moral living. The Mahayana concept of the Buddha clearly shows that this contention is incorrect. Theravada Buddhists also regard their practice as religious; morality is only a preparation. When a Theravadin says "I take refuge in the Buddha", he means not refuge in the person of Siddhartha Guatama, but in all the qualities and teachings of all Buddhas before, including and after Guatama Buddha.

The teachings of the Buddhas, and for us living in the present aeon, particularly of Guatama Buddha, are collectively known as the Dharma. The term "dharma" can also mean "sub-atomic particles" and "phenomena" as we have seen in the previous chapter.

The Sangha is the Buddhist monastic order. To be a monk is not to run away from society to have free food and lodging in a monastery, as some people erroneously believe and some unenlightened monks practise. There is a Chinese saying that becoming a monk calls for greater discipline and ability than becoming a prime minister or an army general!

The adoration above also illustrates two eminent characteristics of Buddhism, namely wisdom and compassion. Wisdom here refers to "higher wisdom", the unequivocal understanding that Enlightenment is

attainable only when one can differentiate reality from illusion. The last verse above clearly shows Asvaghosha's boundless compassion. To Buddhists, Asvaghosha was not a mere mortal, but is a Bodhisattva, an Enlightened being who voluntarily postpones entering Buddhahood so as to help others in their spiritual quest. It is significant to note that he has vowed to save all sentient beings, including non-humans and non-Buddhists.

Chapter 4

Prelude to Asvaghosha's Great Work

The one and only Supreme Reality is manifested in two ways, the transcendental and the phenomenal.

0.1 Mahayana Buddhism

Original Text in Chinese

論曰：有法能起摩訶衍信根，是故應說。

Literal Translation

Sasteras mention teaching to awaken Mahayana. Thus must tell.

Interpretation

It is mentioned in the treatises that there is a teaching to awaken the faith in Mahayana Buddhism. Thus, I must explain it.

Commentary

Buddhist literature is collectively known as the Tripitaka, which means the Three Baskets of Sutras, Sasteras and Vinayas. Sutras are scriptures recording the works said by the Buddha himself. Sasteras are treatises on important topics written by Buddhist masters. Vinayas are codes of monastic rules and associated stories.

Asvaghosha makes clear that this book is a sastera. The material of this sastera, however, is taken from many sutras, like the Langkavatara Sutra (Leng Jia Jing), Avatamsaka Sutra (Hua Yen Jing), Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra (Wei Mo Ji Jing) and Nirvana Sutra (Ni Pan Jing). This means the teaching described in "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" was taught by the Buddha himself.

Some critics say that these Mahayana sutras were not written by the Buddha, and therefore were forgery. In fact the Buddha did not write any sutras at all. At the first Buddhist Council of five hundred disciples at Rajagrha about four months after the Buddha's parinirvana, the Buddha's teaching was reviewed, discussed and composed into sutras. The Buddha's teaching in the form of sutras was transmitted orally and recited by followers in various languages popular in India at that time,

but the two most important languages were Sanskrit in the north and Pali in the south. It was only a few hundred years later that the sutras were first recorded in writing.

In the 4th century BCE, i.e. about a hundred years after the Buddha's parinirvana, Sanskrit became the paramount language in India, whereas Pali almost disappeared. In the 1st century BCE the Pali edition of the Tipitaka ("Tripitaka" in Sanskrit) was found in Sri Lanka. Only in the 5th century, i.e. about one thousand years after the Buddha's parinirvana, the Buddhist master, Buddhaghosa, from the Indian kingdom of Mandaha went to Sri Lanka to copy the Pali Tipitaka, which later formed the core of the Theravada teaching.

No Buddhists of any traditions would deny the Agama, the main body of the Pali cannon, and which emphasizes the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path, as the basic teaching of the Buddha. But to say that this is his only important teaching, suggesting that all other profound teaching concerning the cosmos and the metaphysical dimension as later adulteration, or as incorporated from the Chinese, not only ignores the historical background of Buddhist literature, but also underestimates the Buddha's and other great Indian minds. We must not forget that Buddhism was the principal religion and philosophy in India for about twenty centuries, and the Indians were a highly civilized people with profound knowledge and experience of spiritual and metaphysical achievements. Would they willingly embrace a religion that does not go beyond the physical dimension?

In China, perhaps except in Chan (or Zen) Buddhism which mainly developed in China and later in Japan though the original impetus was still from India, it was the Chinese who generally learned from the Indian teachers. This can be easily verified by the fact that most of the important scriptures in Chinese Buddhism have Indian origins.

Mahayana and Theravada are the two main traditions of Buddhism. The third tradition, Vajrayana Buddhism, is derived from Mahayana. Vajrayana means "Diamond Vehicle".

Mahayana means "Great Vehicle", indicating that its aim is universal salvation, in contrast to Hinayana, meaning "Small Vehicle", which emphasizes personal Enlightenment. Now the term "Theravada" is generally used instead of "Hinayana", because the use of the latter term may be interpreted as being disrespectful. Theravada means "Council

of Elders". When Buddhism took on two distinctive courses of development after the second Great Buddhist Council at Vaisali in the 4th century B.C., one branch, known as Sthaviras, was led by the Council of Elders, who insisted that this branch was the original Buddhism taught by Guatama Buddha. Theravada was one of the traditional eight Hinayana schools that developed from the Sthavira, but as all other Hinayana schools (perhaps with the exception of Sarvastivada, which was prominent then but now relatively unknown), have become extinct, the term Theravada is now loosely used to include all Hinayana schools.

The other branch was the Mahasanghika, from which the traditional ten Mahayana schools developed, and later spread to China and other places. Mahasanghika means the School of Majority, because theirs was the majority view of that time. There were a number of doctrinal disputes, even among the Hinayana schools, such as whether the past and the future were real, whether space and nirvana were conditioned or unconditioned, whether dharma was just a conventional reality, and whether the self or soul existed. But the main point of contention that led to a split between the Mahayana and the Hinayana was whether an Arahat was perfectly Enlightened. The elders believed that he was, whereas the majority believed he was not.

0.2 Five Parts

Original Text in Chinese

說有五分，云何爲五？一者因緣分，二者立義分，
三者解釋分，四者修行信心分，五者勸修利益分。

Literal Translation

Mention five parts. What five parts? One, Cause and Effect; two, Establishing Meaning; three, Explanation; four, Faith and Practice; five, Encouraging Benefits.

Interpretation

It is mentioned that there are five parts in the awakening of faith in Mahayana Buddhism. What are these five parts? They are as follows:

1. Explaining the Cause and Effect, i.e the reasons for writing the treatise.
2. Establishing the Meaning of the basic philosophy to be discussed.
3. Detailed explanation of the philosophy.
4. Discussion of the faith and the methods required to practise the teaching.
5. Enumerating the benefits that can be derived from the teaching so as to serve as encouragement.

Commentary

The prelude, therefore, sets out the structure of the treatise, illustrating that Asvaghosha was both a systematic and thoughtful writer. Commentators sum up Asvaghosha's great work in a poetic expression: "One Reality, two ways of manifestations, three dimensions of universal application, four aspects of faith, and five areas of practice".

This means that the one and only Supreme Reality is manifested in two ways, the transcendental and the phenomenal. Cosmic Reality is limitless in form, characteristics and uses, and operates eternally in the past, present and future. To realize Cosmic Reality we must have faith in the truth, the teacher, the teaching and the discipline. In our spiritual cultivation, we need to practise charity, discipline, tolerance, perseverance and mind training.

Chapter 5

Attaining Eternal Bliss

Everything happens with one or more causes, and every cause brings about one or more effects. Cause and effect are interrelated; the effect of something is the cause of another.

1.1 Reasons for Writing the Work

Original Text in Chinese

初說因緣分。問曰：有何因緣而造此論？
答曰：是因緣有八種。云何爲八？

Literal Translation

Begin with Cause and Effect. What cause and effect make this sastera? Eight types of cause and effect. What eight types?

Interpretation

Let us begin by examining the question of cause and effect. What are the causes and effects, or reasons, connected with the writing of this treatise? There are eight reasons. What are the eight reasons?

Commentary

The principle of cause and effect, or karma, is a crucial concept in Buddhism. Everything happens with one or more causes, and every cause brings about one or more effects. Cause and effect are interrelated; the effect of something is the cause of another. Karma is explained in more detail in other parts of the book.

1.2 Eliminating All Suffering

Original Text in Chinese

一者，因緣總相。所謂爲令眾生離一切苦，得究竟樂，非求世間名利恭敬故。

Literal Translation

One, the general cause and effect is to eliminate all suffering of sentient beings, to attain eternal bliss. Not for worldly fame, material gains nor glory.

Interpretation

First, the general and most important aim of writing this treatise is to help sentient beings to overcome all suffering, so that they will attain eternal bliss. It is not for the sake of worldly fame, material gains nor personal glory.

Commentary

For convenience of study, some masters classify suffering into "three groups", while others into "eight kinds". The three groups of suffering are bodily pain, such as from disease and injury; suffering from loss, such as the termination of pleasures just enjoyed; and suffering from the cycle of birth and rebirth. The eight kinds are birth, old age, sickness, death, parting of loved ones, meeting of hated enemies, frustration from craving, and illusion of the five senses.

Eternal bliss is derived from spiritual enlightenment, and this treatise suggests some ways of attaining it. Masters who have attained spiritual enlightenment describe their bliss as hundreds, or thousands of times more joyous than worldly pleasures.

The mention of not aiming for worldly fame, materialistic gain, and personal glory is not just rhetoric; it has been amply substantiated by the daily examples of great masters. When a person is ready to give up

power and wealth, and even the throne, to lead a monastic life, of what use to him is material gain?

1.3 Explaining the Tathagata

Original Text in Chinese

二者，爲欲解釋如來根本之義，令諸眾生正解不謬故。

Literal Translation

Two, explain Ju Lai, so that all sentient beings have right view, and not be deviated.

Interpretation

The second reason is to explain Ju Lai, i.e. the Tathagata or the Supreme Reality, so that all sentient beings can have the right view for attaining spiritual development, and not be deviated by wrong teaching.

Commentary

The "Tathagata", or "Ju Lai" (Ru Lai) in Chinese, is commonly translated as "Thus Come", "Thusness", or "Suchness", suggesting that the Tathagata has been like what It is since the beginningless beginning, and will be so till the endless end of time. It also transcends space. It is the Supreme Reality or the Ultimate Truth. The Chinese usually refer to the Buddha as the Tathagata, or Ju Lai Fo, and seldom as Guatama Buddha. When the Buddha is personified, he is often referred to as Sakyamuni.

1.4 Spiritual Development

Original Text in Chinese

三者，爲令善根成熟眾生，於摩訶衍法堪任不退信故。

Literal Translation

Three, for the matured good roots not to retrogress in Mahayana.

Interpretation

The third reason is to strengthen the faith of those followers who are already spiritually advanced, so that they may not retrogress in their spiritual development in the Mahayana teaching.

Commentary

Buddhist masters are keenly aware of the different nature and abilities of different individuals, and therefore there are different means for different people in spiritual training. Because of various factors operating in the principle of cause and effect, including their spiritual development in their previous lives, some people are spiritually more advanced than others, and are figuratively referred to as good roots. But if they do evils in this life, they will retrogress to a lower developmental scale in the next life.

When a person has attained a high spiritual level, he will enter monkhood to continue his spiritual development at the highest level until he attains Enlightenment. For some factors in the interaction of cause and effect, some highly advanced individuals may remain as laymen, and they too can attain Enlightenment. Hence, while becoming a monk is a highly desirable facility, it is not a necessity in spiritual realization.

1.5 Strengthen Faith

Original Text in Chinese

四者，爲令善根微少眾生修習信心故。

Literal Translation

Four, for the mediocre roots to develop faith.

Interpretation

The fourth reason is to enable those who are still slight in their spiritual development, to strengthen their faith.

Commentary

Those who are slight in their spiritual development are figuratively referred to as mediocre roots. They can improve their spiritual standing by direct spiritual training, or indirectly by performing meritorious deeds. But no matter how low a person may be in the spiritual ladder, the mere fact that he is born a human is itself a tremendous spiritual achievement, for he must have accredited a lot of merits in his countless, previous lowly lives as insects, plants or animals. He must not, therefore, be so unwise as to waste this very rare, precious chance of being human, by not working for his own spiritual liberation.

1.6 Expedient Means

Original Text in Chinese

五者，爲示方便，消惡業障，善護其心，遠離癡慢，出邪網故。

Literal Translation

Five, provide expedient means, remove bad karma, improve his heart, distance doubt and arrogance, out of evil net.

Interpretation

The fifth reason is to provide expedient means to help sentient beings to remove their bad karmic effect, to purify their mind, and help them to dispel doubt and arrogance so that they will escape from the tempting net of evils.

Commentary

Expedient means are called "upaya" in Sanskrit, and "fang bian" in Chinese. They are adhoc methods to help devotees to solve immediate problems. Expedient means can be useful in three main ways.

Previous thoughts, words and deeds of a person will generate the appropriate results, known as karmic effect, for him. If he has been evil, then the karmic effect is obviously bad. The many methods mentioned in "Awakening of Faith", like being charitable, are creditable to one's karma, thus removing or reducing bad effect from the previous karma.

The second way expedient means can be useful is to purify a devotee's mind, as in meditation practice taught in the treatise. Purifying the mind means removing various and numerous mental hindrances that prevent a person from seeing reality as it really is.

Most human beings are morally weak, and can easily fall into worldly temptations that hamper their spiritual development. Two significant causes of human weakness are their doubt on the value or necessity of spiritual development, and their arrogance due to their lack of higher

wisdom. Expedient means provided in the treatise can help them to overcome their doubt and arrogance so that they can escape from the net of evils.

1.7 Tranquility and Insight Meditation

Original Text in Chinese

六者，爲示修習止觀，對治凡夫二乘心過故。

Literal Translation

Six, practice "zhi guan" to overcome heart weakness of Hinayanists.

Interpretation

The sixth reason is to provide the principles and practice of tranquility meditation and insight meditation, so that the weakness of the Hinayana Buddhists regarding their philosophy of the Supreme Reality can be overcome.

Commentary

"Hinayana" was the proper term for "Theravada". Only in 1950 the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Colombo, Sri Lanka decided to use the term "Theravada" instead of "Hinayana" to emphasize that the development of this branch of Buddhism was led by the Council of Elders.

A crucial difference between the Mahayanists and the Hinayanists (or Theravadins) is that while the former regard spiritual salvation as a universal responsibility, the latter consider it a personal affair -- hence the terms "Great Vehicle" and "Small Vehicle" respectively. In both Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism, meditation is the essential procedure for attaining Enlightenment. There are two categories of meditation: tranquility meditation, called "samatha" in Sanskrit and "zhi" in Chinese; and insight meditation, "vipasyana" and "guan".

Asvaghosha believes that it is a weakness of the Hinayanists to use tranquility meditation and insight meditation for attaining only nirvana, a state of mind whereby one sees reality as it really is, instead of realizing the Mahayanist aim of Buddhahood, whereby one IS the

Cosmic Reality. Hence, Mahayanists believe that Hinayana Buddhism is only the preparatory stage, the final realization lies in Mahayana; Hinayanists of course disagree with this view.

In classical Chinese, the term "heart" usually refers to the mind; and in the context of "Awakening of Faith", it means Cosmic Reality. In the above Chinese text, "heart weakness" refers to the weakness of the Hinayana philosophy concerning the Supreme Reality. "Zhi guan" refers to tranquility meditation and insight meditation.

1.8 Pure Land School

Original Text in Chinese

七者，爲示專念方便，生於佛前，必定不退信心故。

Literal Translation

Seven, provide expedient means for specialist reciters to be born in front of the Buddha, with unwavering faith.

Interpretation

The seventh reason is to provide expedient means for Buddhists of the Pure Land School, so that they will be born in the Western Paradise of Eternal Bliss to be with Amitabha Buddha, where with unwavering faith they will realize Buddhahood.

Commentary

The Pure Land School, "Jing Tu Zong" in Chinese, is the most popular school of Mahayana Buddhism today. Their basic belief is that by intensely and sincerely reciting prayers to Amitabha Buddha, devotees will be born in the Pure Land, i.e. the Western Paradise of Eternal Bliss where Amitabha Buddha resides. There these devotees will continue their spiritual development until they themselves become Buddhas.

1.9 Benefits from Spiritual Development

Original Text in Chinese

八者，爲示利益，勸修行故。有如是等因緣，所以造論。

Literal Translation

Eight, point out benefits, encourage development. These are the causes and effects; hence the treatise.

Interpretation

The eight reason is to point out the benefits one can get from spiritual development, so as to encourage people on their training.

These are the causes and effects connected with the treatise; hence this treatise is offered to the public.

Commentary

While the spiritually advanced appreciate that spiritual development is the mission of their existence, most people lack this higher wisdom and have to be plodded and encouraged. The treatise not only mentions the benefits to be obtained, but more significantly provides the essential knowledge about Cosmic Reality as well as the ways of realizing it.

Of the eight reasons for writing the treatise, the first general reason is most important. The other seven are specific reasons for overcoming particular difficulties. In the original text, the term used is not "reasons" but "causes and effects", which have wider implications. In Buddhist philosophy, causes are effects, and vice versa.

1.10 Found in Sutras

Original Text in Chinese

問曰，修多羅中具有此法，何須重說。

Literal Translation

This teaching is in the sutras; why repeat?

Interpretation

The teaching mentioned in the treatise is also found in the sutras; why is it necessary to repeat it in this treatise?

Commentary

Sasteras or treatises can be divided into two types, those deliberating on one selected sutra or scripture, and those deliberating on various topics found in different scriptures. This division is not meant to be rigid, but for convenience of study. A sutra is a scripture containing the teachings actually spoken by the Buddha, but recorded by his disciples many years later; whereas a sastera is a discourse by a master.

There has been some debate on whether "Awakening of Faith" is a specific treatise on a selected scripture, or a general treatise on many topics found in different scriptures. Much of the material of this treatise can be found in the Lankavatara Sutra (Leng Jia Jing in Chinese), which is a record of the Buddha's teaching in the fairyland-like Lanka, which is probably today's Sri Lanka (formerly called Ceylon). Other scriptures from where important topics in the treatise are found, include the Avatamsaka or Garland Sutra (Hua Yen Jing), the Surangama Sutra (Leng Yen Jing), the Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra (Wei Mo Jing), and the Nirvana Sutra (Nie Pan Jing).

1.11 Different Roots and Movements

Original Text in Chinese

答曰，修多羅中雖有此法，以眾生根行不等，受解緣別。

Literal Translation

Though found in sutras, roots and movements of sentient beings are different; reception, explanation and karmic matrix are different.

Interpretation

Though the teaching is found in the sutras, the capabilities and intentions of individual sentient beings are different. Moreover, the ways the teaching is learnt by the devotees, and taught by the teachers, as well as learning situations are different.

Commentary

This is one example showing that the concise original text in Chinese cannot be easily understood without the help of commentaries. "Roots" refer to the innate capabilities of the devotees, including their social, economical and intellectual differences, and "movements" refer to their intrinsic structures, including their present desires, intentions and emotional set-up, as well as their karmic merits or demerits from previous lives. Roots and movements constitute the internal differences of the devotees.

External differences are found in reception, explanation and karmic matrix. Reception refers to the different ways, because of their individual variances, devotees learn the same teaching; explanation refers to the various methods, because of their different abilities, teachers convey the teaching; karmic matrix refers to the countless different situations brought together by karmic effect where learning and teaching take place.

Obviously, modern educationists and psychologists can learn much from this concept concerning the internal and external differences of both teachers and learners. For example, instead of merely emphasizing the improvement of teaching technology like what many educationists presently do, they should consider other factors like those mentioned by Asvaghosha.

During the time of Guatama Buddha, these differences also existed, but then they did not present any difficulty, as is explained in the following passage.

1.12 Round Voice

Original Text in Chinese

所謂如來在世，眾生利根，能說之人，色心業勝，圓音一演，異類等解，則不須論。

Literal Translation

During the time of Ju Lai's manifestation on earth, sentient beings had favourable roots, the Teacher had the miraculous power of form and mind, and of "round voice" whereby beings of various kinds could understand, hence treatises were unnecessary.

Interpretation

During the time when the Buddha came to the world as Siddhartha Guatama, sentient beings were favourably disposed for spiritual development. The form and mind of the transcendental Buddha is everywhere; and the Buddha in the person of Siddhartha possessed the miraculous effect of "round voice", whereby various kinds of beings at different spiritual levels could understand his teaching according to their individual needs. At such an auspicious time, treatises to explain the teaching were unnecessary.

Commentary

The Eternal Buddha, known as Tathagata or Ju Lai in Chinese, has appeared on earth and in other spheres of existence many times in different aeons. Some of the physical bodies (rupakaya) besides Guatama Buddha that the Eternal Buddha has appeared in, include Dipankara Buddha, Kasyapa Buddha, Aksobhya Buddha and Amitabha Buddha. Each aeon has its prominent characteristic. Dipankara, for example, is the Buddha of Light. While our aeon is characterized by suffering, which Guatama Buddha teaches us to overcome, the next aeon is character-

ized by joy, and Meitriya Buddha, the coming Buddha, is the Buddha of Laughter.

The Buddha always chooses an auspicious time, such as a very favourable alignment of heavenly bodies generating beneficial cosmic energy, to manifest himself in a human body. Hence people who live around the time of the Buddha's manifestation, are born at a very propitious period, and are well disposed for spiritual development. In Guatama Buddha's period, for example, Solon and Socrates were living in the West, while Lao Tzu and Confucius in the East.

Moreover, Guatama Buddha was an excellent teacher, with the miraculous power of "round voice", which means that when the Buddha spoke, his teaching at the same time and place could be understood by different kinds of devotees according to their levels of development. In such a situation, there was no need for treaties to explain the teaching.

According to Mahayana thinking, the Buddha found that due to different levels of intellectual and spiritual attainment, many people could not understand or were not ready for the profound teaching about Cosmic Reality. For such people, the Buddha first taught the agama, or moral precepts, which form the bulk and core of Hinayana Buddhism; after this moral preparation, they would be ready for his higher teaching.

But the situation became different when Guatama Buddha passed into parinirvana, that is, terminated his phenomenal manifestation in Siddhartha Guatama as a person. This is explained in the next passage.

1.13 Four Types of Sentient Beings

Original Text in Chinese

若如來滅後，或有眾生能以自力廣聞而取解者，或有眾生亦以自力少聞而多解者，或有眾生無自智力，因於廣論而得解者，亦有眾生復以廣論文多為煩，心樂總持少文而攝多義能取解者。

Literal Translation

After the disappearance of Ju Lai, some sentient beings have self ability of wide hearing to gain wisdom; some have self ability of narrow hearing but wide understanding; some lack wisdom and depend on sasteras for understanding; some are disinclined to the wordiness of sasteras and prefer specialties for understanding.

Interpretation

After the parinirvana of Guatama Buddha, sentient beings can be classified into four types. The first type are those who possess the intuitive wisdom for listening to recitation of the Buddha's teaching, and attain Enlightenment through insight. The second are those who possess intuitive wisdom, but do not listen to recitation of scriptures widely; however, they attain Enlightenment through reasoning. The third type are those who lack intuitive wisdom, but they attain understanding through diligent study of treatises written by masters to explain the scriptures. The fourth are those disinclined to the wordiness of treatises, and who prefer special writings which provide much information in few words, from where they derive understanding.

Commentary

The first and second types of sentient beings possess intuitive wisdom, or higher wisdom, whereas the third and fourth types do not. With

intuitive wisdom come religious understanding and insight, and Cosmic Reality is realized in a flash of inspiration, holistically, and often illogically to outsiders.

Without intuitive wisdom, a devotee has to apply himself diligently to treatises written by masters to explain religious matters in a logical, dialectical manner. In this way he comes to understand Cosmic Reality intellectually, but he still does not experience reality directly. Nevertheless, this intellectual development, which corresponds to the progress from the fourth and third types of sentient beings to the second, leads to intuitive wisdom, so that when the time is ripe, when he has further progressed to the first type, he can now attain spiritual realization, either gradually or sometimes in a flash of divine providence.

What about those born in the first type? Where did they get their intuitive wisdom on Cosmic Reality when they have not studied it intellectually before, and when some of them may even be illiterate? How is it possible, as it has been amply recorded in Buddhist as well as other religious literature, that by listening to a scripture recitation, or even to an apparently irrelevant sound like a wayward stone hitting a bamboo, or a water droplet falling on a petal, a devotee suddenly attains spiritual realization? The answer is that they have all acquired the necessary preparation in their previous lives.

1.14 Special Writing

Original Text in Chinese

如是，此論爲欲總攝如來廣大深法無邊義故，應說此論。

Literal Translation

This teaching is for those who prefer special writings explaining universal teaching of Ju Lai with boundless significance. Hence, the treatise.

Interpretation

The teaching contained in this treatise is meant for those sentient beings who prefer to read special writings that explain concisely the universal profound teaching of the Buddha on cosmic reality with boundless significance and meaning. Hence, this treatise is written.

Commentary

This treatise is particularly useful to people belonging to the fourth type of spiritual development, that is, those who presently lack the intuitive wisdom to attain spiritual realization, and who find studying lengthy discourses on the scriptures too troublesome. This short treatise will help them to acquire an intellectual understanding of Cosmic Reality which will develop their intuitive wisdom, so that one day they can experience Cosmic Reality directly.

Intuitive wisdom, or higher wisdom, is different from ordinary knowledge. A person who is very knowledgeable in mundane affairs, and may hold high, responsible position in government or public, may not necessarily have higher wisdom. On the other hand, a person with higher wisdom may be insignificant in his social or financial standing. Of course, there are also many people who are accomplished in both mundane and supramundane affairs, like the many Buddhist masters who were also advisers to the Chinese emperors.

One should not be mistaken that these fourth type of people are far behind in spiritual development. As it has been mentioned earlier, being human itself is a tremendous achievement spiritually, after successfully acquiring the needed experiences and merits from countless previous lives in other forms. Nothing in the universe happens by chance -- nuclear physicists think that sub-atomic particles occur randomly because they have not found their cause and effect yet -- and the very fact that you are reading this book, brought about by myriad factors in the complex network of cause and effect, indicates that you yourself is in the sure process of spiritual advancement. Considering the countless lives behind us (views of different religions on reincarnation will be mentioned in a later commentary), the time taken to acquire the intellectual understanding and the necessary intuitive wisdom for spiritual realization is like a split second.

This treatise is also very useful for people in the other three types. For those in the third type who have the patience to read lengthy discourses on spiritual matters, Asvaghosha's short work which runs to only a few pages in classical Chinese, helps them to synthesize and summarize the vast amount of knowledge they have gathered elsewhere. Those in the second type will be able to reflect and deliberate, and enhance their higher wisdom, while those in the first type may find in the treatise just that concept or its sound regarding Cosmic Reality that will trigger off in a flash their spiritual realization.

Of all the records of spiritual experiences in Buddhist and other religious literature, those of the Chan (or Zen) masters are probably the most bizarre -- to the uninitiated. The following is an interesting example concerning two Chan masters.

Nan Quan, wanting to test his disciple Zhao Zhou on his understanding of Cosmic Reality, said, "Now it is best that we leave the group and live with other species."

Zhao Zhou replied, "First, let us not discuss 'other'; please tell me what 'species' is."

Nan Quan placed his hands on the ground, and moved like a four-legged animal. Zhao Zhou went behind, placed his leg on his master and stepped him onto the ground. Then he ran to the main hall of the monastery crying out loudly, "What a pity, what a pity!"

Nan Quan sent someone to ask Zhao Zhou what he was so pitiful

about. Zhao Zhou answered that it was a pity he did not step on him further. Nan Quan was very happy with the answer and laughed out heartily.

Except those who have been Enlightened or have known its significance from somebody's explanation, most if not all people would be bewildered by the strange behaviour of the teacher and his disciple. It was odd enough for the master to crawl like an animal, but shocking that his disciple, especially in a monastic environment where respect and obeisance to the master was an unquestionable tradition, stepped on the master's back. Yet, when the master heard that his disciple found it a pity not to step on him further, he was very pleased with the answer. Every part of the above test, right from the comment about leaving the group to laughing heartily, has a deeper spiritual meaning, which becomes very clear when one is Enlightened about Cosmic Reality.

Asvaghosha's treatise supplies an excellent explanation. I shall not, by providing an explanation here, spoil your joy of finding out the deeper meaning yourself -- though it may be frustration initially. Perhaps you may like to use this gong-an (koan in Japanese), or public record, as an "illogical" problem to be solved as you start your study of this book, so that hopefully the knowledge generously presented by Asvaghosha in the treatise may help you to appreciate the deeper spiritual meaning contained in the gong-an. More significantly, this book may pave the way for the beautiful experience of Cosmic Reality.

Chapter 6

Principle and Significance of One Mind

Buddhist philosophy, both Mahayana and Theravada, is exceedingly rich in its explanation of the cosmos, from the sub-atomic particle to the infinite universe.

2.1 Establishing the Meaning

Original Text in Chinese

已說因緣分，次說立義分。

Literal Translation

After explaining cause and effect, next explain the meaning.

Interpretation

After explaining the reasons for writing the treatise, an introductory explanation on the fundamental meaning of the teaching presented in this treatise is given.

Commentary

The principles and meanings outlined in this section establish the core of Mahayana Buddhism. Those who have previously understood Buddhism from a limited perspective only, will be surprised at how profound and majestic the Mahayana philosophy is, and how similar it is with that of other world's great religion. Indeed, if not for geographical, historical and linguistic factors, had someone used another term like "God", "Allah", "Brahman", and "Tao", instead of "Buddha", many people may mistake this as a Christian, Islamic, Hindu, or Taoist treatise.

2.2 Principle and Significance

Original Text in Chinese

摩訶衍者，總說有二種，云何爲二，一者法，二者義。

Literal Translation

Mahayana can be explained from two perspectives: principle and significance.

Interpretation

Cosmic Reality as taught in the Mahayana philosophy can be explained from two perspectives: principle and significance.

Commentary

Buddhist philosophy, both Mahayana and Theravada, is exceedingly rich in its explanation of the cosmos, from the sub-atomic particle to the infinite universe. Long before the West knew about atomic energy and even now when many astronomers think that life exists only on this earth, Buddhist masters have deliberated on such topics. The following information, quoted from a Theravada source, about what Buddhists already knew centuries before modern science, is awe-inspiring.

In Abhidhamatta Sangaha (Compendium of the Higher Teaching of the Buddha), the Buddha teaches that the rupa kalpa is the finest possible unit of any substance, and if it is split, tremendous energy would be released. "The final result is that the single atom which consisted of 1,111 units of abstract element develops into a force consisting of 1,111 times 176,470, 000,000 or 196,058,170, 000,000 strokes of repetition per the duration of a flash of lightning. This figure would become still more enormous, if we compute the number of repetitions to a standard measure of time, such as, for instance, the second. If by some method, the units of one abstract element could be kept from contact with the units of the other three abstract elements, the continuity of repetition would stretch itself to infinity."

The Buddha teaches that "matter in the universe is in an infinity of states of evolution and so are the infinity of units of mind circulating in the universe. In this connection it is necessary to understand that the process of evolution is not confined to this Earth and the beings living on this Earth. Evolution takes place in all the other planets and stars. Matter in the other planets and stars evolve and, in the same way, the beings in the other planets and stars also evolve. We have, therefore, to consider the whole infinite material universe as one unit of existence in order to enable us to deduce correctly the exact nature of the universe we live in."

What is explained in "Awakening of Faith" is only a small part of Buddhist cosmic knowledge, but it represents the essential information necessary for a comprehensive understanding of Cosmic Reality.

2.3 Universal Mind

Original Text in Chinese

所言法者，謂眾生心。是心則攝一切世間法，出世間法。

Literal Translation

By principle is meant the Heart of sentient beings, which takes in all principles inside the universe, and outside the universe.

Interpretation

By principle is meant the Universal Mind, which is the totality of all minds of all sentient beings, including all forms of life in all galaxies. The Universal Mind incorporates all minds within time and space, and all minds outside time and space.

Commentary

Not only Jungian physiologists, but scientists of many disciplines will find this concept fascinating, and may help them to solve their intriguing problems. Modern biologists, for example, may derive inspiration from this conceptual framework to work out why information learnt by certain creatures seems to be transmitted transcendently to similar creatures elsewhere, even though they are far apart and are not connected by any visible means. Scientists who wish to investigate why miracles that are not supposed to happen (according to their paradigm) actually happened, would get some leads from this concept of Universal Mind. In fact, Eastern masters have long used this concept not only to explain miracles, but to make miracles happen.

As said earlier, in classical Chinese "heart" often means "mind". In Buddhist nomenclature, there are many terms for Universal Mind, such as the Buddha, Tathagata or Ju Lai (Thus-ness), Zhen Ru (Supreme Reality), Dharmakaya or Fa Xin (Primordial Nature), Absolute Truth, Buddha Nature and the Original Face.

2.4 Meaning of Mahayana

Original Text in Chinese

依於此心顯示摩訶衍義，何以故？是心真如相，即示摩訶衍體故。是心生滅因緣相，能示摩訶衍自體相用故。

Literal Translation

This Heart represents the meaning of Mahayana. Why? Because of the Zhen Ru aspect, which is the body of Mahayana. Because of the karmic life-death aspect, which is manifested in the essence, characteristics and uses of Mahayana.

Interpretation

The philosophy and practice of Mahayana are based on the concept of the Universal Mind. Why is this so? It is because the Universal Mind is expressed in two aspects, the transcendental aspect and the phenomenal aspect. The transcendental aspect, known as Zhen Ru or Supreme Reality, represents the body or Principle of Mahayana. The phenomenal aspect, known as sheng-mie-yin-yuan or the karma of birth and death, represents the Significance of Mahayana, and is manifested in form (ti or svabhava), characteristics (xiang or lakshana) and uses (yong or kriya).

Commentary

This is the gist of Mahayana philosophy. All of us, all sentient beings and all other things, including the infinitesimal particles and the infinite stars, are actually one undifferentiated unity. Different people, at different times and places and because of cultural, linguistic and other factors, have called this Cosmic Reality by different names, such as Brahman, Tao, or God. The Buddhists call this reality Universal Mind.

Hence, in the Upanishads, this great truth is written as follows: "Before creation came into being, Brahman existed as the Unmanifest. From the Unmanifest He created the manifest." This is similar to what

Chuang Tzu, the Taoist master, said: "The universe and I have always existed together; every phenomenon and I are one." In Christianity, this truth was expressed by Marina de Escobar as: "The divine attributes appear as summed up in one whole, so that no one of them can be distinguished separately." And in Islam, Mir Valiuddin said: "For those who look behind the veil, other than God does not exist. God is the only Being, and none exists besides Him."

This unanimous agreement concerning Cosmic Reality is one main reason why Buddhists believe that different people can attain salvation in their own different ways. This similarity is also observed in Confucianism, which many people regard more as a philosophy for righteous living than a religion aiming at spiritual realization. Mencius (Meng Zi), the great Confucian philosopher said: "All things in the universe are me; when I discovered this as I looked into my heart, I felt tremendous joy." Another Confucian philosopher, Hu Zhi, said: "One day, suddenly my mind was Enlightened; there were no irrelevant thoughts. I saw all the myriad things in the world inside me, making me exclaim that the whole cosmos is me."

Interestingly, modern scientists are saying the same thing. Einstein mentioned that "before Clerk Maxwell, people conceived of physical reality -- in so far as it is supposed to represent events in nature -- as material points, whose changes consist exclusively as motions. ... after Maxwell they conceived physical reality as represented by continuous fields, not mechanically explicable. ... This change in the conception of reality is the most profound and fruitful one that has come to physics since Newton." Max Plank's comment is almost mystical: "each particle in a system, in a certain sense, at any one time, exists simultaneously in every part of the space occupied by the system. This simultaneous existence applies not merely to the field of force with which it is surrounded, but also its mass and its charge."

Why is it, then, that the world we normally see is differentiated, that we see a cow as a different entity from a house, and that the collection of mass and emotions we call "I" is different from everything else? This is because Cosmic Reality is expressed in two aspects: the transcendental and the phenomenal. Only when we are Enlightened, or when we have the aid of powerful scientific instruments, we may experience reality transcendently.

2.5 Three Dimensions

Original Text in Chinese

所言義者，則有三種。云何爲三？一者體大，謂一切法眞如平等不增減故。二者相大，謂如來藏具足無量性功德故。三者用大，謂能生一切世間善因果故。

Literal Translation

Concerning significance, there are three types: one, great form, all phenomena neither add nor subtract from reality; two, great characteristics, the countless merits of the Tathagata-garbha; three, great uses, capable of creating all karma in the universe.

Interpretation

Concerning the significance of Mahayana philosophy, there are three dimensions, namely universal forms, universal characteristics, and universal uses. Universal forms refer to the world of phenomena, which in reality are undifferentiated, and cannot be added nor subtracted. Universal characteristics refer to the Tathagata-garbha (meaning the receptacle or storehouse of the Supreme Reality), which is capable of countless merits and countless manifestations of phenomena. Universal uses refer to the myriad uses of phenomena, which are capable of generating the law of karma with its countless causes and effects in the phenomenal world.

Commentary

"Mahayana" means the "Great Vehicle". It is regarded as "maha" or great, because of its three dimensions of "greatness" or universality. Its form is great, because it includes everything there is, i.e. the Cosmic Reality, which may be alternatively expressed as the phenomenal world. In reality all the phenomena are undifferentiated, and cannot be added nor subtracted from the Cosmic Reality. For example, when

an un-enlightened person sees Cosmic Reality existing as differentiated entities, this does not mean that phenomena have been added to the cosmos; alternately, when he becomes Enlightened and sees Cosmic Reality as undifferentiated, this does not mean the phenomena he saw before his Enlightenment, have been taken away.

The same phenomenon may exhibit many and different characteristics to different observers. Having much money or holding an influential post may appear as wealth or power to be desired to one person, but to another, it may be a distraction or a hindrance in his spiritual training. The limitless characteristics of phenomena are the manifestation of the Tathagata-garbha, a concept which means a universal receptacle or storehouse. This great variety of characteristics can bring merits if used wisely, or demerits if abused.

Phenomena and their characteristics are used in countless ways, and their myriad uses give rise to karma, which continues indefinitely to generate causes and effects, which then generates more phenomena and their varying characteristics, thereby perpetuating endless karmic cycles, which, in Buddhist thought, are the primary source of suffering. Can a person break off from his karmic cycle? He cannot – if he continues to be deceived by the phenomenal world.

To an Enlightened person, however, all these phenomena are an illusion; therefore, karma has no power over him, because as karma operates only in the phenomenal world, once the Enlightened person realizes the phenomenal world is an illusion of reality, karma too is illusory. If we imagine our ordinary life as reality (as most of us do), then it is like waking up from a dream. All the causes and effects that appear real when we were in the dream, now have no power over us when we wake up.

In Buddhist philosophy, our waking life is a dream, but we do not realize it because we are still dreaming. Sometimes, for some of us, we may have an inkling of this dreamy state when we enter a different state of consciousness, like in deep meditation or in out-of-body experience. The real waking up occurs in spiritual realization -- the realization of our true spirit, and that our physical body is just a shell.

2.6 Vehicle of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Original Text in Chinese

一切諸佛本所乘故，一切菩薩皆乘此法到如來地故。

Literal Translation

It is the vehicle of all Buddhas; all Bodhisattvas use this vehicle to reach the realm of Ju Lai.

Interpretation

The Mahayana teaching is the vehicle used by all the Enlightened ones to become Buddhas: all Bodhisattvas also use the Mahayana teaching to attain the Tathagata or Buddhahood.

Commentary

The term "Buddha" means one who is Enlightened, and there are many buddhas in our midst; but when we say the Buddha, we generally refer to Guatama Buddha, our historical Buddha, and occasionally to other divine manifestations of other aeons or realms like Dipankara Buddha and Amitabha Buddha. The term "Buddha" can also be applied to the Eternal Buddha or Tathagata, that is the Supreme Reality.

The complications, if any, will clear away if we remember that there is actually one undifferentiated reality, called by Buddhists the Buddha, and when a person attains this cosmic realization, he becomes not just a part of reality but reality itself which transcends time and space. That means when he becomes an Enlightened one, when he directly experiences (not merely understands) spiritual realization of Cosmic Reality, he is at the same time a cow, a house, Guatama Buddha and everything there is.

A Bodhisattva is an Enlightened being, a Buddha. He (or she) has therefore broken the chain of karma, that is, he is not fettered by the cycle of birth and rebirth. But because of his great compassion, he voluntarily chooses to be born again so as to help other sentient beings

(not necessarily humans) to attain Enlightenment. He may, if the need arises, choose to be born as a fish or an insect!

Probably the most famous Bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhism is Bodhisattva Guan Yin (Kuan Yin) or Avalokitesvara in Sanskrit, popularly known as the Goddess of Mercy. Many people would wonder why the male Avalokitesvara is the same as the female Guan Yin. This is because in the transcendental realm there is no male or female.

Secondly, Avalokitesvara chose to reincarnate in the female form of Princess Miao Shan, which means "Marvelous Kindness", to serve better the purpose of bestowing compassion. When Miao Shan attained Enlightenment, devotees call her Guan Yin, meaning the Great Compassionate who Sees and Hears the sufferings of humanity.

The other well known Bodhisattvas are Wen Shu (Manjusri), who is often depicted riding on a lion, Pu Xian (Samantabhadra), riding on an elephant, and Di Zang Wang (Khistigarbha), who chose to go to the Underworld to help lost souls there. The writer of this treatise, Asvaghosha (Ma Ming), and another great writer of the 2nd century, Nagarjuna (Long Shu), are also Bodhisattvas.

"Mahayana" comprises of two words, "maha" meaning "great", and "yana" meaning "vehicle". In Chinese, it is called "Da Cheng" (pronounced as "T'a Ch'eng"). As the significance of "maha" has been explained in the previous passage, "yana" is now discussed.

"Yana" indicates a vehicle or way to bring an ignorant person to Enlightenment, to bring sentient beings from suffering to eternal bliss. This vehicle is actually the Universal Mind. The spiritual aspirant works hard on his own mind, which is an integral expression of the Universal Mind, and when he succeeds in purifying his own mind from all traces of ignorance, he sees reality as it really is. He experiences cosmic reality directly, and suddenly becomes aware that the Cosmic Reality is actually an undifferentiated organic unity. Experiencing this truth directly, not merely knowing it intellectually, is spiritual realization.

The vehicle the Buddhist uses for this spiritual realization is great or maha, because, in its absolute aspect, it is reality itself, both immanent and transcendental. In its phenomenal aspect, its form, characteristics and uses are everywhere and of all time. Because of its all-encompassing greatness, nothing is too insignificant nor too immense to prevent applying this vehicle to attain spiritual realization.

Chapter 7

Transcendental and Phenomenal Reality

But why do we see you and I, mountains, elephants and everything else as separate entities, and differentiate time as past, present and future? This is because of illusion, which is the phenomenal aspect of the Universal Mind.

3.1 Three Dimensions in Teaching

Original Text in Chinese

已說立義分，次說解釋分。解釋有三種。云何爲三？一者顯示正義，二者對治邪執，三者分別發趣道相。

Literal Translation

After establishing the meaning, next explain the teaching. There are three. What three? One, reveal the true teaching; two, overcome deviated teaching; three, illustrate characteristics of Enlightenment.

Interpretation

After establishing the meaning of the teaching to be presented in this treatise, the teaching is now explained in detail. There are three dimensions in the teaching: revealing the principles and practice of the true teaching; overcoming mistakes and weaknesses devotees may get from deviated teaching; and illustrating the characteristics devotees will notice if they are on the correct path to Enlightenment.

Commentary

This treatise was written many centuries after the passing on of Siddhartha Guatama Sakyamuni. During this time, some of the Buddha's teaching had been distorted, and deviated teachings had infiltrated into Buddhism. This problem was aggravated by the fact that the Buddha taught by oral transmission, and his teaching was only put down in words a few centuries later. His teaching was recorded in sutras or scriptures, which were recited and devotees learned by listening, not reading. The spiritually advanced could be Enlightened easily, some instantly, but those who are not as advanced might face difficulty. Hence sasteras, or treatises, were written to help them.

3.2 Absolute and Phenomenal

Original Text in Chinese

顯示正義者，依一心法有二種門。云何爲二？一者心眞如門，二者心生滅門。是二種門皆各總攝一切法。此義云何？以是二門不相離故。

Literal Translation

In the true teaching, one Heart has two gates. What two? One, the Heart's Zhen Ru Gate; two, the Heart's Life-death Gate. Both gates embrace all existence. What is the significance? The two gates are not separated.

Interpretation

According to the true teaching of Buddhism, there are two aspects of one Mind, i.e. the Universal Mind. One aspect is the Zhen Ru or absolute aspect of the Universal Mind; the other aspect is its phenomenal aspect. Both the absolute and the phenomenal aspects embrace all states of existence, everything there is in the infinite cosmos. Why is this so? This is because the absolute aspect and the phenomenal aspect are not exclusively different; they are two aspects of the same reality.

Commentary

"One" in "One Mind" is not a numeral term, such as one, two and three; it connotes "the only one", the absolute. The infinite universe is one mind, the Universal Mind, i.e. an organic unity of consciousness. Isn't it awe-inspiring to reflect that this concept was known to Buddhist and ancient masters of other religions more than 20 centuries before great modern scientists like Sir James Jeans said that the universe is more of a gigantic thought than a gigantic machine, and

Sir Arthur Eddington that the stuff of the world is mind-stuff?

The ancient masters were even more profound. This treatise, for example, not only explains why the Universal Mind is seen by us as the phenomenal world, but also provides practical ways how we can directly experience this Cosmic Reality ourselves.

3.3 Transcendental Aspect

Original Text in Chinese

心真如者，即是一法界大總相法門體。所謂心性不生不滅。

Literal Translation

The Heart's Zhen Ru Gate is the body of the universal undifferentiated characteristic of all dharmas of dharmadhatu, so its nature is birthless and deathless.

Interpretation

The absolute aspect of the Supreme Reality is the body of the universal characteristic of all sub-atomic particles and forces which are undifferentiated. Hence, the nature of the absolute aspect is transcendental, without beginning and end, and without past and future. It simply IS.

Commentary

The Chinese term "fa" is a translation of the Sanskrit "dharma"; and "fa jie" of "dharmadhatu". In the past, when Western science had not penetrated into the sub-atomic level, "dharma" was usually translated into English as "elements", which is still conventionally used. But when dharma is used in the phenomenal aspect, it is often translated as "phenomena".

In the context of this passage, where the absolute aspect and not the phenomenal aspect is in question, "phenomena" would not be appropriate. "Elements" would be mis-leading, as Buddhist users clearly mean it to be sub-atomic. Moreover, dharma here is both particles and energy; it is possibly what Sir Arthur Eddington meant by the mind-stuff of the universe. In the Interpretation above, and elsewhere wherever appropriate, "dharma" means "sub-atomic particles and forces".

One should also remember that "Dharma", especially with a capital D, can mean the teaching of the Buddha. For example, a Buddhist

takes refuge (meaning giving up his worldly life to embark on spiritual development) in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha (the monastic order). In some countries, such as Sri Lanka, Buddha's teaching is not called "Buddhism", nor regarded as a religion in the narrow sense; it is referred to as the Dharma. "Dharmadhatu", or "fa jie" in Chinese, means the realm of dharma. In modern scientific terms, "dharmadhatu" is the undifferentiated energy field, though it is usually translated as "world of reality".

3.4 The Phenomenal Dharma

Original Text in Chinese

一切諸法惟依妄念而有差別。若離心念，則無一切境界之相。

Literal Translation

All dharmas depend on illusion for differentiation. Apart from illusion there are no differentiated characteristics.

Interpretation

Because of illusion, we see all phenomena in the universe as myriad separate entities with countless differentiated characteristics. If we can overcome our illusion, we will experience cosmic reality as undifferentiated.

Commentary

The Supreme Reality is actually undifferentiated; in other words, from the transcendental aspect of the Universal Mind, there are no separate units like you and I, mountains, elephants or anything, nor past, present, future or any period. Space and time do not exist. But why do we see you and I, mountains, elephants and everything else as separate entities, and differentiate time as past, present and future? This is because of illusion ("maya" in Sanskrit, and "wang nian" in Chinese), which is the phenomenal aspect of the Universal Mind. If we can overcome our illusion, we will experience reality as it is, undifferentiated, timeless and transcendental. Such an experience is spiritual realization.

This concept of our phenomenal world as an illusion is not confined to Buddhist thought alone. Vedanta wisdom, for example, has unquestionably taught since ancient time that our phenomenal world is an illusory projection or a play of Brahman. Now in the twentieth century, modern science is beginning to say the same thing. Physicist Alastair Rae reports:

Quantum theory tells us that nothing can be measured or observed without disturbing it, so that the role of the observer is crucial in understanding any physical process. So crucial in fact that some people have been led to believe that it is the observer's mind that is the only reality -- that everything else including the whole physical universe is illusion.

Michael Talbot echoes the same view and suggests that the illusory world is a sort of information perceived by observers:

In other words, the thing that makes Elmer and Elsie behave as different and unique personalities does not exist as a "substance" or an "energy". It exists only in the realm of pure information.

The first time I came across this concept was many years ago in Form Six when I read about ancient Greek philosophers like Xenophanes and Parmenides proposing that what we see with our own eyes is not real but an illusion. I remember clearly that I thought what a foolish and laughable proposal it was! Of course it was due to my ignorance and arrogance that I missed the truth. Now the latest discoveries (rediscoveries?) of modern science have confirmed that what we used to regard as the material, objective world is never material nor objective; and the deception is due not only to our gross sensory perception but also to our thought and emotion.

Modern science has shown that at the sub-atomic level, what we regard as our skin is not a boundary that separates us from everything outside our body. There is no demarcation line at all; what we naively believe to be our outermost limit is nothing but a vague linear concentration of sub-atomic particles which are constantly exchanging energy with the boundless surrounding. There is simply no such thing as a boundary separating us from anything else. That is why great religious teachers and philosophers exclaim in their ecstatic moments that the world is in them and they are in the world.

Moreover, what we normally regard as time has no meaning at the sub-atomic level. The great scientist, Louis de Broglie, says:

In space-time, which for each of us constitutes the past, the present, and the future is given en bloc. ... Each observer, as his time passes, discovers, so to speak, new slices of space-time which appear to him as successive aspects of the material world, though in reality the ensemble of events constituting space-time exist prior to his knowledge of them.

3.5 Beyond Conceptualization

Original Text in Chinese

是故一切法從本已來，離言說相，離名字相，離心緣相，畢竟平等，無有變異，不可破壞，惟是一心，故名真如。

Literal Translation

All dharmas are originally beyond verbalization, beyond description and beyond conceptualization; undifferentiated, unchanging, indestructible. They are of One Mind; hence, called Zhen Ru.

Interpretation

The ultimate reality of phenomena cannot be named, cannot be correctly described, and cannot be properly conceptualized; it is undifferentiated, unchanging and indestructible. All the phenomena are of One Mind; hence it is called the Supreme Reality.

Commentary

This concept is similar to the fundamental doctrine of Taoism, taught by Lao Tzu as:

The Tao that can be named, is not the real Tao. The name that can be so named, is not the real name.

The ultimate reality cannot be named, because no matter what names we give to it, these names cannot tell us what the ultimate reality is. It cannot be described, because no matter how we describe it, the readers or listeners still do not know what it is. It cannot be conceptualized, because no matter what concepts we form, these concepts do not give the true picture of the ultimate reality. Why is this so?

It is because unless we have direct experience of the ultimate reality, we cannot know what it is, even though we are given names, descriptions or ideas about it. Suppose a person has not been to heaven. An angel coming from heaven tells him that heaven is also called paradise,

celestial abode, Elysian fields, Eden, Holy City or the Kingdom of God. While these names are meaningful to those who have been to heaven, they are not meaningful to him.

Or the angel may describe to him what heaven is like, such as lovely evergreen trees with delicious fruit, flowing stream of sweet, fragrant wine with gentle music in the air. What that person visualizes would be an idyllic countryside, which may be far off a typical scene in paradise. He may, from various sources, conceptualize about heaven, about what he would be doing there and so on, but because he has no real experience to depend upon, his ideas may be very different from the actual conditions found in heaven.

3.6 Words are False Names

Original Text in Chinese

以一切言說，假名無實，但隨妄念，不可得故，言真如者亦無有相。謂言說至極，因言遣言。

Literal Translation

All words are false names without reality, following illusion, not to be accepted; the word for Zhen Ru has no characteristics. It is the extreme of language; because of word to stop words.

Interpretation

All words used by man are just convenient names. They are an imitation of reality, not reality itself. The choice of words is based on man's illusion, not on his experience of reality. Words are therefore not the ultimate truth. In the same way, the term "Zhen Ru" is just a convenient term, and may not adequately denote what it is supposed to denote, i.e. Suchness.

Nevertheless, this term "Zhen Ru" represents the extreme use of language. There may be other words to denote Suchness; but the use of "Zhen Ru" puts a stop to a continual (and unnecessary) choice of other words.

Commentary

Here is another passage that would present much difficulty if there is no commentary; the original text in Chinese is so concise and technical that many readers would be lost if they read only the literal translation.

The words in any language are just convenient symbols expressing an imitation of reality, not reality itself. This is because the choice of words to express an object or an idea is based on man's illusion of the object or idea, and not on the ultimate reality. For example, we choose the word "table" to express the object table, which is based on

our illusion of it having a solid flat surface supported by four legs. This picture or concept of the table is man's illusion; another sentient being, like a bacterium or an astral being, both of whom would perceive a different spectrum of electromagnetic waves as visible light, would see the "same" table differently.

Words, therefore, do not tell the ultimate truth. What we think the ultimate truth is, will also depend on some variables, one of which is our range of visual perception. Similarly, "Zhen Ju" is a convenient term used to denote the Supreme Reality or Suchness. But how adequately it denotes Suchness, or what pictures or concepts this term conjures in our mind, depends on various factors which include, besides visual perception, the developmental stages of our intellectual understanding and intuitive wisdom.

Nevertheless, as the Supreme Reality is the ultimate truth, the term that denotes it represents the extreme use of language -- extreme in the sense that it stretches our knowledge and wisdom to the furthest possible reach, as well as the sense that its interpretation has the greatest possible range. For example, to a person of a certain spiritual developmental stage, "Zhen Ru" or Supreme Reality may mean an astral kingdom beyond the sky; to another, a fatherly, Godlike figure watching over us. But to a spiritually advanced person who has direct experience of Cosmic Reality, "Zhen Ru" means what it is meant to mean -- Suchness.

Other names can be, and actually have been, used in place of "Zhen Ru". We may call it Tao, Brahman, divine kingdom, Universal Consciousness, unified energy field or God; but using "Zhen Ru" places a stop to this continual, and often unnecessary, search for names, not because "Zhen Ru" is necessarily a better term, but because it demonstrates that whatever name we may use, it is meaningless, or at best an imitation, unless we have direct experience of its reality.

3.7 Supreme Reality

Original Text in Chinese

此真如體無有可遣，以一切法悉皆真故。亦無可立，以一切法切皆同如故。當知一切法不可說不可念，故名爲真如。

Literal Translation

The body of Zhen Ru cannot be denied, dharmadhatu is real, there is no other standing-room, every dharma is found in dharmadhatu. When we know that all dharma cannot be said, cannot be thought, we call it Zhen Ru.

Interpretation

The ultimate truth of the Supreme Reality cannot be denied. Cosmic reality is real; it is not an illusion or something imagined. Transcendental reality and phenomenal world are the same; nothing exists outside transcendental reality, and nothing exists outside phenomenal world. Every phenomenon we see or experience is found inside Cosmic Reality.

When we realize that the ultimate nature of all phenomena cannot be described and cannot be conceptualized, we call this ultimate nature the Supreme Reality.

Commentary

To say that the phenomenal world is an illusion does not mean that it has no existence. The phenomenal world and the transcendental reality are actually the same: there is no line of demarcation to show where the phenomenal world ends and the transcendental reality begins, or vice versa. The phenomenal world does not stand apart from the transcendental reality; neither does the transcendental reality stand apart from the phenomenal world. The phenomenal and the transcendental are not two worlds; they are the same world. Whether we exist in the phenomenal or the transcendental is a matter of perception and spiritual development.

In his ordinary moments, a person sees the transcendental reality as the phenomenal world; when he is Enlightened, he sees the phenomenal world as the transcendental reality. The phenomenal world is real to ordinary people at their ordinary level of consciousness. To them, a table is solid and immovable. Suppose they have sub-atomic vision. Then what appeared as a solid, immovable table earlier on, is now a collection of electrons constantly whirling round protons and neutrons with a lot of "empty space" in between. When they have the vision of spiritual realization, they not only see reality in terms of sub-atomic particles and energy fields, but directly experience the whole cosmos.

3.8 Spiritual Realization

Original Text in Chinese

問曰：若如是義者，諸眾生等，云何隨順而能得入？答曰：若知一切法雖說無有能說可說，雖念亦無能念可念，是名隨順。若離於念，名為得入。

Literal Translation

Question: If this is the meaning, what is the expedient mean for sentient beings to enter?

Answer: If we know that the ultimate truth of all phenomena cannot be described, cannot be conceptualized, we have the expedient mean. If we distance ourselves from conceptualization, we have entered.

Interpretation

Question: If this transcendental and phenomenal aspects of Supreme Reality constitute the fundamental meaning of the Mahayana teaching, what is the expedient mean to help sentient beings to understand the teaching so as to attain Enlightenment?

Answer: If we realize that whatever description and conceptualization of the phenomenal world cannot adequately explain Cosmic Reality, we have the expedient mean. If we discard description and conceptualization, and focus on a direct experience of Cosmic Reality, we have entered the way towards spiritual realization.

Commentary

Expedient means are specific ways to help aspirants solve their particular problems. The particular problem here is to understand the basic doctrine of the Mahayana teaching concerning Cosmic Reality. The specific way to overcome this problem is first to realize that description and conceptualization alone are inadequate. Once we have realized that

spiritual development is not just a matter of intellectual pursue, but requires much time and effort in training to attain a direct experience of Cosmic Reality, we are on the right path to spiritual realization. How to travel along the path will be described later.

Chapter 8

The Void is Full of Consciousness

In Buddhist philosophy, "void" means emptied of phenomena as we normally see them. It does not mean absolute nothingness.

3.9 Describing Cosmic Reality

Original Text in Chinese

復次，此真如者，依言說分別，有二種義。云何爲二？一者，如實空，以能究竟顯實故。二者，如實不空，以有自體具足無漏性功德故。

Literal Translation

Next, Zhen Ru, if described in words, may be classified into two meanings. What two? One, truly Void, which can ultimately reveal reality. Two, Non-void, the body of which is full of purified merits.

Interpretation

Next, if we use words to describe the Supreme Reality, it may be explained in two ways. What are the two ways? One, the Supreme Reality is truly the Void, which actually reveals what Cosmic Reality is. Secondly, the Supreme Reality can be seen as Non-void. The actual body of the Supreme Reality is void to those who have purified their minds and have acquired spiritual merits, but to ordinary people whose minds are still shrouded by defilements, it appears as the phenomenal world.

Commentary

The Supreme Reality cannot be adequately described in words; it has to be experienced directly. Nevertheless, for those who are not ready for such a spiritual experience, a description, despite its setback, is still helpful.

The Supreme Reality, if we attempt to verbalize it, may manifest as Void or Non-void. Void and Non-void are not two different realities; they refer to the same reality. When we experience the transcendental aspect of Cosmic Reality in our Enlightenment, it is Void. When we experience the phenomenal aspect of Cosmic Reality in our ordinary consciousness, it is Non-void. Hence, in Buddhist philosophy there are two levels of

truth, namely the empirical truth (samurti-satya) of the phenomenal world, and higher truth (paramartha-satya) of transcendental reality. The second century master, Nagarjuna, stresses that this distinction is very important:

Those who do not know the distinction between these two truths cannot understand the deep significance of the teaching of the Buddha.

3.10 The Void

Original Text in Chinese

所言空者，從本已來一切染法不相應故，調離一切法差別之相，以無虛妄心念故。

Literal Translation

It is called the Void because since the timeless beginning there has been no differentiation of any dharmas, devoid of all characteristics, free from any thought.

Interpretation

It is called the Void because since the timeless beginning there has never been any differentiation of phenomena, all the atomic particles and forces are devoid of any individual characteristics, and the whole Cosmic Reality is free from the illusion caused by defiled minds of sentient beings.

Commentary

It is a common misconception among many non-Buddhists and some Buddhists to think that "void" here means emptied of anything. This is one important contributing factor why many uninformed people mistakenly think that Buddhism is nihilistic. Actually, in Buddhist philosophy, "void" means emptied of phenomena as we normally see them. It does not mean absolute nothingness. When a Buddhist says that in his deep meditation he experiences the void, it means that he has dispersed his illusion and sees reality as it is, undifferentiated and devoid of phenomena. This void is actually full of life and consciousness; it is Cosmic Reality in its transcendental aspect.

Again it is amazing how ahead of modern science is Buddhist philosophy. Listen to what Michael Talbot has to say about the latest discoveries in modern science:

Inspired by work Wheeler did in the 1950s as well as by recent advances, many physicists believe that at its ultramicroscopic level, empty space is really a turbulent and frothy storm of activity. Moreover, it is now accepted by science that in these violent upheavals in the nothingness, new particles are constantly being created and destroyed. Most of these particles have lifetimes so incredibly brief that they are virtually non-existent, and hence are known as "virtual particles".

However, physicists know that virtual particles are more than just abstractions that pop up in their equations because, ghostly and short-lived though these particles may be, they still jostle around the atoms in our own world a bit when they appear, and these effects can be physically measured. Indeed, a growing number of physicists are coming to believe that everything we know as real in the entire universe may ultimately have sprung out of this empty but seething vacuum -- perhaps reality is what "no-thing" does when it gets bored.

3.11 Neither Nor

Original Text in Chinese

當知真如自性，非有相，非無相。非非有相，非非無相。非有無俱相。非一相，非異相。非非一相，非非異相。非一異俱相。乃至總說，依一切眾生以有妄心，念念分別，皆不相應，故說爲空。若離妄心，實無可空故。

Literal Translation

Should know the nature of Cosmic Reality: it is not with characteristics, not without characteristics, not not with characteristics, not not without characteristics, not both with and without characteristics, not undifferentiated, not differentiated, not not undifferentiated, not not differentiated, not both undifferentiated and differentiated. To sum up, because all sentient beings live under delusion, separate thoughts arise in them, and these thoughts are not unified. Hence, it is called Void. If away from deluded heart, reality is not void.

Interpretation

We should know the true nature of Cosmic Reality. Cosmic Reality is not with characteristics, nor is it without characteristics. The negation of the above two descriptions is also not true. That means neither is Cosmic Reality not with characteristics, and neither is it without characteristics. Moreover, neither is Cosmic Reality both with and without characteristics.

The same situation applies to the nature of Cosmic Reality regarding differentiation. Cosmic Reality is not undifferentiated, and is not differentiated. Neither is Cosmic Reality not undifferentiated, and neither is it not differentiated. Also, neither is it both undifferentiated and differentiated.

To sum up, because all sentient beings who are not yet Enlightened, live under delusion, they conceptualize Cosmic Reality in terms

of countless phenomena existing as separate, individual entities. These phenomena appear disunited, although transcendently Cosmic Reality is one unified consciousness. Hence, to an Enlightened being, Cosmic Reality is called the Void, because, at moments of spiritual realization, it is emptied of illusory phenomena. If we have purified our mind so that it liberates itself from delusion, Cosmic Reality is not literally void; it is full of life and consciousness.

Commentary

This passage illustrates the typical dialectic pattern Buddhist masters often use to refute any attempt to identify the Absolute with the phenomenal. It demonstrates systematically that any verbalization that is based on empirical knowledge or intellectual speculation cannot be adequately used to explain the Absolute, not just because of the limitation of language, but also because of our insufficient understanding due to our lack of direct experience.

This dialectic pattern, formulated by the great Nagarjuna, is based on a four-level refutation, as follows:

1. not "yes"
2. not "no"
3. not "not yes"
4. not "not no"

The dialectics is followed up by further refuting both yes and no, neither yes nor no, and their negation:

1. not "both yes and no"
2. not "neither yes nor no"
3. not "not both yes and no"
4. not "not neither yes and no"

Some of us may wonder why negation instead of affirmation is used in the dialectics, and may wrongly conclude that Buddhist philosophy is negative or pessimistic. The reason is that since the unenlightened inquirer has no direct experience of Cosmic Reality or any profound topic which requires higher wisdom to comprehend, he will be in no position to know any relevant features for confirmation. If he has direct experience, he is Enlightened, and will have no need for questioning. This mode of answering or refuting is similar to that in Vedanta wisdom when a master describes or answers questions on Brahman or any profound topic by saying "Not this, not that ...".

We shall have a better idea if we illustrate with a simple, prosaic example. A child wishes to know about the joy an adult feels when he helps others selflessly. Any description of the noble act of helping others and its consequent satisfaction will have little meaning to the child or even another adult who has never helped someone before. And if the child tries to compare this joy with the childish joys in his experience, the following dialogue represents the range of their inquiry and response format (though in practice, only the negation of the positive is usually used).

Child: Is it like eating sweets?

Adult: No, it is not like eating sweets.

Child: Is it like not eating sweets?

Adult: No, it is not like not eating sweets.

Child: Is it unlike eating sweets?

Adult: No, it is not unlike eating sweets.

Child: Is it unlike not eating sweets?

Adult: No, it is not unlike not eating sweets.

The child may then go on to other questions, such as "Is it like playing with my friends?", "Is it like going to the park?", etc.

The following questions concerning Cosmic Reality may demand much knowledge and wisdom, but the pattern of refutation is similar:

Is Cosmic Reality heaven?

No, it is not heaven.

Is Cosmic Reality not heaven?

No, it is not not heaven.

Is it not that Cosmic Reality is not heaven?

No, it is not that Cosmic Reality is not heaven.

Is it not that Cosmic Reality is not not heaven?

No, it is not that Cosmic Reality is not not heaven.

Cosmic Reality is not heaven because it is all-inclusive, whereas heaven, as normally conceived by most people, is apart from hell and therefore not all-inclusive. Cosmic Reality is not "not heaven" because the bliss of its experience is "heavenly". While Cosmic Reality is not heaven, and not "not heaven", the negation of these two statements also applies, i.e. it is also not true that Cosmic Reality is neither not heaven nor not "not heaven".

Like the child who still will not know what the joy in helping others selflessly is, we still shall not know what Cosmic Reality is, even we have asked many intelligent questions. The aim of the above dialectic method is not to provide definite answers, but to refute any attempt to describe the Absolute in relative terms. We shall, nevertheless, have some idea of what Cosmic Reality is not, so that we can better appreciate the futility of trying to identify it with phenomenal examples. As great teachers have always emphasized, Cosmic Reality cannot be merely understood intellectually; its realization is direct experience.

Interestingly, modern science is using similar language, and is perhaps best described with the classic thought-experiment involving Schrodinger's Cat. To demonstrate the "absurd" implications of the "new" reality revealed by modern physics where nothing is real until it is observed to happen, the great scientist Schrodinger thought out an experiment in which an imaginary cat was placed in a closed box with a vial of poison and some radioactive material. The radioactive material has a fifty-fifty chance of decaying at any time, and if it does, its emitted electrons will break the vial setting off the poison to kill the cat. Hence, at any time, the cat is either dead or alive, or neither dead nor alive.

So, if you ask a physicist whether a particular sub-atomic particle exists, he would tell you that it exists and it does not exist, either it exists or it does not exist, and neither it exists nor it does not exist. If you press him further, he might say that every one of his answers can be true or not true – but we can be assured that all his answers are correct!

3.12 The Non-Void

Original Text in Chinese

所言不空者，已顯法體空無妄故，即是真心。常恆不變，淨法滿足，則名不空，亦無有相可取，以離念境界，惟證相應故。

Literal Translation

What is called Non-Void has revealed the dharmas and the body of the Void when free from illusion. It is the Real Heart, permanent, eternal, unchangeable, immanent and omnipresent. So named Non-Void. It has no characteristics for identification. When free from realm of thought, in harmony with realization.

Interpretation

When we are free from illusion we realize what is called the Non-Void has revealed that it is actually the essence and the sub-atomic particles and forces of the Void. The Void is the Real Mind or Universal Mind, which is permanent, eternal, unchangeable, immanent and omnipresent. But when we are in our ordinary consciousness, we experience the Void as the phenomenal world, which is therefore called the Non-Void, though in reality there are no individual characteristics that seemingly differentiate it into separate entities with their own apparent identities. If we are free from the realm of verbalization and conceptualization, we and the Non-Void merge harmoniously into one undifferentiated reality in moments of spiritual realization.

Commentary

Earlier Asvaghosha explained that the Void is experienced by ordinary people as the Non-Void. Here he reiterates this great truth from the opposite perspective: the Non-Void is the same as the Void, and can be experienced by us as such when we attain spiritual realization.

Buddhists regard the phenomena in the Non-Void or the phenomenal world as transient, momentary, forever changing, separate and localized. But these phenomena, when experienced in transcendental reality, are actually manifestations of dharmas (sub-atomic particles and forces) which are immanent and omnipresent. Understood in this light, many things in our daily life may take on a new meaning. We may, for example, realize that our loved ones who have passed away from this phenomenal world, are actually still with us, if seen from the transcendental perspective. This is why Jesus said in the Bible, "Before Elijah was, I am"; and why Sri Krishna told Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita, "There was never a time when I did not exist, nor you nor any of these kings. Nor is there any future in which we shall cease to be."

Buddhist masters gave a comprehensive explanation of how the phenomenal world is composed, an explanation that modern chemists, physicists and psychologists may derive rewarding food for thought. Most Theravada schools, like the Sarvastivada and the Chu She schools, classify all the dharmas that make up the phenomenal world into seventy five types. The great master Vasubandhu (c.420-500), who was converted from Theravada to Mahayana Buddhism, developed these seventy five types into a hundred, which are accepted by most Mahayana schools, like the Yogacara and the Fa Xiang schools, whose main objective is to investigate into the nature of all existence. These hundred types of dharmas are listed below. Although it may need some effort to study them, the attempt is worthwhile as these terms are often used in Buddhist literature.

The hundred types of dharmas that explain the existence of the phenomenal world are divided into two broad groups, as follows (with the Sanskrit and the Chinese terms in brackets):

Mundane dharmas (Samskrta-dharmas, yu wei fa), and Supramundane dharmas (Asamskrta-dharmas, wu wei fa).

Mundane dharmas are categorized into four classes:

1. Mind (Citta-dharmas, xin fa),
2. Mental Functions (Caitasika-dharmas, xin suo fa),
3. Form (Rupa-dharmas, se fa),

4. Non-Association with Mind (Citta-viprayukta-samskara, xin bu xiang ying xing fa).

Together with Supramundane dharmas, there are five main classes of dharmas that make up the phenomenal world.

Mind dharmas are divided into eight classes:

1. eye-consciousness (caksur-vijnana, yan shi),
2. ear-consciousness (srotra-vijnana, er shi),
3. nose-consciousness (ghrana-vijnana, bi shi),
4. tongue-consciousness (jihva-vijnana, she shi),
5. body-consciousness (kaya-vijnana, shen shi),
6. intellect-consciousness (mano-vijnana, yi shi),
7. sub-consciousness (manas, mi na shi),
8. storehouse-consciousness (alaya consciousness, a li ye shi).

Mental Function dharmas are divided into six classes, with each class further divided into numerous sub-classes:

1. General (Sarvatraga, bien xing)
2. Special (Viniyata, bie jing)
3. Good (Kusala, shan)
4. Evil (Klesa, fan nao)
5. Minor Evil (Upaklesa, sui fan nao)
6. Indeterminate (Aniyata, Bu Ding)

General (Sarvatraga, bien xing)

1. touch (sparsa, chu se)
2. sensation (vedana, shou se)

3. thought (cetana, si se)
4. idea (samjna, xiang se)
5. volition (manaskara, zuo yi)

Special (Viniyata, bie jing)

1. desire (chanda, yu)
2. resolve (adhimoksa, sheng xie)
3. remembrance (smrti, nian)
4. concentration (samadhi, ding)
5. wisdom (prajna, hui)

Good (Kusala, shan)

1. belief (sraddha, xin)
2. shame (bri, can)
3. bashfulness (apatrapya, kui)
4. non-covetousness (alobha, wu tan)
5. non-hatred (advesa, wu chen)
6. non-ignorance (amoha, wu chi)
7. energy (virya, jing jin)
8. repose of mind (prasrabdhi, qing an)
9. vigilance (apramada, bu fang yi)
10. equanimity (upeksa, xing she)
11. non-injury (ahimsa, bu hai)

Evil (Klesa, fan nao)

1. covetousness (raga, tan)
 2. hatred (pratigha, chen)
 3. ignorance (murdi, chi)
 4. arrogance (mana, man)
 5. doubt (vicikitsa, yi)
 6. false view (drsti, e-jian)
- Minor Evil (Upaklesa, sui fan nao)
1. anger (krodha, fen)
 2. enmity (upanaha, hen)
 3. concealment (niraksa, fu)
 4. affliction (pradasa, nao)
 5. envy (irsya, ji)
 6. parsimony (matsarya, qian)
 7. deception (maya, kuang)
 8. fraudulence (sathya, zhou)
 9. injury (vihimsa, hai)
 10. pride (mada, jiao)
 11. shamelessness (ahrikyā, wu can)
 12. non-bashfulness (anapatrapya, wu kui)
 13. restlessness (auddhatya, diao ju)
 14. low-spiritedness (styana, hun chen)
 15. unbelief (asraddhya, bu xin)

16. sloth (kausidya, xie tai)
17. negligence (pramada, fang yi)
18. forgetfulness (musitasmrtita, shi nian)
19. distraction (viksepa, san luan)
20. non-discernment (asamprajanya, bu zheng zi)

Indeterminate (Aniyata, Bu Ding)

1. repentance (kauktrya, hui)
2. drowsiness (middha, sui mian)
3. reflection (xun)
4. investigation (vicara, wen)

Form dharmas are of eleven types:

1. eye (caksur, yan)
2. ear (srotra, er)
3. nose (ghrana, bi)
4. tongue (jihva, she)
5. body (kaya, shen)
6. form (rupa, se)
7. sound (sabda, sheng)
8. smell (gandha, xiang)
9. taste (rasa, wei)
10. touch (sprastavya, chu)
11. phenomenal form (dharmas-yatanikani-rupani, fa chu sou she se)

There are twenty four types of dharmas belonging to the group called Non-Association with Mind:

1. acquisition (prapti, de)
2. life (jivitendriya, ming gen)
3. nature of similar species (nikaya-sabhaga, zhong tong fen)
4. nature of different species (visabhaga, yi sheng fa)
5. meditation on heaven without thoughts (asamjni-samapatti, wu xiang ding)
6. meditation on extinction of phenomena (nirodha-samapatti, mie jin ding)
7. effect from meditation on no thoughts asamjnika, wu xiang guo)
8. name-attribute (nama-kaya, ming shen)
9. word-attribute (pada-kaya, ju shen)
10. description-attribute (vyanjana-kaya, wen shen)
11. birth (jati, sheng)
12. stability (stbiti, zhu)
13. age (jara, lao)
14. impermanence (anityata, wu chang)
15. becoming (pravitti, liu zhuan)
16. distinction (pratiniyama, ding yi)
17. union (yoga, xiang ying)
18. speed (java, shi su)
19. succession (anukrama, ci di)
20. space (desa, fang)

21. time (kala, shi)
22. number (samkhya, shu)
23. totality (samagri, he he xing)
24. differentiation (anyathatva, bu he he xing)

Supramundane dharmas are classified into six types:

1. supramundane space (akasa, xu kong wu wei)
2. extinction of phenomena by higher wisdom (pratisamkhya-nirodha, ze mie wu wei)
3. extinction of phenomena not by higher wisdom but by nature (apratismkhya-nirodha, fei ze mie wu wei)
4. extinction of phenomena by quiescent meditation (cniinja, bu tong mie wu wei)
5. extinction of phenomena by cessation of idea and sensation (samjna-vedayita-nirodha, xiang shou mie wu wei)
6. true suchness (tathata, zhen ru wu wei)

While modern science uses ninety two elements to describe the composition of the world, Buddhism uses a hundred dharmas, but whereas the scientific approach is mainly unidiscipline, usually in chemistry, the Buddhist approach is holistic, involving chemistry, physics, psychology and other disciplines. Strictly speaking, according to Buddhist thinking, the dharmas, being undifferentiated in reality, are not the ingredients of the phenomenal world; but their manifestation in a hundred ways tricks us to see undifferentiated reality as differentiated phenomena.

Hence, when we see a particular collection of atoms as an elephant, it is not just because of the chemical or physical properties of the relevant elements, but also because of many other factors like the eight mind dharmas (types 1 to 8) as well as the dharmas of space and time (types 90 and 91). If we are advanced in our spiritual development, the operation of the dharmas concerning supramundane space (type 95)

may enable us to see through the physical elephant into its molecular structure.

On the other hand, other sentient beings with the dharmas operating in different ways, will see the same reality differently. A cell in the elephant, for example, would have a vastly different experience. That same collection of atoms we refer to as an elephant, would probably be a universe to the cell. If we extend our analogy towards the other scale, and imagine a being bigger than us in magnitude as we are bigger than the cell, then what we regard as our universe may be some form of a cosmic elephant to this being.

But don't be unduly disturbed by our comparative insignificance; this cosmic being as well as the cell in the elephant and all other phenomena are just an illusion, a cosmic play of our mind! This does not mean that phenomena are imaginary, that they would disappear if we do not think of them. They "really" exist as long as we live in illusion. Asvaghosha's "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" is meant to help us overcome this illusion. The next few chapters explain how this illusion arises.

Chapter 9

Types and Levels of Enlightenment

The illusory ego falls away, yet nothing real is lost. Spirit, freed from its bonds, returns to Spirit, not as a dew-drop destined to form an insignificant particle of a vast ocean, but as the boundless returning to the boundless. The liberated consciousness expands to contain - to be - the entire universe! Could there ever, ever be a more glorious endeavour?

John Blofeld

3.13 Tathagata-garbha and Alaya Consciousness

Original Text in Chinese

心生滅者，依如來藏故有生滅心，所謂不生不滅，與生滅和合，非一非異，名爲阿黎耶識。

Literal Translation

Due to Ru Lai Zang (Tathagata-garbha) there is the life-death aspect of the Heart. The birthless-deathless harmonizes with the life-death, not undifferentiated and not differentiated, and is called the alaya consciousness.

Interpretation

As the result of the Tathagata-garbha (Ju Lai Zang or Ru Lai Zang), or the Universal Storehouse, there arises the life-death attribute of the Universal Mind. In the Universal Mind there are two attributes, namely the birthless-deathless (bu sheng bu mie) attribute and the life-death (sheng mie) attribute. These two attributes harmonize with each other, becoming neither undifferentiated nor differentiated, and the resulting unity is called the alaya consciousness.

Commentary

The Chinese name for the Sanskrit term "Tathagata-garbha" is "Ru Lai Zang" (or "Ju Lai Zang"), which means "the Storehouse of the Universal Mind". This Universal Storehouse refers to that quality of the Universal Mind that stores all its myriad manifestations in the phenomenal world. In its transcendental aspect, the Universal Mind or Supreme Reality is undifferentiated and unified, but in its phenomenal aspect it is manifested as countless different and separate entities. The quality of the Universal Mind that allows these myriad manifestations to happen is the Universal Storehouse or Tathagata-garbha.

The Universal Storehouse, like the Universal Mind itself for which it is a feature, has two attributes. While the two attributes or aspects of the Universal Mind are transcendental reality and phenomenal world, the two attributes of the Universal Storehouse are birthless-deathless attribute and life-death attribute. As their names denote, the birthless-deathless attribute transcends life and death, time and space; whereas the life-death attribute is phenomenal and limited by karma.

In the Universal Storehouse, these two attributes harmonize with each other. By themselves, the birthless-deathless attribute is undifferentiated, and the life-death attribute differentiated. But when they harmonize into one organic unity, they become neither undifferentiated nor differentiated, and this unity is called alaya-vijnana ("Aliye Shi" in Chinese), or Storehouse Consciousness. This Storehouse Consciousness or alaya consciousness is an expression of the Universal Storehouse, which in turn is an expression of the Universal Mind.

In other words, seen from the other perspective, first we have the Universal Mind or Supreme Reality which is transcendental, immanent and undifferentiated. With the first cosmic transformation, the Universal Mind manifests as Universal Storehouse, which is both undifferentiated and differentiated. With the second cosmic transformation, the Universal Storehouse manifests as the alaya consciousness, which is neither undifferentiated nor differentiated. The alaya consciousness is the interface between the transcendental and the phenomenal. With the third cosmic transformation, the alaya consciousness manifests as the phenomenal world.

3.14 Enlightenment and Non-Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

此識有二種義，能攝一切法，生一切法，云何爲二？一者覺義，二者不覺義。

Literal Translation

This consciousness has two meanings, capable of manifesting all phenomena, creating all phenomena. What two? One, Enlightenment (jue). Two, non-Enlightenment (bu jue).

Interpretation

The alaya consciousness, which is capable of manifesting and creating all phenomena in the phenomenal world, can be understood in two ways, namely Enlightenment (jue) and non-Enlightenment (bu jue).

Commentary

While modern psychologists talk about the five sensory perceptions, and the conscious, subconscious and unconscious (or superconscious) mind, Buddhist masters since long ago have classified consciousness in many ways.

In one way of classification, there are eight types of consciousness:

1. eye consciousness (caksur-vijnana)
2. ear consciousness (srotra-vijnana)
3. nose consciousness (ghrana-vijnana)
4. tongue consciousness (jihva-vijnana)
5. body consciousness (kaya-vijnana)
6. conscious mind (mano-vijnana)

7. subconscious mind (manas-vijnana)
8. storehouse consciousness (alaya-vijnana)

Jung's concept of universal mind is very close to the Buddhist concept of alaya consciousness.

3.15 Original Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

所言覺義者，謂心體離念。離念相者，等虛空界，無所不徧，法界一相，即是如來平等法身。依此法身說名本覺。

Literal Translation

Enlightenment means the heart-body is away from thought. Away from characteristics means the realm of timelessness and void, omniscient and omnipresent, the unified realm of dharmadhatu (fa jie), i.e. the undifferentiated Dharmakaya (fa shen). This Dharmakaya is named the original Enlightenment (ben jue).

Interpretation

Seen from the viewpoint of the life-death attribute when we still live in the phenomenal world, Enlightenment means that our mind is free from verbalization and conceptualization. Being free from attachment to the distinctive characteristics of the phenomenal world enables us to experience the realm of timelessness and void, becoming omniscient and omnipresent, experiencing the unified world of cosmic reality (dharmadhatu, or fa jie), and merging into the undifferentiated Suchness (Dharmakaya, or fa shen). This kind of Enlightenment is called original Enlightenment (ben jue).

Commentary

The alaya consciousness is the cosmic interface between transcendental reality and the phenomenal world. After having purified ourselves from defilements, we arrive at the alaya consciousness. If we move "upward" towards the undifferentiated Supreme Reality, we free ourselves from verbalization and conceptualization which give rise to illusory differentiation, and free ourselves from our attachment to the distinctive characteristics of countless events and objects in the phenomenal world.

If we move "downward" towards the phenomenal world, we immerse ourselves in the world of illusion.

Moving towards Cosmic Reality, we arrive at the realm of timelessness and void, transcending both time and space, and become omniscient and omnipresent ourselves! We have achieved spiritual realization of Cosmic Reality. Depending on the terms usually used in our own religious belief, we have attained Buddhahood, united with Brahman, merged with Tao, attained union with Allah, or returned to God.

This kind of Enlightenment or spiritual realization is called original Enlightenment. It is significant to note the word "original". This means spiritual realization is our natural birth-right, not something new or alien; it is with us all the while, the trouble is we have wandered away from it and have lost sight of our spiritual origin. Spiritual realization is returning to our divine source.

3.16 Actualized Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

何以故？本覺義者，對始覺義說，以始覺者，即同本覺。始覺義者，依本覺故而有不覺，依不覺故說有始覺。

Literal Translation

Why is it so? Original Enlightenment (ben jue) is in contrast to actualized Enlightenment (shi jue). Actualized Enlightenment is the same as original Enlightenment. Actualized Enlightenment is because of original Enlightenment, hence non-Enlightenment (bu jue). Because of non-Enlightenment, there is actualized Enlightenment.

Interpretation

Why is "original Enlightenment" so called? This term is used in contrast to "actualized Enlightenment".

Actualized Enlightenment (shi jue) is actually the same as original Enlightenment (ben jue).

Why is actualized Enlightenment so called? This is because the term "original Enlightenment" necessarily denotes its counterpart "non-Enlightenment". Because of the concept of non-Enlightenment, there arises the counterpart concept of "actualized Enlightenment".

Commentary

The conciseness of classical Chinese is two fold. Terms are concise: one or two words are often used to represent a long phrase. For example, in the previous passage (No. 3.15), the Chinese term "heart-body" (xin ti) is used to represent "the Heart's life-death attribute which is the body of the alaya consciousness in the Supreme Reality". It is translated as "life-death attribute" in the above passage; but mis-informed scholars may translate it as "the mental and physical aspects of the aspirant", which is not appropriate here.

Secondly, information that intended readers were expected to have, was often not mentioned in classical Chinese. This might not present much difficulty to contemporary readers, but to modern readers many centuries away from the author, it can cause great problems. The problems are aggravated if the classical text is translated by someone not familiar with Chinese culture. Thus, without commentaries, very few people today (including modern Chinese scholars, unless they are also well versed in Mahayana philosophy) can understand the very concise language in "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana".

An example of such difficulty is found in the present passage (No. 3.16), which is explained below. The term "original Enlightenment" is so named because it is used in contrast to "actualized Enlightenment". Although we were originally Enlightened, because of our defilements accumulated over countless lives, we have lost sight of this original Enlightenment. But once we are aware of our spiritual potentiality, we start to cultivate and purify ourselves, until ultimately we activate the innate divine spark that is in us. To differentiate these two dimensions of Enlightenment, we call them original Enlightenment and actualized Enlightenment, but actually they are the same Enlightenment. When we actualize our Enlightenment, we do not find a new Enlightenment; we realize the Enlightenment that has been innate in us.

The concept of Enlightenment denotes its counterpart, non-Enlightenment. To put it another way, if there is no concept of Enlightenment, then there is no need for the concept of non-Enlightenment, and vice versa. Although we are all originally Enlightened beings, when we are not aware of this fact and have no direct experience of its reality, we can, for convenience of description, call this stage non-Enlightenment.

Because of the concept of non-Enlightenment, meaning not yet Enlightened, there arises the concept of actualized Enlightenment, or working towards Enlightenment. If there is no concept of "not yet Enlightened" or non-Enlightenment, then there is no need for the concept of "working towards Enlightenment" or actualizing Enlightenment. And when we have accomplished this important spiritual task, we find that what we have actualized is in fact our original Enlightenment.

3.17 Perfect and Non-Perfect Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

又以覺心源故，名究竟覺。不覺心源故，非究竟覺。

Literal Translation

Next, Enlightenment that is aware of the source of the Heart is called perfect Enlightenment; Enlightenment that is unaware of the source of the Heart is called non-perfect Enlightenment.

Interpretation

Next, we can classify types of Enlightenment in another way. Enlightenment in which the adept realizes completely the Universal Mind is called perfect Enlightenment (jiu jing jue); Enlightenment in which the adept does not realize completely the Universal Mind is called non-perfect Enlightenment (fei jiu jing jue).

Commentary

There is some debate over the meaning of "the source of the heart" or "xin yuan" (heart-source) among classical masters. The great commentator Fa Zang (also known as Xian Shou) explained that "xin" (heart) referred to the Heart's life-death attribute, or the phenomenal attribute of the Universal Mind; and "yuan" (source) to the Supreme Reality, or the transcendental attribute of the Universal Mind.

Another great commentator Zong Mi explained that "xin" referred to the One Heart, and "yuan" the source, together meaning the Universal Mind.

3.18 Enlightenment of the Initiated

Original Text in Chinese

此義云何？如凡夫人覺知前念起惡故，能止後念令其不起。雖復名覺，即是不覺故。

Literal Translation

What is the meaning? For example, a layman realizing that his earlier thoughts have brought evil deeds, is able to stop the evil thoughts. Although he can be said to be Enlightened, he is still not Enlightened.

Interpretation

What is the meaning of non-perfect Enlightenment? One example is like a layman who realizes that his evil thoughts have resulted in evil deeds, thus generating bad karma. So he is able to stop future evil thoughts from arising in his mind, thereby effectively putting a stop to future evil deeds and preventing the worsening of his karma. This is some form of Enlightenment, but he is still not Enlightened.

Commentary

This first level of non-perfect Enlightenment is now popularly called "Enlightenment of the initiated" (nei fan jue), though this term is not mentioned by Asvaghosha in his treatise. By saying he is initiated is meant that he now realizes the significance of moral or spiritual cultivation. Compared to the uninitiated, i.e. those who deny moral or spiritual training, this person is Enlightened, because he understands the effect of karma, whereas the uninitiated in their ignorance continues to sow evil seeds, thus sinking lower and lower into a quagmire.

However, he cannot be said to be an Enlightened person, because, for example, he does not fully understand the purpose of spiritual cultivation.

3.19 Enlightenment of Resemblance

Original Text in Chinese

如二乘觀智，初發意菩薩等，覺於念異，念無異相，以捨粗分別執著相故，名相似覺。

Literal Translation

Like those holding the view and wisdom of Hinayana, or bodhisattvas of the early developmental stages, who realize that thoughts are differentiated, and whose thoughts are undifferentiated, see the rough but still have attachment; hence theirs is called "Enlightenment of resemblance" (xiang si jue).

Interpretation

The second form of Enlightenment refers to the Enlightenment of those adepts holding Hinayanist view and wisdom, or of bodhisattvas who are at the early stages of their spiritual development. They realize the illusion of the phenomenal world, and they are able to experience the undifferentiated, transcendental aspect of Cosmic Reality, but their realization is not yet refined because they still have attachment to dharmas or to self. This kind of Enlightenment is called "Enlightenment of resemblance" (xiang si jue).

Commentary

According to Mahayana thinking, the teaching of Hinayana (or Theravada as it is usually called now) is only a preparatory stage for the deeper teaching of Mahayana. Two crucial points that Hinayanists fail to accomplish are universal salvation and liberation from dharmas.

Mahayanists believe that Hinayanists succeed in personal Enlightenment but do not actively help others to achieve Enlightenment; and that Hinayanists have liberated themselves from attachment to self (i.e. they believe that self is illusory), but fail to liberate themselves from

attachment to dharmas (i.e. fail to realize that even the dharmas, or sub-atomic particles and forces that make up the phenomenal world, are illusory).

Hinayanists believe that dharmas are real, though they exist only momentarily. Mahayanists believe that dharmas are an illusion of the mind, and do not exist in transcendental reality. The ultimate aim of the Hinayanist is nirvana, which is to see reality as it is; whereas the ultimate aim of the Mahayanist is Buddhahood, which is nothing short of becoming one with the Eternal Buddha or Supreme Reality.

The meaning of "bodhisattva" as used here is different from that today. The modern meaning of a Bodhisattva is one who has been perfectly Enlightened, i.e. one who has become the Buddha, but because of his or her profound compassion, he or she chooses to be reincarnated again and again so as to help other sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. Hence, a Bodhisattva still has attachment to self, which is necessary as he or she desires to help others.

A bodhisattva during Asvaghosha's time, as shown in this treatise, might not necessarily be perfectly Enlightened; his most important feature, nevertheless, is deep compassion. Here the term "bodhisattva" therefore can be loosely applied to Mahayanists, who, unlike Hinayanists, regard Enlightenment not as a personal achievement but a cosmic responsibility. A Bodhisattva has vowed to help humanity, irrespective of their religions, and other beings to achieve salvation. His spiritual training consists of ten stages, known as the "Ten Stages of Bodhisattva", explained by the Indian master, Vasubandhu (or Shi Qin in Chinese, c.420-500) in his work, "Dasabhumi Sutra" ("Shi Di Jing" or "Scripture of the Ten Stages"), and popularized by the Chinese master, Hui Guang (468-537).

The Ten Stages of Bodhisattva are:

1. Joy (pramudita, or fan xi di).
The Bodhisattva experiences the joy of having the right view for spiritual development.
2. Purity (vimala, or li gou di).
He (or she) attains perfection in discipline and morality.

3. Illumination (prabha-kari, or fa guang di).
He acquires introspective wisdom, and becomes free from errors.
4. Insight (virya, or yan hui di).
He deepens his courage and insight.
5. Invincibility (sudurjaya, or nan sheng di).
He attains perfection of meditation, resulting in the understanding of empirical truth and higher truth.
6. Mental Presence (abhimukhi, or xian qian di).
He attains perfection of equanimity.
7. Far-Going (duran-gama, or yuan xing di).
He completes the perfection of expediency, and exercises great compassion to all beings.
8. Immovability (acala, or bu dong di).
He completes the perfection of his vows and acquires the ability of omnipresence.
9. Wisdom (sadhupati, or shan hui di).
He attains perfection of power and wisdom, thus becoming omnipotent and omniscient.
10. Ideal Cloud (dharma-megha, or fa yun di).
He preaches the ideal teaching or Dharma to all beings, like rain clouds bringing rain during a drought.

3.20 Enlightenment of Convergence

Original Text in Chinese

如法身菩薩等，覺於念住，念無住相，以離分別粗念相故，名隨分覺。

Literal Translation

Like Bodhisattvas of the Dharmakaya, who realize the attachment of thoughts, their minds are free from characteristics, and liberated from the illusion of thoughts and characteristics. This is named "Enlightenment of convergence" (sui fen jue).

Interpretation

The third form of Enlightenment is like that of the Bodhisattvas of the advanced developmental stages, who realize the illusion of the phenomenal world, and being free from the delusion of the countless differentiated characteristics of phenomena, experience the transcendental aspect of the Supreme Reality. This form of Enlightenment is called "Enlightenment of convergence" (sui fen jue).

Commentary

Dharmakaya, or "fa shen" in Chinese, refers to the spiritual body of the Buddha, which means the Supreme Reality. Bodhisattva of the Dharmakaya refer to Mahayanist adepts who have attained the highest levels of spiritual training.

A person who places "attachment to thoughts" has a deluded mind; thus he sees reality not in its transcendental aspect but as the phenomenal world. A person who is "free from characteristics" has the higher wisdom of seeing through the countless illusory characteristics of phenomena, thereby experiencing the transcendental aspect of cosmic reality. This form of spiritual realization is called "Enlightenment

of convergence”, meaning that it converges with, or is very close to, perfect Enlightenment.

3.21 Becoming a Buddha

Original Text in Chinese

如菩薩地盡，滿足方便，一念相應，覺心初起，心無初相，以遠離微細念故，得見心性。心即常住，名究竟覺。

Literal Translation

Like having completed the ten stages of the Bodhisattva’s training, and fulfilled all expedient means, the Bodhisattvas harmonize with one thought. Their original Enlightenment arises, and they become free from the original thought, liberated from the faintest delusion, and see the origin nature of the Heart. The Heart is omniscient and omnipresent, and this is called perfect Enlightenment.

Interpretation

This is the highest form of Enlightenment, like the Enlightenment of the Bodhisattvas who, having fulfilled all expedient means towards Buddhahood, have completed all their ten stages of spiritual training.

Their final thought of actualizing Enlightenment harmonizes with their original Enlightenment. They are now free from the original thought which first started the cosmic transformation at the alaya consciousness.

As they are now free from this primordial thought which first deluded their minds, starting the chain of transformations that create the phenomenal world, they are liberated from the faintest delusion and attain realization of the Universal Mind, which is omniscient and omnipresent. This form of Enlightenment is called perfect Enlightenment (jiu jing jue).

Commentary

Enlightenment may be perfect or non-perfect. In perfect Enlightenment, spiritual realization of the Supreme Reality is total and complete;

whereas in non-perfect Enlightenment, it is not.

Non-perfect Enlightenment is the preparatory steps to the final perfect Enlightenment, and may be classified into three types. Although the progress from ignorance to Enlightenment can be arbitrarily divided into numerous stages, and the progress from one stage to another is usually (but not always) gradual, these four types of Enlightenment illustrate typical levels of spiritual development.

The first level is known as "Enlightenment of the initiated", when a layman experiences his first spiritual awareness, but he has little or no knowledge of Cosmic Reality.

A major break-through is achieved when he progresses to the level where he realizes that the phenomenal world is illusory, and this awareness which is typically different from the previous level is called the "Enlightenment of resemblance". This Enlightenment is a resemblance and non-perfect because although he has discarded his attachment to phenomena, which is indeed a tremendous spiritual achievement, he still has not discarded his attachment to self. In other words, he sees reality as it really is, as undifferentiated and impartial, but he still sees it as an individual, from the perspective of his own self.

At the next level, his spiritual realization is further deepened, but is typically different, as he fully realizes that his personal identity is also an illusion, and that he is actually an integral and organic part of the Supreme Reality. Nevertheless, for some specific reasons, like wishing to relieve the suffering of other beings or help them to attain Enlightenment, he chooses to exist as an individual. In other words, although he is now aware of the attachment to self, and can free himself from it if he wants to, he still remains attached to it. He may exist as a human or in other physical forms, or in astral forms like gods or other divine beings. (Not all astral beings, however, are Enlightened.)

This form of spiritual realization is called "Enlightenment of convergence", converging at perfect Enlightenment. When this highly Enlightened being has expended his last karmic force, such as having fulfilled his last vow to save humanity, he finally discards his attachment to self and attains perfect Enlightenment; he becomes the Buddha, which is the Supreme Reality. This does not mean that a new Buddha is created, or that this being adds his own stuff (whatever it may be) to the existing stuff of the Supreme Reality. Neither does it mean that this

being disintegrates, becomes extinguished, a concept many misinformed people may have regarding nirvana or Buddhahood.

At perfect Enlightenment, he returns to his original divine source. The perfectly Enlightened being, who is now the Buddha, may appear again in the world if it is desirable, as has happened countless times in past aeons with the coming of many historical Buddhas.

The Eternal Buddha, or the Supreme Reality, has always been, is, and will always be there, here, and everywhere. Nothing is added or subtracted between the phenomenal world and transcendental reality; they are two aspects of the same Supreme Reality. That perfectly Enlightened being, like all of us and everything, is an expression of the Supreme Reality. We are unaware of this great cosmic truth because of our ignorance, because our minds have been shrouded by layers and layers of defilement.

Purifying our minds for this awareness and direct experience is spiritual fulfilment. John Blofeld, explaining spiritual realization in Taoism, which is actually applicable to any religion, describes this concept poetically. The aim is to return to the Source by undergoing an apotheosis that can be best be hinted at in words. The illusory ego falls away, yet nothing real is lost. Spirit, freed from its bonds, returns to Spirit, not as a dew-drop destined to form an insignificant particle of a vast ocean, but as the boundless returning to the boundless. The liberated consciousness expands to contain -- to be -- the entire universe! Could there ever, ever be a more glorious endeavour?

Chapter 10

Widsom, Miracles and Enlightenment

What does an Enlightened person see or feel when he experiences Cosmic Reality?

3.22 State of No Thought

Original Text in Chinese

是故修多羅說：若有眾生能觀無念者，則為向佛智故。又心起者，無有初相可知，而言知初相者，即謂無念。

Literal Translation

The sutra says, if sentient beings can see no thought, that is towards Buddha's wisdom. When heart arises, no first thought is known. To say to know the first characteristics, is no thought.

Interpretation

It is mentioned in the sutra that if sentient beings who have countless thoughts in their mind, can attain a level of meditation whereby they eliminate all thoughts, they have acquired intuitive wisdom that will lead them towards Buddhahood.

When the first thought arises in the mind, there is no thought before this first thought, which gives the first characteristics to phenomena. When we understand this situation of the first thought, and can look beyond it, we attain the state of no thought.

Commentary

After explaining the stages and nature of Enlightenment, Asvaghosha sets out to explain the nature of thought and how it leads to spiritual ignorance so that we can eliminate thought and overcome ignorance to work towards Enlightenment.

Thoughts which give differentiation to phenomena and therefore veil the transcendental aspect of the Supreme Reality, can be explained under four characteristic states (avastha, or si xiang), namely arising, abiding, changing and stopping (jati, sthiti, anyatva and nirodha, or sheng, zhu, yi and mie). For example, we think of a tree; the thought of a tree arises in our mind.

Then, this thought of the tree abides and develops; we think of the tree having leaves which make use of sunlight to make food. Thirdly, the thought changes; we may change our thinking from sunlight to solar energy, to atomic power, to world wars, and to a loved one serving in a war. Lastly, the thought stops, but for most people, as soon as the original thought stops, another thought arises, usually without awareness of their transition.

The sutra referred to in the passage, many commentators believe, is the Lankavatara Sutra (Leng Jia Jing in Chinese), which recorded the Buddha's teaching in Lanka.

3.23 Beginningless Ignorance

Original Text in Chinese

是故一切眾生不名為覺，以從本來念念相續，未曾離念，故說無始無明。

Literal Translation

All sentient beings cannot be called Enlightened, because from the origin they are full of continued thoughts, and are never freed from thoughts. Hence this is called beginningless ignorance (wu shi wu ming).

Interpretation

No sentient beings can be said to be perfectly Enlightened because originally they have thoughts, and have never been freed from thoughts. As thoughts generate differentiation and thus prevent the sentient beings from experiencing the transcendental, undifferentiated aspect of Cosmic Reality, thoughts bring about spiritual ignorance. This ignorance which is the result of the original or innate thought of sentient beings, and is therefore has no beginning, is called beginningless ignorance (wu shi wu ming).

Commentary

The Chinese term for beginningless ignorance is "wu shi wu ming", which is literally "no beginning no understanding". The expression "no beginning" may be interpreted as an adjectival phrase meaning "beginningless", as it is done above and by most commentators, or as a separate noun phrase.

Fa Zang (also known as Xian Shou), the famous third patriarch of the Hua Yen (Garland) school of Buddhism, was of the opinion of the second interpretation. He explained that the Supreme Reality transcends space and time, and therefore has no beginning. Hence "wu shi wu ming" would be interpreted as the "ignorance of the no beginning" or cosmic ignorance.

3.24 Nature of Thought

Original Text in Chinese

若得無念者，則知心相生住異滅，以無念等故。

Literal Translation

Those who have no thoughts, understand the arising, abiding, changing and stopping of the heart's characteristics. This is the same as with no thought.

Interpretation

Those who have cultivated their mind to eliminate all thoughts, will understand the nature of thought in relation to mind, i.e. the arising, abiding, changing and stopping of thoughts in the mind. Then they become the same as those with no thoughts.

Commentary

Those with no thoughts are those who have reached the realm of Buddhahood. Thoughts are features of the phenomenal world. In transcendental reality, there is no thought, as the transcendental is undifferentiated and impartial. In the Supreme Reality, there is absolutely no difference between having thoughts and having no thoughts.

This Buddhist philosophy on thought provides a conceptual framework for some practical methods to attain Enlightenment. Briefly, it is as follows. As the arising, abiding, changing and stopping of thoughts lead from original Enlightenment to ignorance, the reverse process of thought control in meditative practice will lead back from ignorance to Enlightenment.

In meditation, the aspirant stops all new thoughts from arising. Then he follows backward the process of his changing thoughts. This leads him to the abiding thought which first arose. Eliminate this first thought and look beyond to no thought. As Asvaghosha taught, if we

can eliminate the first thought and look beyond no thought, we become like those with no thoughts, i.e. Enlightened beings.

The principle is simple, but the actual practice of course demands much time and effort. Just stopping thoughts from arising, for many people, may need months if not years of practice. But, as Blofeld said, "could there ever, ever be a more glorious endeavour" than realizing our divine source.

3.25 Same Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

而實無有始覺之異，以四相俱時而有，皆無自立，本來平等，同一覺故。

Literal Translation

Actually here is no difference in actualized Enlightenment. The four characteristics are present in illusion. They are not independent, but are originally undifferentiated. It is the same Enlightenment.

Interpretation

Actually there is no difference between actualized Enlightenment and original Enlightenment. In other words, there is no difference between the spiritual realization of Cosmic Reality achieved by an aspirant, and the primordial Cosmic Reality that has been there timelessly.

Similarly, the four characteristics of thought are illusory; they are present only in the phenomenal aspect. These four characteristics are not independent of one another; they are actually one continuous mental process. Yet, in the transcendental aspect, this continuous aspect does not exist; it is only an illusion to the defiled mind. When the mind is purified, in the timeless moment of Cosmic Reality, everything IS. Thus, there is actually only one kind of Enlightenment.

Commentary

The "Scripture of Round Enlightenment" (Yuan Jue Jing) says that "All sentient beings are originally the Buddha; the difference between samsara and nirvana is just like waking from a dream." Viewing from the realm of no thought, sentient beings do not achieve Enlightenment in the sense of achieving something new; they merely actualize something that has all the time been in them.

It is significant to note that the same concept is found in other world's religion. Hence, Christians talk of returning to the Kingdom of God, and Muslims the return to Allah. Hindus talk of union with Brahman, which is the original divine source of all illusory manifestations, and Taoists talk of merging with the primordial cosmos in the attainment of immortality.

Yet, in our illusion, we talk of the transient world and the eternal heaven, the mundane manifestation and the divine source, or in Buddhist terms, samsara and nirvana, which is the suffering resulting from endless cycles of birth and rebirth, and the everlasting bliss of spiritual realization. But in reality, samsara and nirvana are the same; it is a matter of waking up from our illusion.

This Mahayanist view, which incorporates two fundamental concepts, is distinctively different from the Theravadin view. The two fundamental Mahayana concepts are as follows. One, all sentient beings, when they have attained perfect Enlightenment, are the unchanging, everlasting, absolute manifestation of the transcendental Cosmic Reality. They appear as changing, momentary and relative only in the phenomenal world. This is why all sentient beings are originally the Buddha. Two, in perfect Enlightenment when reality is experienced as undifferentiated and transcendental, nirvana and samsara are the same. They are different only in non-Enlightenment.

The Theravadin view is well expressed by the Venerable Walpola Rahula:

According to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, conditioned and impermanent, and that there is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance like Self, Soul or Atman within or without. This is the Absolute Truth. Truth is never negative, though there is a popular expression as negative truth.

The realization of the Truth, i.e. to see things as they are (yathabhutam) without illusion or ignorance (avijja), is the extinction of craving "thirst" (Tanhakkhaya), and the cessation (Nirodha) of dukkha, which is Nirvana. It is interesting and useful to remember here the Mahayana view of Nirvana as not being different from Samsara. The same thing is

Samsara or Nirvana according to the way you look at it -- subjectively or objectively. This Mahayana view was probably developed out of the ideas found in the originally Theravada Pali texts, to which we have just referred to in our brief discussion.

3.26 Manifestations

Original Text in Chinese

復次，本覺隨染分別，生二種相，與彼本覺不相捨離。云何爲二？一者，智淨相，二者，不思議業相。

Literal Translation

Then again, the phenomenal aspect of original Enlightenment when analyzed, has two characteristics, which are not distinct from the other Enlightenment. What two? One, the characteristic of pure wisdom; two, the characteristic of incredible effect.

Interpretation

Then again, original Enlightenment when viewed from the perspective of the phenomenal world, manifests itself in two characteristics, which are also applicable to the other type of Enlightenment, i.e. actualized Enlightenment, as these two types are actually the same in reality. What are the two characteristics? They are the characteristic of cosmic wisdom, and the characteristic of miraculous effect.

Commentary

After explaining actualized Enlightenment, Asvaghosha proceeds to original Enlightenment. It should be remembered that these two kinds are the same Enlightenment; the difference is one of perspective. Seen from the viewpoint of transcendental reality, it is original Enlightenment -- the Enlightenment has been there all the time. Seen from the viewpoint of the phenomenal world, it is actualized Enlightenment -- sentient beings attain or rediscover the Enlightenment that was originally with them.

When a person attains Enlightenment, he acquires two characteristics, namely cosmic wisdom and miraculous ability. These two fea-

tures are the manifestation of the omniscience and omnipotence of the Supreme Reality.

3.27 Cosmic Wisdom

Original Text in Chinese

智淨相者，謂依法力熏習，如實修行，滿足方便故，破和合識相，滅相續心相，顯現法身，智淳淨故。

Literal Translation

Cosmic wisdom, according to the power of the Dharma, cultivate diligently, fulfil all expedient means, break through the uniting-separating consciousness, the characteristic of the phenomenal world, reveal the spiritual body, attain wisdom and purity.

Interpretation

Cosmic wisdom includes the following: understanding the Buddhist teaching, especially regarding the Supreme Reality as summarized in this treatise; cultivating diligently morality, right view, right intention, and meditation; employing whatsoever expedient means that are relevant; breaking through the interface between the phenomenal and the transcendental of the alaya consciousness; being aware of the illusory nature of the phenomenal world; realizing the transcendental nature of the Supreme Reality; and attaining higher wisdom and purity of mind.

Commentary

Cosmic wisdom represents the gist of Mahayana teaching. It includes, among other things, an understanding of the phenomenal and transcendental aspect of the Supreme Reality, the diligent practice of the Noble Eight-fold Path, and the application of whatever appropriate expedient means that can help the aspirant to attain Enlightenment.

Many people are bewildered by the variety of methods Mahayana Buddhists use in their spiritual practice. Some, especially those who understand Buddhism only from the Theravada perspective, even go to

the extend of saying that these practices employed by Mahayanists are not Buddhist.

The above passage will provide a good answer. The Buddha advises that his teaching is only a vehicle, not an absolute law, that transports sentient beings from samsara to nirvana, or from ignorance to Enlightenment, and he even suggests that if his followers can find other suitable ways to achieve this aim, they may do so. This explains why there is such variety of expedient means for achieving Enlightenment in Mahayana practices, as well as why Buddhists are sincerely respectful of other religions.

The various and varied expedient means, which constitute the variety of Mahayana practices, represent some of the effective ways that serve like vehicles to help sentient beings in their spiritual development. The majority of followers of Buddhism, as of any other world religion, are not intellectually or spiritually advanced enough to appreciate the magnificent philosophy of, or experience directly the Supreme Reality. To impose upon them advanced spiritual practice like highly disciplined mind training of tracing wandering thoughts back to no thought so that they can come face to face with transcendental reality, is both unreasonable and unrealistic.

So, simpler expedient means appropriate to their developmental levels are used, such as praying to the statue of the Buddha, mechanically reciting some scriptures, and offering food and clothing to monks. Laughing at their simplicity or naivety, with such remarks like the Buddha statue is but a piece of wood, they do not know the language in which the scriptures are written, or they are pampering individuals who do not contribute to the economic welfare of society, shows not only our intolerance but also our ignorance.

Although these simple means rarely enable the devotees to be Enlightened immediately, they certainly help them in their spiritual progress. Considering the prevailing weakness of human nature, just to be spiritually concerned and charitable is already a remarkable achievement. From a secular perspective, religious teaching is a definite contribution to society, because when people are habitually aware of divine presence, they are unlikely to commit crimes.

On the other hand, expedient means for advanced Mahayanist devotees may leave some readers puzzled. In Chan (or Zen) Buddhism, for

example, a gong-an ("koan" in Japanese) is frequently used as an aid to help aspirants achieve Enlightenment. A gong-an, literally meaning public case, is a record of a meaningful encounter between a master and a student, often involving a seemingly non-sensical question or answer. The following is an interesting example.

A monk asked the Chan master, Wei Kuan, "Where is Tao?"

"Right in front of your eyes!"

"Why can't I see it?"

"Because of me, you cannot see it," the master said.

"If I cannot see Tao because of you, then can you, master, see it?"

"Because of you and me, Tao disappears."

"If there is no me and no you, can you still see Tao?"

"When there is no you and no me, who needs to see Tao?" the master explained.

If you are Enlightened, you will understand the above dialogue instantly. But even if you have not experienced Cosmic Reality directly, but have understood intellectually what has been explained in this book so far, you will still know the deeper meaning of the above encounter.

However, if you are still puzzled, a good clue is that the student could not see Tao, or the Supreme Reality, because of his attachment to phenomena and to self. Because he saw the master as an individual entity (attachment to dharma), the student could not appreciate transcendental reality. Because he differentiated himself from the master (attachment to self) he also missed the ultimate truth.

3.28 Mind and Ignorance

Original Text in Chinese

此義云何？以一切心識之相，皆是無明，無明之相，不離覺性，非可壞，非不可壞。如大海水，因風波動，水相風相不相捨離，而水非動性，若風止滅，動相則滅，濕性不壞故。如是，眾生自性清淨心，因無明風動。心與無明俱無形相，不相捨離。而心非動性，若無明滅，相續則滅，智性不壞故。

Literal Translation

What is the meaning? All characteristics of heart and thought are due to ignorance. Ignorance is inseparable from Enlightenment nature, cannot be destroyed, yet cannot be not destroyed. Like water in sea, because of wind, waves arise. Wind characteristic and water characteristic are inseparable. But water is not of moveable nature. When wind stops, moveable characteristic stops, but water nature is not destroyed. Similarly, the original nature of the heart of all sentient beings is pure and tranquil. The wind of ignorance moves. Heart and ignorance have no forms, and are inseparable. Heart is immovable. If ignorance ceases, endless characteristics cease, but the nature of wisdom is not destroyed.

Interpretation

What is the meaning of this cosmic wisdom, and how is it related to ignorance? All characteristics of mind and thought are due to ignorance of the transcendental nature of the Supreme Reality. Ignorance is inseparable from Enlightenment, which gives expression to the Supreme Reality. Ignorance, therefore, cannot be destroyed, yet it cannot be not destroyed.

It may be compared to the water in the sea, where the sea represents Cosmic Reality, water represents the mind, waves represent thoughts,

and wind represents ignorance. Because of wind, waves arise; when the wind ceases, the waves stop. Hence, the characteristic of the wind is inseparable from the characteristic of the water. But water by itself is not of movable nature; it moves because of the wind. When the wind stops, the movement also stops, but the nature of the water is not destroyed; it retains its waterness.

The relationship of mind, thought and ignorance is similar to that of water, waves and wind in the above example. The original nature of the mind of all sentient beings is pure and tranquil. The mind does not move, but thoughts arise because of ignorance. When there is ignorance, thoughts move, just like when there is wind, the waves move. Mind and ignorance have no physical forms of their own. Ignorance is inseparable from mind: if there is no mind, there will be no ignorance. If ignorance ceases, the illusion of phenomena with endless characteristics also ceases, but cosmic wisdom of the mind remains intact.

Commentary

This passage answers an important question: If ignorance is inseparable from mind, and has existed as long as mind has existed, why is it that mind remains intact when ignorance is destroyed? Asvaghosha answers the question by giving an analogy of moving wind causing waves to arise. When the wind (ignorance) ceases, the waves (thoughts) stop, but the water (mind) is intact.

Thus, although ignorance is inseparable from mind, it is not mind; it is only a particular expression of mind. When one particular expression ceases, another expression takes its place. In this case, when ignorance ceases, Enlightenment arises. Ignorance and Enlightenment are two aspects of the same mind, just as the phenomenal world and transcendental reality are two aspects of the same reality. Seen from the phenomenal viewpoint, mind is expressed as ignorance; seen from the transcendental perspective, mind is expressed as Enlightenment. Just as in the case of Cosmic Reality, there is nothing added nor subtracted: when ignorance ceases, nothing is subtracted from mind; and when Enlightenment occurs, nothing is added. The difference is a matter of perspective.

It should be remembered that ignorance here refers to spiritual ignorance or cosmic ignorance, and not intellectual ignorance. From the intellectual perspective, it does not make sense to say that ignorance is due to thoughts arising; but this is actually the case from the spiritual or cosmic perspective. Because of thoughts arising, the mind becomes veiled, thus seeing reality which is actually undifferentiated and impartial, as the differentiated, phenomenal world. This absence of Enlightenment, this inability to see reality as it is, is referred to as (spiritual or cosmic) ignorance.

3.29 Miraculous Effect

Original Text in Chinese

不思議業相者，以依智淨，能作一切勝妙境界。所謂無量功德之相，常無斷絕，隨眾生根，自然相應，種種而現，得利益故。

Literal Translation

Miraculous effect, because of cosmic wisdom, is capable of creating all kinds of wonderful phenomena, with countless characteristics and merits, relatively permanent and lasting, according to the needs of sentient beings. Naturally harmonizing, and of myriad kinds and appearances, it results in benefits.

Interpretation

Because of cosmic wisdom, miraculous effect is capable of creating all the wonderful phenomena, with countless individual characteristics and merits, which are relatively permanent and lasting, to fulfil the countless needs of sentient beings in the phenomenal world. All these countless phenomena with myriad kinds and appearances, are naturally and mutually harmonizing, resulting in benefits to all sentient beings.

Commentary

The description of miraculous effect here refers to that of the Supreme Reality. Working in conjunction with cosmic wisdom, miraculous effect provides all the needs and benefits for the phenomenal world.

The same effect applies to Enlightened beings operating in the phenomenal realm. A Bodhisattva, for example, possesses miraculous effect or abilities to help sentient beings. Although many people would be skeptical of such a claim, there is no doubt that an Enlightened being can perform what laymen would call miracles, such as knowing what happens miles away, and materializing things. If ordinary people can

acquire psychic powers like telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and prediction after a few months of psi training, what more of morally taintless and spiritually Enlightened persons who have devoted years to mind cultivation.

Mahayana teaching regards the possession of miraculous effect as one of the expedient means of Bodhisattvas. Buddhist literature not only records applications of this effect but also provides guidance to its development. In India when robbers wanted to kill Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang), as he had neither money nor possessions, this famous 7th century pilgrim and translator created a storm, and the die-hard robbers were so scared or impressed that they turned over a new leaf and embraced Buddhism.

The Lankavatara Sutra described telepathic, clairvoyance and other psychic powers of the Buddha's disciples. The 8th century scholar-warrior Padmasambhava used miraculous powers to subdue hostile astral forces in Tibet and helped to establish Vajrayana Buddhism there. Padmasambhava made an interesting prophecy which has turned out to be true: "When the iron bird flies, and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the world, and the Dharma will come to the land of the Red Man."

The "Ju She Lun" (Abhidhamma, or Treatise on Higher Wisdom) classifies miraculous abilities into the following six main categories, known as "Six Miraculous Abilities":

1. Heaven's Eye Ability (Tian Yen Tong).
Seeing ability that transcends space and time.
2. Heaven's Ear Ability (Tian Er Tong).
Hearing ability that transcends space and time.
3. Telepathic Ability (Ta Xin Tong).
Ability to know others' thoughts and emotions.
4. Past Lives Ability (Xiu Ming Tong).
Ability to see into the past.
5. Transcendental Ability (Shen Jing Tong).
Ability to change oneself into any form, and be present anywhere.

6. Perfect Control Ability (Lou Jin Tong).

Ability to have perfect control over physiological and psychological functions of own body.

Will these powers be abused? Not at all likely, because the unworthy lack the moral and spiritual discipline to acquire them, and those who have acquired these powers know unmistakably that any misuse would retrogress their spiritual growth by many years, or even lifetimes. Moreover, of what purposes can such misuse be for masters who have renounced wealth, fame and worldly pleasures in their quest of spiritual fulfilment? These miraculous abilities, however, are not emphasized in Buddhist teaching. While Mahayana and Vajrajana masters find them useful in their effort to help others, many Theravada masters think they are a hindrance to their personal Enlightenment.

3.30 Characteristics of Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

復次，覺體相者，有四種大義，與虛空等，猶如淨鏡。云何爲四？一者如實空鏡，遠離一切心境界相，無法可現，非覺照義故。二者，因熏習鏡，謂如實不空，一切世間境界，悉於中現，不出不入，不失不壞，常住一心，以一切法即真實性故。三者，法出離鏡，謂不空法。出煩惱礙，智礙，離和合相，淳淨明故。四者，緣熏習鏡，謂依法出離故，徧照眾生之心，令修善根，隨念示現故。

Literal Translation

Characteristics of Enlightenment body have four main meanings, similar to emptiness, like a clear mirror. What four?

One, Empty Mirror of Reality (Ru Shi Kong Jing). It is free from all characteristics of the heart realm, cannot be seen, and cannot be manifested.

Two, Manifested Mirror of Reality (En Xun Xi Jing). It is non-empty reality. All the phenomena in the world are manifested in it, non-out non-in, non-lost non-destroyed. Permanently attached to One Heart, all phenomena are real.

Three, Non-Phenomenal Mirror (Fa Chu Li Jing). It is non-empty phenomena, free from emotional and intellectual hindrance, free from unite-separate characteristic, tranquil and bright.

Four, External Developmental Mirror (Lu Xun Si Jing). To free from defiled objects, illuminate sentient being's hearts so as to cultivate good roots, manifested according to thoughts.

Interpretation

There are four characteristics of the essence of Enlightenment, which is similar to emptiness, and is like a clear mirror. What are the four characteristics?

They are Empty Mirror of Reality (Ru Shi Kong Jing), Manifested Mirror of Reality (En Xun Xi Jing), Non-Phenomenal Mirror (Fa Chu Li Jing), and External Developmental Mirror (Lu Xun Si Jing).

The Empty Mirror of Reality is free from all characteristics of the phenomenal world, cannot be seen by non-Enlightened persons, and cannot be manifested to them.

The Manifested Mirror of Reality is a contrast to the first characteristic; it is non-empty reality. All the phenomena in the world are manifested in it. As it is a reflection of the phenomenal world, nothing outside phenomenal experience is manifested. These manifestations are an expression of the Universal Mind, hence they cannot be lost nor destroyed; and as long as there is attachment, these phenomena will permanently appear as real.

The Non-Phenomenal Mirror reflects the non-empty phenomena (while the Manifested Mirror in the second characteristic reflects the non-empty reality). It is free from emotional and intellectual hindrance, and free from the illusion that may be caused by the alaya consciousness.

It is tranquil and bright. The External Developmental Mirror serves to free sentient beings from all defiled objects and thoughts of the phenomenal world. It illuminates their hearts or minds to induce them to work for spiritual development so as to cultivate good karma. It is manifested according to the thoughts of the Enlightened person.

Commentary

What does an Enlightened person see or feel when he experiences Cosmic Reality? These characteristics of Enlightenment explained by Asvaghosha provide a description of the experiences of Enlightened persons at moments of spiritual realization. They are usually experienced during meditation.

There are countless individual experiences, but they may be classified into four main kinds, which are, nevertheless not exclusive as overlapping is possible. The levels of Enlightenment, from "Enlightenment of the initiated" to perfect Enlightenment, of course affect the nature and intensity of the ecstatic experiences.

The first characteristic, where Cosmic Reality is experienced like an empty mirror free from all signs of the phenomenal world, is expe-

rienced by those of the highest level only. This experience is beyond the comprehension of the non-Enlightened. This is the realization of Cosmic Reality at the highest level, where the knower is not different from the known, the personal mind merges with the Universal Mind, the individual spirit becomes the Cosmic Spirit.

Enlightenment at the third and final levels, "convergence Enlightenment" and "perfect Enlightenment", often reveals Cosmic Reality like a manifested mirror, where the phenomenal world is reflected in celestial light.

Those at the second level, "Enlightenment of resemblance", may also have this kind of experience. The vision or feeling is transcendental; the enlightened person sees in his mind's eye not just his immediate environment, but a majestic, paramount view miles or years away. The examples of ecstatic experiences mentioned in the introductory chapter of this book are of this characteristic.

At a glance the third characteristic of Enlightenment may appear similar to the first, but it is not the same; it is of a much lower developmental stage. In the first characteristic, the meditator experiences Cosmic Reality directly. In the third characteristic, his mind is tranquil and bright, and he understands the illusory nature of phenomena, but he does not have the indescribable experience that he is the Cosmic Reality.

The fourth characteristic of Enlightenment is typical of those who attained the "Enlightenment of the initiated", i.e. those who have just started their spiritual training. They experience a sense of inner peace, and feel that their hearts or minds are open to spiritual cultivation.

Chapter 11

Transformations Into Phenomenal World

Since reality is actually an organic unity of universal consciousness, why do people, before they are Enlightened, see reality as a world of differentiated phenomena?

3.31 Meaning of Non-Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

所言不覺義者，謂不如實知真如法一故，不覺心起而有其念。念無自相，不離本覺。

Literal Translation

What is non-Enlightenment? It means not knowing the reality of phenomena. The heart of non-Enlightenment arises with thoughts. Thoughts have no reality, not free from original Enlightenment.

Interpretation

What is the meaning of non-Enlightenment? Non-Enlightenment means not knowing the Cosmic Reality behind the illusory world of phenomena. When the mind of non-Enlightenment first arises, thoughts are already present. These thoughts are not reality; so they are not independent of reality.

Commentary

The alaya consciousness is where the transcendental aspect of reality meets its phenomenal aspect. To use an imperfect description, on one side of alaya consciousness is undifferentiated reality, on the other side is the phenomenal world. As thoughts arise on one side, we see the phenomenal world; on the other side where there are no thoughts, we see transcendental reality. It must be remembered that this description is imperfect; actually the transcendental and the phenomenal are the same, but for those who have not experienced Cosmic Reality directly and thus find it hard to comprehend, the description, thought imperfect, is useful.

3.32 Non-Enlightenment Due to Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

猶如迷人，依方故迷。若離於方，則無有迷。眾生亦爾，依覺故迷。若離覺性，則無不覺。以有不覺妄想心，故能知名義，為說真覺。若離不覺之心，則無真覺自相可說。

Literal Translation

Like a lost person, lost because of direction. If no direction, then not lost. Same with sentient beings, deluded because of Enlightenment; if free from nature of Enlightenment, then no non-Enlightenment. Because of non-Enlightened, illusory hearts, then know the name and meaning; to be liberated for Enlightenment. If free from non-Enlightened heart, no Enlightenment to mention.

Interpretation

Because there is the concept of directions, a person becomes lost if he is confused over the directions. If there is no concept of directions, then the concept of being lost does not arise. It is the same with sentient beings. Because of the concept of Enlightenment, a person who fails to attain Enlightenment is said to be deluded or non-Enlightened. If we are free from the concept of Enlightenment, then there is no such thing as non-Enlightenment.

Because there are people who are non-Enlightened and whose minds are deluded, we know of the name and meaning of Enlightenment, and we endeavour to be liberated from non-Enlightenment to attain Enlightenment. If men's minds are free from non-Enlightenment, then there will be no mention of the concept of Enlightenment.

Commentary

Fa Zang explains that men's preoccupation with the concept of Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment is due to his having senses and emotions. If men were like stones and vegetables, without human emotions, then the question of Enlightenment becomes irrelevant. Cosmic Reality will remain undifferentiated and impartial.

On the other hand, because people's experience is normally phenomenal, it is necessary to use examples of contrasting and distinctive nature to describe Cosmic Reality; otherwise the people will not be able to have any idea, although it is an imperfect one, of what Cosmic Reality is.

This Buddhist concept of relativity is similar to the Confucian and Taoist concept of yin-yang which is preeminent in Chinese culture. This yin-yang concept is generally misunderstood by the West. Yin and yang are not two opposing forces that constitute the universe, as is frequently mis-represented. Yin and yang are merely symbols representing two opposite yet complementary aspects of any object or concept. For example, if the transcendental aspect is represented as yang, then its phenomenal aspect is represented as yin; if Enlightenment is yang, then non-Enlightenment or ignorance is yin.

Yin and yang are not only opposite, but also complementary: yin exists because of yang, and yang exists because of yin. If there is no yin, then there will be no yang, and vice versa. Hence, if there is no Enlightenment, then there will be no non-Enlightenment. We understand what is Enlightenment because there is the counter concept of non-Enlightenment, just as we can tell which side is left or top, only because we have designated the other side as right or bottom.

3.33 Characteristics of Non-Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

復次，依不覺故生三種相，與彼不覺相應不離。云何爲三？一者，無明業相。以依不覺故。心動說名爲業。覺則不動。動則有苦。果不離因故。二者，能見相。以依動故能見。不動則無見。三者，境界相。以依能見，故境界妄現。離見則無境界。

Literal Translation

Because of non-Enlightenment, there arise three characteristics, inseparable from non-Enlightenment. What three? One, characteristic of karma due to ignorance. When heart moves, effect results. Enlightenment, no movement; if movement, suffering results. Thus, effect cannot be separated from cause. Two, characteristic of perceiving ability. Because of movement, there is perceiving ability; no movement, no perceiving ability. Three, characteristic of realm of objects. Because of perceiving ability, illusion of realm of objects. If free from perceiving ability, no realm of objects.

Interpretation

Because of non-Enlightenment, there arise three characteristics, which are inseparable from the state of non-Enlightenment. What are the three characteristics?

One, there is the characteristic of karma, which is due to spiritual ignorance. The karmic effect is the result of thoughts arising in the mind. Thoughts do not arise in a state of Enlightenment; when thoughts arise, the karmic effect is set in motion, resulting in suffering. Thus, according to the law of karma, arising thoughts generates cycles of cause and effect.

Two, there is the characteristic of perceiving ability. Because of arising thoughts that generates the karmic effect, there arises the ability

to perceive; if there are no thoughts arising, there is no need for this perceiving ability.

Three, there is the characteristic of the realm of phenomena. Because of the perceiving ability, there arises the illusion of a phenomenal realm. If one is free from this perceiving ability, there will not be any illusory realm of objects and processes.

Commentary

Here Asvaghosha gives a brief but fascinating explanation of how the phenomenal world comes into being. Because of our spiritual ignorance of the transcendental aspect of the Supreme Reality, there arise in us three characteristics. Thoughts arise in our mind. Because of thoughts, there arises the ability to perceive.

Because of this perception, we see reality as a realm of phenomena or a world of objects and processes. This realm or phenomenal world is an illusion due to our ignorance. If we are Enlightened, we can pierce through this veil of illusion and experience reality as it is, i.e. an undifferentiated spread of universal consciousness.

This is a crucial concept in Buddhist philosophy explaining the illusory phenomenal world around us. Known as the Theory of Ideation, or "Wei Zhi Lun" in Chinese, this concept is well developed in the Fa Xiang School of Buddhism (known as Vijnaptimatra, or formerly Yogacara, in India; and as Hosso School in Japan). "Fa Xiang" means "Characteristics of Phenomena". This school attributes the existence of all the outer world to inner ideation, expostulating that all the countless objects we see are actually a manifestation of the mind.

Scientists and philosophers interested in investigating the reality of matter or mind whether in the sub-atomic particle or the infinite galaxies, would derive much inspiration and knowledge from the wealth of Buddhist philosophy. The Ideation Theory held by the Fa Xiang School, which is semi-Mahayanist in philosophy, is only one of the main Buddhist theories explaining the existence of the outer world.

This ideation doctrine lies between the realism doctrine of such Theravada schools as Sarvastivada, Ju She and Kusha (similar schools in India, China and Japan), which expound that dharma, or the sub-atomic particles and forces that constitutes phenomena, are real but exist only

momentarily, and the emptiness doctrine of such Theravada schools as Sarvasunyavada, Cheng Shi and Jojitsu, which expound that both self and dharma are empty.

The relativity doctrine of such Mahayana schools like Madhyamika, San Lun and Sanron, expounds that the outer world is ultimately unreal but phenomenally real; whereas the totalism doctrine of such Mahayana schools like Avatansaka, Hua Yen and Kegon, expounds that all attributes and realities are harmoniously interwoven into an organic whole.

One should not make the mistake to think that since there are different doctrines among these schools in their explanation of the outer world, only one of them is right and the rest wrong, or all are wrong. Although there have been heated debates among the teachers of these different schools, they also accept the views of the others, because they realize that in such matters, there is no dogmatic right or wrong. All of them are right in their own ways; it is a question of interpretation or perspective, just like light may be viewed as waves or particles, and distant stars as gigantic masses of matter or gigantic balls of energy. In a similar way, a Buddhist accepts the doctrines of other religions, and believes that everyone has the right, morally as well as legally, to follow and practise whichever religion he likes best.

Interestingly, world renowned scientists are now investigating reality along similar lines. For example, the consciousness-based theory of such scientists like the Nobel Prize winning physicist Eugene Wigner, who suggests that it is the working of the mind that converts quantum waves into concrete particles, is reminiscent of the relativity doctrine of the Madhyamika school, while the holistic physics of such scientists like David Bohm, who says that "everything interpenetrates everything", reminds us of the totalism doctrine of the Avatansaka school.

3.34 Six Characteristics and Six Transformations

Original Text in Chinese

以有境界緣故，復生六種相。云何爲六？一者，智相依於境界，心起分別，愛與不愛故。二者，相續相，依於智故，生其苦樂，覺心起念，相應不斷故。三者，執取相，依於相續，緣念境界，住持苦樂，心起著故。四者，計名字相，依於妄執，分別假名言相故。五者，起業相，依於名字，尋名取著，造種種業故。六者，業繫苦相，以依業受果，不自在故。當知無明能生一切染法，以一切染法，皆是不覺相故。

Literal Translation

Because of the realm of objects there again arise six characteristics. What six? One, the characteristic of intellect, due to the realm of objects, and differentiated from the arising of the heart, resulting in likes and dislikes. Two, the characteristic of continuity, due to the intellect, resulting in joy and sorrow, as thoughts continue to rise from the heart, continuity arises. Three, the characteristic of attachment, due to continuity, effect of the realm of objects, attached to joy and sorrow, thoughts arise from the heart. Four, the characteristic of verbalization, due to attachment, resulting in names for attributes. Five, the characteristic of effect, due to verbalization, seeking names results in karmic effects. Six, the characteristic of suffering, due to fruit of karmic effects, being not free or spontaneous. Know that ignorance can create all types of phenomena, because of non-Enlightenment.

Interpretation

Because of the realm of phenomena there again arise six characteristics. What are the six characteristics?

One, there is the characteristic of intellect, which is due to the existence of the realm of objects or the phenomenal world. With intellect, the mind starts to discriminate, resulting in likes and dislikes.

Two, there is the characteristic of continuity, which is due to the intellect. Thoughts continue to arise from the mind, resulting in the awareness of joy and sorrow.

Three, there is the characteristic of attachment, which is due to the continuity of thoughts. As we continuously think of the realm of phenomena, we become attached to its joy and sorrow.

Four, there is the characteristic of verbalization. Because of our attachment to the phenomenal world, we give names to objects and their attributes.

Five, there is the characteristic of karma, which is due to verbalization, or giving names to differentiated objects and attributes. Because of our carving for the objects and satisfaction which we have named, we create karmic effects.

Six, there is the characteristic of suffering, which is due to the fruit of karmic effects. Because of this suffering, we are not free or spontaneous.

Be aware that if we are ignorant of the ultimate truth of Cosmic Reality, it can create an illusory realm with all types of phenomena. This is because we are in a state of non-Enlightenment.

Commentary

Since reality is actually an organic unity of universal consciousness, why do people, before they are Enlightened, see reality as a world of differentiated phenomena? This transformation of transcendental Cosmic Reality on a universal scale into the phenomenal world observed at a personal level is explained by the three characteristics mentioned in the previous passage (3.33), and the six characteristics mentioned here, which generate "three fine transformations, and six gross transformations". The three fine characteristics, which refer to ignorance, perception and realm of phenomena concern the alaya consciousness; whereas the six gross characteristics concern the intellect consciousness.

Initially, at the state of original Enlightenment, Cosmic Reality is one organic, undifferentiated spread of universal consciousness. The first transformation is caused by thoughts arising, which gives the pri-

mordial even spread the first stir of unevenness. At the second transformation, perception arises, making the original Cosmic Reality more uneven. At the third transformation, Cosmic Reality, which is actually undifferentiated, is now seen as a realm of differentiated phenomena. These three fine transformations occur at the universal alaya consciousness, resulting in the illusion of phenomena.

At the fourth transformation, or the first gross transformation, because of the illusory realm of differentiated phenomena, intellect arises to discriminate, thus creating the first stir towards the illusion of individual self. Once the intellect discriminates, the unfolding of transformation continues, manifesting as the fifth transformation, and resulting in the experiencing of the whole range of emotions. This brings to the sixth transformation, whereby the self attaches himself to the phenomenal world. At the seventh transformation, he verbalizes the different objects and attributes the experiences. At the eighth transformation, his attachment results in karmic effects, which perpetuate the ninth transformation with his cycle of birth and rebirth in the phenomenal world.

The first three fine transformations which result in the illusion of phenomena also create the illusion of space; whereas the next six gross transformations which result in the illusion of self, also create the illusion of time. Moreover, the illusion caused by the fine transformations is regarded as intrinsic, as it occurs in the mind, and is attributed to "root non-Enlightenment"; whereas the illusion caused by the gross transformations is extrinsic, as it finds its expression in the physical world, and results in "branch non-Enlightenment".

The aim of Buddhism is to realize the illusion of phenomena and self, and of space and time, at both the physical and mental level, thus overcoming suffering caused by the cycle of birth and rebirth, and returning to the eternal bliss of original Enlightenment.

On a prosaic note, Buddhism says that the so-called outside world ordinary people see as objective reality is actually an illusion, and this illusion is caused by our gross perception. If you think this is non-sense, you would be surprised that the latest science is saying the same thing. The popular science writer, Prof. Paul Davies, explains that:

The fuzzy and nebulous world of the atom only sharpens

into concrete reality when an observation is made. In the absence of an observation, the atom is a ghost. It only materializes when you look for it. And you can decide what to look for. Look for its location and you get an atom at a place. Look for its motion and you get an atom with a speed.

This illusion occurs not only in the sub-atomic world of the new physics. Notable scientists like Hugh Everett and Bryce De Witt have come up with the quantum cosmology theory, proposing the simultaneous existence of all possible worlds. Prof. Davies explains:

But where are these worlds? In a sense, those that closely resemble our own are very nearby. Yet they are totally inaccessible: we cannot reach them however far we travel through our own space and time. The reader of this book is no more than an inch away from millions of his duplicates, but that inch is not measured through the space of our perceptions.

Yet these worlds have been reached by Buddhist masters who have transcended our ordinary level of consciousness. For example, the Swedish research psychologist, Dr. Rune E.A. Johansson, reports that according to the important Theravada scripture, Samyutta Nikaya, a human being of a former age, Abhibhu, through his meditation travelled to the Brahma-world and preached Buddhism to God Brahma himself. Lesser minds, of course, would think Samyutta Nikaya (despite being a highly regarded sacred text) talk nonsense, or at best describe a fairy tale. But if far-sighted scientists wish to explore the quantum cosmology theory, it is not difficult to find modern Buddhist masters who have made contact with such other worlds.

The depth of Buddhist philosophy is also astounding. While modern scientists attempt to explain the illusion of the so-called external object world at one or two levels, Buddhist masters have gone to nine levels deep (as illustrated in the three fine transformations and six gross transformations described above.)

Alastair Rae, after explaining that "physics, previously considered the most objective of all sciences, is reinventing the need for the hu-

man soul and putting it right at the centre of our understanding of the universe”, poses the argument why most physicists do not believe a consciousness-based measurement theory is a correct way to understand the physical universe. He says:

However, there are a number of important arguments which make a purely subjective view in which the physical world has no objective existence and our consciousness is the only reality appear unreasonable, at least. Perhaps the most important of these is that different conscious observers agree in their description of external reality.

Alastair Rae obviously refers only to human observers. Other sentient beings, like a cell in an elephant or a cosmic being described in chapter 8, would perceive “external reality” differently. Even at the human plane, different observers may see the same “external reality” differently, as is often the case among court witnesses. It is said that when Columbus first landed in America, the natives could see him and his men, but not his ship anchored a short distance from the shore. But the main point of Rae’s argument is concerned not with such subtle differences, but with large-scale perception, like why do we all see a mountain as a mountain. This is because of our *alaya* consciousness, and will be discussed in Chapter 14.

3.35 Sameness and Difference

Original Text in Chinese

復次，覺興不覺有二種相。云何爲二？一者同相，二者異相。

Literal Translation

Next, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment have two characteristics. What two? One, sameness. Two, difference.

Interpretation

Next, there are two characteristics regarding Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment. What are the two characteristics? One, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are the same. Two, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are different.

Commentary

Many people reading the above statement may find it non-sense or self-contradictory. How can Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment be the same? If they are the same, how can they be different?

This is an example of what Buddhist philosophers regard as two levels of truth or wisdom – empirical truth or ordinary wisdom, and transcendental truth or higher wisdom. From the perspective of empirical truth or ordinary wisdom, operating at the phenomenal level, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are obviously different. In Buddhist terms, this is viewing from the life-death attribute.

From the perspective of transcendental truth or higher wisdom, operating at the absolute level, or viewing from the birthless-deathless attribute, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are the same, because Cosmic Reality is impartial and undifferentiated. Any difference we see or experience in any ways is an illusion, caused by our spiritual ignorance and the gross limitation of our senses.

Once, when a skeptic asked the Buddha whether an Arahāt (an Enlightened being) existed after he had physically passed away, the Buddha chose to keep a noble silence. The skeptic mistakenly thought the Buddha did not know the answer, and as it is a precept in Buddhism not to tell lies, the Buddha had to remain silent. The actual reason was the Buddha did not want to confuse him, and the skeptic was not ready for higher wisdom. Had the Buddha given the appropriate answer – which is “He exists and he does not exist”, or its alternative, “Neither he exists nor he does not exist” – the skeptic would not understand.

3.36 All from the Tathagata

Original Text in Chinese

言同相者，譬如種種瓦器，皆同微塵性相。如是無漏無明
種種業幻，皆同真如性相。

Literal Translation

Concerning sameness, like various chinaware, they are from the same nature and attribute of clay. Like various kinds of manifestations and effects of the unconditioned and of ignorance, they are the same as the nature and attribute of the Tathagata.

Interpretation

Concerning the characteristic of sameness, an example can be found in the various types of chinaware, which are made from clay with the same nature and attribute. Similarly, the various kinds of manifestations and effects that a person experiences whether he is in a state of the unconditioned (or Enlightenment), or in a state of illusion (or non-Enlightenment), are all the same, because they all come from the Tathagata, or Supreme Reality, with the same nature and attribute.

Commentary

An apt parallel can be taken from science. All the countless different creatures and objects in the world are made of atoms. When atoms are broken down, all these different creatures and objects are made of the same types of neutrons, protons and electrons. Hence, at the sub-atomic level, everything – whether it is an ant or a whale, a volcano or a drop of water – is the same.

3.37 To be Actualized

Original Text in Chinese

是故修多羅中，依於此真如義故，說一切眾生本來常住入於涅槃。菩提之法，非可修相，非可作相，畢竟無得。

Literal Translation

Hence, in the sutra, according to the significance of the Tathagata, all sentient beings originally and eternally in nirvana. The way of the Bodhi is not to be learnt nor created, finally not obtainable.

Interpretation

Hence, it is mentioned in the sutra that according to the transcendental significance of the Tathagata or Supreme Reality, all sentient beings are originally and eternally in nirvana or Enlightenment. The way to Bodhi or higher wisdom is not to be learnt or created, but to be realized or actualized, because it is already there. If someone tries to develop or create Bodhi, as if developing or creating ordinary information, he will never obtain it.

Commentary

The sutra referred to above is the Great Prajnaparamita Sutra (Da Pin Ban Rou Jing), but some commentators suggested it might be the Manjusri Sutra (Wen Shu Shi Li Jing).

Buddhist philosophy stresses that every being has the Buddha nature, therefore has the potential to become a Buddha, or an Enlightened being. In a more glorious context, according to the teaching explained above, he becomes not just a Buddha, but the Buddha, i.e. merges organically into the Supreme Reality.

There was a passage in the Da Ban Ni Yuan Jing (Mahaparinirvana Sutra), translated by Fa Xian, the first important Chinese pilgrim to India in 399, saying that a species of people known as the icchantika ("yi

chann ti" in Chinese) did not have the Buddha nature, therefore could never become a Buddha. Icchantikas were those whose main interest in life was the gratification of desires.

Tao Sheng (ca.360-434) felt that this translation must be incorrect, or perhaps incomplete, and boldly expounded that even icchantikas could achieve Buddhahood.

I believe this problem is linguistic, not philosophical or ontological. When a person continuously craves for gratification, he is an icchantika. As long as he chooses to be so, he cannot attain nirvana. But if this same person ceases his craving, he also ceases to be an icchantika, and thus is capable of becoming a Buddha.

3.38 Form as Illusion

Original Text in Chinese

亦無色相可見。而有見色相者，惟是隨染業幻所作，非是智色不空之性，以智相無可見故。

Literal Translation

No characteristic of form. If form is observed, because of illusory effect, not because of non-void of wisdom. According to wisdom, it cannot be seen.

Interpretation

There is no characteristic of form in the Tathagata or Supreme Reality. If form is observed by unenlightened beings in the phenomenal world, it is the effect of illusion, and not because of any non-void characteristic resulting from higher wisdom. According to the characteristics found in higher wisdom, form or appearance cannot be seen.

Commentary

This is a development of the concept mentioned in the previous passage. From the transcendental view-point of the Supreme Reality, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are the same, because reality is only one. The countless different forms or appearances we see in the phenomenal aspect of reality are the effect of illusion.

We can draw an analogy from science. Whether we look at a fruit-fly, the favourite of biological scientists in their research experiments, with our naked eyes or under an electronic microscope, it is the same fruit-fly. But the picture we see is vastly different. The difference is further complicated if we are under the influence of liquor, fatigue or a strong emotion. In our ordinary life, the fruit-fly with its wings and legs is real, but if we are investigating its molecular structure, we would not see any wings and legs, but various patterns of atoms.

3.39 Difference Due to Defilement

Original Text in Chinese

言異相者，如種種瓦器，各各不同。如是無漏、無明、隨染幻差別、性染幻差別故。

Literal Translation

Concerning the characteristic of difference, like various chinaware, each is different. Similarly, it is with the unconditioned and ignorance. The nature of difference is related to levels of defilement.

Interpretation

Concerning the characteristic of difference, various pieces of chinaware are each different from another, though all are made from clay. Similarly, though both originate from the same reality, the unconditioned is different from ignorance, or Enlightenment is different from non-Enlightenment. The nature of their difference is related to the different levels of defilement.

Commentary

From the phenomenal viewpoint, there are two different states, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment. Enlightenment refers to spiritual realization of Cosmic Reality. Non-Enlightenment is spiritual ignorance.

Enlightenment may be original or actualized. Original Enlightenment refers to the Enlightenment that is already present right at the beginningless beginning. It is unconditioned, i.e. it is not conditioned by any prior factors. But we have lost it or are unaware of it. Hence we have to cultivate ourselves to return to our original Enlightenment, which is described in various terms like "return to the Kingdom of God", "return to Allah", "union with Brahman", or "unity with the Cosmos". This is actualized Enlightenment.

Non-Enlightenment can be considered as "root" or "branch". "Root non-Enlightenment" is the result of three fine transformations – of ignorance, perception and realm of phenomena in the mind. From this intrinsic root, non-Enlightenment "branches" out extrinsically, caused by six gross transformations – of intellect, continuity, attachment, verbalization, karma and suffering.

These different characteristics are the result of experiencing reality at the phenomenal level, when we are in a state of non-Enlightenment. At the transcendental level, experienced by us in cosmic realization, there is no difference; Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are the same.

Through the process of three fine transformations which involve the alaya consciousness, and six gross transformations which involve the intellect consciousness, our minds become defiled, and consequently we fail to see Cosmic Reality as it really is. Yet, what we actually see with our naked eyes, even with the help of elaborate scientific instruments, is only a small part of the innumerable worlds of illusion. We shall learn about these interesting worlds in the next chapter.

Chapter 12

Reincarnation and Karma

Karma is not a system of reward and tribulation, nor a code of value judgement. In simple terms, it means the operation of cause and effect.

3.40 The Operation of Karma

Original Text in Chinese

復次，生滅因緣者，所謂眾生依心、意、意識轉故。

Literal Translation

The karma of life and death of sentient being is due to their heart, will and knowledge.

Interpretation

The karma generating the cycle of life and death of sentient beings is a function of their mind, intellect consciousness and alaya consciousness.

Commentary

Karma is the law of cause and effect. Whatever a person has thought and done in the past, accumulates to shape his present. All the good and bad effects of his present thoughts and deeds, operate to form his future. A person's fate, therefore, is his own thinking and doing. If he thinks good thoughts and leads a good life, he shall have a good future, not because some divine or outside power rewards him, but because he earns it through his own effort. On the other hand, if he has been evil, his future shall be bad, again not because of divine or outside punishment, but because of his own making. The doctrine of karma is not something thought out by some moralizing teachers to scare would-be wrong doers; it is a timeless universal truth.

Why, then, there are cases of evil-doers who enjoy good lives, while good people suffer? This is because the present evil-doers have accumulated merits in their previous lives, and are now enjoying their own rewards; but if they are foolish enough to continue with their present wickedness, they are creating harmful karmic effect for themselves. The good people suffer because they are bearing the fruit of their wrongdoings done in their previous lives. Their present goodness, however,

can compensate for their previous evil, and the surplus if any shall be added to their future credit.

When a person dies, unless he has attained nirvana, his karmic force will be transferred to his next life, thus generating the endless cycle of birth and death. This endless cycle, known as samsara, whereby a being becomes a slave to his karma, is the principal cause of his suffering. The chief aim of Buddhism is to break this cycle, so that he attains nirvana or Buddhahood, which can, and should, be attained while he is still living his physical life. This book will show some practical ways to do so.

But what starts karma in the first place? Asvaghosha explains that it is caused by mind, intellectual consciousness and alaya consciousness, and will be explained subsequently.

The doctrine of karma entails the belief in reincarnation. Modern Westerners are probably the only people in the history of mankind who doubt that people reincarnate. All known great peoples, including the ancient and medieval Westerners, have recorded in their religious and other great books their undeniable belief that people are born again and again. Nevertheless, the number of modern Westerners being converted to the belief in reincarnation has been growing. In a 1979 Sunday Telegraph poll, it was found that 28 percent of all British adults believed in reincarnation. In 1980, the conservative London Times reported that 29 percent of the 1,314 people responding to a questionnaire had the same belief. The famous Gallup poll in America disclosed in 1982 that very nearly every one American in four were reincarnationist.

The belief of the Chinese, Indians, Egyptians, Tibetans, and other Eastern peoples on reincarnation is well known; because of space constraint only examples from Christians, Muslims and Western peoples are given below.

Numerous places in the Bible clearly indicate that Jesus is the reincarnation of Elijah. It is significant that the Old Testament concludes with the following words:

But before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, I will send you the prophet Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again; otherwise I would have to come and destroy your country. – Malachi 4:5.

And when Jesus went to Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples:

Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am? And they said. Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. – Matthew 16:13:4.

St Gregory (257-332) said, "It is absolutely necessary that the soul should be healed and purified, and if this does not take place during its life on earth, it must be accomplished in future lives."

The Koran mentions that "God generates beings, and sends them back over and over again, till they return to Him."

Sharf Uddin Manari, a Sufi teacher, said, "O Brother, know for certain that this work has been before thee and me in bygone ages, and that each man has already reached a certain stage. No one has begun this work for the first time."

Plato said, "Know that if you become worse you will go to the worse souls, or if better to the better, and in every succession of life and death, you will do and suffer what like may fitly suffer at the hands of like".

Virgil said, "All these souls, after they have passed away a thousand years, are summoned by the divine ones in great array, to the Lethean river ... In this way they become forgetful of the former earthlife, and re-visit the vaulted realms of the world, willing to return again into living bodies."

Great scientists too, ancient as well as modern, believe in reincarnation. Paracelsus said, "Some children are born from heaven, and others are born from hell, because each human being has his inherent tendencies, and these tendencies belong to his spirit, and indicate the state in which he existed before he was born."

Thomas Edison said, "The unit of life is composed of swarms of billions of highly charged entities which live in the cells. I believe that when a man dies, this swarm deserts the body and goes out into space, but keeps on and enters another cycle of life and is immortal."

Hence, not only humans but virtually all forms of life from the tiniest cells to the gigantic stars participate in reincarnation.

Joe Fisher says, "As the catalyst of transformation on which the evolution of all matter and spirit depends, reincarnation is ceaselessly within us and around us. From the tiniest micro to the macro most

huge, cycles that hinge on rebirth and regeneration are proceeding at every conceivable level of life."

3.41 Karma as Function of Mind

Original Text in Chinese

此義云何？以依阿黎耶識，說有無明。

Literal Translation

What is the meaning? Because of alaya consciousness there is ignorance.

Interpretation

What is the meaning of saying that karma is a function of mind, intellectual consciousness and alaya consciousness? Because of alaya consciousness (often translated as "storehouse consciousness"), there is ignorance, which in turn operates intellect consciousness and awareness (or mind), thus generating karma.

Commentary

Alaya consciousness (alaya vijnana) is the universal mental storehouse where the seeds for all manifestations are found. It is the universal mind. Jung's concept of universal consciousness is similar, except the Buddhist concept is grander and wider for it encompasses not only the minds of all humans and creatures on earth, but also the minds of all sentient beings of all spheres, including numerous astral planes. Each individual, however, has his own alaya consciousness, which is an expression of the universal alaya consciousness.

Intellect consciousness (mano vijnana) refers to the sense centre where impressions from the outer world received through the various sense organs are interpreted. It is the conscious mind.

In earlier passages, it was mentioned that ignorance is originally found in the Supreme Reality, and here it is mentioned that ignorance is due to alaya consciousness. Does ignorance come before or after alaya consciousness? Throughout the ages, Buddhist masters have debated over this question.

A popular view is that the Supreme Reality being timeless and spaceless is impartial and neutral; it can be Enlightenment or ignorance, or more appropriately, neither Enlightenment nor ignorance. But it holds the seed of ignorance – just as it holds the seed of Enlightenment. Alaya consciousness is another name for the Supreme Reality with the seed of ignorance. Because of this alaya consciousness, ignorance (not just its seed) occurs, generating various transformations into the phenomenal world.

Another view, however, contends that original ignorance was already present. If there were no ignorance, the concept (and reality) of Enlightenment would be irrelevant. Therefore, because of ignorance, alaya consciousness arises. Alaya consciousness acts like a mirror, reflecting and manifesting ignorance, which in turn generates transformation into the phenomenal world. Because of the phenomenal world, karma operates.

Because of inadequate understanding, it is easy to misunderstand or misinterpret the meaning and significance of karma. For example, Paul Edwards in his article "Karma Tribulations" raises the following arguments against karma:

1. "The Law of Karma has no predictive value whatsoever". For example, when a plane with a thoroughly decent crew and passengers takes off, a believer of karma cannot predict confidently whether the plane will crash.
2. The Law of Karma "is compatible with anything and hence totally empty", because it is "post hoc". For example, "if a kind and decent person comes to a good end, this can readily be explained as the result of his good karma. But if he comes to a bad end, would this disconfirm the karmic principle? Not at all, because it can be argued that he committed evil deeds in his previous life. In other words, no matter what the result is, one can contrive to apply the karmic principle because its explanation is after (not before) the event."
3. The "administration" of karmic ordinances poses an "utterly devastating question". For example, how are good and bad deeds registered? How and where is it decided what will happen to a

person in his next incarnation? How are such decisions translated into reality?

4. "Karma is completely vacuous as a principle of moral guidance." For example, if we meet a child in trouble, whether we help him or not, "we will be doing the right thing." If we help him, "this means that his earlier deed did not require more severe punishment"; if we do not help him, "this shows that his sin was so great as to deserve the total amount of his suffering".

Before examining the answers to all the arguments, it is helpful to be aware of the following two points:

Karma is not a system of reward and tribulation, nor a code of value judgement. In simple terms, it means the operation of cause and effect. For example, if a plane crashes and decent passengers are in it, the meaning of karma in this case is not whether decent passengers should be involved, but that the passengers have boarded that plane.

The significance of karma, like other Mahayana concepts, will be better appreciated if we are aware of two levels of knowledge. At an ordinary level, a plane crash is certainly morbid, but at a higher level, though it may appear ridiculous to non-believers, the plane crash can be a blessing to the decent passengers, such as instantly transporting them to another happier realm of existence!

It should be remembered that karma is not meant by its advocates as a predictive model. It is not the fashion of Buddhists, for example, to say that if decent people board a plane, according to the law of karma the plane is not likely to crash. Neither is it a fashion to insist that if it ever crashes, the decent people in it must have had sinful lives in the past. There could be other causes, such as engine failure or pilot's error, besides some madmen planting a time-bomb on it. For a true Buddhist who believes in karma and reincarnation, he has no fear of being killed in a plane crash, though he would probably not want to experience it.

The law of karma is post hoc only if we choose to view it after the event. If we view it before the event, the karmic principle is often predictive, though that is not what karma is normally used for. For example, if a fine human being has the habit of dashing across busy streets carelessly, he has a good chance of being run over by a driver, drunken or otherwise. If it happens, probably irrespective of whether

he sinned in his previous life, the cause is carelessness. If you know that your friend is cheerful, exercises regularly, sleeps and eats well, you can reasonably predict that according to the law of karma, he is not likely to land in a hospital. But if you also know that he had a heart attack the previous month, then, also according to the law of karma, you can expect it when he is hospitalized. In the same way, if you know he had been sinful in his previous lives, you would not be surprised that he comes to a bad end even if his present life is decent.

When we have a deeper understanding of how karma works, we will realize that "administration" of karma is never an "utterly devastating question". As explained by Asvaghosha in the above passage, karma is a function of the alaya consciousness and the intellect consciousness. Its operation does not need the service of special agents to decide what will happen to a person in his next incarnation, nor an office to register good and bad deeds. There are no such decisions as those made by any central karmic authority; but each person makes his own decisions which are translated into "reality" as thoughts, words and deeds, which then become causes and effects in the autonomous karmic operation.

Because of the alaya consciousness, cosmic reality which is actually undifferentiated, is perceived by ordinary people as the differentiated phenomenal world. This results in attachment to self and to phenomena, leading to the arising of discriminating thoughts and desires. For example, the collection of dharmas (sub-atomic particles and forces) that may be invisible to other sentient beings with their different set of alaya consciousness, appears to humans as earthquakes. (Please see elsewhere in this book for an explanation of how this happens.) Because of a complex matrix of karmic causes and effects, thousands of people have moved here and are killed, but some others may even benefit from this disaster. According to Buddhist philosophy, the earthquake is not "a special intervention on the part of the Deity", nor is it true that "the believer in Karma, by contrast, must be prepared to claim that the earthquake was brought about in order to punish or reward the various people who suffered or benefited from the earthquake."

Similarly, a complex matrix of karmic causes and effects brings about a terrorist burning of a town, including mistakenly burning some houses of their supporters. It should be noted that karma is concerned with cause and effect, and not with punishment and reward. Moreover, value

judgement, which is usually subjective, operates only at the ordinary level; at the higher level, there is no such concepts as right and wrong!

Burning someone's house is "right" to the terrorists, "wrong" to the house owner, and neutral to some beings operating at a different cosmic dimension. If a person's house is burnt, it is not because the Deity punishes him, but because of the karmic effect of his thoughts, words and deeds, such as a distant thought in the past that he would own a house, his outspoken speech which might have attracted the attention of the arsonists, and his building a house in that town.

Hence, passing a value judgement subjectively as whether karma is vacuous as a principle of moral guidance, can be interpreted at different levels. At a superficial level where we lack in-depth understanding, the judgement may seem valid. At an intermediate level where we understand karma better, unless we have a perverse set of moral values, there is no question of whether helping or not helping a suffering child is the right thing to do. The onus of the karmic principle is on us, not on the child: it is not a question of whether the child sinned much or little in his past life, but whether we would like to have good or bad effect of helping or not helping the child.

Even if a horrendous sinner in his present life is in trouble, we have no justification for not helping him. Hence, statements like "It follows from their (karma believers') principle that Abraham Lincoln, Jean Jaurès, the two Kennedy brothers, and Martin Luther King got no more than they deserved when they were assassinated" and "the seven astronauts who perished in the Challenger space shuttle in 1986 were entirely responsible for their deaths, and the grief felt by millions of people all over the world was quite out of place" are unsound. While supporters of these great men and of the space programmes would think their death unfair, and their opponents think it warranted, it is safe to say that most people, irrespective of whether they believe or not believe in karma, provided they are still capable of expressing their emotion, would be sad at the tragedies. The significance of the karmic principle here is not whether they deserve or not deserve their tragic deaths, but that there are inevitable causes of and effects from these events.

Yet, according to Buddhist philosophy at the highest level, it is not important whether the karmic effect is right or wrong, deserving or unwarranted. This is because karma, like the phenomenal world itself from

which it derives its origin and operation, is an illusion. Understandably, to those who may not appreciate the higher wisdom of Buddhism, this concept may not make any sense. Moreover some of its implications may appear outlandish. For example, it may imply that Abraham Lincoln's assassination was not only an inevitable effect of all the causes he had generated in his noble effort to abolish slavery, it also actualized the sublimation of his life's mission, bringing inspiration as well as actual benefits to posterity – an event that Lincoln himself, in retrospective, would like to happen!

The concept of karma is often and rewardingly used by people of different religious and cultural backgrounds to provide moral guidance. Nevertheless in Buddhism, it is stressed that whatever reward or punishment that may result from the operation of karma is the recipient's own doing, and definitely not an act of intervention from any divine sources.

Let us suppose that a person has cultivated merits all his lives, and has never done an evil deed. Can we predict that he will have a good life? Certainly. Will any evil happen to him? Never. Can he be hit by a stray bullet, or run over by a car accidentally? Accidents do not happen; there is a cause and an effect for everything. Why are we so sure? Because the law of karma is inexorable.

As it is impracticable to demonstrate how a complex matrix of myriad causes produce the inevitable effects, let us simplify the explanation to the following examples. If you plant mangoes, you will inexorably get mangoes; if apples come out from your mango trees instead, there must be other causes. If a quantum physicist sets up his apparatus to measure the wave properties of an electron, the electron will always manifest as a wave; if it manifests as a particle, there must be other causes. If you sow good karmic causes, you will inexorably harvest good karmic effects; if bad effects occur, there must be other causes.

Interestingly, Paul Edwards concludes his article with an illuminating statement: "Calling natural regularities instances of Karma is about as enlightening as describing them as manifestations of the Absolute Mind or as instances of the dialectical interplay of Being and Non-Being." Probably he means that describing karma as "lawfulness" or "regularities" is "saying nothing at all", suggesting that terms like Absolute Mind, Being and Non-Being are hollow without meaning. But if

we understand the meaning of these terms, then his statement illustrates a profound cosmic truth.

In Buddhist philosophy, the Absolute Mind is the ultimate truth or the Supreme Reality, which is impartial and undifferentiated. Suppose you look at the universe through an extremely powerful electronic microscope. You will not see the usual objects like houses, trees and people; but you will see their elementary particles dissolving into energy fields, and if you have intuitive wisdom, you can sense this cosmic void teeming with consciousness. This will give you a useful, though imperfect, idea of the Absolute Mind.

Because of ignorance, ordinary people perceive the Absolute Mind as differentiated into the phenomenal world, with the result that karma arises. When a being is Enlightened and experiences Cosmic Reality intrinsically as undifferentiated, karma ceases. But for ordinary people who experience reality as the illusory phenomenal world, karma describes the lawfulness and regularities of the manifestations of the Absolute Mind.

The terms "Being" and "Non-Being" are not commonly used in Buddhism, but they approximate to the Buddhist concepts of "Buddha" and "Tathagata". To most Western readers, the term Buddha usually refers to Siddhartha Guatama Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, who is regarded in all schools of Buddhism as the physical body of the Buddha. The Buddha, especially in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, can also appear in his cosmic form, in his transformational or reward body. At the cosmic scale, the transformational body of the Buddha represents the phenomenal world. When a person is Enlightened, he sees through the illusion of the phenomenal world and experiences Cosmic Reality as the ultimate truth. This undifferentiated Cosmic Reality is called the Spiritual Body of the Buddha, or the Tathagata, which is the Sanskrit term literally meaning "Suchness" or "Thusness".

The Buddha or the Being, and the Tathagata or the Non-Being are therefore two aspects of the same reality. Because of spiritual ignorance, ordinary people see the Tathagata as the Buddha – in other words, see transcendental reality as the phenomenal world. The law of karma operates in the phenomenal world. Thus, karma can be described as instances of the dialectical interplay of Being and Non-Being.

Chapter 13

Thousand Worlds from a Single Thought

Mahayana philosophy on cosmology, metaphysics and related subjects is awe-inspiring, with information preceding modern science by centuries! It describes, for example, living universes with scales ranging from a speck of dust to infinite stars.

3.42 Five Types of Consciousness

Original Text in Chinese

不覺而起能見、能現、能取境界。起念相續，故說爲意。此意復有五種名。云何爲五？一者，名爲業識，謂無明力不覺心動故。二者，名爲轉識，依於動心能見相故。三者，名爲現識，所謂能現一切境界，猶如明鏡現於色像。現識亦爾，隨其五塵對至即現，無有前後。以一切時任運而起常在前故。四者，名爲智識，謂分別染淨法故。五者，名爲相續識，以念相應不斷故。住持過去無量世等善惡之業令不失故，復能成熟現在未來苦樂等報無差違故，能令現在已經之事，忽然而念。未來之事，不覺妄慮。

Literal Translation

Non-Enlightenment creates perception, appearance and awareness of phenomenal world. Continuity of thoughts, hence consciousness. This consciousness has five names. What five? One, karma consciousness, due to motion of the force of ignorance of non-Enlightenment. Two, transformation consciousness, due to the ability of the heart motion to see characteristics.

Three, perception consciousness, that is ability to perceive every thing in phenomenal world, like clear mirror reflecting all forms and appearances, mutually operational, according to the five defilements, neither earlier nor later, all the time according to their arising and appearing. Four, knowledge consciousness, for differentiating various phenomena. Five, memory consciousness, for remembering continual characteristics, holding countless good and evil effects of karma of the past without loss, activating and maturing for future joy and sorrow accordingly without error, able to recall past and present events, and fantasize on future happenings.

Interpretation

Non-enlightenment creates perception, appearance and consciousness of the phenomenal world. As thoughts continue to arise, it generates consciousness. There are five names to describe this consciousness. What are the five names?

One, there is the karma consciousness, which is due to the force of ignorance as a result of non-Enlightenment. Two, there is the transformation consciousness, which is due to the ability of the activated mind to experience the characteristics of the realm of phenomena.

Three, there is the perception consciousness, which is the ability to perceive every thing in the phenomenal world. This perception consciousness is like a clear mirror, reflecting all forms and appearances. The perception consciousness, which is internal, operates mutually with the five external sense organs, which are organs of defilement, because they supply illusory information to the mind. The perception consciousness, however, perceives the illusory information spontaneously and all the time according to the gross inputs of these sense organs as soon as the phenomena arise and appear.

Four, there is the knowledge awareness, which is used for differentiating various phenomena. Five, there is the memory awareness, for remembering characteristics of phenomena that are continually arising, for holding countless good and evil effects of karma of the past without forgetting any, and for activating and maturing these karmic effects that will bring future joy and sorrow accordingly without error. With the memory consciousness, one is able to recall past and present events, and fantasize on future happenings.

Commentary

Psychologists and psychiatrists certainly can benefit much from studying Buddhist philosophy, even if they leave out all religious or spiritual material. They can find not only startling information but also amazingly different ways of looking at man's psyche.

It is well known that Buddhist monks and other religious people are generally free from psychiatric illness, which is approaching epidemic proportions in Western societies. Of course one needs not be a monk to enjoy psychiatric health. Also no one seriously suggests that Western

psychiatrists should discard their treatment techniques for Buddhist methods. But Buddhist philosophy, or psychology, can provide Western psychologists with many unexpected ways to understand the mind, and provide Western psychiatrists with alternative methods besides drugs, psychosurgery and psychotherapy to overcome mental sickness.

Even the short passage above can supply some interesting examples, if modern psychologists and psychiatrists care to study it a little deeper. For example, the above information reminds us that there are other ways to approach the mind besides the id, ego and superego, or the conscious, subconscious and unconscious levels. Or, choosing an outlandish example, it may force us to ask ourselves how valid we are to label a person schizophrenic when all our sensual inputs are actually illusory.

3.43 Three Realms of Existence

Original Text in Chinese

是故三界虛偽，唯心所作。離心則無六塵境界。

Literal Translation

Hence the three realms of existence are void and unreal, created by the heart. Apart from the heart, there is no world of six defilements.

Interpretation

Hence, the three realms of existence are void and unreal, because they are created by the mind. Apart from the mind, the phenomenal world we experience through the defilement of our six senses does not exist.

Commentary

Many Western scholars have the mis-conception that Buddhism pays little attention to cosmology and metaphysics. It is often cited in Western literature on Buddhism that when the Buddha was asked about the after-life, or about the origin and structure of the cosmos, the Buddha maintained a noble silence.

This mis-conception is mainly the result of reading Buddhist literature from Theravada sources, with emphasis on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-Fold Path, which constitute an excellent vehicle for moral cultivation and the attainment of nirvana. According to Mahayana thinking, the Theravada teaching is only a preparation for higher wisdom and the attainment of Buddhahood. Hence, when those not ready for esoteric knowledge asked the Buddha, he found it best to remain silent. But the Buddha did elaborate extensively on cosmological and metaphysical matters, and such teachings are recorded in works like the Lotus Sutra and the Garland Sutra.

Mahayana philosophy on cosmology, metaphysics and related subjects is awe-inspiring, with information preceding modern science by

centuries! It describes, for example, living universes with scales ranging from a speck of dust to infinite stars. The galaxy where our earth is located among millions of other worlds, billions of miles apart, is called Sahadhatu ("Suopo Shijie" in Chinese). This Sahadhatu is one of the twenty galaxies in the milky way called Maniketu ("Huazang Shijie"), and there are countless other milky ways.

Those scientists who believe that life exists only on our earth must be astonished to discover that according to Buddhist philosophy, life exists everywhere. But even if these scientists succeed in landing on some worlds teeming with life, because their eyes, despite being the most perceptive of the sense organs, can see only a miserably minute portion of electromagnetic waves extending between 0.4 and 0.8 micron when the known spectrum ranges from 0.00000047 micron to over 30 km, it is unlikely the scientists can see any inhabitants!

Many eminent scientists, however, believe that life is present in other worlds besides our own. Andrew Scott says that "the vast number of alternative environments out there in which life could have originated makes the possibilities of the primeval earth shrink into puny insignificance." Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of DNA, believes that the origin of life on our earth may have been infected on purpose by some alien civilizations. Sir Fred Hoyle, well known for his knowledge on synthesized elements within stars, suggests that interstellar space is teeming with life, in particles of "dust" clouds, or "molecular" clouds of interstellar space, or trapped within meteorites and comets, whose influence on our earth ranges from pandemic diseases to dramatic evolution!

The Buddhist knowledge about life in the universe is staggering. In each of the millions of worlds of the countless galaxies there are three realms of existence, namely the realm of desires (Kamaloka in Sanskrit, or Yu jie in Chinese), the realm of form (Rupaloka or Se jie), and the realm of non-form (Arupaloka or Wu se jie). In the realm of desires, which is the lowest of the three realms, there are eleven planes of existence. We, humans, are somewhere in the middle of this realm, located at the human plane (Manussaloka, or Ren tao), with the planes of animals, asuras or titans, spirits and ghosts below, and various planes of dewas or heavenly beings above. Even in this realm of existence on our own earth, the inhabitants at nine out of the eleven planes are invisible to scientists.

In the middle realm, the realm of form, there are sixteen planes of existence, which are the abodes of various hierarchy of gods. The gods still have bodily forms, though they are of very fine substance, far too fine for human eyes to see. Because of their good karma, these gods enjoy blissful existence in various heavens. But their existence, though extremely long by human standard, is not eternal, and when their good karmic effect is spent they have to undergo reincarnation. If they have cultivated spiritually during their godly existence, they may progress to the next and highest realm, the realm of non-form.

There are four planes in the realm of non-form, namely the planes of infinite space, of infinite consciousness, of total nothingness, and of neither mindfulness nor non-mindfulness. These are the planes of Bodhisattvas and Arahats, where as the names of the realm suggest, they have no form but only consciousness. Hence, influential Western neurophysiologists, psychologists and philosophers like Gilbert Ryle, D. Drake and Bertrand Russel who are worried where a person's consciousness is housed, if he still has one, when his brain has died, may take comfort that not only consciousness needs not necessarily be housed in a brain, it may not take any form. Nevertheless, should a Bodhisattva desires so, he may manifest himself in any form in any plane, like Bodhisattva Di Zang Wang manifesting himself as a master in hells to help lost souls.

It is also amazing how the Buddhists could have such impressive astronomical knowledge centuries ago. They figuratively described the arrangement of these countless worlds as petals of lotus flowers, which closely corresponds to the shapes of galaxies as modern science knows them. Interestingly enough, Buddhist literature refers to these galaxies as specks of dust in indefinite space.

At the extreme end of the other scale, Buddhist masters had astonishing knowledge of sub-atomic worlds. The smallest possible bit of a substance is known as anu (ji wei in Chinese). If a unit of anu is broken up, it ceases to be that substance; it becomes even smaller units with a different nature. These smaller units are called paramanu (se ju zhi wei). When these paramanu are further broken up, they become rupa kalapa (wei chen). Before modern science rediscovered these units as elements, atoms and sub-atomic particles, many people thought the Buddhist masters were talking non-sense. Even the size of the atom estimated by Buddhist masters to be 10 to the minus tenth power cm,

is close to its modern estimation by scientists.

The ancient masters of course did not have the bubble chamber to study sub-atomic particles, but when they used their "wisdom-eye", which is a manifestation of the miraculous effect (please see Passage 3.29) as a result of their spiritual development, to look at the rupa kalapa, they found that the rupa kalapa are constantly changing into kriya (qi in Chinese), which in modern scientific terms means sub-atomic particles changing into energy! The really astounding is yet to come. While modern scientists can only conclude that different charges of energy are whirling round the nucleus in an atom, ancient masters saw in their wisdom-eye that each sub-atomic particle is a comprehensive cosmos teeming with life!

However, perhaps the most astounding point is that according to Buddhist thought, all the countless worlds with their countless inhabitants in the countless galaxies, or in the sub-atomic particles are the result of the mind. Heavens or hells or any plane of existence exist as a function of the mind. If an Enlightened person deny their existence mentally, all these galaxies and sub-atomic cosmos which are "real" to unenlightened people in their illusion, disappear to become an undifferentiated spread of universal consciousness! This is a crucial Buddhist doctrine, seriously expounded throughout the ages to guide aspirants in their search for cosmic realization. The following frequently quoted, but seldom understood, lines from the famous Heart Sutra express this doctrine succinctly:

Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form is emptiness and emptiness is form; likewise, sensations, thoughts, impulses and consciousness are empty.

Similarly, Hsuan Hua, a master of the Chan School of Buddhism who is currently residing in America, teaches that "the ten dharma-realms are not beyond a single thought." Some masters simplify the more than thirty spheres of existence of the desire, form and non-form realms into ten dharmarealms. These ten realms are divided into six lower realms which are subjected to the law of karma (No. 1-6 below), and four higher realms which are not subjected to karma (No. 7-10):

1. Realm of buddhas, or those who have achieved perfect Enlightenment.
2. Realm of bodhisattvas, or those who work for universal Enlightenment.
3. Realm of pratyekabuddhas, or those who cultivate for personal Enlightenment.
4. Realm of sravadas or those who attain Enlightenment through hearing and following the Buddha's teaching.
5. Realm of dewas or gods.
6. Realm of humans.
7. Realm of animals.
8. Realm of asuras or titans.
9. Realm of pretas or hungry ghosts.
10. Realm of inhabitants in hells.

Some readers may wonder why is there a realm of buddhas. Isn't it mentioned earlier that when one becomes a buddha, he transcends the phenomenal world, which means that the perfectly Enlightened being has broken down all veils of illusion to merge with the Eternal Buddha, or Supreme Reality? If this is so, then there will be no realms at all. This, in fact, is the essence of the statement that all the ten dharmarealms result from the mind. Isn't this realm of buddhas a contradiction of this concept?

No, it is not a contradiction, while the views expressed in the above paragraph are also in perfect agreement with Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. "The realm of buddhas" can be interpreted in two ways. One, it refers to the realm where all buddhas are the Eternal Buddha; it is the Supreme Reality in the absolute aspect. So, when a being experiences the highest spiritual realization, when he attains Buddhahood, he enters – or, more appropriately, becomes – the realm of buddhas.

Two, the Eternal Buddha may manifest in his "transformational body" or "reward body" as buddhas. These buddhas are visible to spiritually advanced beings like bodhisattvas, but are not normally visible to ordinary people, unless the buddhas wish to appear to them. This realm where the buddhas appear, is the realm of buddhas.

These two interpretations are actually of the same reality; the apparent difference is because of different perspectives, the first interpretation is viewed from the transcendental aspect, and the second from the phenomenal.

According to the philosophy of the Tiantai School, one of the most important schools of Chinese Buddhism and which is sometimes known in English as the Lotus School because its development was mainly based on the Lotus Sutra (Saddharma-pundarika, or Miao Fa Lian Hua Jing), the ten dharmarealms are mutually immanent and mutually inclusive. In each of the ten realms are also found the other nine realms. For example, all the realms ranging from that of hell inhabitants to that of buddhas are also found in the human realm. Those humans who are always fighting are considered to be living in the realm of asuras, whereas those who are helpful and compassionate in the realm of bodhisattvas. Thus this inter-penetration results in a hundred realms.

In each of the hundred realms, there are ten major kinds of semblance, of which one is most prominent. These ten kinds of semblance are characteristics, nature, structure, power, activity, cause, effect, fruit, reward, and cycle. For example, asuras in the human realm may be different in their characteristics, nature, etc. Similarly, bodhisattvas in other realms may be differentiated by these ten kinds of semblance. Hence the hundred realms can be manifested into a thousand realms.

Tiantai philosophy expounds that reality can be expressed in three ways: as void, as real, or as the mean. This doctrine encompasses the different views of various schools regarding dharma, or the sub-atomic particles and forces that give rise to all phenomena, as unreal, real but momentary, and existing only in the mind but not in physical substance. This doctrine of three-fold truth, therefore, manifests the one thousand realms into three thousands.

In the Chinese language, "three thousand" does not merely indicate a discrete number: generally, it means countless. Therefore, the term three thousand dharmarealms refers to countless millions of worlds in

the infinite universe.

In refuting the existence of the soul, the famous eighteenth century French satirist Voltaire said, "God could have given men and animals a plain, immaterial soul, which he preserves independently of their bodies. For him, that is just as possible as creating a million worlds more than he did or giving me two noses and four hands, wings and claws, but if we are to believe that he has, in fact, done all these possible things, it seems to me that we would have to see them."

It is a pity that Voltaire did not have access to Buddhist literature on the soul and cosmology, or else he would have realized that although God or the Supreme Reality did not give him two noses and four hands, because God did not want to make him a freak, He did give men and animals a soul, and create a million more worlds. If Voltaire had a chance to read Asvaghosha's great work and practise the spiritual cultivation suggested, the satirist might have a chance to see some of these worlds and souls.

Yet, all these countless worlds or dharmarealms are an illusion! They exist only in the phenomenal realms; they are not found in transcendental reality of perfect Enlightenment.

The Tiantai School has a poetic expression for this concept, but the poetry unfortunately is lost when translated literally: One Thought Three Thousands, or "yi nian san qian" in Chinese. It means that all the countless worlds in the infinite universe are generated from a single thought!

This does not mean the worlds or realms are imaginary. These realms are real as long as sentient beings operate in the phenomenal dimensions. For example, if you are in a land of constant famine, no amount of imagination can remove the suffering of hungry ghosts in human forms. (Surprisingly, hungry ghosts are described in Buddhist literature as having small heads and big round stomachs, which fits the appearance of famine-stricken victims.) Yet, from the Buddhist perspective, this is an illusion, a cosmic trick! When you are in a state of Enlightenment, there will be no famine and no hungry ghosts. Why this is so, will be explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 14

Illusion of Phenomenal World

How can a mountain with all its trees and creatures, and a table which everyone can see and feel, be illusory?

3.44 Function of the Mind

Original Text in Chinese

此義云何？以一切法皆從心起，妄念而生。一切分別，即分別自心。心不見心，無相可得。

Literal Translation

What does this mean? All phenomena arise from the heart, created by illusion, all differentiated, differentiated from the heart. If the heart does not see the heart, there will be no characteristics.

Interpretation

What does it mean by saying that all the phenomenal worlds of the three realms are a function of the mind? All phenomena arise from the mind; these phenomena are created by illusion. All things are actually an integrated organic unity, but we see them as separate and differentiated because the mind interprets them so. If the mind does not see itself as individual minds, then it actualizes its own universality and all the illusory characteristics of separate things will disappear.

Commentary

Understandably, it is not easy for many people to accept this doctrine that all phenomena are illusory. When they look at a mountain, for example, they see a mountain which to all their purposes is certainly real. When they touch a table, they find it is solid and immutable. How can a mountain with all its trees and creatures, and a table which everyone can see and feel, be illusory?

Of course to us in our ordinary consciousness, and to Buddhist masters in their daily lives, a mountain, a table and all other objects are real. Buddhist philosophy never suggests that we imagine things that are not there. But it teaches that what we consider as absolute is actually an illusion, caused by our ignorance and the very inadequate ability of our

senses which distort reality. A proverbial example is the four blind man, feeling an elephant's ear, leg, body and tail, honestly thought that the elephant was shaped like a fan, tree, wall or rope respectively.

We are familiar with the sight of our sky with our sun, moon and common stars. Had we different types of eyes, we might see not one but three unknown suns, and the moon became almost invisible; or all the familiar stars became not stars but clouds of extremely diluted gas. This was exactly what happened when astronomers scanned the sky with ultra-violet rays or radio waves.

This illusion occurs not only in the human plane but in all planes, and not only in the realm of desires but in all the three realms of existence. The existence of heavens and hells, as mentioned earlier, is also because of the mind, and this will be discussed in the next commentary.

It is significant to note that Buddhism does not merely explain this illusion, but, being a very practical religion, provides ways to overcome the illusion so as to attain Enlightenment. These practical ways will be explained later.

3.45 Phenomena are like Images

Original Text in Chinese

當知世間一切境界，皆依眾生無明妄心而得住持。是故，一切法，如鏡中像，無體可得，唯心虛妄。以心生則種種法生，心滅則種種法滅故。

Literal Translation

Know that all objects in the phenomenal world are due to the ignorance of sentient beings causing illusion to abide. Hence all phenomena are like images in a mirror, without any real form, due to the heart's delusion. Thus, when the heart arises, all sorts of phenomena arise; when the heart ceases, all sorts of phenomena cease.

Interpretation

We should know that all objects in the phenomenal world are due to the ignorance of sentient beings which causes illusion to abide. Hence all phenomena are like images in a mirror. The phenomena have no real form; they are due to the delusion of the mind. When the deluded mind arises, all sorts of phenomena arise; when the mind ceases to be deluded, all sorts of phenomena ceases to appear.

Commentary

The earliest recorded expression that the three realms of existence are illusory and occur in the mind only, is found in the Dasabhumī Sūtra (Shi Di Jing, or Ten Stages Scripture), one of the earliest Mahāyāna scriptures of the first and second centuries, which was later incorporated into the famous Avatānsaka Sūtra (Hua Yen Jing, or Garland Scripture).

All phenomena in all the three realms of existence, most of which are not visible to the naked human eyes, are caused by the deluded mind. For example, heavens and hells, in Buddhist philosophy, are illusory; they exist, like trees and streams exist, because the mind is

deluded. This does not mean that heavens and hells are the product of imagination only; they are "real" to unenlightened beings who believe in them. In other words, for those whose religious conviction accepts the existence of heavens and hells, their souls "really" go to heavens or hells depending on their merits or wickedness. In heavens or hells they would experience the joys or pains the same way as their cultural or religious teaching suggests them to be.

Hence, the state of mind of a dying person, besides the karmic effect he has accumulated, is extremely important, as it greatly influences the kind of after-life he is to experience. If his mind is calm or thoughtful of spiritual development, it will be of great help to his experience in the after-life. Thus, all known religions conduct services for the soul that has just passed into another plane. Awakening Osiris and Hearing in the Bardo, made popular through the albeit misnamed Book of the Death of the Egyptian and of the Tibetan, are interesting examples.

But, if all phenomena, physical and astral, are the product of the mind, why is it that people share the same experiences? Why is our illusion the same? Why do you, I and every other human being see a mountain as a mountain? This is because, besides the specific ways our eyes and all parts of our body are made, our individual consciousness is an expression of the same alaya consciousness. Other beings, vibrating at a frequency different from us, or with eyes that see within a different range of electromagnetic waves, would have very different experiences of the same stuff that constitutes our phenomena.

What we experience as a mountain, would be invisible to them; they can literally walk through it without realizing its presence! In fact modern physicists, especially in their investigation into shadow matter and anti-particles, are seriously trying to find out whether such things are actually happening to us without our knowing. Richard Morris says that "one could stand on a shadow matter mountain and never realize it was there."

Astro-scientists may be interested to know that similarly what we see as nothing may be a whole range of phenomena to inhabitants on Mars or any heavenly bodies. Edward Russell interestingly suggests that whole crowds of moon inhabitants might have witnessed the landing of our astronauts on their territory without the astronauts having the slightest idea of their presence. Even on earth, what we humans consider

as the earth's mantle may be as thin as our atmosphere to some forms of beings, whereas to other forms of beings our atmosphere may act as solid rock upon which their abodes are built.

The alaya consciousness also explains why people from different religious or cultural backgrounds who returned from clinical death, or spirits of deceased persons through mediums, reported different pictures of the after-life, but all the different pictures corresponded to the concepts according to their respective religions or cultures, and those of the same religion or culture gave similar descriptions. A ghost described by an Englishman, for example, is almost always in white gown; whereas a typical Chinese would describe one in classical dress.

But how does the mind create heavens and hells? How does the mind create even physical things like houses and oceans? These questions will be discussed in the next commentary. Psychologists interested in the question of the mind, irrespective of whether they are behaviourists who denied the role of the mind, interactionists who believe mental and material events interact between each other, epiphenomenalists who assert that all mental activities are generated by events in the body, or parallelists who insists on a correlation between mental and material events in the body, would probably be surprised at the depth of the Buddhist explanation on the mind-phenomena relation.

3.46 Intellect Consciousness (Mano-Vijnana)

Original Text in Chinese

復次，言意識者，即此相續識。依諸凡夫取著轉深，計我我所，種種妄執。隨事攀緣，分別六塵，名為意識，亦名分離識，又復說名分別事識。此識依見愛煩惱增長義故。

Literal Translation

Next, saying about intellect consciousness, it is the continuity of arising thoughts. According to ordinary people, their transformations become deeper and deeper, attached to self and all forms of delusion. As phenomena arise, they are differentiated as six defilements, known as intellect consciousness, also named differentiating consciousness, and also called discriminating consciousness. This consciousness is strengthened by perception and desire, thus lengthening attachment.

Interpretation

Next, let us discuss what intellect consciousness is. Intellect consciousness is the continuity of arising thoughts. For ordinary people, the transformations from the transcendental to the phenomenal continue, and their attachment to self and to all forms of delusion becomes intensified. As phenomena arise, they are differentiated according to the six senses into six defilements.

This ability is known as intellect consciousness (yizhi in Chinese, mano-vijnana in Sanskrit). It is also called differentiating consciousness and discriminating consciousness. As a person continues to perceive and to desire, his intellect consciousness is strengthened, thus intensifying his attachment to himself as an individual person and to phenomena as real occurrences.

Commentary

Earlier, "the three fine transformations and six gross transformations" responsible for transforming the Supreme Reality to the phenomenal world have been explained (Passages 3.33 and 3.34). Here the intellect consciousness, which is important for the six gross transformation, is elaborated. The six senses mentioned in the passage above refer to those of eyes, ear, nose, mouth, body (touch) and intellect.

Because these senses are gross, our perception of reality through them are distorted, and the distorted reality is consequently referred to as six defilements. Our perception of reality (which is distorted) is possible because of our intellect consciousness, which enables us to differentiate and discriminate. Hence, the intellect consciousness enables us to create tables and oceans and all other phenomena in our human plane, as well as heavens and hells in other planes of existence where unenlightened souls go to.

How does the mind create tables and oceans? Before a carpenter makes a table, he must have in his mind the concept of the table. Every part and process in the creation of the table, from visualizing its design to hammering the last nail, comes from the mind. The power of the mind marshals the relevant dharma or sub-atomic particles and forces to be arranged in a way it has decided to produce the table. At our materialistic plane, where matter is too gross for mind to move physically, the mind accomplishes the task indirectly, by instructing the necessary muscles or machines to do the job.

Great masters with tremendous mental power, like Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang) in the 7th century and Sai Baba in our modern time, can directly materialize objects from thin air. At the astral plane, however, where astral matter is finer and movable by mind, you can create objects directly with mental power. If you have ever wondered why heavenly beings need not work for a living, here is an answer. Should they like to eat a steak, though it is unlikely they have this desire, they merely visualize it to have it materialized!

What about oceans? Surely we cannot create an ocean in the physical plane by using the mind? We can! In fact, we did – long, long ago collectively. According to Buddhist philosophy, oceans and stars and every phenomenon we experience, are created by mind. We see

oceans as oceans, and stars as stars because our mind decides so. Mind here is not an individual mind, but the universal mind or the alaya consciousness.

Through millennia our alaya consciousness has conditioned us to perceive the relevant collections of dharma, or sub-atomic particles and forces, as oceans or stars. A fish would perceive the same collections of dharma differently. What is an ocean to us is probably limitless space to the fish, and if it ever has the chance to perceive the stars, it might interpret them as divine signals from outer space.

In the same way, heavens and hells are created by the mind, just as the phenomenal world is. Different cultural practices, religious beliefs and other factors influence the way a sentient being would experience his heavenly or hellish existence. That is why, for example, when a good Christian passes on, he will find himself in heaven with other good Christians; it is unlikely he will find any Hindu or Buddhist scenery or pious Hindu or Buddhist friends, for they too would go to their own heavens created by their own minds.

Yet, in Buddhist thought, going to heaven is not the highest achievement. Heavenly beings are still not perfectly Enlightened; when they are, they will be free from the three realms of existence, which are illusions of the deluded mind. When the mind is perfectly purified, when he has liberated himself from attachment to self and to phenomena in perfect Enlightenment, all these phenomena of hells, worlds and heavens cease to be. Where does the perfectly Enlightened being go to? He does not go anywhere: he actualizes Buddhahood, i.e. he IS the Supreme Reality!

3.47 Known only by Buddhas

Original Text in Chinese

依無明熏習所起識者，非凡夫能知，亦非二乘智慧所覺。謂依菩薩從初正信發心觀察。若證法身，得少分知，乃至菩薩究竟地，不能盡知，惟佛窮了。

何以故？是心從本已來，自性清淨而有無明。為無明所染，有其染心。雖有染心，而常恒不變。是故此義惟佛能知。

Literal Translation

Consciousness arises because of ignorance transformation, not easily understood by ordinary people, and not easily realized even by the wise followers of Hinayana. Bodhisattvas from the first stage of correct faith observe the heart; some attain realization of the Dharma Body. They understand a bit, but even Bodhisattvas at the final stage do not know thoroughly.

Why? Because since the origin, there is ignorance in the serenity of primordial nature. Affected by ignorance, defiled heart arises; although it is defiled heart, yet it is eternal and immutable. Hence its meaning is known only by Buddhas.

Interpretation

The concept that consciousness arises because of transformations as a result of ignorance is not easily understood by ordinary people. Even the wise followers of Hinayana Buddhism do not easily realize this.

Bodhisattvas who have progressed from the first stage of spiritual development and have observed the mind, have some realization of the Dharma Body (Fashen or Dharmakaya) or Supreme Reality. But even Bodhisattvas at the final stage of their development may not know this great truth thoroughly.

Why is this so? This is because originally ignorance is present in the serenity of primordial nature. Affected by ignorance, thoughts arise,

making the mind defiled. Although the mind has been defiled, it remains eternal and immutable. Hence, the meaning of all this is known only to enlightened beings, i.e. Buddhas.

Commentary

It is understandable that ordinary people find this concept difficult as it is so different from conventional wisdom. Even wise followers of Hinayana Buddhism do not comprehend this easily. Although Hinayanists have profound knowledge concerning the illusion of self, and have achieved liberation from it, they are still not liberated from phenomena, for they believe dharma are real albeit momentary entities.

Enlightened Hinayanists are known as Sravadas (Sheng Wen), or Pratyekabuddhas (Yuan Jue). Sravadas attain nirvana through hearing and practising the Buddha's teaching, while Pratyekabuddhas become Enlightened through self cultivation.

Bodhisattvas, in their compassion to help others, necessarily differentiate between self and others. As the thought of "helping others" is still present, they have not overcome the illusory barrier between the knower and the known. Hence their liberation from self is still not complete.

While Sravadas and Pratyekabuddhas have attained liberation from self but are still attached to phenomena, Bodhisattvas have attained liberation from phenomena but are still attached to self. Though they are highly Enlightened beings, their Enlightenment, nevertheless, is not yet perfect: they have not yet actualized their innate Buddhahood, i.e. they have not become the Supreme Reality. Only Buddhas, the perfectly Enlightened ones, fully understand and realize this concept, because being perfectly free from attachment to phenomena and to self, they are the Supreme Reality.

3.48 Suddenly Thought Arises

Original Text in Chinese

所謂心性，常無念故，名為不變。以不達一法界故，心不相應，忽然念起，名為無明。

Literal Translation

The heart nature always has no thought, hence immutable. Not realizing the one undifferentiated Dharmarealm, the heart does not harmonize; suddenly thought arises, called ignorance.

Interpretation

The nature of the mind is always beyond thought; hence it is immutable. But when the mind does not realize that the one and only Dharmarealm or Supreme Reality is undifferentiated, the mind becomes disturbed and defiled. Suddenly thought arises, and is called ignorance (avidya or wu ming).

Commentary

The word "suddenly", or "hu ran" in Chinese, in the above passage was much commented upon by classical masters. Most commentators, including the most celebrated of them, the Hua Yen master Fa Zang, agree that "suddenly" here has no reference to time, and it means beginninglessly without any awareness.

In Buddhism the fundamental problem faced by people is ignorance (avidya or wu ming). The concept of original sin never arises. In other words, people are unenlightened not because they have committed any sin, but because they are ignorant. Because of this basic philosophy, ideas like punishment and condemnation are absent in Buddhism. Hence what Buddhists show to non-believers is never intolerance nor enmity, but compassion for their ignorance and charity if they require help.

Ignorance, here, refers to spiritual ignorance, i.e. the failure to understand the transcendental, undifferentiated aspect of Cosmic Reality. Because of ignorance, illusion arises, resulting in the creation of the various realms of existence, including heavens and hells. If a sentient being is contented with, or desirable of, going to heaven, he can achieve this spiritual goal even if he remains blissfully ignorant, so long as he accredits good karma by having and performing meritorious thoughts, words and deeds.

With more than thirty types of heaven, Buddhism certainly offers a wide choice for the aspirants. But if he wishes to attain the highest, most noble spiritual goal, that of actualizing Cosmic Reality in perfect Enlightenment, he must overcome ignorance. If we wish to overcome ignorance, we should first find out more about ignorance and how our mind becomes defiled. This will be explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 15

Overcoming Ignorance and Defilement

Buddhism is very practical; all its philosophy is not meant for speculation or decoration, but as means for solving practical problems, be they physical, emotional, mental or spiritual.

3.49 Six Kinds of Defilement

Original Text in Chinese

染心者，有六種。云何爲六？一者，執相應染，依二乘解脫，及信相應地遠離故。二者，不斷相應染，依信相應地修學方便，漸漸能捨，得淨心地究竟離故。三者，分別智相應染，依具戒地漸離，乃至無相方便地究竟離故。四者，現色不相应染，依色自在地能離故。五者，能見心不相应染，依心自在地能離故。六者，根本業不相应染，依菩薩盡地，得入如來地能離故。

Literal Translation

Defiled mind, six kinds. What six? One, mutual-reaction with attachment, liberated by the Hinayana vehicle, and by the faith of non-attachment. Two, mutual-reaction with continuity, liberated by practicing expedient means, gradually being able to discard, and attain the state of purified heart for perfect detachment. Three, mutual-reaction with discriminating consciousness, liberated by practising wholesome precepts for gradual detachment, through expedient means till the stage of no characteristic, and become perfectly detached.

Four, disharmonious-reaction with phenomenal perception, state of spontaneous phenomena able to detach. Five, disharmonious-reaction with heart perception, state of spontaneous heart able to detach. Six, disharmonious-reaction with karmic effect, at final stage of Bodhisattva's development, able to enter the stage of Tathagata to detach.

Interpretation

There are six kinds of defiled mind. What are the six kinds?

One, there is the defiled mind as a result of mutual-reaction (xiang ying) with attachment. One can be liberated from this defilement by following the Hinayana vehicle, and the faith of non-attachment.

Two, there is the defiled mind due to continuity of attachment. The aspirant can practice expedient means to free himself from attachment. In this way, he can gradually discard his mental defilement, and when he reaches a state of purified mind he can achieve perfect detachment.

Three, there is the defiled mind as a result of mutual-reaction with discriminating consciousness. As the aspirant practises wholesome precepts of the Buddhist teaching, he gradually detaches himself from defilement. When he reaches through expedient means the stage of meditating on the void, he will be perfectly detached from this defilement.

Four, there is the defiled mind which is due to disharmonious-reaction (bu xiang ying) with the realm of phenomena. The aspirant can overcome this defilement by mental cultivation to the stage where he can view the phenomenal world with detachment.

Five, there is the defiled mind due to disharmonious-reaction with the perception characteristic of the mind. The aspirant can overcome this defilement by purifying his mind through meditation.

Six, there is the defiled mind due to disharmonious-reaction with karmic effect. This defilement can be overcome when the aspirant reaches the final stage of the Bodhisattva's development, and is able to enter the stage of Tathagata.

Commentary

Since Rene Descartes (1596-1650) separated the mind from the body in his Cartesian model which has since become the "official doctrine" in the West, Western philosophers, psychologists and medical scientists have been debating the mind-body relation keenly. The great 17th century English philosopher John Locke suggested that we are only bodies to which God has superadded the mind.

The 18th century French physician and philosopher Pierre Cabanis said that "Just as the stomach and intestines are destined to operate digestion, the liver to filter bile, the parotid and maxillary glands to prepare the salivary juices, so the brain performs organically the secretion of thought." Possibly echoing Cabanis' idea, Charles Darwin in the 19th century asked, "Why is thought being a secretion of the brain more wonderful than gravity a property of matter? It is our arrogance and admiration of ourselves."

Modern psychologists, at the height of materialism and behaviourism, tend to alienate the mind even further. The American D. Drake asserts that "The mind is the brain. In using the term 'mind' we are conceiving these cerebral events as they are on the inside." Nevertheless, the American philosopher David Lund retorts, "How can the brain, a material substance, produce something as radically different from it as consciousness is? How can the brain create out of its own material substance a reality that has no mass, no shape, no size, and is not even in space?"

In Buddhism and Eastern philosophies generally, there is no question about the mind not being the brain. The brain is never given the special position as the seat of consciousness; at best it is a form of super computer. Instead of debating the mind-body relation, Buddhist masters concentrate on an in-depth study of the mind. Unlike Western philosophers and scientists whose concepts of the mind are mainly derived from speculation, those of the Buddhist masters are derived from direct experience.

In this passage, after having explained the principles of ignorance that generates the transformations of transcendental Cosmic Reality into the phenomenal world, Asvaghosha explains the kinds and causes of defiled mind that causes people to perceive reality as illusion; then he suggests methods to overcome the defilement.

While the transformations that cause people to perceive transcendental reality as the phenomenal world, operate from fine to gross, the cultivation processes to overcome the defilement moves from gross to fine. The first three kinds of defiled minds are due to mutual-reaction (xiang ying). They are the result of gross transformations, and involve the intellect consciousness. The last three kinds are due to disharmonious-reaction (bu xiang ying). They are the result of fine transformation, and involve the alaya consciousness. The meaning of mutual-reaction and disharmonious-reaction will be explained in Passage 3.51 below.

3.50 Dharmarealm

Original Text in Chinese

不了一法界義者，從信相應地觀察學斷。入淨心地隨分得離。乃至如來地能究竟離故。

Literal Translation

Not understanding the meaning of one Dharmarealm, from first stage observing the faith, to entering purified heart with partial detachment, to Tathagata stage with total detachment.

Interpretation

Not understanding that the one and only Dharmarealm is transcendental and undifferentiated, is the source of ignorance, which leads to attachment. By following the faith an aspirant starts his first stage in spiritual development, and when he has reached the stage when his mind is purified he has achieved partial detachment. When he reaches the final stage of the Tathagata or Supreme Reality, he has achieved total detachment, thereby attaining perfect Enlightenment.

Commentary

A dharmarealm, or a realm of sub-atomic particles and forces, means a sphere of phenomenal existence. It may refer to one of the three major realms, namely the realm of desires, the realm of form and the realm of non-form. Or it may refer to one of the planes of existence in one of these major realms, like the realm of humans or the realm of heavenly beings.

However, when the term "one Dharmarealm" is used, it means the one and only Dharmarealm, referring to the summation of all the dharmarealms, that is, the Supreme Reality.

3.51 Mutual-Reaction and Disharmonious Reaction

Original Text in Chinese

言相應義者，謂心、念法異。依淨染差別，而知相、緣相同故。不相應義者，謂即心不覺，常無別異，不同知相、緣相故。

Literal Translation

Talking about mutual-reaction, heart and thought are related, according to purity or defilement, being aware of characteristics, and the effects are similar. In the meaning of disharmonious-reaction, the heart is not Enlightened, not with environment, and has different characteristics.

Interpretation

By mutual-reaction is meant that the mind on one hand, and thoughts and their resulting phenomena on the other, are directly related. When the mind is pure, thoughts are pure; when the mind is defiled, thoughts are defiled. The mind is aware of the characteristics of the thoughts, and they produce similar karmic effects.

On the meaning of disharmonious-reaction, the mind is already defiled before the gross transformations into the phenomenal world begin. Hence there is disharmonious-reaction between the defiled mind on one hand and the transcendental aspect of reality on the other; or from the other perspective if the mind had not been defiled, disharmonious-reaction between the (otherwise) purified mind and the phenomenal world. The relationship between the inner and the outer world is inverse. As a result, the characteristics observed by the defiled mind are different from what they really are.

Commentary

Although this is a short passage, the original Chinese text and its subsequent literal translation are among the most difficult to understand, because not only the concept presented here is profound, the classical language is very concise. If not for the commentaries from masters of earlier centuries, even Chinese scholars in the modern time may not know its meaning.

Here, Asvaghosha explains the meaning of "mutual-reaction" and "disharmonious-reaction", which are significant in the six types of defiled mind mentioned in Passage 3.49 above. This concept may supply modern psychologists and psychiatrists with some unexpected insight.

Mental defilement can be caused by six major factors divided into two broad groups:

1. mutual-reaction with
 - a) attachment,
 - b) continuity,
 - c) discriminating consciousness.
2. disharmonious-reaction with
 - a) phenomenal world,
 - b) perception,
 - c) karmic effect.

The relationship between the inner and the outer world (i.e. the mind and the external phenomena) in mutual-reaction is direct, whereas that in disharmonious-reaction is inverse.

Once we have understood the concept, it is not difficult to simplify it for our more prosaic daily needs. For example, according to the concept of mutual-reaction, if the mind is defiled, it will see the outer world as defiled. If the mind is pure, or purified through training, it will see the same outer world as pure. On the other hand, according to the concept of disharmonious-reaction, a person with a defiled mind will consider any action by another person as hostile, though it may be

well-intended; whereas a person with a purified mind can readily regard malicious remarks against him as some form of jokes.

Asvaghosha's teaching may be useful to modern psychiatrists. For example, neurotic depression, an ailment that is becoming prevalent in Western societies, may be interpreted as mutual-reaction of a defiled mind with continuity. This means a defiled mind is continuously attached to some defiled phenomena. Schizophrenia, an illness that is giving many psychiatrists a big headache, may be interpreted as disharmonious-reaction of a defiled mind with perception. This means when a defiled mind perceives a phenomenon, even though the phenomenon is pure, the defiled mind will see it as defiled.

Besides dressing these psychiatric disorders in some philosophical terms, can Asvaghosha's concept provide any practical help? It can. Buddhism is very practical; all its philosophy is not meant for speculation or decoration, but as means for solving practical problems, be they physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. If we find any Buddhist philosophical concepts far-fetched or ludicrous, it is because we have not understood them. The profound elaboration on the different dharma-realms or on the cause of ignorance, for example, is not meant as material for mythology or mental gymnastics, but as serious teaching to help humanity attain Enlightenment.

Let us see how Asvaghosha's philosophical concept may be used to overcome psychiatric problems. As the problems can be conceptualized into two parts, mind and phenomena, we may overcome them by working on either one part or on both parts. Hence, instead of using drugs, psychotherapy or electroconvulsive therapy, the three conventional treatment methods which unfortunately have often turned out to be ineffective, we may remedy neurotic depression, for example, by strengthening the patient's mind so that he can better cope with continual unpleasant situations, or change the situations so that his mind, despite being weak, may still cope with them.

In the case of schizophrenia, as the problem lies with the mind (which is defiled) and not with the perceived object (which is pure), the treatment is to purify the mind. Meditation is the best way for mind purification, but as a schizophrenic patient usually lacks the ability and discipline for meditation practice, expedient means like doing charity work, reciting religious verse (or inspiring poetry), mental relaxation

and simple focusing exercises can be helpful.

3.52 Defilement and Ignorance

Original Text in Chinese

又，染心義者，名為煩惱礙，能障真如根本智故。無明義者，名為智礙，能障世間自然業智故。

Literal Translation

Next, meaning of defilement, called mental disturbance, can hinder original wisdom of Zhen Ru. Meaning of ignorance, called hinderance to wisdom, can hinder the spontaneous karmic wisdom of phenomenal world.

Interpretation

After discussing the six states of defiled mind, and mutual-reaction and disharmonious-reaction, let us discuss the meaning of defilement and ignorance. Defilement is called mental disturbance. It can mar our understanding that Zhen Ru or the Supreme Reality is undifferentiated and transcendental, thus hindering our spiritual realization. Ignorance is called hinderance to wisdom. It can hinder our understanding of the spontaneous operation of karma in the phenomenal world.

Commentary

Mental defilement refers to the six states of defiled mind mentioned earlier. Because of it, we fail to understand that Cosmic Reality is actually undifferentiated and transcendental; consequently we view reality as differentiated into myriad phenomena which are therefore illusory.

Ignorance, which creates the illusory outer world, is a hindrance to higher wisdom which reveals the transcendental aspect of reality. Because of ignorance, we fail to understand the working of karma, the universal law of cause and effect, which is natural and spontaneous in the phenomenal world. We also fail to realize that karma is also illusory, because it ceases to operate in the transcendental aspect.

Realizing this higher truth can be of tremendous impact. As transcendental reality is undifferentiated, there is no right and wrong, either in the absolute or relative sense. That was why when they were perfectly Enlightened, when they realized that they are an integral expression of Cosmic Reality, Zen masters freely hit their Enlightened students, and their students them. That was also why in the Bhagavad-gita when Arjuna hesitated to go to battle because he did not want to murder, God speaking in the person of Sri Krishna told him all that was happening is maya, or illusion, and no one ever dies.

Of course, no masters ever suggest anyone to hit or kill. But, even though we are so far behind Zen masters and Arjuna in spiritual development, we can derive much consolation and inspiration that even if we do not accumulate as much worldly wealth, power or pleasures as we would like, there is definitely no cause for disappointment or dejection, because all these worldly gains are merely tricks of our defiled minds.

This does not mean we should be complacent. Contrary to what many mis-informed people might think, Buddhist teaching expounds that great and right effort must be put in to attain set goals in this or other better worlds. If we wish to enjoy heavenly bliss, for example, there are more than thirty heavens where we can definitely go to, but we must work hard to build up sufficiently good karma. Yet the greatest achievement is obtainable here and now, that is realizing Cosmic Reality. This book will show us how.

3.53 Universal Law

Original Text in Chinese

此義云何？以依染心，能見能現，妄取境界，違平等性故。以一切法常靜，無有起相，無明不覺，妄與法違，故不能得隨順世間一切境界種種智故。

Literal Translation

What is the meaning? Due to the defiled heart, one can see what can appear, with illusion taking in the phenomenal world, which is far from undifferentiation. All phenomena are quiescent: there are no arising of characteristics. Due to ignorance and non-Enlightenment, delusion and phenomena are related. Hence one cannot know and follow the various phenomenal operation in the realm of objects.

Interpretation

What is the meaning of saying that mental defilement hinders our understanding of transcendental reality, and ignorance hinders our understanding of the phenomenal world?

Actually there is only one reality, but because of mental defilement, there arise two dimensions, the subject and the object, or the knower and the known. The knower sees the known that appears, as the illusory phenomenal world, which is differentiated into countless entities, far unlike the undifferentiated nature of transcendental reality.

Actually all phenomena in their absolute aspect are quiescent, without any arising of differentiated characteristics. Because of ignorance and non-Enlightenment, delusion and phenomena become directly related, with the result that the deluded mind sees phenomena as differentiated and separated. This is contrary to the natural law of reality. Hence a deluded mind does not know the universal natural law governing the operation of various phenomena in the phenomenal world.

Commentary

This passage contains two universal truths that can explain the working of psychic abilities or miraculous powers. These two truths are that there is no difference between subject and object, or the knower and the known; and that the phenomena we see in our ordinary consciousness as separate and differentiated, are actually an intimately connected organic whole. These two truths are the same; they describe Cosmic Reality from two perspectives.

A psychic is able to know what is in another person's mind because, at a heightened state of consciousness, he the knower, and the other person's mind, the known, are the same unity. Or, explained from the other perspective, his own mind and the other person's thought are organically connected. Similarly, a master who understands and is able to actualize this universal law governing the operation of phenomena in the phenomenal world, is able to perform what ordinary people would call miracles, such as bilocation, materialization and distant healing.

There are many records of Mahayana masters using miraculous powers to save people. While many Theravada masters consider such powers as a hindrance to spiritual development, Mahayana masters regard them as one of the expedient means to help others to attain spiritual fulfilment.

Certainly many people would find it hard to believe that psychic and miraculous powers are possible. When I made a public announcement in 1988 on distant transmission of cosmic energy (which can be employed for healing people hundreds of kilometres away), there was a huge public outcry against me. In 1989 I proved that this was true in a month-long public experiment organized by an independent national newspaper.

How can one acquire miraculous powers? By purifying the mind. Would he abuse them? If he can attain such a level, he would realize that spiritual growth is much more important than any other considerations.

3.54 Gross and Fine

Original Text in Chinese

復次，分別生滅相者，有二種。云何爲二？一者，粗與心相應故。二者，細與心不相應故。又，粗中之粗，凡夫境界。粗中之細，及細中之粗，菩薩境界。細中之細，是佛境界。

Literal Translation

Next, discriminating life-death characteristics, two kinds. What two? One, gross heart mutual-reaction. Two, fine heart disharmonious-reaction. Gross of the gross, realm of ordinary people. Fine of the gross, and gross of the fine, realm of bodhisattvas. Fine of the fine, realm of buddhas.

Interpretation

Having explained mental defilement and ignorance, explanation is now given for "life-death characteristics" (sheng mie xiang), or the characteristics of samsara. They refer to the characteristics of existence in the phenomenal world, i.e. the phenomenal aspect of the Supreme Reality.

These characteristics of the phenomenal world can be divided into two main groups, namely gross mutual-reaction with the mind, and fine disharmonious-reaction with the mind.

The fine and gross groups can be further divided into fine and gross again, making four types. The gross of the gross mutual-reaction operates in the realm for ordinary people; the fine of the gross mutual-reaction, and the gross of the fine disharmonious-reaction operate in the realm for bodhisattvas; the fine of the fine disharmonious-reaction operates in the realm for those about to become buddhas.

Commentary

The classification of the characteristics of the phenomenal world, which leads to the operation of karma, are related to the six defiled states

mentioned earlier (Passage 3.51). These six states of defilement consist of three gross mutual-reaction types, and three fine disharmonious-reaction types:

1. gross mutual-reaction with attachment,
2. gross mutual-reaction with continuity,
3. gross mutual-reaction with discriminating consciousness,
4. fine disharmonious-reaction with phenomenal world,
5. fine disharmonious-reaction with perception,
6. fine disharmonious-reaction with karmic effect.

The gross of gross characteristics is related to the first type of mental defilement, and these characteristics are common among ordinary people. The minds of ordinary people are defiled because their intellect consciousness, or discriminating mind, causes them to be attached to worldly things. This attachment results in karmic effect perpetuating the cycle of birth and rebirth.

The fine of gross characteristics are related to the second and the third types of defilement. The gross of fine characteristics is related to the fourth and the fifth types. All these defilements generate karma.

These characteristics are common among people who have started their spiritual training, which is divided into ten stages of spiritual growth (please see Commentary for Passage 3.19.) In Asvaghosha's time, these spiritually minded people are known as bodhisattvas, whose karma is usually good. Now the meaning of "Bodhisattvas" is different; they refer to Enlightened beings, who may have transcended karma, but who voluntarily delay entering into Buddhahood because of their great compassion in helping other beings in the three phenomenal realms.

The fine of fine characteristics is related to the sixth type of defilement. These characteristics are common among highly spiritual masters who are about to become buddhas. Their minds are almost perfectly purified, but there is still traces of defilement because in their great compassion to help others, they still differentiate between self (themselves) and others. In other words, they have not completely overcome

the distinction between the knower and the known. Bodhisattvas, in the modern sense, have this kind of characteristics.

Those who are about to enter Buddhahood have almost completely overcome all their karmic effect. Some have actually completely overcome their karmic effect, because having actualized (not merely understood) the Supreme Reality, they have overcome the last trace of illusion, and karma does not work for them any more. But they still have a very fine trace of defilement in their minds; as they still have thoughts of helping others, there is still some manifestation of the phenomenal aspect in them. Therefore, there is disharmonious-reaction between their slightly defiled mind and their termination or near termination, of karmic effect. Or, for Bodhisattvas who have perfectly purified their minds, but returned to the phenomenal realms to help others, the disharmonious-reaction is between having a pure mind but involved in karmic effect while operating phenomenally.

3.55 Ignorance and Karma

Original Text in Chinese

此二種生滅，依於無明熏習而有。所謂依因、依緣。依因者，不覺義故。依緣者，妄作境界義故。若因滅，則緣滅。因滅故，不相應心滅。緣滅故，相應心滅。

Literal Translation

These two life-death due to ignorance. Due to cause, due to effect. Cause, because of non-Enlightenment. Effect, delusion concerning the phenomenal world. If cause ceases, effect ceases. Cause ceases because disharmonious-reaction of heart ceases. Effect ceases because mutual-reaction of heart ceases.

Interpretation

These two types of characteristics of the phenomenal world are due to the function of ignorance, which generates both cause and effect. The cause of ignorance, which also causes the two types of phenomenal characteristics, is non-Enlightenment. The effect of ignorance, which also brings about the characteristics, is delusion concerning the phenomenal world.

If cause ceases, effect ceases. If ignorance ceases, there will be no delusion concerning the phenomenal world. Cause ceases because the disharmonious-reaction of the mind ceases. Ignorance ceases when the individual mind harmonizes, or be united organically, with the Universal Mind. Effect ceases because the mutual-reaction of the defiled ceases. We will not distort reality if our mind is purified.

Commentary

Ignorance, the central problem in Buddhism, is the crucial factor contributing to our distortion of reality. Ignorance, as used here and elsewhere in Buddhist philosophy, refers to spiritual ignorance, and not merely a lack of knowledge in the ordinary sense.

This ignorance factor is both the cause and the effect of characteristics of the phenomenal world. In other words, ignorance is both the cause and the effect of man's suffering in samsara, or the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Because of ignorance there arise the three fine defiled states; and as a result of ignorance there arise the three gross defiled states (please see Passage 3.51). One of the most important objectives of Buddhist teaching is to overcome ignorance.

This may come as a surprise to many readers who believe that the whole business of Buddhism is to eliminate desires. This belief is mainly because of reading the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are of course a fundamental teaching of Buddhism, and eliminating desires a basic tenet. But if they are mis-understood, or understood only at its elementary level, it is easy to mis-interpret Buddhism as pessimistic, or at best reduce its followers to unthinking, unfeeling individuals.

The Four Noble Truths state that there is much suffering in life, the cause of suffering is attachment, to eliminate suffering it is necessary to eliminate attachment, and one effective, practical way to do so is the Noble Eight-Fold Path. Eliminating desires, therefore, is in the third noble truth.

Everything can be interpreted at two levels – elementary or profound, ritualistic or philosophical, ordinary knowledge or higher wisdom. For most ordinary people, especially those who are steep in dishonest activities and licentious indulgence, the Four Noble Truths should be taught at the elementary, ritualistic level of ordinary knowledge, and eliminating unwholesome desires is a definite, positive step towards spiritual development. Obviously for others who are already on the way to spiritual realization, the Buddhist teaching should be given a more profound interpretation.

One must not be so obsessed with the doctrine "there is much suffering in life" that he forgets the other important Buddhist doctrine "to be born a human is an extremely rare blessed opportunity", just as in Christianity one must not be so carried away by the tenet "man is a sinner" that he forgets "man is godlike" too. Eliminating desires means eliminating harmful desires. Having useful desires is not against the teaching of Buddhism. Indeed, one of the tenets in the Noble Eight-fold Path is right intention, with emphasis on the desire for spiritual cultivation. In some Mahayanist schools, like the Amitabha and the

Maitreya schools, the basic doctrine is the expressed and explicit desire to be reborn in the Paradise of Eternal Bliss.

When the Buddha says that there is much suffering, he specially refers to the endless cycle of birth and rebirth in the human realm, in comparison to blissful life in heaven, or eternal joy in nirvana or Buddhahood. The cause of this suffering is craving for worldly things, thus perpetuating the karmic effect of being reborn in the human or even lower realms. To eliminate this suffering of samsara, one must eliminate this craving, thereby ending karma, or if he is not ready yet, improve his karmic effect so that he may be reborn at a higher level. The way to achieve this is the Noble Eight-fold Path, which consists of morality, higher wisdom and spiritual cultivation to attain Enlightenment.

Chapter 16

Why the World Appears as an Illusion

When his mind characteristics (or ignorance) arise, the sentient being experiences reality as the phenomenal world with countless separate objects and beings. Whenever these mind characteristics cease, he attains nirvana, experiencing reality as it really is, i.e. he experiences the void of undifferentiated reality.

3.56 Mind Characteristics and Mind Essence

Original Text in Chinese

問曰：若心滅者，云何相續？若相續者，云何說究竟滅？

答曰：所言滅者，唯心相滅，非心體滅。如風依水而有動相。若水滅者，則風相斷絕，無所依止。以水不滅，風相相續。唯風滅故，動相隨滅，非是水滅。無明亦爾，依心體而動。若心體滅，則眾生斷絕，無所依止。以體不滅，心得相續。惟癡滅故，心相隨滅，非心智滅。

Literal Translation

Question: When heart ceases, why continuity of characteristics? When continuity of characteristics, how perfect cessation?

Answer: Heart cessation means cessation of heart characteristics, not cessation of heart-body. Like wind depends on water for characteristics of movements. If water ceases, then wind characteristics cease, as there is no more dependence. If water does not cease, wind characteristics continue. When wind ceases, movements cease, but water does not cease. So is ignorance, its movement is dependent on heart body. When heart-body ceases, all sentient beings cease, nowhere to depend on. If body does not cease, heart characteristics continue. If ceases, heart characteristics ceases, not heart wisdom ceases.

Interpretation

Question: When the mind ceases to be, why is there still continuity of the mind characteristics? When there is continuity of characteristics, how is it possible to have perfect cessation?

Answer: When we say the mind ceases, we mean the cessation of the characteristics of the mind, not the cessation of the essence of the

mind itself. This is like the analogy of the dependence of wind on water for its appearance of movement. If water ceases to be, then there will be no appearance of wind movement, because there will be no water to depend upon to show the movement. If water does not cease, the movement of wind over water will continue. When the wind ceases, the wind movement will cease, but the water does not cease.

So it is the same with ignorance and mind. The expression of ignorance is dependent on the essence of the mind. When the mind essence ceases, all sentient beings will cease, because there is nowhere for them to depend on. If the essence of the mind does not cease, then the characteristics of the mind continue. When we say the mind ceases, we mean its characteristics cease, not its essence. Therefore, perfect Enlightenment is possible.

Commentary

The above description refers to the relation between the universal mind, or the Supreme Reality, and the phenomenal world, rather than between an individual mind and individual entities. The question is: if the universal mind ceases to be, how can the phenomenal world continue to operate? When the phenomenal world continues, how is it possible to have perfect Enlightenment universally? In other words, if Cosmic Reality is an undifferentiated organism, why are there so many different manifestations of separate things and beings in the world? Alternatively, if the world is full of myriad entities, how is the great void of perfect stillness possible?

Buddhist masters often use the analogy of water, wind and waves, which are recited in the Lankavatara Sutra, to explain this concept. Water represents Cosmic Reality; wind, ignorance; and waves, the phenomenal world. When wind blows, waves move over the water, signifying that when ignorance arises, the phenomenal world is manifested over the Cosmic Reality. When wind ceases, waves cease, and the water remains calm and tranquil. Similarly, when ignorance ceases, the phenomenal world ceases, revealing the undifferentiated void of Cosmic Reality.

Hence, when we say "the mind ceases", it refers to the cessation of mind characteristics, which is original ignorance, and not to the cessa-

tion of mind essence, which is Cosmic Reality. Cosmic Reality cannot cease; it is eternal and everywhere. The first question "If universal mind ceases, how can the phenomenal world continue to operate?" is irrelevant because the universal mind, which is Cosmic Reality, cannot cease as it is omniscient and omnipresent. The confusion is due to mistaking mind characteristic (which is ignorance) for mind essence (Cosmic Reality). The phenomenal world continues to operate because mind characteristics, which is an intrinsic aspect of the universal mind, arise.

The second question "When the phenomenal world continues, how is it possible to have perfect Enlightenment universally?" is valid. The answer, in fact, is related to the first question, if we substitute mind essence (Universal Mind) with mind characteristic (ignorance). Hence, whenever mind characteristics ceases, the phenomenal world also ceases, resulting in perfect Enlightenment.

This explanation, though applied universally, can also be used for individual Enlightenment. When his mind characteristics (or ignorance) arise, the sentient being experiences reality as the phenomenal world with countless separate objects and beings. Whenever these mind characteristics cease, he attains nirvana, experiencing reality as it really is, i.e. he experiences the void of undifferentiated reality.

Nirvana, therefore, is never extinction nor termination, as some uninformed persons may erroneously believe. It is in fact the cosmic experience of universal consciousness, of universal life in one organic unity. Some Buddhist teachers may use the terms "extinction" or "termination" when describing nirvana, but what they refer to is not the extinction or termination of the adept, but the extinction or termination of his attachment to self, especially as a meditation technique to attain nirvana.

3.57 Four Types of Permeation

Original Text in Chinese

復次，有四種法熏習義故，染法淨法起不斷絕。云何爲四？一者，淨法，名爲眞如。二者，一切染因，名爲無明。三者，妄心，名爲業識。四者，妄境界，所謂六塵。

Literal Translation

There are four types of permeation whereby the pure and the defiled arise continuously. What four? One, the pure state, known as the Tathagata. Two, all causes of differentiation, known as ignorance. Three, defiled heart, named karmic consciousness. Four, deluded realm, known as six defilements.

Interpretation

There are four types of permeation among the pure and the defiled states of mind, whereby these states arise continuously. What are the four types?

One, it is the pure state, and is known as Zhen Ru or the Tathagata, which means Thusness. Two, it is known as ignorance, which is the cause of all differentiation. Three, it is the defiled mind, known as karmic consciousness. Four, it is the delude realm, known as the six defilements.

Commentary

Earlier (Passage 3.34) Asvaghosha explains how the "Three Fine and Six Gross" transform Cosmic Reality into the phenomenal world:

Three Fine:

1. Ignorance.
2. Perception.

3. Realm of phenomena.

Six Gross:

1. Discrimination.
2. Continuity.
3. Attachment.
4. Verbalization.
5. Karma, or the operation of cause and effect.
6. Samsara, or the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Here Asvaghosha explains how the transcendental reality and the phenomenal world interact and influence each other. There are four levels of such permeation:

1. Tathagata, the undifferentiated cosmic reality.
2. Ignorance, the cause of all differentiation.
3. Karma, the result of defiled mind.
4. Six Defilements, the distorted experience of reality through the six grossly limited senses.

Fa Zang described these permeations as the inter-creativity and destructivity between the pure and the defiled. The permeations refer to the processes whereby the pure (the Tathagata) permeates into the defiled states (ignorance, karma and six defilements) to purify them, and the defiled permeates into the pure to defile it.

3.58 Downward and Upward Permeation

Original Text in Chinese

熏習義者，如世間衣服，實無於香。若人以香而熏習故，則有香氣。此亦如是：真如淨法，實無於染，但以無明而熏習故，則有染相。無明染法，實無淨業，但以真如而熏習故，則有淨用。

Literal Translation

Permeation is like clothing without scent. People places perfume to make it fragrant. Similarly, the Tathagata has no differentiation, but ignorance permeates into it to make it differentiated. Ignorance has no purity, but the Tathagata permeates into it to make it purified.

Interpretation

These permeations are like the case of perfume permeating into clothing. Initially there is no scent in the clothing, but after placing perfume on it, the perfume permeates into the clothing to make it fragrant. Similarly, the Tathagata is initially not differentiated, but after permeation by ignorance, there is differentiation. Initially there is no purity (or undifferentiation) in ignorance, but after permeation by the Tathagata, ignorance can be purified.

Commentary

There are two main directions of permeation. When ignorance permeates into the Tathagata, the direction is downwards to the phenomenal world. When the Tathagata permeates into ignorance, the direction is upwards to Enlightenment.

3.59 Permeation of Differentiation

Original Text in Chinese

云何熏習起染法不斷？所謂以依真如法故，有於無明。以有無明染法因故，即熏習真如。以熏習故，則有妄心。以有妄心，即熏習無明。不了真如法故，不覺念起現妄境界。以有妄境界染法緣故，即熏習妄心，令其念著，造種種業，受於一切身心等苦。

Literal Translation

How permeation creates defiled mind continuously? Dependence on the Tathagata, ignorance arises. Because of ignorance, differentiation arises. Thus permeates the Tathagata. Because of permeation, defiled heart arises. Because of defiled heart, thus permeates ignorance. No more understanding of Tathagata. Non-Enlightenment thought arises the realm of defilement. With realm of defilement, permeation of differentiation begins. Thus permeates defiled heart, causing thoughts to arise, generating various types of karma, resulting all suffering of the heart and body.

Interpretation

How do the processes of permeation continuously create the state of defiled mind? Ignorance arises because it is originally present in the Tathagata, or Cosmic Reality. Because of ignorance, there is internal differentiation. This internal differentiation in return permeates the Cosmic Reality.

Because of the permeation of internal differentiation, the universal mind becomes defiled. In return, the defiled mind permeates ignorance. As a result, the higher wisdom concerning the undifferentiated nature of Cosmic Reality is lost.

Because of this non-Enlightenment, thoughts arise and create the realm of defilement. With the creation of the realm of defilement, external permeation of differentiation begins. So far, expressed individu-

ally in a sentient being, the processes of permeation have been internal, i.e. a downward but mutual permeation from the Tathagata through ignorance to the realm of defilement.

This external realm of differentiation (which is the result of internal permeation) in return permeates the internal defiled universal mind. This causes more thoughts to arise, with the result that countless types of karmic effects are generated. Once the wheel of karma operates, it perpetuates endless cycles of birth and rebirth, which brings mental and physical suffering to sentient beings.

Commentary

Why do we experience our world as an illusion, instead of as it really is? First, Cosmic Reality is transformed in three fine stages (due to the alaya consciousness) and six gross stages (due to the intellect consciousness) into the phenomenal world. Secondly, the phenomenal world, at various internal and external levels, permeates into Cosmic Reality, thereby aggravating and perpetuating our experience of the world as an illusion.

Although the main direction of this permeation is downward, i.e. from original ignorance in Cosmic Reality towards phenomenal world, the permeation is also mutual, i.e. differentiation in the phenomenal world in return affects and intensifies ignorance. The downward processes of permeation are as follows:

1. Tathagata, or cosmic reality.
2. Ignorance.
3. Differentiation.
4. Defiled Mind.
5. Realm of Defilement, or the phenomenal world.
6. Thoughts.
7. Karma, or the operation of cause and effect.
8. Samsara, or the endless cycles of birth and rebirth.

It must be stressed again that Buddhism is an exceedingly practical religion. The above explanation is not the result of speculation, but the result of higher wisdom of great masters who have experienced its truth directly. Of course, not many people can have the direct experience of this great truth; not even many can understand its meaning intellectually. Hence, great masters who have such experiential wisdom, out of their compassion and desire to help other sentient beings, painstakingly make known of such invaluable knowledge, and provide practical means for realizing Cosmic Reality.

Since suffering is the result of the endless cycle of birth and rebirth, the logical step to eliminate suffering is to break this cycle. As this cycle is caused by karma, samsara can be overcome by transcending karma. This can be best accomplished, according to some schools like the Theravada, by becoming a monk so that the aspirant can not only concentrate all his time and effort towards this noble aim, but also distance himself from the ordinary world of phenomena to minimize its adverse permeation. For others who are not ready, they should prepare themselves for the future by improving their karma through moral cultivation.

As the source of karma is the arising of thoughts, karma can be eliminated by eliminating thoughts. This can be achieved through meditation, which is the essential path to Enlightenment. As the mind is purified, differentiation ceases, with the result that ignorance is overcome. When ignorance is dispelled, the aspirant attains nirvana or Enlightenment, which is the spiritual experience of Cosmic Reality.

When we compare these processes of spiritual cultivation with the permeation processes listed above, it is clear this approach is a step by step working upward from samsara to the Tathagata. This is the gradual approach adopted by many Buddhists.

Another way is the instant approach. Referring to the list of permeation processes again, we can see that ignorance is the source of the various differentiation steps towards samsara. If we can eliminate ignorance at this stage, then all the subsequent stages will not occur. Hence, in the instant approach, the main objective is to dispel ignorance. Chan, or Zen, Buddhism, which aims to experience reality in an instant of spiritual realization, is an outstanding example.

This division into gradual and instant is for convenience. Most

schools employ a mixture of both. Generally, Theravada Buddhism uses more of the gradual approach, whereas Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism use more of the instant approach. The gradual approach operates from the perspective of the phenomenal world, whereas the instant from that of transcendental reality. A rough analogy is that in the gradual approach, an aspirant lost in the world of phenomena gradually peels off the many layers of defilement that creates illusion, until finally the last layer is removed to reveal the undifferentiated Cosmic Reality. In the instant approach, the aspirant who intellectually understands the nature of Cosmic Reality, or is guided by a master who has this higher wisdom, makes a concerted, sometimes frantic, effort to tear away ignorance to attain Cosmic Reality.

It must be noted that the instant approach is not necessarily easier or even faster than the gradual. Those who are not ready may spend whole lifetimes trying, yet cannot arrive at that glorious instant of cosmic realization, but if they persist, perhaps in subsequent lives, irrespective of whether their approach is instant or gradual, they will certainly, inevitably achieve cosmic realization, for they rightly actualize their own nature.

3.60 Permeation towards Samsara

Original Text in Chinese

此妄境界熏習義，則有二種。云何爲二？一者，增長念熏習，二者，增長取熏習。

妄心熏習義有二種。云何爲二？一者，業識根本熏習，能受阿羅漢辟支佛一切菩薩生滅苦故。二者，增長分別事識熏習，能受凡夫業繫苦故。

無明熏習義有二種。云何爲二？一者，根本熏習，以能成就業識義故，二者，所起見愛熏習，以能成就分別事識義故。

Literal Translation

Permeation of realm of defilement is of two kinds. What two? One, intensify thought permeation. Two, intensify attachment permeation.

Permeation of the defiled heart is of two kinds. What two? One, permeation of basic karma, capable of causing arahats, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas suffer samsara. Two, intensify permeation of intellect consciousness, capable of causing ordinary people suffer samsara.

Permeation of ignorance is of two kinds. What two? One, basic permeation, capable of causing karma. Two, permeation of arising desires, capable of causing discriminating consciousness to arise.

Interpretation

The permeation of the realm of defilement, or phenomenal world, is of two kinds. One is to intensify the permeation of thoughts, i.e. the phenomenal world causes more and more thoughts to arise in us. The other is to intensify the permeation of attachment, i.e. the phenomenal world increases our attachment to ourselves and to objects.

The permeation of the defiled mind is of two kinds. One is the permeation of basic karma, which causes arahats, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas to continue their existence in the phenomenal realms. The second kind is to intensify the permeation of the intellect consciousness, causing ordinary people to continue their existence in the endless cycle of birth and rebirth.

The permeation of ignorance is of two kinds. One is the basic permeation, capable of causing karmic force that perpetuate the endless cycle of birth and rebirth. The second kind is the permeation of arising desires, which causes the discriminating consciousness, or the conscious mind, to arise.

Commentary

This is an elaboration of the permeation of differentiation. As mentioned earlier, there are four levels of permeation: Cosmic Reality, ignorance, karma, and phenomenal world.

These four levels can be divided into two groups, namely permeation of purity, and permeation of differentiation. Permeation of purity involves the first type, and represents the interaction of the Tathagata, or Cosmic Reality, to purify the other three phenomenal levels. Permeation of differentiation involves the three phenomenal levels, and represents their interaction to defile Cosmic Reality into differentiated realms of illusion.

Each of the three levels of differentiation permeation is further divided into two types, which may be described as fine and gross, though Asvaghosha did not use these two terms here. Fine permeations refer to those that are internal or too subtle to be discernable by people, whereas gross permeations are external or easily discernable.

The permeation of the phenomenal world in making Cosmic Reality defiled, can be fine, by causing more and more thoughts to arise in our mind. It can be gross, by intensifying our attachment to ourselves and to phenomena. In other words, due to the phenomenal world we become less likely to realize Cosmic Reality, because our mind is full of thoughts which will generate karmic effects, and because we cling to worldly belongings and emotions which hinder spiritual realization.

The permeation of karmic effect, which is caused by defiled mind, can be fine and gross. Arahats (or sravadas), pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas are highly enlightened beings, but they still exist in the phenomenal realms, in our world or in other planes as what many people would refer to as gods or higher intelligence, because their minds still harbour traces of thoughts such as wanting to help other beings. Their existence is the result of fine permeation of karma. On the other hand, the gross permeation of karma causes ordinary people to continue their existence in the cycle of birth and rebirth.

The fine permeation of ignorance refers to the interaction of original ignorance in Cosmic Reality, which through a series of transformations results in the operation of karma in the phenomenal world. This permeation is fine because not many people are aware that gross karmic operation of ordinary people in samsara is traceable to the original ignorance. On the other hand, the permeation of ignorance of ordinary people is gross. Because of the ignorance of the individual in the phenomenal world, various forms of desires arise in him, with the result that his discriminating consciousness is intensified. This, understandably, makes it harder for him to realize Cosmic Reality.

Nevertheless, while this downward permeation of differentiation causes us to experience reality as an illusory phenomenal world, the upward permeation of purity helps us towards spiritual realization. The next chapter explains this purity permeation and the various interactions that aid us in our quest for Cosmic Reality.

Chapter 17

Towards Cosmic Realization

Hence, if we only open our hearts, we can find spiritual influences everywhere. A helping hand from a stranger, or a feeling of awe when viewing the vastness of stars above, may permeate us to cultivate towards spiritual realization.

3.61 Permeation towards Nirvana

Original Text in Chinese

云何熏習起淨法不斷？所謂以有真如法故，能熏習無明。以熏習因緣力故，則令妄心厭生死苦，樂求涅槃。以此妄心有厭求因緣故，即熏習真如。自信己性，知心妄動，無前境界，修遠離法，以如實知無前境界故。種種方便，起隨順行，不取不念，乃至久遠熏習力故，無明則滅。以無明滅故，心無有起。以無起故，境界隨滅。以因緣俱滅故，心相皆盡，名得涅槃，成自然業。

Literal Translation

How does permeation give rise to purity continuously? Because of the Tathagata, it permeates ignorance. Because of this permeation force, the defiled heart rejects the suffering of samsara, and aspires to the bliss of nirvana. Because the defiled heart rejects karma, it permeates the Tathagata. With faith in own nature, know defilement and movement of heart, no realms beyond.

Cultivate to distance from phenomena, thus really understand no realms beyond. Various expedient means for cultivation, no attachment and no thought, until because of long force of permeation, ignorance is eliminated. With the cessation of ignorance, no heart arises. Because of no arising, all realms cease. Because both cause and effect cease, the heart characteristics terminate. This is called nirvana, and attain the Natural Effect.

Interpretation

How does permeation of the Tathagata give rise to a continual realization of Cosmic Reality?

Because the Tathagata is eternal and omnipresent, it permeates ignorance. Because of the force of this permeation, the defiled mind rejects the suffering of samsara, and aspires to the bliss of nirvana. Thus, the

defiled mind of the aspirant understands and consequently rejects the working of karma, and in return it permeates the Tathagata, with the result that he acquires higher wisdom and strengthens his faith. He knows that his own nature is actually an integral expression of Cosmic Reality, knows that all the differentiation and movements he experiences are actually the illusion of his defiled mind, and that all phenomenal realms are illusory.

The aspirant starts to cultivate to liberate himself from the phenomenal realms, as he truly understands that there are no realms beyond thoughts. Various expedient means are employed for this spiritual cultivation. He begins to free himself from attachment and from thought, until after a long period of such permeation, ignorance is eliminated. With the cessation of ignorance, no thought arises. As the result, all phenomenal realms cease. Hence the operation of cause and effect also ceases, and the aspirant eliminates the force of karma. As all characteristics of the individual mind terminate, the aspirant merges into the universal mind. This is called nirvana, and the aspirant attains the natural effect of manifesting in a reward body or transformational body if he wishes.

Commentary

This is the upward permeation from the phenomenal world to transcendental reality. There are two primordial qualities of the Supreme Reality, namely original Enlightenment and original ignorance, which relate to its two aspects, the transcendental and the phenomenal.

Hence, primordially, original Enlightenment and original ignorance permeate each other. The permeation of ignorance, or permeation of differentiation, which has been explained earlier, moves downwards from Cosmic Reality to phenomenal world. The permeation of Enlightenment, or permeation of purity, moves upwards from phenomenal world to Cosmic Reality. Fa Zang, the celebrated commentator, referred to permeation of the original Enlightenment which makes defiled mind long for purity, as "original permeation" (ben xun). Permeations other than this primordial impetus are referred to as "new permeation" (xin xun).

This passage also provides a comforting answer to the doubt of many people who wonder what happens to the enlightened being when he en-

ters nirvana. Does he, or his mind, spirit, soul or whatever you may call it, disintegrate into nothingness? Certainly not! Buddhism is definitely not nihilistic!

There are many levels of nirvana, or Enlightenment. At the lowest level, after seeing reality as it really is, i.e. a living void of universal consciousness in which the knower is also the known, he comes out of his samadhi, or deep meditation, and returns to his ordinary phenomenal self.

At a higher level he may manifest himself in other planes of existence or even in other time dimensions. He can do so as he has transcended time and space. Of course, he can come back to his earthly body if he still has attachment to it or to any earthly affairs; but if he so desires, he can discard his "smelly skin receptacle" and enjoys his reward in his "reward body" (sambhogakaya, or bao shen) or "transformational body" (nirmanakaya, or hua shen) in some heavenly realms.

At the highest level, when he attains perfect Enlightenment, he merges into the Universal Mind to enjoy eternal bliss – he becomes the Eternal Buddha! Even this is not the end. Should this highly Enlightened being wish to, he can come back to any realm as a Bodhisattva to help suffering beings.

3.62 Permeation of Defiled Mind

Original Text in Chinese

妄心熏習義有二種。云何爲二？一者，分別事識熏習，依諸凡夫二乘人等，厭生死苦，隨力所能，以漸趣向無上道故。二者，意熏習，謂諸菩薩發心勇猛，速趣涅槃故。

Literal Translation

Defiled heart permeation has two types. What two? One, discriminating consciousness permeation. Dependent on ordinary people and Hinayana followers, reject life-death suffering, following cultivation, gradually towards highest way. Two, will permeation. The powerful vows of bodhisattvas, speedily towards nirvana.

Interpretation

There are two types of permeation of the defiled mind. What are the two types?

One, there is the permeation of discriminating consciousness. Because of this permeation, ordinary people and Hinayana followers reject the suffering of birth and rebirth, and practise spiritual cultivation so that they will gradually advance towards the highest goal of spiritual realization.

Two, there is the permeation of sub-consciousness. Because of this permeation, bodhisattvas, i.e. spiritual cultivators following the Mahayana faith, who have made vows of far-reaching consequences advance speedily towards nirvana.

Commentary

This is an elaboration of the purity permeation. When the defiled mind is permeated by the thoughts of spiritual realization, there are two types of mani-festation.

The first type concerns the discriminating consciousness, or consciousness mind (*mano-vijnana*, or *yi shi*). This involves ordinary people and Hinayanists who believe that nirvana exists differently from samsara, i.e. when they attain Enlightenment they will go to a place or experience a state of mind that is existentially separate from where they are now or from a mental state of suffering. Their spiritual cultivation, therefore, aims at this heavenly realm, spatially or mentally.

The second type of purity permeation of the defiled mind concerns the sub-consciousness (*manas*, or *wei na shi*). This concerns Mahayanist cultivators who realize that nirvana and samsara are not existentially different, but are two aspects of the same reality. The difference is not ontological, but a matter of perspective and developmental stage. When they attain nirvana, they do not go elsewhere nor have changed their mind. They still remain where they are and their mind is the same, but while earlier they saw the world as an illusion in terms of differentiated phenomena, now they experience the infinite universe as undifferentiated, transcendental Cosmic Reality. The transformation is not just a change of mental state; it is spiritual liberation from a restricted personal confinement to the magnificent universal expanse of eternity and infinity.

The Mahayanist approach is therefore faster than the Hinayanist, because it is direct whereas the Hinayanist approach needs at least two stages – the first transports the adept into a nirvanic realm, and only the second, when he realizes that this nirvanic realm is still phenomenal and not transcendental, finally liberates him into Cosmic Reality. The first stage liberates him from attachment to self, and the second stage from attachment to phenomena.

Nevertheless, many Mahayanists, often without realizing it themselves, are following the two-stage approach similar to that of the Hinayanists. For example, the aim of the devotees of the Pure Land School (*Jing Tu Zong*), probably the most popular school of Chinese Buddhism today, is to be reborn at the Western Paradise of Eternal Bliss presided by Amitabha Buddha. This paradise exists in the phenomenal realm; this means the heavenly beings in this paradise still have not liberated themselves from the attachment to phenomena. But there with the help and blessing of Amitabha Buddha, they will eventually attain the final liberation into the Supreme Reality.

3.63 Permeation of the Tathagata

Original Text in Chinese

眞如熏習義有二種。云何爲二？一者，自體相熏習。二者，用熏習。

Literal Translation

Tathagata permeation has two types. What two? One, natural form permeation. Two, application permeation.

Interpretation

There are two types of Tathagata permeation. What are the two types? One, there is the permeation of the natural form or essence of the Tathagata, or Supreme Reality. Two, there is the permeation of the application of the Tathagata.

Commentary

The purity permeation on the defiled mind explained in the previous Passage is known as "new permeation" or "acquired permeation", i.e. a person becomes aware of the need for spiritual realization because of certain good influences acquired in the phenomenal world, such as learning from spiritual masters or reading religious literature. Another type of permeation, where the influence exists primordially, is known as "original permeation", and is explained in this Passage.

Original permeation comes from the Tathagata, or Supreme Reality, itself. The Supreme Reality can be manifested in three universals – the universal of forms, the universal of characteristics, and the universal of applications. This means that the Supreme Reality when manifested phenomenally can be of any and all forms, any and all characteristics, and any and all uses. Whatever forms that appear in phenomenal realms, like a stream in our world or hell fire in an infernal realm, are expressions of the Supreme Reality. What-ever characteristics or uses,

like the beauty of an angelic smile or the soothing effect of a temple chanting, are expressed by the Supreme Reality.

Hence, the permeation of the Supreme Reality is universal, found in all forms, characteristics and applications. This, indeed, is a comforting thought. Not only the most condemned criminals can be saved, the grace and blessing of the Tathagata is found in the darkest corners of the deepest hells.

The Tathagata permeation is of two types. The first type, which is gross, concerns all forms and characteristics. In Western terms, whatever we see and feel, even if it may be lowly, is an expression of God. The second type, which is fine, concerns all applications. Hence, if we only open our hearts, we can find spiritual influences everywhere. A helping hand from a stranger, or a feeling of awe when viewing the vastness of stars above, may permeate us to cultivate towards spiritual realization.

3.64 Permeation of Tathagata Form Original Text in Chinese

自體相熏習者，從無始世來，具無漏法，備有不思議業，作境界之性。依此二義，恒常熏習。以有力故，能令眾生厭生死苦，樂求涅槃，自信己身有真如法，發心修行。

Literal Translation

Natural body permeation, from beginningless beginning, is transcendental. Equipped with incredible effects, it manifests as phenomenal realms. Hence two meanings. It has permanent and eternal permeation. Because of its force, it is capable of making all sentient beings reject life-death suffering, and aspire to nirvana. They have faith that they have the nature of the Supreme Reality, and make vow to cultivate.

Interpretation

Since the beginningless beginning, the Supreme Reality is transcendental. However, it is equipped with the power of incredible effects, i.e. it can manifest itself as phenomenal realms. Hence, there are two aspects of the Supreme Reality: the transcendental aspect which is undifferentiated, and the phenomenal aspect which is differentiated.

The Supreme Reality has permanent and eternal permeation. Because of this permeation force, it is capable of making all sentient beings reject the suffering of birth and rebirth, and aspire to the attainment of nirvana. As a result, sentient beings have faith that they themselves possess the Buddha nature, i.e., they are an integral expression of the Supreme Reality. So they make vows to cultivate towards spiritual realization.

Commentary

According to Buddhist philosophy, Cosmic Reality has no beginning and no end, though our universe, which is only one of the countless universes of the phenomenal aspect of Cosmic Reality, may go through a cosmic cycle of birth, development, decay and death. It is significant to note that even among scientists who support the Big Bang theory, some of them are beginning to believe there is a beginning before the "absolute beginning". The research physicist Anjam Khursheed reports that "before the Big Bang, a super-heated melted vacuum is thought to have existed, filled with a sea of ghost particles."

In the phenomenal dimension, all sentient beings are an expression of the Supreme Reality. In Buddhist terms, all beings have the Buddha nature. So, even if there is no spiritual influences from outside, all sentient beings have the innate urge to cultivate for spiritual realization.

3.65 Different Rate in Enlightenment

Original Text in Chinese

問曰：若如是義者，一切眾生悉有真如，等皆熏習，云何有【信、無信、無量、前後】差別？皆應一時自知有真如法，勤修方便，等入涅槃。

答曰：真如本一，而有無量無邊無明。從本已來，自性差別，厚薄不同故，過恒沙等上煩惱，依無明起差別。我見愛染煩惱，依無明起差別。如是，一切煩惱，依於無明所起，前後無量差別。惟如來能知故。

又，諸佛法有因有緣。因緣具足，乃得成辯。如木中火性，是火正因。若無人知，不假方便，能自燒木，無有是處。眾生亦爾，雖有正因熏習之力，若不遇諸佛菩薩善知識等，以之為【緣】，能自斷煩惱入涅槃者，則無是處。若雖有外緣之力，而【內淨法】未有【熏習力】者，亦不能厭生死苦，樂求涅槃。若因緣具足者，所謂自有熏習之力，又為諸佛菩薩等慈悲願護故，能起厭苦之心，信有涅槃，修習善根。以修善根成熟故，則值諸佛菩薩示教利喜，乃能進趣向涅槃道。

Literal Translation

Question: If according to the meaning, all sentient beings innately have the Tathagata, and all are permeated, why is there difference of faith, no faith, great variety, front and back? All should simultaneously know that they have the Tathagata, diligently cultivate expedient means and enter nirvana.

Answer: The Tathagata is originally one and only, but there is immeasurable, unlimited ignorance. From the beginning, ignorance by nature is differentiated, not of the same thickness, and disturbed minds more numerous than the sands of the Ganges arise and be differentiated because of ignorance. Attachment to self, passions, differentiation, defilement arise dependent of ignorance. Hence, all defilements

dependent of ignorance arise, front and back of immeasurable difference, only the Tathagata knows.

Also, Buddhism has cause and effect. If cause and effect are adequate, it will be done. Like wood has fire nature. Fire is cause. If people are unaware of this, and do not apply expedient means, then wood will not burn. The same with sentient beings. Although they have the cause of permeation force, if they do not meet Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have this higher wisdom, which acts as effect, the sentient beings would not on their own liberate themselves from defilement to enter nirvana. There may be force of external effect, but if inner purity has no permeation force, then they may not reject the suffering of life-death and aspire to nirvana. Because both the cause and effect are present, there is natural permeation force, and there is compassionate protection and care from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, there arises the heart to reject suffering, believe in nirvana and cultivate good karma. When good karma is ripe, they deserve the blissful teaching of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, therefore they can advance towards nirvana path.

Interpretation

Question: If according to what has been explained that the Tathagata may manifest as transcendental reality or phenomenal world, all sentient beings are innately an expression of the Tathagata, and are permeated by the Tathagata, why is there great variety in the difference of believers and non-believers, and why some attain Enlightenment sooner than others? All people, knowing that they are an expression of the Tathagata, should simultaneously and diligently make use of expedient means in their spiritual cultivation and enter nirvana at the same time.

Answer: Although there is originally only one and the only Tathagata, there is immeasurable and unlimited variety of ignorance. From the beginningless beginning, ignorance by nature is differentiated, and of different quantities. Because of this great difference of ignorance, there arise defiled minds more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, and these defiled minds are also similarly differentiated. Because of

the great difference of ignorance, there arise the attachment to self, to passions, to differentiation, and to defilement. All defilements arise because of ignorance, at different times and of immeasurable varieties. The differentiation is so great that only the Tathagata knows all about this.

Also, there is the principle of cause and effect in Buddhist teaching. If cause and effect are adequate, universal laws will take their course. For example, wood has the fire nature, i.e. it is natural that wood can burn. Here the fire nature is regarded as cause, and burning its effect. If people are unaware of this, and do not expedient the burning, then that piece of wood will not burn. This is the same with sentient beings. Although they have the force of the Tathagata permeation in them, which is regarded as cause, if they do not meet Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have this higher wisdom regarding enlightenment, which acts as effect, the sentient beings would not on their own liberate themselves from defilement to enter nirvana.

On the other hand, there may be force of spiritual influence from outside, but if sentient beings were not the expression of the Tathagata and therefore had no Tathagata permeation force, then they may not have the desire to reject the suffering of birth and rebirth, and aspire to nirvana. Because both cause and effect are present, i.e. there is the natural permeation force of the Tathagata, and there is compassionate protection and care from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, there arises the intention to reject suffering, believe in nirvana and cultivate good karma. When good karma is ripe, the sentient beings, deserving the blissful teaching of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, can advance towards the nirvana path.

Commentary

Why do people have different rates of spiritual development, when the Supreme Reality is uniform and undifferentiated, or in Western terms, when God is fair and impartial to all? Internally, this is because different people have different amount and nature of ignorance in them. Externally, they experience a great variety of spiritual influences.

These internal and external factors in the process of enlightenment are known, for want of better terms in English, as cause and effect.

Both are necessary for people to work towards enlightenment. If they did not have the Buddha-nature in them (if they did not have the divine spark in the first place), they would not attain spiritual realization no matter how hard they might try. Even if they have the Buddha-nature, if they do not cultivate, they will not be able to actualize their divine potential. Hence, as we all have the divine spark in us, what we need to do is to cultivate according to our chosen religion.

The kind of permeation discussed here is the permeation of the Tathagata form, i.e. the benign effects of the Supreme Reality itself enable man to work towards enlightenment. This influence can be internal or external. Besides this form permeation, there is also the application permeation of the Tathagata, i.e. wholesome phenomenal manifestations of the Supreme Reality influence man to strive for cosmic realization. This permeation of the Tathagata application is explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 18

Benign Influence of Cosmic Reality

The benign cosmic influence may work on us not only through our parents and close friends, but also our servants and even enemies.

3.66 Permeation of Tathagata Application

Original Text in Chinese

用熏習者，即是眾生外緣之力。如是外緣有無量義，略說二種。云何爲二？一者，差別緣，二者，平等緣。

Literal Translation

Application permeation is the force of external effect of sentient beings. External effect has unlimited meanings. Generally may be said to be two. What two? One, differentiated effect. Two, undifferentiated effect.

Interpretation

The permeation of Tathagata application is the cosmic force that is expressed in all the manifestations in the phenomenal world. These manifestations are unlimited and countless, but can be divided into two main kinds, namely differentiated and undifferentiated.

Commentary

The countless ways cosmic reality interacts with the phenomenal world to help sentient beings attain cosmic realization, can be classified into two types, namely form permeation and application permeation.

Form permeation, which is the expression and influence of the Supreme Reality in all forms in all phenomenal realms, has been described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, application permeation, which can be differentiated or undifferentiated, is explained.

3.67 Differentiated Permeation

Original Text in Chinese

差別緣者，此人依於諸佛菩薩等，從初發意始求道時，乃至得佛。於中若見若念，或爲眷屬父母諸親，或爲給使，或爲知友，或爲怨家，或起四攝，乃至一切所作無量行緣。以起大悲熏習之力，能令眾生增長善根，若見若聞，得利益故。此緣有二種。云何爲二？一者，近緣，速得度故。二者，遠緣，久遠得度故。是近遠二緣，分別復有二種。云何爲二？一者，增長行緣。二者，受道緣。

Literal Translation

Differentiated effect, a person dependent on Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from the arising of the first intention to seek Tao until Buddhahood, during which time in sights or thoughts, or in the persons of parents or relatives, or servants, or intimate friends, or enemies, or through the arising of the four acts of loving kindness, and all myriad actions and effects. Awaken the permeation force of great compassion, enable sentient beings strengthen their good roots, through sights or hearing, to derive benefits. These effects are of two kinds. What two? One, near effect, attainable rapidly. Two, far effect, attainable after a long time. These near and far effects are further of two types. What two? One, the effect of strengthening the way of cultivation. Two, the effect of attaining the Tao.

Interpretation

The differentiated application permeation applies through the blessings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to an aspiring person since the first time he has developed the thought of cosmic realization till his attainment of Buddhahood. During his period of spiritual development, the influence of the Tathagata on him may be in the form of sights or thoughts, or in the persons of his parents or relatives, or servants, or intimate friends, or

even enemies, or through the arising of the four acts of loving kindness (which are charity, kind words, beneficial action and co-operation), and all other myriad actions and effects. This awakens the permeation force of great compassion in him, and enables him to improve his religious faith through sights or hearing, and to derive various forms of benefits.

The effects of this differentiated permeation are of two kinds, namely near permeation which is attainable rapidly, and far permeation, which is attainable after a long time. These near and far permeations are further divided into two types, namely the permeation that strengthens the way of spiritual cultivation, and the permeation of attaining nirvana.

Commentary

The differentiated application permeation of the Tathagata refers to the permeation of the differentiated cosmic manifestations on people to influence them towards spiritual realization. These differentiated cosmic manifestations may work in many and unexpected ways. The benign cosmic influence may work on us not only through our parents and close friends, but also our servants and even enemies. An outstanding example is found in the Bagavadgita where the Godhead personified as Sri Krishna and served as a charioteer to Arjuna. In an outlandish example, if an enemy killed you, it might be an act of merciful God enabling you to attain spiritual realization!

My personal experience may be illuminating. Years ago, when I learned of numerous cases of people killed in motor accidents immediately after they had prayed to gods in temples, I was indignantly angry. I was even rash and arrogant enough to say I would confront those gods and ask them in their faces what kinds of gods they were! But later as I developed spiritually, I realized I was wrong. The gods could have been very kind and generous! To us mere mortals who can only comprehend the universe from our puny, and grossly limited and distorted perspective, accident deaths must be ghastly. But from a wider cosmic perspective, those souls felt no sorrow and no pain, and perhaps felt grateful to their gods for the immediate liberation, as they instantly discarded their earthly bodies for probably happier planes, if not for the grand cosmic union.

Needless to say, the above description is never meant to rationalize any form of killing. Killing, in fact, is a cardinal sin in Buddhism. But it does illustrate an example of viewing events from a cosmic perspective, where there is no absolute right or wrong. It also explains some of the seemingly illogical actions of Zen masters, like stumping or hitting their teachers. Of course, unless we have attained this level of spiritual development, we are not permitted this form of 'idiosyncrasy.' At the transcendental dimension, all forms of dualism cease: there is no difference between teacher and student, subject and object, for everything is undifferentiated.

This understanding would have significant impact on us. As an example of the beneficial effect of the application permeation of the Supreme Reality, we may suddenly realize that many of the things that we previously attached great importance to, like keeping up with the Jones or winning the mad rat race, are actually not so important after all. We may be able to take our setbacks more philosophically: while not degenerating to resignation, we can rightly regard our setbacks as opportunities generated by cosmic permeation for our spiritual growth.

3.68 Undifferentiated Permeation

Original Text in Chinese

平等緣者，一切諸佛菩薩，皆願度脫一切眾生，自然熏習恒常不捨。以同體智力故，隨應見聞而現作業。所謂眾生依於三昧，乃得平等見諸佛故。

Literal Translation

In undifferentiated permeation, celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas vow to save all sentient beings, and spontaneously and perpetually permeate them, never forsaking them. Through the wisdom which is the same, through sights and hearing they manifest their deeds. All sentient beings through samadhi are capable of equally seeing celestial Buddhas.

Interpretation

In undifferentiated permeation, celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have made vows to save all sentient beings, spontaneously and perpetually permeate them, and never forsake them. Through their wisdom which is the same as the Tathagata wisdom inspiring all beings towards enlightenment, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas manifest their deeds in various ways that sentient beings can see and hear. As they progress in their cultivation, all sentient beings in their samadhi, or deep meditation, are able to see celestial Buddhas.

Commentary

Fa Zang commented that differentiated permeation involves the manovijnana or conscious mind, whereas undifferentiated permeation involves the manas, or subconscious. In differentiated permeation, like listening to religious teaching or doing charitable work, the aspirant is usually conscious of the spiritual effect of the permeation. In undifferentiated permeation, so called because the spiritual influence does not

occur as separate events, the aspirant is not normally aware of the permeation. So, if you feel like doing something good, it may be a case of undifferentiated permeation.

In their deep meditation, aspirants may be able to see celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who benignly influence them. While many uninitiated readers would be skeptical of such a claim, I personally know of many people who have had such experiences. The term "celestial Buddhas" refers to Buddhas who manifest themselves in their reward bodies or transformation bodies so that spiritually advanced people can see them, in contrast to transcendental Buddhas, who are undifferentiated aspects of the Supreme Reality.

It would be interesting to investigate if this concept of undifferentiated permeation can be used to explain certain experiences in the profane world. For example, can it be a case of negative undifferentiated permeation when societies frequently exposed to violence in television also incline towards violence in real (or phenomenal) life? On the other hand, societies that are mindful of divine presence are generally contented and law-abiding, although there may not be any deliberate programmes asking them to be so. This is an example of positive permeation.

3.69 Pre and Post Mutual Reaction

Original Text in Chinese

此體用熏習，分別復有二種。云何爲二？一者，未相應，謂凡夫二乘初發意菩薩等，以意、意識熏習。依信力故能修行。未得無分別心，與體相應故；未得自在業修行，與用相應故。二者，已相應，謂法身菩薩，得無分別心，與諸佛智用相應。惟依法力，自然修行，熏習真如滅無明故。

Literal Translation

This form and application permeation can again be divided into two types. What two? One, pre-mutual-reaction. Ordinary people, Hinayanists and bodhisattvas who have just started spiritual training use their discriminating hearts in permeation, and are dependent on faith force to cultivate. They have not attained the undifferentiated heart, and they interact with form. They have not attained spontaneous effect cultivation, and they interact with application. Two, post-mutual-reaction. Dharmakaya Bodhisattvas who have attained non-discriminating hearts, mutually react with the wisdom of celestial Buddhas. Using the Dharma force, they cultivate spontaneously. They permeate Zhen Ru and eliminate ignorance.

Interpretation

Permeation of the Tathagata form (explained in the previous chapter) and permeation of the Tathagata application (explained above) can also be classified into two types, according to pre or post mutual-reaction between the aspirants and the Tathagata.

In the permeation of pre-mutual-reaction, the aspirants have not reacted mutually with Cosmic Reality, i.e. they have not directly experienced cosmic realization. This type of permeation applies to ordinary people, Hinayanists and those bodhisattvas who have just started

spiritual training. These aspirants use their discriminating minds in permeation, i.e. their effort towards the attainment of cosmic reality is made consciously. They are dependent on the force of their faith in their spiritual cultivation. As they have not attained cosmic realization directly, their interaction with Cosmic Reality is through various phenomenal forms manifested by the Supreme Reality. Also, because they have not attained the effect of spontaneous cultivation, their interaction with the applications of Cosmic Reality is differentiated.

In the permeation of post-mutual-reaction, the adepts have interacted with Cosmic Reality, i.e. they have directly experienced cosmic realization. This type of permeation applies to Bodhisattvas who, having realized Cosmic Reality, have experienced the undifferentiated void of universal consciousness. Thus, they can mutually react with the wisdom of celestial Buddhas. Using their spiritual force, they cultivate spontaneously. They permeate the Supreme Reality and eliminate ignorance.

Commentary

This Passage indicates that there are different levels of Enlightenment, and suggests the difference between nirvana and Buddhahood. Mahayanist Buddhists say that Theravada Buddhism is only a preparation because Theravadins aim only at nirvana, which is to the Mahayanists a lower form of Enlightenment. Mahayanists aim at Buddhahood, which is becoming the Supreme Reality!

Permeation with the Supreme Reality can be divided into two types, according to whether the aspirant has directly experienced Cosmic Reality or not. For those who have not experienced Cosmic Reality, the permeation is pre-mutual-reaction; for those who have attained cosmic realization, it is post-mutual-reaction. Reaction here refers to that between the aspirants and transcendental reality.

Those in the pre-mutual-reaction permeation may have intellectually understood what the Supreme Reality is, but they still have no direct experience of it. Hence, their interaction with the Supreme Reality is at the phenomenal dimension. They have not gone "beyond the three realms" (i.e. the realm of desires, the realm of form, and the realm of non-form).

Those who have experienced Cosmic Reality directly have attained nirvana, i.e. they have experienced reality as it is, and not as an illusion. They "have jumped beyond the three realms", but they jump back because their karmic effects are not totally spent. They may, for example, have vowed to save other sentient beings, and this acts as a karmic force to pull them back into the phenomenal world. As they have transcended space and time (which are non-existent in transcendental reality), they can perform expedient means which ordinary people, who are restricted by the dimensions of space and time, call miracles, like transporting water from a distant stream for drought victims, or looking into the past or future for information to help others. They are highly Enlightened beings, but as there are still higher levels of Enlightenment they continue to cultivate until eventually they attain Buddhahood.

3.70 Supreme Reality is Eternal

Original Text in Chinese

復次，染法從無始以來，熏習不斷。乃至得佛，後則有斷。淨法熏習，則無有斷，盡於未來。此義云何？以真如法常熏習故。妄心則滅，法身顯現，起用熏習，故無有斷。

Literal Translation

Again, differentiated permeation since non-beginning has permeated continuously. Until becomes Buddha, then it stops. Purity permeation has no end, through eternity. What is the meaning of this? The eternal permeation of Zhen Ru, defiled heart will terminate. The Dharma Body will appear and give rise to permeation. Hence no end.

Interpretation

Let us look again at differentiated permeation. Since the beginning-less beginning, differentiated permeation has operated ceaselessly. But this differentiated permeation will stop when all sentient beings have attained Buddhahood. On the other hand, purity permeation has no end; it will continue through eternity.

Why is this so? This is because as the purity permeation operates ceaselessly, there will come a time when all sentient beings will have achieved spiritual realization. At this time all defilement will terminate. The full glory of the Supreme Reality will appear without any blemish of ignorance, and will continue to radiates in purity. Hence, there is no such thing as an end to the Supreme Reality.

Commentary

Domesday, Armageddon, extinction of mankind, end of the cosmos and such concepts are never found in Buddhism. Instead, the Supreme Reality, or God, Brahman, Tao, Allah or whatever name your religion

decides, will ultimately reign in full glory for eternity and everywhere. Meanwhile, countless worlds, at both the microscopic and the galactic scales, constantly are born, develop and expire, and will be described in the next chapter.

There are also no such things as divine retribution for, or alienation against sinners. If a person has sinned, the first concern of a Buddhist for him is not punishment nor judgement, but compassion and help. Who says Buddhism is negative?

Chapter 19

Cosmic Evolution and Individual Soul

Although every sentient being in the phenomenal realms has a soul, who carries the five aggregates in his countless lives in the cycle of birth and rebirth, including rebirth in heavens if he maintains good karma; in transcendental reality there is no individual soul.

3.71 Infinite and Eternal

Original Text in Chinese

復次，眞如自體相者，一切凡夫、聲聞、緣覺、菩薩、諸佛，無有增減，非前際生，非後際滅，畢竟常恆。

Literal Translation

Then, the natural body of Zhen Ru. All ordinary people, Sravadas, Pratyekabuddhas, Bodhisattvas, all Buddhas neither add nor subtract. Neither created in the beginning nor terminated at the end. It is infinite and eternal.

Interpretation

After we have learnt about the two aspects of the Supreme Reality, i.e. transcendental reality and phenomenal world, let us now learn about its three universals, i.e. the universals of forms, of characteristics and of applications. Let us start with its universal of forms.

From the spatial perspective, the Supreme Reality is all inclusive. Everything there is, is included in the Supreme Reality. The total numbers of ordinary people, Sravadas, Pratyekabuddhas, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are neither added nor subtracted. For example, when an ordinary person becomes a Buddha, it does not mean that there is one ordinary person less and one Buddha more. From the temporal perspective, the Supreme Reality was not created in the beginning, nor terminated at the end. It is infinite and eternal.

Commentary

Why is it that when a mortal becomes a Buddha, the numbers of mortals and Buddhas still remain the same? Hui Neng's famous statement that when a mortal is Enlightened he becomes a Buddha, when a Buddha is unenlightened he becomes a mortal, provides an answer. It is something like your brother getting married: he does not cease to be your brother when he becomes his wife's husband.

It is also significant to note that while Sravadas become Enlightened by hearing and following the Buddha's teaching, Pratyekabuddhas include those who become Enlightened by following other religious teachings. This shows that Buddhists accept that Enlightenment can be attained by other religious or even non-religious, like scientific, means.

In Buddhist teaching, the Supreme Reality is eternal: it has no beginning and no end. Phenomenal worlds and whole universes, however, undergo birth and rebirth! Much ahead of modern astronomers, Buddhist masters described the life cycles of worlds and whole universes in four stages of birth, growth, decay and death. Their knowledge was astonishingly accurate. For example, Buddhist sources since the past have mentioned that our universe was formed 12.8 billions years ago. Only now, after numerous errors in earlier estimates, many astronomers believe that the age of our universe is between 10 to 20 billion years.

Regarding our earth, Buddhist sources say that it was covered with water during its birth or formative stage which lasted 335,960,000 years. Black clouds formed in the sky with heavy rain and lightning beating on the earth's ocean, which was probably what modern scientists call the prebiotic soup. Cosmic winds blew over the water and vaporized its essence to form various heavenly realms above the earth surface. Later the "realm of supportive structure" (qi shi jie), or the inorganic world in western terms, appeared.

The "realm of sentient beings" (you qing shi jie), or the organic world, began on earth at its growth or developmental stage. According to Buddhist sources, the first forms of organic life arrived here from other worlds, while some life forms also came from the heavenly realms above where heavenly beings because of their bad karma reincarnated here. Probably after nine kalpas, which is about 3 billion years, the first humans were found, for it was then that the early Buddhas appeared on earth. The Buddhist sources mention that due to their karmic merits or demerits, the life-span of humans varied enormously at different epochs, ranging from about 20 years to 84,000 years! In this era of Guatama Buddha, the human life-span is about a hundred years.

Buddhist sources also mention that throughout its history our earth has been devastated by natural catastrophes, in the pattern of seven fires followed by a deluge. Once, there were two, then three, and finally seven suns in the sky, with the result that the earth was parched. During

great floods, sometimes the water reached up to some of the heavenly realms. However, the final catastrophe that will destroy this earth, the Buddhist masters predicted, is neither fire nor flood, but cosmic winds.

But that is not necessarily the end of the world or mankind. The world, perhaps in different forms, will be born again, and continue its endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Moreover, the various stages of birth, growth, decay and death occur at different times for different worlds. So, at any one time, there are countless worlds teeming with life.

The cycle of birth, growth, decay and death operates at the galaxy level as well as at the human, sub-atomic and all other realms. Lobsang Rampa's description in his "The Cave of the Ancients" that from the time a match is lighted till the flame extinguishes, representing to some sentient beings the birth and extinction of a universe, is illuminating. This cycle is also applicable to the mental dimension. A thought, as explained in Passage 3.22, arises, abides, changes and stops. As thoughts, in different realms, are real substantial things, it would be interesting to philosophize whether what we think in our mind is actually a "real-life" drama for some other beings. Alternatively, is our life drama a mental projection of some divine consciousness?

3.72 Joy, Permanence, Self

Original Text in Chinese

從本以來，性自滿足一切功德。所謂自體有大智慧光明義故，徧照法界義故，真實識知義故，自性清淨心義故，常樂我淨義故，清涼不變自在義故。具足如是過於恆沙、不離不斷、不異、不思議佛法。乃至滿足無有所少義故，名為如來藏，亦名如來法身。

Literal Translation

Since the origin, the nature is self-sufficient to satisfy all merits. This is because the natural body has great wisdom of brightness, illuminating all Dharmarealm. It has real consciousness of knowledge, and its self nature is pure and tranquil, endowed with permanence, joy, self, and purity, clear and cool, immutable and free.

Its excellent qualities are more numerous than the sands of Ganges, non-differentiated and non-transient, unchangeable, incredible dharmas of Buddha. It can satisfy everything and lacks nothing, named Ju Lai Zang, also named Ju Lai Fa Shen.

Interpretation

Since the beginningless origin, the nature of the Supreme Reality is self-sufficient to satisfy all needs in the phenomenal world. This is because the Supreme Reality possesses great wisdom to overcome ignorance, illuminating the entire Dharmarealm. It also has real consciousness of knowledge, and purity to eliminate all defilement. It is endowed with permanence, therefore overcoming impermanence; joy, therefore overcoming suffering; spontaneous self, therefore overcoming uncertainty regarding souls; and purity, therefore overcoming all problems.

It is free from any distortion, and is immutable, and free from birth and rebirth. Its excellent qualities are more numerous than the sands

of Ganges, and exist as non-differentiated and non-transient, unchangeable, incredible dharmas of Buddha. This collection of dharmas satisfies everything, and lacks nothing, and is named Ju Lai Zang (Tathagata-garbha, or the Storehouse of the Supreme Reality), and also named Ju Lai Fa Shen (Tathagata Dharmakaya, or the Spiritual Body of the Supreme Reality).

Commentary

This is an important passage answering some intriguing questions on Buddhism from the Mahayanist view-point. It is frequently said that the three marks of Buddhism, i.e. the three special features that distinguish (mainly Theravada) Buddhism from other religions, are dukkha, anicca and anatta, which are Pali terms meaning the doctrines of suffering, of non-permanence, and of non-self. These three doctrines expound that there is much suffering in life, that nothing is permanent, and that the self is non-existent.

However, if these three doctrines are inadequately understood, they may lead to serious mis-conceptions. Not only a person does not have a soul or spirit, even his own physical and mental identity is in question. According to this concept, what the person thinks is his real self is only a collection of five aggregates (skandhas) of forms, thoughts, feelings, activities and intellect, which are all constantly changing. So, he is totally different from what he was the previous moment, and will be, as he has always been, totally different every moment. On top of all this, he suffers through life most of the time.

At death, the five aggregates dissolve, but his karmic effect results in a rebirth of a new collection of five aggregates. Actually, according to this belief, the terms "death" and "rebirth" are not appropriate, because as everything is impermanent and there is no self or soul involved, it is not certain who or what dies and is reborn.

Nevertheless, although this collection of aggregates exists only momentarily, his spiritual aim, like that of all other Buddhists, is to eliminate suffering and attain nirvana. Exponents of this belief never seem to be bothered with answering why is it necessary for this soulless, non-self person, properly regarded as a momentary collection of five aggregates,

to eliminate suffering when the very next moment he and all his suffering will be naturally eliminated.

Nirvana, in this context, is often regarded as extinction – extinction of suffering as well as the karmic effect that would, if not for nirvana, result in another collection of aggregates. As there is no permanent self or soul, it is difficult to answer questions like who actually attains nirvana, or what happens at or after nirvana. More serious questions for which there have been no satisfactory answers, include what is the purpose of working for nirvana when everything (including nirvana) is impermanent, and what actually is nirvana if it is not – as it seems here – total, final extinction.

If Buddhism is interpreted along this philosophy, it is no surprise that many people think it is pessimistic, negative and nihilistic. What is there to work for if everything is impermanent? What is the meaning of salvation if there is no soul or self to save? What is the logic of enlightenment if it results in the dissolution of the very being that is Enlightened? Obviously, the fact that so many people of various races and cultures, among whom are highly intelligent minds and deeply sincere hearts, have embraced Buddhism throughout history, indicates that there must be some mistake in the interpretation of these three doctrines.

This concept, which is accepted by many Theravadins today, is rejected by many other Buddhists. Mahayanists and Vajrayanists generally believe in the existence of an indestructible self, mind or soul.

Right at the beginning when doctrinal differences led to the formation in India during the first five hundred years in Buddhist history, of the traditional eighteen schools, of which Theravada was one of these schools, there was intense debate over this issue of self or soul. The Pudgalavadins, a popular Hinayana school which later developed into many other schools, put up convincing arguments against these doctrines held by some elders. In fact, the name of the school was derived from their stand that the self, or pudgala, exists in the phenomenal realm. They pointed out, for example, it was incontestable that the term pudgala is often mentioned in the sutras. The Vatsiputriyas, another Hinayana school, quoted from the Burden Sutra and postulated that the bearer of the five aggregates is the pudgala, or self.

Recalling his previous lives, the Buddha himself said, "This sage

Sunetra, who existed in the past, that Sunetra was I.” Even in the *Abhidharma*, the Buddhist classic greatly valued by the exponents of non-self, the eight types of enlightened beings are generally known as the eight pudgalas. “The orthodox teachers had to admit these passages, but maintained that they do not mean what they say”. Their defence was rather flimsy too, arguing that “even if your pudgala exists, he is not useful for salvation, does not promote welfare, or dharma, or the religious life, produces no super-knowledge, Enlightenment or Nirvana. Because there is no use for him, therefore the pudgala does not exist”.

Yet it is intriguing that even in important Theravada scriptures, the soul is discussed. For example, “one of the sutras of the *Digha Nikaya* (D I 17-49) mentions a great number of speculative views. The subject discussed were especially the nature of the soul and the world, the nature of virtue and its results, the existence of another world, and whether the soul and the world are caused or not.” The trouble with the doctrines of suffering, impermanence and non-self lies in their being understood superficially. Buddhism, like most other religions, must be appreciated at two levels: ordinary knowledge and higher wisdom. *Bodhisattva Nagarjuna*, considered by many as the second Buddha, said that the essence of Mahayana Buddhism is lost if these two levels of ordinary knowledge and higher wisdom are not understood.

Seen from the phenomenal perspective, life is suffering, not that there is no joy in living, but that the very nature of existence in the phenomenal realm deprives the being from existence in transcendental reality. But from the transcendental view-point, life is eternal joy. It is understandable that those without any knowledge of the eternal joy of transcendental reality, will cling to worldly pleasures, just as a child who has never gone beyond his poverty-stricken environment will cling to his petty toys. One should note that the teaching is not against enjoying pleasures (unless it brings suffering to others), but that clinging to these pleasures will generate karmic effect that ties him to birth and rebirth, thus denying himself the chance of attaining eternal joy.

From the phenomenal aspect, everything is transient; but from the transcendental aspect, everything is permanent. In the phenomenal world, not only the dharmas that constitutes a person are momentary as they are constantly changing, even his whole life-span of a hundred years in the present era is like a wink of the eye when compared to the

countless lives he has undergone and will undergo if he makes no effort to liberate himself from samsara. But if he succeeds in realizing Cosmic Reality, he actualizes his eternity!

Even in the Hinayana scriptures, the Buddha did not categorically say that there was no soul. When asked by followers who had not acquired the higher wisdom, or even challenged by other people, the Buddha kept a noble silence so as not to confuse them. But in the Mahayana and the Vajrayana scriptures, there are frequent references to the soul, like souls of devotees going to the Western Paradise of Eternal Bliss.

The idea of non-soul or non-self was used by the Buddha for two specific purposes: to correct wrong beliefs concerning the soul at the phenomenal level, and to help his followers to attain Cosmic Reality at the transcendental level. These two purposes are actually the same, but interpreted at the ordinary or the higher levels. Many people believe that each person has a separate soul, which will go to heaven if he has faithfully fulfilled his religious duties. This is a common belief among ordinary people at the phenomenal level. At a higher transcendental level, spiritual aspirants believe that when they achieve spiritual realization, their individual souls will reunite with the Supreme Reality.

According to the Buddha’s teaching, these two concepts are mistaken, or they miss the highest spiritual goal. There is no doubt in Buddhism, as in other religions, that the good and pious will go to heaven. But in Buddhist teaching, going to heaven is not the highest spiritual ideal, because it is still in the phenomenal realm. And if those souls in heaven are obsessed with their own individuality, they will not be able to liberate themselves from the phenomenal illusion so as to attain transcendental reality.

At a higher level, the aspirant in this worldly life understands the higher wisdom and works for cosmic realization with the Supreme Reality directly, without bothering to go to heaven first. When he succeeds in this most noble mission, he is awakened to the fact that he is the Supreme Reality! It is not the case of his puny individual soul joining the Cosmic Soul; his is the Cosmic Soul!

An analogy, though imperfect, can illuminate this great truth. Let us say that the Supreme Reality is a gigantic ocean, and the countless fishes swimming in the ocean are spiritual aspirants. In every aspirant

there is some water of the ocean, which, for our purpose, represents the individual soul of that aspirant. When the aspirant attains spiritual realization, he discards his fishy body, and suddenly realizes that his soul (the drop of water formerly imprisoned in his body) is actually an integral part of the Supreme Reality (the whole ocean). The amount of water remains the same in the ocean, before and after he attains spiritual realization. He does not add his drop of water to the ocean, because this drop was already a part of the ocean. Similarly, when a person attains perfect enlightenment, he does not add his soul to the Cosmic Soul. The amount of souls remains the same, but he suddenly realizes that his soul is actually the Cosmic Soul.

Hence, although every sentient being in the phenomenal realms has a soul, who carries the five aggregates in his countless lives in the cycle of birth and rebirth, including rebirth in heavens if he maintains good karma; in transcendental reality there is no individual soul. If an aspirant clings to his individual soul, which means he has not totally liberated himself from the phenomenal dimension, he will not be able to realize the highest spiritual fulfilment. The Buddha, therefore, expounded the concept of no soul (in the transcendental aspect) to help him.

Chapter 20

Triple Body, Quantum Fields and Shadow Matter

Indeed, many controversial issues and mis-understandings concerning Buddhism, such as whether Buddhism is a religion or a philosophy of life, whether the Buddha is a human or God, and whether Buddhists are atheists, monotheists or polytheists, can be resolved with a proper understanding of this triple body concept.

3.73 Void and Quantum Fields

Original Text in Chinese

問曰：上說眞如，其體平等，離一切相。云何復說體有如是種種功德？答曰：雖實有此諸功德義，而無差別之相，等同一味，惟一眞如。此義云何？以無分別，離分別相，是故無二。

Literal Translation

Zhen Ru mentioned earlier is undifferentiated, devoid of all characteristics. Then why say its body is provided with all sorts of merits? Answer is that although reality has these merits, there are no differentiated characteristics; they are the same as one flavour, only one Zhen Ru. What meaning? There is no differentiation, devoid of all characteristics, thus without any double.

Interpretation

It is mentioned earlier that the Supreme Reality is undifferentiated, and devoid of all characteristics. Then why is it that its body or essence is provided with all sorts of phenomena? The answer is that although the Supreme Reality can be manifested in differentiated phenomena, these differentiated characteristics are actually of one and the same nature. There is only one Zhen Ru.

What is the meaning of this: saying that it is differentiated and also undifferentiated? The Supreme Reality has no differentiation, and is devoid of all characteristics. There is only one Supreme Reality; it is without any double. But, because of our gross perception, we wrongly interpret the Supreme Reality as differentiated.

Commentary

Perhaps the most notable tenet of Mahayana Buddhism is void or emptiness. This concept has puzzled many people. What is meant by void

here, is not absolute nothingness; it means that transcendental reality is devoid of phenomena. In other words, the countless, different objects and processes we see are actually an illusion.

How can the universe be void or empty? If we limit ourselves on earth and to the phenomenal dimension, we can, of course, see countless, different objects and processes. But what about the universe out there? Does it consist of the countless, different objects we see on earth?

Many of us would be surprised at what our scientists have found out – according to their gross perception, albeit with elaborate scientific instruments. "Hydrogen is believed to account for about 92.7 per cent of all the atoms in the entire universe, and helium for around 7.2 per cent. This leaves a tiny 0.1 per cent for all the other types of atoms, of which there are 90 known to occur naturally." So, we can imagine if any one of our unenlightened humans happens to be out there in the universe, all he probably sees, as he cannot see hydrogen and helium atoms, is void or emptiness.

Let us now listen to what our latest physicists have to say about our physical world. "Many physicists now believe that particles are not fundamental constituents of matter. According to these scientists, the physical world is made up of quantum fields, which can manifest themselves as particles in many different ways. Quantum fields are all that exists, they say; there is nothing else."

It is indeed amazing that our modern physicists are saying the same things Buddhist masters said centuries ago, although the same ideas are expressed in different words. The Buddhist masters went further. As described in details elsewhere in this book and summarily reviewed below, they explained why we see the particles or quantum fields as houses, cars, birds and other phenomena. On the other hand, what earthlings see as void out in the universe, may be experienced by other beings operating in other phenomenal realms as countless, different objects and processes. Conversely, when these beings look at our world, because of their different forms of sense perception, all they see may just be emptiness!

3.74 Manifestations of Phenomena

Original Text in Chinese

復以何義得說差別？以依業識生滅相示。此云何示？以一切法本來唯心，實無於念，而有妄心，不覺起念，見諸境界，故說無明。心性不起，即是大智慧光明義故。若心起見，則有不見之相。心性離見，即是徧照法界義故。若心有動，非真識知，無有自性，非常非樂，非我非淨，熱惱衰變，則不自在。乃至具有過恒河沙等妄染之義。對此義故，心性無動，則有過恒沙等諸淨功德相義示現。若心有起，更見前法可念者，則有所少。如是淨法無量功德，即是一心，更無所念。是故滿足，名爲法身如來之藏。

Literal Translation

Then why is there differentiation? This is due to the characteristics of karma, consciousness and samsara. How? All dharmas basically come from the heart; reality has no thoughts. Non-Enlightenment gives rise to thoughts, and sees all phenomenal happenings. Hence it is said to have ignorance. When the nature of heart does not arise, this is the meaning of the light of great wisdom. If perception arises in the heart, there arises the characteristic of not seeing reality. When the nature of heart is free from perception, this is the meaning of illuminating the dharmarealm.

If the heart is moved, it is not real knowledge, and results in unnaturalness, non-permanence and non-joy, non-self and non-purity, hot-headed and troubled heart, hence non-spontaneity. This causes defilements more numerous than the sands of Ganges. Concerning this meaning, the heart nature is not moved, thus merits of purity more numerous than the sands of Ganges. If heart arises, then like earlier dharmas with thoughts, thus lacking. Thus merits of purity are unlimited, all is only one heart, without thoughts. Hence, fully endowed, named Fa Shen Yu Lai Zang.

Interpretation

If the Supreme Reality is undifferentiated, then why is there differentiation in its manifestation as the phenomenal world? This differentiation is due to the characteristics of karma, consciousness and samsara.

How is this possible? All dharmas, or objects and processes in the phenomenal world, basically come from the mind. The Supreme Reality has no thoughts of its own. Thoughts arise because of non-Enlightenment, which causes us to see undifferentiated reality as differentiated phenomena. Hence, this non-Enlightenment is said to be the original ignorance of the Supreme Reality.

When thoughts do not arise in the mind, it is the meaning of having the light of great wisdom. If perception arises in the mind, the mind becomes defiled and thus cannot see reality as it really is. When the mind is free from perception, this is the meaning of the light of great wisdom illuminating the dharmarealm, or the phenomenal world, thus seeing reality as it is.

If the mind is defiled by thoughts, what it knows is not real knowledge, because it is only knowledge of the illusory world, not of cosmic reality. This is not consistent with the nature of the Supreme Reality, thus causing non-permanence and non-joy, non-self and non-purity, defiled mind and troubled heart. Hence, this is not the spontaneous state of Supreme Reality. This results in defilements more numerous than the sands of Ganges.

But if the mind is not defiled, then it results in excellent qualities more numerous than the sands of Ganges. The four excellent qualities of permanence (chang), joy (le), self (wo) and purity (jing) will result. If the mind is defiled, then, like the results of defilement mentioned earlier, these excellent qualities will be lacking. These excellent qualities are unlimited, and they all come from the one and only Universal Mind.

When the mind of an aspirant, which is an expression of the Universal Mind, is purified of all thoughts, he attains cosmic realization. This fully endowed nature of the Supreme Reality is called Cosmic Body (Fa Shen, or Dharmakaya) when manifested, or Supreme Storehouse (Ju Lai Zang, or Tathagata-garbha) when latent.

Commentary

Why do we see the phenomenal world as differentiated when transcendental reality is undifferentiated? This question has been answered in details earlier when Asvaghosha describes the two aspects of the Supreme Reality. Here, as he explains the universal characteristics of the Supreme Reality after explaining its universal forms, he summarizes the earlier detailed explanation.

In a nutshell, phenomenal differentiation is the result of karma, consciousness and samsara. It means that because of the karmic effects of his previous lives, a person is born with innate different qualities that constitute his consciousness, which is also linked to the alaya consciousness, or universal consciousness, of man developed through the millennia. Hence he sees reality as differentiated. This further generates karmic effect, thus perpetuating his cycle of birth and rebirth, with the result that the defilement of his mind is intensified.

It is significant to note that here, again, Asvaghosha mentions the "four excellent qualities" of permanence, joy, self and purity (chang, le, wo, jing) in transcendental reality, and he contrasts them with non-permanence, non-joy, non-self and non-purity (fei chang, fei le, fei wo, fei jing) in the phenomenal world. It is clear that the so-called three marks of (mainly Theravada) Buddhism, i.e. impermanence, suffering and non-self, are certainly not meant as uncompromising features of Buddhist life, but meant as doctrinal techniques to help devotees attain Enlightenment. In Mahayana Buddhism, the three most typical marks are void, compassion and wisdom.

3.75 Simultaneous Arising of All Realms

Original Text in Chinese

復次，真如用者，所謂諸佛如來，本在因地，發大慈悲，修諸波羅蜜，攝化眾生，立大誓願，盡欲度脫等眾生界。亦不限劫數，盡於未來，以取一切眾生如己身故。而亦不取眾生相。此以何義？謂如實知一切眾生，及與己身真如平等無別異故。以有如是方便智，除滅無明，見本法身，自然而有不思議業種種之用。即與真如等徧一切處。又亦無有用相可得。何以故？謂諸佛如來，惟是法身智相之身。第一義諦，無有世諦境界。離於施作，但隨眾生見聞得益，故說爲用。

Literal Translation

Next, application of Zhen Ru. All Buddhas are Thusness. Originally at the land of cause, they manifested great compassion, cultivated various paramitas, saved all sentient beings, made great vows, desired to eliminate all samsara of sentient beings. Their effort is unlimited by the number of kalpas, to the end of eternity. They save all sentient beings as if saving ourselves, but they do not manifest the characteristics of sentient beings. What is the meaning? They know that all sentient beings are not different from their own body of the Supreme Reality. With great wisdom of great expedient means, they eliminate ignorance, and see the original Spiritual Body. Naturally there are miraculous effects, thus extending to everything and everywhere. Yet, there are no characteristics. Why? Because all Buddhas are the Tathagata, the Spiritual Body as the body of wisdom, the first truth, without the realms of phenomena. They are free from activities, but through sights and hearing sentient beings get benefits. Thus it is said to be application.

Interpretation

After discussing the forms and characteristics of the Supreme Reality, let us now discuss its applications.

All Buddhas, during their appearance in the phenomenal worlds as Bodhisattvas, manifested great compassion and cultivated various paramitas to save all sentient beings. They made great vows with the desire to eliminate all cycles of birth and rebirth of all sentient beings. Their effort is unlimited by the numbers of kalpas, and continues till the end of eternity.

These Buddhas regard all sentient beings as they regard themselves; the Buddhas never regarded sentient beings as separate with different characteristics. Why is this so? This is because they know that all sentient beings and they themselves are the same Supreme Reality with no differentiation. They have great wisdom which is manifested in the expedient means they employed in their spiritual cultivation. Hence they could eliminate all ignorance, and perceive the original Spiritual Body. Naturally they possess the application of miraculous effects with manifold influences, pervading the whole Dharmarealm.

Yet they leave no marks of their applications. Why is this so? It is because all the Buddhas, or the Buddha-Tathagata is the Supreme Reality itself, the embodiment of all wisdom, the Absolute Principle. The Buddha-Tathagata is free from all phenomenal activities where conventional truths operate; yet because sentient beings can derive benefits from seeing and hearing the Buddhas, they are regarded as the universal application of the Tathagata.

Commentary

”One Heart, Two Gates, Three Universals”. This is the main theme of Asvaghosha’s Awakening of Faith in Mahayana. It means there is the one and only Supreme Reality, which can be experienced in two dimensions, namely the phenomenal and the transcendental, and which manifests as universal forms, universal characteristics and universal applications in the timeless past, present and future. Phenomenally, the Supreme Reality encompasses everything there is, including all known and unknown forms of matter and energy in all galaxies, as well as all ”non-material” entities like thoughts, emotions, heavens, hells and astral

beings. Transcendently, space and time become irrelevant: everything is one beautiful living unity interpenetrating one another, and all arising at the same time. Ten dharmarealms (or universes) can be found in a particle of dust, and a particle of dust can contain ten dharma-realms!

But how can that be possible? We, so used to our spatial and temporal limitations, would ask. Indeed, Empress Wu of the Tang Dynasty once asked the great Hua Yen master, Fa Zang (who was also a celebrated commentator of Awakening of Faith), to demonstrate this famous Hua Yen doctrine of all in one and one in all, the simultaneous arising of all realms, the inter-penetration and containment of all dharma.

Fa Zang prepared a hall full of mirrors on all the walls, ceiling and floor. Then he placed a statue of the Buddha in the centre of the hall with the mirrors reflecting and counter-reflecting the Buddha images infinitely. As the empress was spell-bound by the panorama, the master said: Your Majesty, this is a demonstration of Totality in the Dharma-dhatu. In each and every mirror within this room you will find the reflection of all the other mirrors with the Buddha’s image in them. And in each and every reflection of any mirror you will find all the reflections of all the other mirrors ... the mystery of realm embracing realm ad infinitum is thus revealed.

Then he placed a crystal ball on his palm, and explained: Your Majesty, now we see all the mirrors and their reflections within this small crystal ball. Here we have an example of the small containing the large as well as of the large containing the small. This is a demonstration of the non-obstruction of ”sizes”, or space.

3.76 Transformational and Reward Bodies

Original Text in Chinese

此用有二種。云何爲二？一者，依分別事識。凡夫、二乘心所見者，名爲應身。以不知轉識現故，見從外來。取色分齊，不能盡知故。二者，依於業識。謂諸菩薩從初發意乃至菩薩究竟地，心所見者，名爲報身。身有無量色。色有無量相。相有無量好。所住依果，亦有無量種種莊嚴。隨所示現，即無有邊，不可窮盡。離分齊相，隨其所應，常能住持，不毀不失。如是功德，皆因諸波羅蜜等無漏行熏、及不思議之所成就，具足無量樂相，故說爲報身。

Literal Translation

Such uses are of two kinds. What two? One, according to discriminating consciousness, what laymen and Hinayana followers see in their hearts is called the Transformational Body. Because they do not know the appearance of transformational consciousness, they regard from the outside, taking from form, unable to understand fully. Two, according to the karma consciousness, conceived by all Bodhisattvas from initial stage of vows till the final stage, seen by the heart, called the Reward Body. The Body has countless forms, the forms have countless characteristics, the characteristics have countless benefits. According to their fruit, there are countless and various glories, manifested as needed, without bounds, and there are no limits. The differentiation into characteristics is manifested according to needs. They are permanent and inexhaustible, indestructible and never lost. Such are the results of merits due to the practice and permeation of the paramitas, as well as the results of miraculous effects, sufficient to provide countless characteristic of bliss, hence called the Reward Body.

Interpretation

The application of the Buddha or the Supreme Reality is of two kinds. What are the two kinds?

One, according to the discriminating consciousness of sentient beings in the phenomenal dimension, there is the Transformational Body (Nirmanakaya), which is what laymen and Hinayana followers see in their mind. Because the laymen and Hinayana followers fail to understand that the appearance of the phenomenal world is actually the result of a series of consciousness transformation, they erroneously think that this appearance comes from outside the observers (that is, erroneously think that the phenomenal world has objective reality). This is because they do not understand fully.

Two, according to the karma consciousness conceived by all Bodhisattvas from the initial stage of taking vows to the final stage of enlightenment, there is the Reward Body (Sambhogakaya), which, because of their karmic merits, the Bodhisattvas understand is an expression of the mind.

The Reward Body may be manifested in countless forms, the forms with countless characteristics, and the characteristics with countless benefits.

According to the fruit of their cultivation, the Bodhisattvas may experience the manifestations of the Reward Body of the Buddha in countless, glorious ways relating to what is needed. The manifestations are without bounds, and there are no limits. The differentiation of the manifestations into infinite characteristics is manifested according to needs. The manifestations are permanent and inexhaustible, indestructible and never lost. Such are the results of merits due to the Bodhisattvas' practice and permeation of the paramitas (or perfections) as well as the results of miraculous effects. The Reward Body is so called because it is sufficient to provide countless characteristic of bliss.

Commentary

It is amazing how far was Asvaghosha ahead of modern physicists and psychologists. Almost twenty centuries before overwhelming experimental results in quantum mechanics force modern physicists to accept "that nothing is real and that we cannot say anything about what things are

doing when we are not looking at them”, Asvaghosha already explained that the so-called outside world, known as the Transformational Body of the Buddha, has no objective reality. Those who are not familiar with quantum mechanics, may like to know that ”quantum theory represents the greatest achievement of science”, without quantum mechanics ”we’d have no computers, no science of molecular biology, no understanding of DNA, no genetic engineering.”

And when modern psychologists and neuroscientists are still uncertain whether the mind is housed in the brain, long ago Asvaghosha expounded that what most people regard as objective reality is actually an illusion due to a series of consciousness transformations (described in some detail elsewhere in this book). The great Buddhist master further explained that because of their spiritual cultivation, Bodhisattvas experience a different, and more beautiful, perception of the phenomenal world, which is known as the Reward Body of the Buddha, and they are able to apply the manifestations of this Reward Body for countless needs, including saving sentient beings. It should be noted that ”Buddha” here refers to the Eternal Buddha, or the Supreme Reality.

Here, the concept of the Transformational Body and Reward Body of the Buddha is used at the cosmic scale. The phenomenal experience of Cosmic Reality by ordinary people is referred to as the Transformational Body by Bodhisattvas as the Reward Body. The concept can also be applied at the human scale, where the Buddha is manifested in the human form. The human manifestation as Siddharta Guatama Sakya-muni seen by ordinary people is the physical body of the Buddha; when manifested in other forms in other spatial or temporal dimensions is known as the transformational body. The Buddha seen by Bodhisattvas in celestial light at the divine dimension is the reward body.

3.77 Triple Body of the Buddha

Original Text in Chinese

又，爲凡夫所見者，是其粗色。隨於六道，各見不同。種種異類，非受樂相。故說爲應身。復次，初發意菩薩等所見者，以深信真如法故，少分而見。知彼色相莊嚴等事，無來無去，離於分齊，惟依心現，不離真如。然此菩薩猶自分別，以未入法身位故。若得淨心，所見微妙，其用轉勝。乃至菩薩地盡，見之究竟。若離業識，則無見相。以諸佛法身，無有彼此色相迭相見故。

Literal Translation

Then, what is seen by ordinary people is its coarse form. According to the six planes, each see differently, various different types, not receiving the characteristic of bliss. Thus called the Transformational Body. Again, Bodhisattvas since their first stage of spiritual development, because of their deep faith in Zhen Ru, have a partial insight into reality. They know that the forms, characteristics and other glorious manifestations do not come or go, free from differentiation, dependent on the mind’s perception, inseparable from Zhen Ru. But these Bodhisattvas still differentiate because they have not enter the Spiritual Body (Dharmakaya). If they attain pure heart, are able to perceive the subtlest marvels, their application will turn to perfection as they arrive at the final stage of the Bodhisattvas’ cultivation and perceive the ultimate. When free from karma, there is no perception of characteristics. The Spiritual Body of all Buddhas has no such forms and characteristics to be seen.

Interpretation

What is seen by ordinary people is the coarse form of Cosmic Reality. According to their different planes of existence in the six realms of hell dwellers, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, astral beings and gods, differ-

ent beings perceive reality differently. Ordinary people perceive reality as differentiated into countless phenomena, and this differentiation is according to the transformational processes of their consciousness. Thus the illusory phenomenal world is called the Transformational Body of the cosmic reality.

Since the first stage of their spiritual cultivation, because of their deep faith in the Tathagata or Supreme Reality, Bodhisattvas have a partial insight into Cosmic Reality. They know that all the forms, characteristics and other glorious manifestations of the cosmic reality do not just come and go as perceived by ordinary people, and this Bodhisattvas' perception is called the Reward Body of cosmic reality. All the different phenomena seen by ordinary people are in reality free from differentiation; they appear as differentiated because of the coarse perception of deluded mind. Actually what is ignorantly perceived as phenomena is inseparable from the Supreme Reality.

Yet, these Bodhisattvas at the early stages of spiritual cultivation still differentiate. Their mind is still dualistic, because they have not entered the One and Only Mind of Supreme Reality, known as the Spiritual Body of the Buddha. If they attain this One Mind, and are able to perceive the subtlest marvels, their application of cosmic reality in whatever they do will turn to perfection, as they arrive at the final stage of the Bodhisattvas' cultivation and perceive the ultimate. When the Bodhisattvas have become Buddhas, and are free from the effects of karma, there is no perception of any forms or characteristics, because cosmic reality is undifferentiated and non-dualistic. The Spiritual Body of all Buddhas, who are physical bodies of the one and only Eternal Buddha, has no such forms and characteristics to be seen.

Commentary

Here Asvaghosha gives an excellent and concise explanation of the triple body of the Buddha, which is one of the most important concepts in Mahayana Buddhism. Indeed, many controversial issues and misunderstandings concerning Buddhism, such as whether Buddhism is a religion or a philosophy of life, whether the Buddha is a human or God, and whether Buddhists are atheists, monotheists or polytheists, can be resolved with a proper understanding of this triple body concept.

Professor Yoshito S. Hakeda provides an admirable commentary:

The Awakening of Faith is known, among other things, for its concise presentation of this (triple body) theory. As presented in the text, the Dharmakaya or 'Essence-body' represents the manifested form of pure Suchness, which in its latent form is known as Tathagata-garbha. The Sambhogakaya or 'Bliss-body' represents Suchness as conceived by the mind of the Bodhisattvas, endowed with infinite attributes of bliss. The Nirmanakaya or 'Transformation-body' represents Suchness as conceived by the minds of ordinary people, the body appearing in the likeness of the conceiver.

The Sanskrit terms for the triple bodies, Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya, are variously translated. Pro. Hakeda (1967) uses 'Transformation-body', 'Bliss-body' and 'Essence-body' respectively. Rev. Timothy Richard (1907) refers to them as 'common state', 'inspired state' and 'Divine State'. All these terms are appropriate; the difference, I believe, is due to the personal choice and emphasis of the translator, which perhaps is inevitable in any translation. My choice of 'Transformational Body', 'Reward Body' and 'Spiritual Body' is guided by my preference to linguistic exactness of the original Chinese terms, 'ying shen', 'bao shen' and 'fa shen', from which all translations are made.

My choice, however, is arbitrary: "Response Body" is probably more linguistically exact than 'Transformational Body', but I choose the latter because it has been widely used. The translations of 'Zhen Ru' ('Tathagata' in Sanskrit) into 'Suchness' by Prof. Hakeda, and into 'True Model', 'True Likeness' and 'True Reality' by Rev. Richard are linguistically more exact, but I prefer 'Supreme Reality' and sometimes 'cosmic reality' because of cultural consideration.

However, in the last sentence of the quotation above, Prof. Hakeda appears to say that the 'Transformation-body' of the Buddha is the physical body (rupakaya) of the historical Buddha as seen by ordinary conceiver, though elsewhere in his book 'Transformation-body' can be taken to mean 'the total body of phenomena'. This apparent confusion is due to the different interpretation of the word 'Buddha'.

It is important to remember that "Buddha" in this context does not refer to Siddhartha Guatama Sakyamuni or to other human manifestations in other aeons, but refers to the Supreme Reality, which is the Omnipresent and Omniscient of all and everything there IS, probably corresponding to what in Western term would be called the Almighty God in transcendental dimension. This is a typical Mahayana concept, not readily accepted by Theravadins. Hence readers who are used to Theravada literature, may find this concept unfamiliar.

Not only are the three bodies of the Buddha or Supreme Reality perceived differently by people at different developmental stages, every manifestation is also perceived differently by different beings at different planes of existence. At the human plane, for example, while a devoted Buddhist may view a wooden statue of Guatama Buddha with deep reverence and perhaps with awe, a follower of another religion, if he is tolerant enough, may just admire the beauty and majesty of its sculpture. On the other hand, a Zen monk who has attained enlightenment but who for some reasons still remains in his human form, would have no need for the statue, and may find it more useful to chop it into pieces for a fire to keep warm – though this will be a selfish gesture, probably contributing a karmic effect that pulls him down to his human plane.

But to a micro-organism that happens to be lodged in the wooden belly, the statue would be a physical universe, and the micro-organism would perhaps regard clusters of carbon atoms at the head of the statue as distant galaxies. Sentient beings vibrating at a different frequency in a different plane of existence may not see this "solid" statue at all, or they may see it in a form more weird than our wildest imagination can conjure. If some of their members happen to have scientific knowledge similar to our own, they may develop mathematical equations demonstrating that much of their "empty space" is actually filled with shadow matter.

Chapter 21

The Buddhist Doctrine of Emptiness

Saying the universe is void or empty does not mean it is total nothingness; it means that at the transcendental level, the universe is devoid of all phenomena as they are normally seen by ordinary people.

3.78 Form and Spirit

Original Text in Chinese

問曰：若諸佛法身離於色相者，云何能現色相？答曰：即此法身是色體故，能現於色。所謂從本已來，色心不二。以色性即智故，色體無形，說名智身。以智性即色故，說名法身，徧一切處。所現之色無有分齊，隨心能示十方世界，無量菩薩、無量報身、無量莊嚴。各各差別，皆無分齊，而不相妨。此非心識分別能知，以真如自在用義故。

Literal Translation

Question: If all Buddhas' Spiritual Body is free of form and characteristics, why able to reveal forms and characteristics? Answer: Because the Spiritual Body is the body of form, able to reveal forms. So, since the origin, form and mind are not two. From the nature of form is wisdom, the body of form has no shape, named the body of wisdom. From the nature of wisdom is form, named Spiritual Body, pervading everywhere. The forms that are manifested have no limitations, according to the heart can be manifested in the ten phenomenal realms of time and space, as infinite Bodhisattvas, infinite reward bodies, infinite glories, all differentiated and unrestricted, and without any interference amongst one another. This is not what the discriminating heart and consciousness can comprehend, as it is the spontaneous working of Zhen Ru.

Interpretation

Question: If the Spiritual Body of the Eternal Buddha, or Supreme Reality, is free of form and all characteristics, why is reality as we know it able to reveal countless forms and characteristics?

Answer: This is because the Spiritual Body of the Buddha, or the Supreme Reality, is the embodiment of form, and therefore is able to reveal all forms. Right from the beginningless beginning, form and spirit

are the same. Seen from the perspective that the nature of form is wisdom, or the perspective of original Enlightenment, the embodiment of form has no shape. It is named the Embodiment of Wisdom.

But seen from the perspective that the nature of wisdom is form, or the perspective of non-Enlightenment, the manifestations of the Supreme Reality, named Spiritual Body of the Buddha, pervade everywhere. There are no limitations to the kinds and numbers of forms that are manifested. According to the operation of the deluded mind, these myriad forms can be manifested in all phenomenal realms of time and space, as infinite Bodhisattvas, infinite reward bodies, infinite glories, all differentiated and unrestricted, and without any interference amongst one another. This is not what the discriminating mind and consciousness of ordinary people can comprehend, as it is the spontaneous working of the Supreme Reality.

Commentary

At the transcendental dimension, spirit and form, or mind and matter, are one and the same. At the phenomenal dimension, mind and matter are different and exclusive. Ranasinghe explains that "each living being in the universe is a unit of mind" and "the chief difference between a unit of mind and a unit of matter is that whereas the mind never merges with any other unit of mind or matter, the unit of one element always merge or mix freely with units of other elements."

Here, Asvaghosha confirms what mystic masters have postulated since ancient time, that what the mind can believe, it can conceive. Phenomena which we normally regard as real and objective are the creations of the mind. When a master of any religion has purified his mind and transcended the illusory phenomenal difference between mind and matter, he can perform not just petty tricks found in creation myths and magical rites, but incredible miracles that have profoundly influenced history.

The miracles performed by the Buddhist masters An Shi Kao and Padmasambhava, for example, affected the histories of China and Tibet. Numerous classical Buddhist texts, like "Qing Jing Dao Lun" (Treatise on the Way of Stillness), "Ju She Lun" (The Abhidharma, or Treatise

on Higher Wisdom), and "Da Zhi Du Lun" (Treatise on the Path of Great Wisdom) provide explanation on these miracles.

3.79 From the Phenomenal to the Transcendental

Original Text in Chinese

復次，顯示從生滅門即入真如門，所謂推求五陰，色之與心。六塵境界，畢竟無念。以心無形相，十方求之，終不可得。如人迷故，謂東為西，方實不轉。眾生亦爾。無明迷故，謂心為念，心實不動。若能觀察知心無念，即得隨順入真如門故。

Literal Translation

Then, show the way from the Gate of Life-Death to the Gate of Zhen Ru. This involves searching for the five yins, that is, form and heart. The six dusty realms are ultimately without thought. As the heart has no characteristic of shapes, searching in ten directions, it still cannot be found in the end. Like lost in a journey, thinking east is west, but reality has not turned. So are sentient beings, ignorant and lost, regard heart as thought, yet real heart does not move. If able to observe and perceive the heart without thought, then able to follow and enter the Gate of Zhen Ru.

Interpretation

After understanding that mind and matter are actually the same, we can show the way from the 'Gate of Life and Death' to the 'Gate of Supreme Reality', that is, from samsara to nirvana, or from the phenomenal world to transcendental Cosmic Reality. This involves examining the 'five yins' (now usually called the 'five yuns'), or the five skandhas or aggregates of forms, feelings, thoughts, action and consciousness. In the final analysis these five aggregates concern matter and mind.

The 'six dusty realms' or six realms of defilement are those of form, sound, smell, taste, touch and substance. These realms are ultimately without thought. In other words, the phenomenal world we perceive through our six senses is actually an illusion of the deluded mind.

As the mind has no spatial and temporal dimensions, it still cannot be found even if we search for it in ten (figuratively meaning all) spatial and temporal directions. Such searching is like that of someone lost in a journey, who mistakes east for west, but in reality east and west have not changed.

So are sentient beings, who being ignorant and lost in their spiritual quest, regard the One Mind as their deluded thoughts, i.e. mistake cosmic reality as the illusory world; yet Supreme Reality has not changed though their thoughts constantly change. If they are able to observe and perceive the Universal Mind without the interference of their personal thoughts, then they are able to follow and attain spiritual fulfilment.

Commentary

This passage sums up the philosophy and practice of Buddhism! It illustrates how important and concise Asvaghosha's work is, and how difficult it is for someone unfamiliar with Buddhist terms to understand Awakening of Faith in Mahayana even if he understands Chinese. It is also suggestive to those neuro-surgeons hopeful to find the mind when they operate on the brain, that they are most likely to be disappointed.

As in all other great religions, the aim of Buddhism is to realize Supreme Reality, called by various names due to linguistic, cultural and other differences. We are actually an integral, organic part of the Supreme Reality, but because of our ignorance and gross sense perception, we perceive the manifestations of the Supreme Reality, including ourselves, as the illusory phenomenal world. Our spiritual task, therefore, is to dispel the illusion and directly experience cosmic reality.

This fundamentally involves dispelling the illusion concerning our "internal" selves, and the illusion concerning "external" phenomena. What we mistake as our material selves are actually five aggregates of sub-atomic particles, feelings, thoughts, action and consciousness. And what we regard as 'solid, "objective" phenomena are actually creations of our six sense perceptions.

In the transcendental dimension, in which cosmic reality is to be realized, both the five aggregates and the six sense creations are unreal, brought about and conditioned by our thoughts, which we mistake as our individual minds. When we can go beyond thoughts, our false

"internal" selves and "external" phenomena fall apart, and "we" attain the state of wu-xin or no-mind, as what "we" erroneously thought were our individual minds "dissolve" or "expand" to become the Universal Mind, thereby accomplishing spiritual fulfilment.

3.80 The Correction of Evil Attachment

Original Text in Chinese

對治邪執者，一切邪執，皆依我見。若離於我，則無邪執。是我見有二種。云何爲二？一者，人我見。二者，法我見。

Literal Translation

Against evil attachments: all evil attachments are due to personal views. If free from personal self, then there are no evil attachments. Personal views are of two types. What two? One, personal view on self. Two, personal view on phenomena.

Interpretation

Regarding the dealing against evil attachments, or false practice owing to wrong concepts, it should be known that all evil attachments are due to having wrong personal views. If a person is free from wrong personal views, he will have no evil attachments. Wrong personal views are of two types, namely wrong view on self, and wrong view on phenomena.

Commentary

This passage concerns the first percept of the Noble Eight-fold Path, that is, right understanding or right view. The tremendous importance of this first percept is obvious from the fact that if a devotee starts with wrong understanding, he would waste much time and effort even though he may be very pious. This statement may seem like a platitude, but many devotees fail to realize cosmic reality because of this evil attachment. For example, a pious Buddhist daily worshiping a statue of the Buddha may become more pious, if not superstitious, but he is unlikely to progress very far in his quest for cosmic reality if he does not understand the illusion of self and of phenomena.

3.81 Void is Not Empty Space

Original Text in Chinese

人我見者，依諸凡夫，說有五種。云何爲五？一者，聞修多羅說，如來法身，畢竟寂寞，猶如虛空。以不知爲破著故，即謂虛空是如來性。云何對治？明虛空相是其妄法，體無不實。以對色，故有。是可見相，令心生滅。以一切色法，本來是心，實無外色。若無外色者，則無虛空相。所謂一切境界，惟心妄起，故有。若心離於妄動，則一切境界滅。惟一真心，無所不徧。此謂如來廣大性智究竟之義，非如虛空相故。

Literal Translation

False views on self, according to ordinary people are of five kinds. What five? One, hearing the sutras say that the Spiritual Body of the Buddha is ultimately quiescent, like empty space. Not realizing it is meant to overcome the Being concept, may think empty space is the Buddha nature. How to rectify? Understand that the characteristic of empty space is phenomenal method; its body is not unreal. For form, it has. Can see its characteristics, let the heart become life-death. All forms of substance are originally the heart, in reality there is no outside form. If no outside form, then no characteristic of empty space. Thus all realms of space origin from the heart, therefore they exist. If heart is free from deluded movements, then all spatial realms cease. One and only heart, nowhere it does not permeate. This is termed the all-inclusive, ultimate wisdom of the Buddha nature, not actually empty space.

Interpretation

There are five kinds of false views on self held by ordinary people. What are the five kinds?

One, on hearing the sutras say that the Spiritual Body of the Buddha, or the Supreme Reality, is ultimately quiescent like empty space, ordinary people, not realizing that this description is meant to negate the concept of the Eternal Buddha as a Being, may actually think that empty space is the nature of the Buddha.

How to rectify this mis-conception? We should understand that conceptualizing the Eternal Buddha, or the Supreme Reality, with the characteristic of empty space is a method using phenomena for description. The Supreme Reality is not unreal. If we talk about form, the Supreme Reality has form. However, if we are led to see its characteristics, we may be misled to think of the Mind (i.e. Supreme Reality) as having features of life and death, i.e. the phenomenal world.

All forms of substance we see in the phenomenal world are originally the Mind; in reality there is no outside form giving shapes to phenomena. But if we conceptualize the universe as having no phenomena, then it is not possible to conceptualize cosmic reality with characteristic of empty space, because the concept of empty space is possible only in relation to the concept of phenomena.

Thus, all realms of space origin from the Mind; these spatial realms exist because the Mind creates them by the operation and conditioning of thoughts. If the Mind is free from movements of deluded thoughts, then all spatial realms cease. The one and only Mind pervades everywhere; there is nowhere it does not permeate. This is termed the all-inclusive, ultimate wisdom of the Buddha nature, which is actually not empty space.

Commentary

The concept that the universe or reality is void or empty is a typical doctrine in Buddhism, but it is frequently mis-understood, including by many Buddhists today. Here Asvaghosha clearly explains that saying the universe is void or empty does not mean it is total nothingness; it means that at the transcendental level, the universe is devoid of all phenomena as they are normally seen by ordinary people, because phenomena, being created and conditioned by thoughts, are illusory.

This passage also clarifies that the Eternal Buddha is not conceptualized as a Being, human or divine. The infinite energy-field of new

physics is a better analogy than Michelangelo's fatherly-figure of God to describe the Mahayana concept of the Eternal Buddha, known in Chinese as Ju Lai, and in Sanskrit as the Tathagata.

In this connection it is important to understand the triple body concept of the Buddha. The Buddha statue devotees pray to in a Buddhist temple is not the Buddha, just as the crucifix in a church is not Christ. Constructed in the image of the physical body of the Buddha, radiant with serenity, wisdom and compassion, it symbolizes the Spiritual Body of the Buddha, the Absolute Reality. For devotees who have not developed either the intuitive or the intellectual perception of the Absolute Reality, the Buddha statue serves as a helpful expedient means in their spiritual growth. Others who are more advanced in the spiritual quest may experience the reward body of the Buddha, appearing as gods, Bodhisattvas or other glorious manifestations in moments of divine inspiration.

3.82 The Sunyata Doctrine

Original Text in Chinese

二者，聞修多羅說，世間諸法畢竟體空；乃至涅槃真如之法，亦畢竟空。從本已來自空；離一切相。以不知為破著故，即謂真如涅槃之性，惟是其空。云何對治？明真如法身自體不空，具足無量性功德故。

Literal Translation

Two, the sutra says, all dharmas are ultimately empty; even the dharmas of Nirvana and Zhen Ru are empty. From the origin, spontaneously empty, free from all characteristics. If ignorant that is meant to overcome phenomena, then believe that Zhen Ru and Nirvana nature is empty. How to rectify? Understand that Spiritual Body of Zhen Ru is not empty; endowed with limitless merits.

Interpretation

Secondly, the sutra says that all dharmas are ultimately empty; even the dharmas that constitute Nirvana and the Supreme Reality are ultimately empty. It is said that from the beginningless beginning everything is empty, and free from any characteristics. If people do not know that the above statements are made so as to help man overcome his attachment to phenomena, they may actually believe that the nature of the Supreme Reality and Nirvana is really empty. How can we rectify this mis-conception? We should understand that the Spiritual Body of the Buddha, or the Supreme Reality, is not empty; it is actually endowed with limitless merits to bring benefits to humanity.

Commentary

Because of this common mis-conception, many people erroneously regard Buddhism as nihilistic. Historically, the Sarvastivada, which was

one of the leading traditional Hinayana schools, postulated that dharmas are real entities, though they exist only for an instant. On the other extreme was the Sautrantika, another Hinayana school, which argued that nothing (mind or matter) exists at all. Mahayana schools generally postulate that dharmas are unreal. Probably the most vocal on this issue was the Yogacara school, from which the Chinese Fa Xiang school and the Japanese Hosso school derived, and which propounded that the existence of all the outer world is due to inner ideation.

The sutra Asvaghosha refers to in this passage is the Prajnaparamita Sutra (Scripture on the Perfection of Wisdom), a voluminous collection in which the famous Heart Sutra is found, and which is probably the most representative on the void doctrine. "Void" is known as "kong" (pronounced as "k'ung") in Chinese, and "sunyata" in Sanskrit.

As Asvaghosha advises, one must not be mistaken to think that Sautrantika and Yogacara masters denied the existence of such objects as tables and chairs. Their insistence that dharmas, which the tables and chairs are ultimately consisted of, are unreal or exist only in the mind, are provisional techniques to help their followers to free themselves from attachment to phenomena. When Buddhists, while operating in the phenomenal dimension (which they happen to be most of the time in their earthly lives), sit on chairs or write at tables, they certainly know that these contrivances are "solid"; but if they understand the sunyata doctrine and perceive that in the transcendental dimension these contrivances are 'empty' or just a mental illusion, they will be in a better position to actualize Cosmic Reality.

Without a proper understanding of the sunyata doctrine, many people, including some Buddhists, erroneously think that nirvana is an extinction into nothingness. Asvaghosha's explanation, therefore, would put many aspirants at ease. The Supreme Reality, which the successful aspirant would have a glimpse at, at an early stage of nirvana, or be immersed in it at a final stage, is not a vacuum, but fully and marvellously endowed with limitless merits.

Chapter 22

Nirvana and Cosmic Reality

When an aspirant actualizes cosmic reality, he attains nirvana.

3.83 Mind and Matter

Original Text in Chinese

三者，聞修多羅說，如來之藏無有增減，體備一切功德之法。以不解故，即謂如來之藏有色心法自相差別。云何對治？以惟依眞如義說故，因生滅染義示現說差別故。

Literal Translation

Three, the sutra says, the Tathagata-garbha does not increase or decrease, but provided with all merits of dharmas. If not understood, would think the Tathagata has self-contradictory features of form and heart. How to rectify? Explain the meaning according to the Tathagata; and according to life-death defilement, hence difference.

Interpretation

Thirdly, the sutra says that the Tathagata-garbha, or the Universal Storehouse of the Supreme Reality, does not increase nor decrease in its universal storage, but is provided with dharmas sufficient for use in all sorts of forms and characteristics in the phenomenal world. If this is not properly understood, one may think that the Tathagata has self-contradictory features of matter and mind, i.e. plurality of mind and matter.

How can this mis-conception be rectified? This can be done by explaining that the meaning of the teaching can be interpreted from the perspective of Absolute Reality, whereby the Tathagata-garbha is seen as undifferentiated mind; and from the perspective of the defiled phenomenal world, whereby the Tathagata-garbha is manifested as differentiated material entities.

Commentary

Though the Tathagata-garbha, or Ju Lai Zang (or Ru Lai Zang) in Chinese, is an important concept in Mahayana Buddhism, it is surprisingly

not widely known or discussed. While cosmic reality is the undifferentiated one and only Mind, it has the potential to be manifested in countless, limitless forms, characteristics and uses according to the sense perceptions and needs of sentient beings.

In scientific terms, while "ultimate reality" may be the undifferentiated united energy field, human beings may shape, internally and externally, the same energy waves or particles into differentiated objects and processes according to their sense perceptions and needs. Other sentient beings whom we know, like whales and microbes, and beings whom we may not know, like fairies and extra-territorials, will experience the same energy field differently because they have different needs and sense perception.

This potentiality of undifferentiated cosmic reality to be differentiated in countless, limitless ways is termed the Tathagata-garbha, Ju Lai Zang or the Universal Storehouse of the Supreme Reality, where all the seeds for manifestations into phenomenal realms are stored.

3.84 Conditioned Origination

Original Text in Chinese

四者，聞修多羅說，一切世間生死染法，皆依如來藏而有；一切諸法不離真如。以不解故，謂如來藏自體具有一切世間生死等法。云何對治？以如來藏從本已來，惟有過恒河沙等諸淨功德，不離不斷，不異真如義故。以過恒沙等煩惱染法，惟是妄有，性自本無。從無始世來，未曾與如來藏相應故。若如來藏體有妄法，而使證會永息妄者，則無是處故。

Literal Translation

Four, the sutra says, all phenomena in the defiled world of life and death are possible because of the Tathagata-garbha; all phenomena are not independent of Zhen Ru. If not understood, may think that the Tathagata possesses all phenomena of life and death. How to rectify? The Tathagata-garbha since its origin has pure merits out-numbering the sands of Ganges, not independent of, not apart from and not different from Zhen Ru. Out-numbering the sands of Ganges are conditioned phenomena, due to illusion, their nature is originally non-existent. Since beginningless time they have had nothing in correspondence with the Tathagata-garbha. If the body of the Tathagata-garbha has defilement, realizing the Tathagata would eliminate defilement forever, has no sense.

Interpretation

Fourthly, the sutra says that all phenomena in the defiled world of samsara (endless cycle of rebirth) are possible because of the Tathagata-garbha, or Universal Storehouse of the Supreme Reality, and all phenomena are dependent of the Supreme Reality. If this is not properly understood, one may think that all the defiled phenomena in samsara are found in the Supreme Reality.

How to rectify this mis-conception? It should be explained that since the timeless origin, pure merits out-numbering the sands of Ganges are found in the Tathagata-garbha, and these merits are not independent, apart or different from the Supreme Reality. Phenomena, which also out-number the sands of Ganges, are conditioned, are due to illusion, and their nature is originally non-existent. Since beginningless time these phenomena have had nothing in them in correspondence with the Tathagata-garbha. If we take a hypothetical example and propose that the body of the Tathagata-garbha is defiled, then it makes no sense to say that one could eliminate defilement forever by realizing the Supreme Reality.

Commentary

The "world of life and death" means the phenomenal world, or samsara, where sentient beings have to undergo endless cycles of birth and rebirth. The phenomenal world is defiled because it is perceived through our very gross senses.

Phenomena are, therefore, conditioned; their appearance depends on the conditions of our gross senses, as well as on the prior factors that cause their appearance. Originally phenomena have no real existence! Cosmic reality is unconditioned; its existence does not depend on any conditions. It is therefore absolute or ultimate.

According to Buddhist philosophy, an object like a bird, an emotion like joy, or a process like singing, appear to us as phenomena because of various conditions. Their existence is provisional, not ultimately real! Earlier, Asvaghosha has explained that the illusory existence of these phenomena are conditioned by ignorance, karma and gross sense perception; and also by the "three fine and six gross" transformations.

Another way of explaining, widely used in Theravada Buddhism, is the doctrine of causality, or the doctrine of dependent origination, which lists "twelve causes of dependent origination" ("paticca-samuppada" in Pali, and "shi er yuan qi" in Chinese) in the following cyclical developmental stages:

1. Ignorance (avijja, wu ming).
2. Activities (sankhara, xing).

3. Consciousness (vinnana, shi).
4. Modality (namarupa, ming se).
5. Six Entries (salayatana, liu ru).
6. Contact (phassa, chu).
7. Perception (vedana, shou).
8. Desire (tanha, ai).
9. Attachment (upadana, qu).
10. Becoming (bhava, you).
11. Life (jati, sheng).
12. Death (marana, si).

What causes or conditions life and death, or the phenomenal world? It is caused or conditioned by the becoming or arising of phenomena. What conditions their becoming? They are conditioned by attachment, i.e. because we are attached to phenomena (whether they are birds, joyful emotion or singing) we experience them. If you have no attachment to birds, for example, they may pass you without your knowing.

What conditions attachment? It is desire. What conditions desire? It is sensual perception. What conditions perception? Contact between the phenomena and the appropriate sense organs. Many sounds in the universe, for example, are non-existent to us because our ears fail to make meaningful contact with them. What conditions contact? The six entries, whereby the "six defiled realms" of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thoughts are interpreted by our "six roots" of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and intellect.

What conditions the six entries? The modality of the foetus, including the mental and material aspects of the father and mother at the time of conception. What conditions this modality of the foetus? The consciousness which affects the choice of his father and mother, and the time and place of his rebirth. What conditions this consciousness? The activities of his former lives which bring about his present karma.

What conditions these activities? Ignorance. Because of his spiritual ignorance at the time of his previous death, this being, or karmic force as most Theravadins would say, perpetuates the cycle of samsara.

This doctrine of dependent origination certainly provides much food for thought, and hopefully action, for our modern psychologists and psychiatrists. May be the next time our psychiatrists examine a schizophrenic or a maniacal patient, besides prescribing drugs that they themselves know merely suppress his symptoms, they would check this list of causes, and if necessary seek the co-operation of therapists competent in past-life regression.

3.85 Nirvana has No End

Original Text in Chinese

五者，聞修多羅說，依如來藏，故有生死；依如來藏，故得涅槃。以不解故，謂眾生有始。以見始故，復謂如來所得涅槃，有其終盡，還作眾生。云何對治？以如來藏無前際故，無明之相亦無有始。若說三界外更有眾生始起者，即是外道經說。又如來藏無有後際。諸佛所得涅槃，與之想應，則無後際故。

Literal Translation

Five, the sutra says, according to the Tathagata-garbha, there is life and death; according to the Tathagata-garbha, one can attain nirvana. If not understood, may think that sentient beings have a beginning, and seeing beginning, may think the nirvana attained in Zhen Ru has an end, return to become sentient beings. How to rectify? The Tathagata-garbha has no beginning, the characteristic of ignorance has no beginning. If say that beyond the three realms there is beginning of sentient beings, it is taught by scriptures of other religions. Then the Tathagata-garbha has no ending. The nirvana attained by all buddhas correspond to the Tathagata, without end.

Interpretation

Fifthly, the sutra says that in the Tathagata-garbha is contained the origination of the phenomenal world, as well as the attainment of nirvana. If this teaching is not properly understood, one may think that as there is a beginning of nirvana for sentient beings, there is also an end to nirvana in cosmic reality, whereby the enlightened being would return to the phenomenal world as ordinary people. How to rectify this mis-conception.

It should be explained that the Tathagata-garbha has no beginning. Similarly, the characteristic of ignorance also has no beginning. If some-

one says that there is a beginning for sentient beings beyond the three realms (the realms of desires, the realms of form and the realm of non-form, which together represent the total phenomenal dimensions), that is the teaching of non-Buddhist scriptures. The Tathagata or cosmic reality, therefore, has no beginning and no ending, and the nirvana attained by all buddhas, corresponding to the eternal cosmic reality, has no ending too.

Commentary

The great commentator Fa Zang explained that this mis-conception is due to a faulty reasoning of dualistic concepts in a time sequence. It is easy for ordinary people to presume that concepts like ignorance and Enlightenment, samsara and nirvana are exclusive polarities, and that when one ends the other begins in a logical time order. They reason that when ignorance ends, Enlightenment begins, and when samsara ends, nirvana begins. Hence, logically but erroneously, they conclude that as there is a beginning for Enlightenment and nirvana, there is also an end.

Asvaghosha points out that ignorance has no beginning but an end, Enlightenment has a beginning but no end, and Cosmic Reality has no beginning and no end. Similarly, samsara has no beginning but an end as the aspirant becomes Enlightened, whereas nirvana has a beginning at Enlightenment but corresponding with Cosmic Reality, it has no end.

These five mis-conceptions (the first two mis-conceptions are described in the previous chapter) are due to people's attachment to their selves. Because of this attachment to self, many people, including mis-informed Buddhists, mistakenly think that Cosmic Reality is empty space, nirvana is extinction into nothingness, the Tathagata-garbha has plurality of mind and matter, there is defilement in Cosmic Reality, and nirvana has an end.

It is also interesting to note that "attachment to self" means the self exists. If there is no self in the first place, "attachment to self" becomes irrelevant. Like the profound teachings mentioned above, the doctrine of non-self is employed by the Buddha and other masters to help followers overcome this attachment to self. Similarly, this non-self

doctrine, if not properly understood, can be mis-interpreted to mean that the self, or soul, does not exist.

3.86 Faulty Concepts Regarding Nirvana

Original Text in Chinese

法我見者，依二乘鈍根故。如來但爲說人無我。以說不究竟，見有五陰生滅之法。怖畏生死，妄取涅槃。云何對治？以五陰法自性不生，則無有滅，本來涅槃故。

Literal Translation

Attachment to dharma. Because of the shallow understanding of the Hinayanists, the Tathagata only explained the doctrine of non-self. Hence, the teaching was not complete. Expounding the doctrine of five yins in samsara, and fearful of life-death, they wildly cling to nirvana. How to rectify? The five yins are unborn by nature, thus there is no cessation, originally in nirvana.

Interpretation

Mis-conceptions resulting from the attachment to dharma are now described. Because of the shallow understanding of the Hinayanists, the Buddha only explained the doctrine of non-self, without explaining the doctrine of non-dharma. Hence the Buddha's teaching is not completely understood by the Hinayanists. Expounding the doctrine of five yins (skandhas or aggregates) in samsara, and fearful of the cycle of birth and rebirth, they cling to a mistaken concept of nirvana. How to overcome this mis-conception? It should be explained that the five yins or aggregates are unborn by nature; thus, there is actually no cessation of the five aggregates because they are originally in nirvana.

Commentary

After describing the five mis-conceptions that result from the attachment to self, Asvaghosha now describes the mis-conception that result from the attachment to dharma. These two categories of attachment constitute the fundamental obstacles to nirvana.

According to the Mahayana tradition, soon after Guatama Buddha attained the highest nirvana, he gave a fascinating sermon on his Enlightenment and the mysteries of Cosmic Reality to a huge gathering of not only humans but also dragon kings, gods and other beings. However, his teaching was so profound that very few at that time could understand him. So he decided he would first teach the agama, the preliminary teaching on moral purity, and some basic doctrines so as to prepare his followers for later more profound teaching, which is now found in the Mahayana.

As the Hinayanists could not initially comprehend his deeper teaching on cosmic reality, so the Mahayanists claim, the Buddha first taught the doctrine of non-self, leaving the doctrine of non-dharma to when the followers were ready. Thus, those who did not progress to Mahayana philosophy did not have the complete teaching of the Buddha.

Vajrayana Buddhism, which was a later development, includes Mahayana philosophy. Theravadins, a term now loosely used to represent all Hinayanists, of course indignantly reject this Mahayanist claim, and postulate that the Mahayana as well as the Vajrayana teachings, including their most sacred scriptures, were later adulteration.

The Mahayanist stand on this issue is typically Buddhist in attitude, i.e. it does not really matter whether the teaching was personally from Guatama Buddha (though the Mahayanists honestly believe it was), so long as it helps devotees to attain the highest spiritual fulfilment; and in line with the Buddhist tenets of compassion and tolerance, Mahayanist teachers would expound this "higher teaching" of Buddhism, but sincerely respect the choice of Theravadins and other people in accepting or rejecting the teaching.

Needless to say, Asvaghosha's elucidation of what he considers as the mis-conceptions of the Hinayanists, is done in sincerity and good faith, certainly not in the least intended to chaff at the Hinayanists. If Theravada Buddhists or other people find the information disagreeable, they can of course disregard it as rubbish.

Let us hear what ancient Hinayana masters and modern Theravada teachers say about nirvana. In Pali, the language in which most of the Theravada scriptures are written, "nirvana" is called "nibbana".

"Nibbana, Nibbana, friend Sariputta, thus they say. But what, friend, is this Nibbana?" was the question asked by the wandering as-

cetic, Jambukhadaka. The Venerable Sariputta replied, "Nibbana is the extinction of lust, hatred and delusion."

Sariputta, a direct disciple of the Buddha himself, is one of the most venerated masters in Theravada Buddhism. The above quotation is taken from the Theravada scripture Samyutta-Nikaya.

The following is quoted from another Theravada scripture, Anguttara-Nikaya.

Freedom from conceit, destruction of thirst, the uprooting of attachment, the cutting off of continuity, the extinction of thirst, detachment, cessation, Nibbana.

The following two definitions are by well-known modern Theravada teachers, the Venerable Narada Thera and the Venerable Dhammananda respectively.

From a metaphysical standpoint Nibbana is deliverance from suffering. From a psychological standpoint Nibbana is the eradication of egoism. From an ethical standpoint Nibbana is the destruction of lust, hatred and ignorance. Nibbana the final goal of Buddhism implies nothing else but the clear, pure condition of freedom from sorrow, based upon freedom from desire, this in turn being founded upon the highest apprehension of the truth.

The above definitions of nibbana or nirvana are not quoted out of context; they are not meant by the above speakers to refer to one or some of many aspects of nirvana, such as answering specific questions like "What is the relation between nirvana and suffering?", "Does lust exist in nirvana?". The above quotations are meant by their speakers to answer the general question "What is nirvana?".

According to Mahayana philosophy, such a Hinayanist (or Theravadin) concept of nirvana is faulty. Prof. Yoshito S. Hakeda, who represents a Mahayanist view, says that "Nirvana is conceived by the Hinayanists as a state of perfect annihilation, i.e. as non-being, in contrast to being, which undergoes constant transformation."

The great Mahayana master, Nagarjuna, explains that there is no absolute difference between nirvana and samsara. The difference is relative: when one exists in the phenomenal dimension, it is samsara; when

he experiences transcendental reality, it is nirvana. In Chinese Buddhist literature, the term "Buddhahood" is often used in place of nirvana. The sixth patriarch of Chan Buddhism, Hui Neng, says, "The pure nature of Supreme Reality is the real Buddhahood." In other words, when an aspirant actualizes Cosmic Reality, he attains nirvana.

The Hinayanists' faulty conception of nirvana, as explained by Asvaghosha almost twenty centuries ago, is due to their attachment to dharma, although they have successfully freed themselves from attachment to self. They understand only the doctrine of non-self, but not the doctrine of non-dharma. So, in their zest to eliminate self, they eliminate the five aggregates or skandhas of forms, feelings, perception, activities, and thoughts, and arrive at a mental state which they believe is nirvana, and which, paradoxically, is a pseudo-extinction of dharmas.

What the Hinayanists should understand is that dharmas cannot be destroyed because they are, by nature, unborn, meaning they are neither born nor not born. In other words, the dharmas that constitute the five skandhas appear as phenomena in samsara; but when samsara is transcended, the phenomena disappear. The dharma, if they are real as many Hinayanists would believe, are still there though now they cannot be seen as differentiated phenomena.

Interestingly, quantum physics provides a useful illumination, if we are prepared to consider only the material form of the aspirant, leaving aside for the time being the other four skandhas of feelings, perception, activities and thoughts. Using his naked eyes (which represent his ordinary perception) he sees his own phenomenal body. Suppose he now sees himself through a huge and powerful electron microscope (which represents his Enlightened vision).

He no longer sees his phenomenal body; instead, he sees fascinating patterns of sub-atomic particles. If the microscope is even more powerful, he may not see any particles, but only undifferentiated energy field. What has happened to his phenomenal body, which he must have thought to be real? Don't worry, it has not been destroyed, because it cannot be destroyed. From the transcendental viewpoint, it was not there in the first place; the phenomenal body was an illusion.

Then, you may ask, is the body real or not real? Both the Mahayanist master and the quantum physicist will tell you correctly that it is real and it is not real, or it is either real or not real, or it is neither

real nor not real. Perhaps the difference between Mahayana philosophy and quantum physics is that if you wish to get a specific answer at a specific point of time and space, the master would tell you it depends on the aspirant's state of consciousness, while the physicist would say it depends on the mathematician's matrix of probabilities. Another difference is that while the Mahayana masters have known this for centuries, the modern physicists are still trying to make sense of these "absurdities".

So, when Mahayana masters expound the doctrines of non-self and of non-dharma, they can mean that, depending on the situation, the self and the dharma are real, and are not real. These doctrines are not meant to be dogmatic facts; they are meant to aid aspirants attain Cosmic Reality.

Chapter 23

Various Ways of Spiritual Cultivation

Despite the numerous and obvious differences in rituals and customs, the supreme aim of all the world's great religions is similar.

3.87 Relative Difference

Original Text in Chinese

復次，究竟離妄執者，當知染法淨法皆悉相待，無有自相可說。是故一切法從本已來，非色非心，非智非識，非有非無，畢竟不可說相。而有言說者，當知如來善巧方便，假以言說，引導眾生。其旨趣者，皆為離念，歸於真如。以念一切法令心生滅，不入實智故。

Literal Translation

Then, completely freed from defilement, must know that defilement and purity are relative, do not have own characteristics. Because everything from origin is not matter not mind, not wisdom not knowledge, not being not non-being, ultimately cannot describe their characteristics. Nevertheless, language is used. Should know the Tathagata skillfully employed expedient means, used language provisionally, to guide sentient beings. Those who understand can free from thoughts, return to Zhen Ru. If think of any thoughts, can cause life-death, cannot enter real wisdom.

Interpretation

In order to be completely freed from defilement, besides freeing ourselves from attachment to self and attachment to phenomena (which has been explained in the previous two chapters), we must know that defilement and purity, i.e. phenomenal world and transcendental reality, are actually relative, and not absolutely different.

This is because everything from the beginningless origin is neither matter nor mind, neither infinite wisdom nor finite knowledge, neither being nor non-being, and is ultimately indescribable.

Nevertheless, in order that people may understand Cosmic Reality, language is used to explain it. The Buddha skilfully employed expedient means to explain Cosmic Reality, and used language provisionally to guide sentient beings. Those who understand the teaching, can free

themselves from thoughts, thereby attaining purity, and return to their original state of Supreme Reality. If they think of any thoughts, it will cause them to remain in the cycle of birth and rebirth, with the result that they cannot acquire the real wisdom to enter Cosmic Reality.

Commentary

Here Asvaghosha elucidates a basic difference between the Mahayanist and the Hinayanist concept of nirvana. In the Hinayanist concept, where nirvana is interpreted as an extinction of suffering, lust and sorrow, it is fundamentally different from samsara, where suffering, lust and sorrow are typical characteristics. To attain nirvana, a Hinayanist strives to eliminate all suffering, lust and sorrow.

In the Mahayanist concept, nirvana and samsara are not absolutely different. The difference is relative: it is a matter of perspective. What is samsara to an unenlightened person is nirvana to an Enlightened being. The Mahayanist does not strive to destroy suffering, lust and sorrow, for the dharmas that cause them cannot be destroyed because these dharmas are an integral part of Cosmic Reality.

Then, what happens to suffering, lust and sorrow? In nirvana, they simply do not exist: the same dharmas that cause these differentiated phenomena become undifferentiated in transcendental reality. Let us look at a very crude analogy. When you are asleep, you dreamed of something sorrowful or fearful, and you tried to eliminate your sorrow or fear in your dream. Another way is to be awakened. Once you are awakened, whatever that causes sorrow and fear disappears.

One should not be mistaken to think that nirvana is merely a psychological shift of perspective, though such a shift is involved. Nirvana is the ultimate aim in all schools of Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism nirvana is never extinction or annihilation, because fundamentally there is nothing to be extinguished or annihilated. Nirvana is experiencing reality. At a lower level, nirvana is seeing reality as it ultimately is, not just its conditioned manifestations in the phenomenal world. At its highest level, where it is usually termed Buddhahood, nirvana or Enlightenment is becoming the Buddha, the actualizing of the Supreme Reality!

It should be remembered that the Supreme Reality is beyond description and beyond explanation: it has to be experienced directly. To say that the Supreme Reality is indescribable and inexplicable does not mean we cannot use words to describe and explain it, but our description and verbalization and the resultant perception, despite our best and sincere effort, will be far from accurate. Indeed, for those who have not developed to the necessary spiritual level for a direct experience, some form of description and verbalization, though imperfect, has to be attempted.

Description and verbalization represent two levels of distortion. Even if we presume that language is perfect, the resultant description will still be distorted, because the listener (or reader), and sometimes the speaker (or writer) lack the experience upon which the description is based. A Londoner, for example, may describe London perfectly (which is doubtful, and the fault does not necessarily lie in the use of language), but a person who has no experience of London still will not have a perfect picture of it.

But, of course, language is imperfect: it is at best an imitation of what it verbalizes. The fault again is not necessarily in how words are used, but in the nature of words themselves. The word "wife" or "husband", for example, may mean someone you hug and cuddle, or someone you habitually throw abuse at.

A third distorting factor, which is fundamental but which many people may not be aware, is what Buddhists call the "six entries", or the six sense organs (eyes, ear, nose, tongue, skin and intellect) through which we perceive our surrounding. Not only we cannot see the countless micro-organisms floating all around us, we also cannot perceive the range of sounds a bat hears or the various scents a dog smells.

3.88 Three Kinds of Cultivation

Original Text in Chinese

分別發趣道相者，謂一切諸佛所證之道，一切菩薩發心修行趣向義故。略說發心有三種。云何爲三？一者，信成就發心。二者，解行發心。三者，證發心。

Literal Translation

Analyzing the Tao to Enlightenment, the Tao of all Buddhas, the path of all Bodhisattvas in their spiritual cultivation. Generally speaking, three kinds of cultivation. What three? One, cultivation through faith. Two, cultivation through understanding. Three, cultivation through insight.

Interpretation

Analyzing the Tao or way to Enlightenment, the Tao taken by all Buddhas in their attainment of Enlightenment and the path taken by all Bodhisattvas in their spiritual cultivation, there are generally speaking three kinds of spiritual cultivation. What are the three kinds? One, there is the cultivation through faith. Two, there is the cultivation through understanding. Three, there is the cultivation through insight.

Commentary

As in other religions, there are three main approaches to spiritual cultivation, namely through faith, through understanding, and through insight. Most people follow their religion because of dogmatic belief, sometimes turning into fanaticism. Others, who are more intellectually developed, accept a religion because they agree with its philosophy. The spiritually advanced, including masters and high priests, devote themselves to their religion through intuitive experience.

The word "Tao" ("Dao" in Romanized Chinese) is sometimes used in Buddhist literature, suggesting the close philosophical affinity between

Buddhism and Taoism. Both Buddhism and Taoism explicitly aim to attain the realization of Cosmic Reality.

There are many ways to Enlightenment. Buddhism never insists that its ways are the only ways. The three main approaches in Buddhist practice through faith, understanding and insight correspond to *bakti yoga*, *jnana yoga* and *raja yoga* of Hinduism, with which, like Taoism, Buddhism also shares the explicit aim of realizing the Supreme Reality.

Historically, the main philosophical difference between Buddhism and Hinduism is that while Hindus believe an aspirant frees his *atman* (or soul) to join Brahman (God or the Universal Spirit), Buddhists believe that the aspirant's consciousness (or soul) is already an inseparable part of the Eternal Buddha (or Universal Consciousness).

Personally, I think this philosophical difference is superficial, caused by a difference of emphasis and the limitation of language. Hindu philosophy makes it unquestionably clear that Brahman is the Absolute, the Ultimate, beyond which nothing exists. On the other hand, as explained in Chapter 18, the Buddhist doctrine of *anatman* ('*anatta*' in Pali) or non-soul, does not mean the soul does not exist, but is an expedient mean to free followers from the attachment to the individual soul. In Christianity and Islam too, God is the Absolute and Ultimate, inclusive of everything there is. Hence, to say that one is united with God or return to God, is the same as saying the individual consciousness attains Universal Consciousness. Despite the numerous and obvious differences in rituals and customs, the supreme aim of all the world's great religions is similar.

3.89 Cultivation through Faith

Original Text in Chinese

信成就發心者，依何等人，修何等行，得信成就，堪能發心？所謂依不定聚眾生，有熏習善根力故。信業果報，能起十善，厭生死苦。欲求無上菩提，得值諸佛，親承供養，修行信心。經一萬劫，信心成就故，諸佛菩薩，教令發心。或以大悲故，能自發心。或因正法欲滅，以護法因緣，能自發心。如是信心成就得發心者，入正定聚，畢竟不退。名住如來種中，正因相應。

Literal Translation

Regarding cultivation through faith, suitable for whom, how to cultivate, how does aspiration arise? Among the undetermined, there are sentient beings with purity permeation and good roots, who believe in karma, are capable of the ten precepts, abhor the suffering of life-death, desire the supreme *bodhi*. Able to meet the Buddhas, worship and serve them, cultivate the faith. After ten thousand kalpas, faith will be perfected. The Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* teach them to awaken their spiritual aspiration, or teach them out of great compassion, or out of preservation of the teaching. If the faithful succeed to develop their aspiration, enter the ranks of the upright, will never regress. Named to be abided to the seeds of the *Tathagata*, being in correspondence with the right cause.

Interpretation

Regarding the cultivation through faith, for whom is it suitable, how to cultivate it, and how does spiritual aspiration arise?

Among people who are still "undetermined", i.e. those whose spiritual path fluctuates forward and backward, there are sentient beings who have been permeated by the purity of the Supreme Reality, and who have good spiritual roots, i.e. they are spiritually matured. They believe

in karma, are capable of practising the ten precepts (abstinence from killing, stealing and robbing, sexual license, telling lies, being double-tongued, slandering, false flattery, being greedy, being hot-tempered, and being ignorant), abhor the suffering of samsara, and desire the benefits of the highest teaching of the Buddha.

They have the good fortune to come into contact with buddhas, worship and serve them, and cultivate the faith. After a very, very long time covering many, many reincarnations, their faith will be perfected. The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas teach them to awaken spiritual aspiration, or teach them out of great compassion, or out of the preservation of the teaching. If the faithful succeed to develop their aspiration, and enter the ranks of the upright, they will never retrogress, and thus attain the stage of the "determined".

This stage is called to be abided to the seed of the Tathagata, being in correspondence with the right cause for Enlightenment. In other words, if they persist in their spiritual cultivation, they will certainly attain Cosmic Reality eventually, because in them is germinated the seed for Enlightenment.

Commentary

Cultivation through faith implies that the devotees practise the religion because they strongly, but usually arbitrary, believe that their religion is right and true, often without intellectual understanding nor intuitive experience. As in other religions, most Buddhists follow theirs through faith, although the Buddha himself and other great teachers have emphasized that they should base their acceptance of Buddhism only on their understanding and experience.

Nevertheless, Buddhist teachers realize that not many people are sufficiently developed intellectually and intuitively for cultivation through understanding and insight. Cultivation through faith, therefore, is often an important preliminary stage.

In Buddhist philosophy there is a stage in a devotee's spiritual development when he will be certain of progress towards Enlightenment. A devotee who has reached this crucial stage is said to be "determined". Before this stage, when his is still "undetermined", he may sometimes progress and sometimes retrogress depending on his merits or demer-

its. When he is "determined", he will only progress, the rate of which depends on his cultivation.

Of the three main kinds of cultivation, the cultivation through faith is specially meant for those who are still "undetermined". But among the "undetermined" are found the spiritually ready who have the good fortune to come into contact with spiritual teaching. If they have faith, after a very long time through spiritual contact, their spiritual aspiration will be awakened, which means they will develop a strong desire to work towards Enlightenment. With this spiritual awakening, they join the ranks of the "determined".

3.90 Weak and Good Roots

Original Text in Chinese

若有眾生善根微少，久遠已來，煩惱深厚。雖值於佛，亦得供養，然起人天種子，或起二乘種子。設有求大乘者，根則不定，若進若退。或有供養諸佛，未經一萬劫。於中遇緣，亦有發心。所謂見佛色相而發其心。或因供養眾僧而發其心。或因二乘之人教令發心。或學他發心。如是等發心，悉皆不定，遇惡因緣，或便退失墮二乘。

Literal Translation

There are sentient beings whose good roots are slight, since a long time, defilements deep and thick. Although pray to the Buddhas, and support and honour them, abided to the seeds of humans or heavenly beings, or Hinayanist seeds. Say cultivate for Mahayana, roots uncertain, may progress may regress. Or those who honour the buddhas, before ten thousand kalpas, meet favourable conditions on the way, will awaken aspiration. Aspiration may arise on seeing the material forms and characteristics of the Buddha, or may arise on honouring the community of monks, or may arise from instructions from Hinayanists, or may arise from examples of other people. All these arisings of aspiration is not stable, if meet adverse circumstances may relapse to Hinayanist level.

Interpretation

There are sentient beings whose spiritual roots are weak. Since a long time ago, their defilements have become deep and thick. Although they may pray to Buddhas, and support and honour monks and religious teachers, they are only abided to the seeds of humans or heavenly beings, or to Hinayanist seeds. In other words, the good karma they gather is sufficient only to enable them to be born in the human or heavenly realms, or to be born as Hinayanist followers (who may attain a lower

state of nirvana, but lack the higher wisdom to attain Buddhahood). They may cultivate for Mahayana achievement, but since their spiritual roots are still uncertain, they may progress or regress in their spiritual path. In other words they are still "undetermined".

However, those who honour the Buddhas and practise their teaching, if they meet favourable conditions on the way, they may develop aspirations towards Buddhahood, even though the ten kalpas (or the very, very long time) normally needed for developing strong spiritual roots, are not over. Such aspirations may arise on seeing the material forms and characteristics of the Buddha, or may arise on account of honouring and serving the community of monks, or may arise from instructions taught by Hinayanists, or may arise from good examples of other people. But all these arisings of aspiration are not stable; if the followers meet adverse circumstances, they may relapse to the Hinayanist level where they lack the higher wisdom to attain Cosmic Reality.

Commentary

The "undetermined", i.e. those whose spiritual Enlightenment has not been assured because they have not reached a critical level, can be divided into two main groups, namely those with weak spiritual roots, and those with strong spiritual roots.

Some people have weak roots because since their numerous past lives long, long ago, their Buddha nature or the divine spark in them have been shrouded by thick and deep layers of defilement. In this human life, they may be very pious and pray to the Buddha, but because of their spiritual ignorance, the good karma derived from their piety and other merits can only enable them to be reborn to a higher station in the human realm.

At the most they may be reborn as dewas or gods in various heavens, or as Hinayanists capable of only a lower level of nirvana. However, if they meet favourable circumstances, they may awaken their spiritual aspiration and have a chance for attaining Cosmic Reality, though the aspiration may not be stable. Nevertheless, as they continue to develop spiritually, they will eventually have good spiritual roots.

People with good roots are spiritually aware, but their spiritual progress is not yet guaranteed. If they are unwise enough to abuse

their knowledge or ability, they would build up bad karma and relapse to having weak roots, which means retarding their spiritual growth by many life times. They also have better contact with spiritual teaching and teachers, and hence more chance to awaken their spiritual aspiration for cosmic reality. If they persist with their development they will eventually become "determined", which means they are sure of progress towards Enlightenment.

Chapter 24

Spiritual Cultivation through Faith

The Buddha's compassion and selflessness are boundless; his greatest wish is for all his followers to emulate him, not just regard him as an unattainable model. Everyone, therefore, is a potential buddha.

3.91 Three Types of Faith Cultivation

Original Text in Chinese

復次，信成就發心者，發何等心？略說有三種。云何爲三？一者，直心。正念真如法故。二者，深心。樂集一切諸善行故。三者，大悲心。欲拔一切眾生苦故。

Literal Translation

Next, awakening aspiration by way of cultivation through faith. What types of cultivation? Briefly speaking, three types. What three? One, straight heart, rightly meditate on Zhen Ru. Two, deep heart, joyful to accumulate all kinds of meritorious deeds. Three, compassionate heart, desirous to uproot sufferings of all sentient beings.

Interpretation

Next, let us look at the awakening of aspiration by way of the cultivation through faith. What are the different types of this kind of cultivation?

Briefly speaking, there are three types of cultivation through faith. What are the three types? One, it is the cultivation of the direct mind, which involves meditating correctly on the Supreme Reality. Two, it is the cultivation of the deep mind, which is joyfully accumulating the performance of all kinds of meritorious deeds. Three, it is the cultivation of the compassionate mind, which is desirous to uproot the sufferings of all sentient beings.

Commentary

These three types of cultivation exemplify three outstanding features of Buddhism, namely directness, depth and compassion. Buddhism aims at attaining spiritual fulfilment directly according to the level of the aspirants. At the highest level, one can attain nirvana without employing a single rite nor tool.

Some rituals may be used at lower levels, but they are designed to help less advanced devotees achieve specific purposes, and not for mystifying or dramatizing the religion. Buddhism is deep, elucidating aspects of reality that modern science is only starting to investigate. Buddhist compassion for all beings is proverbial; their concern for the welfare of plants and animals is as much as for humans.

3.92 Direct Mind and Deep Mind

Original Text in Chinese

問曰：上說法界一相，佛體無二，何故不惟念真如，復假求學諸善之行？

答曰：譬如大摩尼寶，體性明淨，而有鑛穢之垢。若人雖念寶性，不以方便種種磨治，終無得淨。如是眾生真如之法體性空淨，而有無量煩惱染垢。若人雖念真如，不以方便種種熏修，亦無得淨。以垢無量，徧一切法故。修一切善行，以為對治。若人修行一切善法，自然歸順真如法故。

Literal Translation

Question: Earlier it was said that the Dharmarealm has only one characteristic, and the body of the Buddha is not two. Why not meditate on Zhen Ru, instead of dependent on devotees performing kind deeds.

Answer: Like a huge precious gem, its nature is bright and pure, but still contains impurities. Although people meditate on the precious nature, if not polished by various expedient means, finally it cannot attain purity. So like sentient beings, the Spiritual Body of Zhen Ru is by nature empty and pure, but defiled by countless impurities. Although people meditate on Zhen Ru, unless permeated by various expedient means, they still cannot attain purity. Impurities are unlimited, pervading everywhere in the phenomenal realms. Cultivate all types of kindness, so as to counteract. If people cultivate all forms of kind deeds, then naturally they will logically return to Zhen Ru.

Interpretation

Question: Earlier it was said that the Dharmarealm, or the whole of phenomenal realms, is only one and undifferentiated, and the body of the

Buddha, or transcendental cosmic reality, is not dualistic. Then, why do we not meditate on the Supreme Reality: instead we are taught that spiritual realization is dependent on devotees performing kind deeds.

Answer: It is like a huge precious gem, whose nature is bright and pure, but it still contains impurities. People may meditate on the pure nature of the gem, but if it is not polished by various expedient means of the jeweller, ultimately it still cannot attain purity. So it is for sentient beings. The Spiritual Body of Zhen Ru, or the Supreme Reality in its transcendental aspect, is by nature empty and pure, but it is defiled by countless impurities in its phenomenal aspect. Although people may meditate on the Supreme Reality, unless they are permeated by various expedient means of spirituality, they still cannot attain purity. Impurities are unlimited, pervading everywhere in the phenomenal realms. We have to cultivate all types of kindness so as to counteract these impurities. If people cultivate all forms of kind deeds, then they will naturally return to the Supreme Reality.

Commentary

There are three main ways of faith cultivation, namely cultivating the direct mind, the deep mind, and the compassionate mind. Since the phenomenal realms and the transcendental reality are the same Supreme Reality, why is it not sufficient just to cultivate the direct mind, i.e. directly meditate on the one and only Universal Mind (even though the devotee may not have understood nor experienced it)?

Although the Universal Mind is pure by nature, in its phenomenal form it is defiled by impurities. Hence, to attain purity, it is efficacious to counteract against these impurities, and a useful method is cultivating the deep mind, which means accumulating the performance of kind deeds.

But, why does performing kind deeds make the mind, or heart, deep? And how does having a deep heart naturally enable the aspirant return to the Supreme Reality. A deep heart refers to depth in knowledge as well as in intuition. Performing kind deeds improves one's karma, thereby making him more spiritually intuitive. This eventually enables him to understand the operation of karma, and its role in the transformation of Cosmic Reality into the phenomena world.

With a better understanding and intuition of cosmic laws, he has a better opportunity to attain Cosmic Reality. Moreover, Cosmic Reality is pure by nature, and purity when manifested phenomenally is often expressed as kindness. Performing kind deeds, therefore, leads the person naturally to return to the Supreme Reality.

3.93 Expedient Means for Faith Cultivation

Original Text in Chinese

略說方便有四種。云何爲四？

一者，行根本方便。謂觀一切法自性無生，離於妄見，不住生死。觀一切法，因緣和合，業果不失，起於大悲，修諸福德，攝化眾生，不住涅槃。以隨順法性無住故。

二者，能止方便。謂慚愧悔過，能止一切惡法不令增長。以隨順法性離諸過故。

三者，發起善根增長方便。謂勤供養禮拜三寶，讚歎隨喜，勸請諸佛。以敬愛三寶淳厚心故，信得增長。乃能志求無上之道。又因佛法僧力所護故，能銷業障，善根不退。以隨順法性離癡障故。

四者，大願平等方便。所謂發願盡於未來，化度一切眾生，使無有餘。皆令究竟無餘涅槃。以隨順法性無斷絕故。法性廣大，徧一切眾生，平等無二，不念彼此，究竟寂滅故。

Literal Translation

Briefly speaking, four kinds of expedient means. What four?

One, practise fundamental expedient means. See all phenomena in their nature as unborn, free from defiled concepts, not abided to life-death. See all phenomena come together because of cause-effect, fruit of karma never lost, arise because of great compassion, cultivate prosperity and merits for others, save all sentient beings, not attached to nirvana. Accordingly the spiritual nature never abides.

Two, capable of stopping expedient means. With humility, repent past wrongs, capable of stopping all evil phenomena from increasing or developing. Follow spiritual nature, can be free from wrongs.

Three, awakening good roots, increasing and developing expedient means. Diligently honour and pay homage to the Triple Gem, praise and rejoice in the Buddha, and seek his blessings. Because of respect and love for the Triple Gem, the heart is strengthened, faith is increased and developed, thus with ambition to seek the unsurpassed Tao. Also because the spiritual power of Buddha increases strength, he is able to eradicate karmic obstacles, his good roots do not relapse, and following spiritual nature he eradicates hindrance caused by bad karma.

Four, the great vow of universality expedient means. Thus one makes vow till the end of the future, save all sentient beings without exception. So as to attain perfect, all-embracing nirvana, according to the unending and unlimited spiritual nature. The spiritual nature is extensive and big, pervading all sentient beings, undifferentiated without two, without subject and object, completely quiescent.

Interpretation

Briefly speaking, there are four kinds of expedient means. What are the four kinds?

One, there are expedient means for practising fundamental doctrines. The aspirant should see all phenomena in their nature as unborn, i.e. they are neither being born nor not being born. He should free himself from defiled concepts, and not cling to the idea of being reborn to a higher station. He should understand that all phenomena exist because of the principle of cause and effect, and in the phenomenal world the fruit of karma is never lost.

His own existence is due to the great compassion of the Supreme Reality; thus, while he has the rare opportunity of human existence, he should cultivate prosperity and merits for others, and aspire to save all sentient beings. Yet, he must not attach himself to the concept of nirvana. He should conform accordingly to the essential nature of the Supreme Reality which has no abiding.

Two, there are expedient means capable of stopping further evil karma. With humility, the aspirant should repent past wrongs; these

expedient means are capable of preventing all evil phenomena from increasing or developing. If he follows the essential nature of the Supreme Reality, he can be free from wrongs.

Three, there are expedient means for awakening spiritual awareness, and for increasing and developing this awareness. The aspirant should diligently honour and pay homage to the Triple Gem, i.e. the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. He should praise and rejoice in the Buddha, and seek his blessings. Because of his respect and love for the Triple Gem, his mind is strengthened, and his faith is increased and developed, with the result that he develops the ambition to seek the unsurpassed way to enlightenment.

Also because the spiritual power of Buddha increases in strength inside himself, he is able to eradicate karmic obstacles, and his good roots do not relapse into weak ones. Following the essential nature of the Supreme Reality, the aspirant can eradicate the hindrance caused by bad karma.

Four, there are expedient means for realizing the great vow of universal salvation. Thus the aspirant makes the vow that till the end of eternity, he will save all sentient beings without exception, so that they too will attain perfect, all-embracing nirvana, with its unending and unlimited spiritual nature. The Supreme Reality is omniscient, pervading all sentient beings, undifferentiated without duality, without subject and object, and is completely quiescent.

Commentary

There are countless expedient means or ways to help devotees attain spiritual fulfilment through the cultivation of faith. Briefly speaking these countless expedient means can be divided into four major categories, which represent four distinct attitudes regarding spiritual development.

The first category includes expedient means that make people realize the existence of a dimension beyond the physical, such as telling myths about gods and demons. The second category persuades people to stop doing evils, like praying in temples and following religious precepts. The third category develops spiritual awareness, like serving the monks and reciting scriptures regularly. The fourth category involves the aspirants

making a definite decision to cultivate for spiritual fulfilment, such as becoming monks.

These expedient means are specially meant for those who approach spiritual cultivation through the sheer strength of belief, often without philosophical knowledge or intuitive wisdom. Such cultivation through faith is the slowest of the three approaches, taking numerous life times for development. Although many Buddhists employ this approach, it is least encouraged by great Buddhist masters, who have always advocated that acceptance of any religion should be based on understanding and experience.

This cultivation through faith corresponds to the Theravada way of spiritual development. Faith cultivation is spread over numerous life times, unless the faithful are blessed with favourable circumstances where they are exposed to deeper understanding or intuitive experience when they may attain nirvana rapidly.

Hence, it is not uncommon to find that many Theravada followers are merely contented with leading morally pure lives with the hope that they may eventually be reborn as monks so as to devote their lives to spiritual training. Even as monks, their highest aim is to become arahats (or arahans), i.e. conquerors who have destroyed lust, hatred, sorrow and all other negative qualities. Theravadins would never dream of becoming Buddhas: that would be exceedingly presumptuous, if not sacrilegious, for they believe that there is only one Buddha in our historical time.

Because of their great respect for the Buddha, Theravadins believe that no one can ever approach his attainment. According to Mahayanist thinking, this attitude is immature. The Buddha's compassion and selflessness are boundless; his greatest wish is for all his followers to emulate him, not just regard him as an unattainable model. Everyone, therefore, is a potential Buddha.

The Vajrayana master, Lama Anagarika Govinda, a former Theravada teacher and later the only Westerner with the rare honour to become a Lama, explained in his own words that he initially went to Tibet "to uphold the purity of the Buddha's teaching, as practised in Ceylon, and to spread its message in a country where the Buddha-Dharma had degenerated into a system of demon-worship and weird beliefs". But after having acquired deeper understanding and insightful experience in Tibet, and also because of his concern for his Theravada brethren, he

laments that "(according to the Sinhalese themselves) Ceylon had not produced a single saint during this long period," and it was "preposterous to assume that anybody could actually realize any of the state of higher consciousness of which the sacred texts speak so often."

3.94 Four Levels of Faith Cultivation

Original Text in Chinese

菩薩發是心故，則得少分見於法身。以見法身故，隨其願力，能現八種，利益眾生。所謂從兜率天退，入胎，住胎，出胎，出家，成道，轉法輪，入於涅槃。然是菩薩未名法身。以其過去無量世來有漏之業，未能決斷。隨其所生與微苦相應。亦非業繫，以有大願自在力故。如修多羅中，或說有退墮惡趣者，非其實退。但為初學菩薩未入正位而懈怠者恐怖，令彼勇猛故。又，是菩薩一發心後，遠離怯弱，畢竟不畏墮二乘地。若聞無量無邊阿僧祇劫，勤苦難行，乃得涅槃，亦不怯弱。以信知一切法從本已來自涅槃故。

Literal Translation

Because of the aspiration awakened by bodhisattvas, thus see some of the Spiritual Body. To see the Spiritual Body, following the power of their vows, is manifested in eight kinds to benefit sentient beings. This is rebirth from the Tushita heaven, enter the womb, abide at the womb, out of the womb, out of the family, attain the Tao, turn the wheel of dharma, enter nirvana. But the bodhisattvas are not called the Spiritual Body, because the conditioned karmic effect of countless past lives, have not been terminated. In accordance with their rebirth, interact with slight suffering.

Not because of karmic effect, but with the power of the great vow. As mentioned in the sutras, may be reborn in evil places, but not really retrogression. But for beginning bodhisattvas who have not established the right path thus misunderstand with fear, thus fearful to stir courage. Again, when the bodhisattvas have made their vows, free from fear and doubt, not fearful of second level land. Even if they hear extreme suffering in immeasurable aeons, still cultivate diligently to attain nirvana, never fearful nor doubtful because know all dharmas since origin come from nirvana.

Interpretation

Because their spiritual aspiration is awakened, the bodhisattvas, i.e. Mahayanists who are determined to seek enlightenment for themselves and for all sentient beings, have some awareness of the Supreme Reality. To attain Cosmic Reality, following the power of their vows, they have eight kinds of manifestation for the benefit of all sentient beings.

These eight manifestations are rebirth from the Tushita heaven, entering the human womb, abiding at the womb, coming out of the womb, leaving the family to enter monkhood, attaining enlightenment, turning the wheel of dharma (i.e. spreading the Buddhist faith), and entering nirvana.

However, these bodhisattvas have not attained perfect enlightenment or Buddhahood yet, because they have not terminated all the conditioned karmic effects of their countless past lives. Hence they still suffer slight miseries in accordance to their rebirth into the phenomenal world. Their slight suffering is not because of bad karma, but because of the spontaneous power of their great vows to save other beings.

As mentioned in the sutras, these bodhisattvas may be reborn into evil states of existence. However, this is not really retrogression in their spiritual growth, but a means to place beginning bodhisattvas, who have not been firmly established in the right path, in fearful situations so that they will be stirred into courageous effort for spiritual development.

Moreover, once the bodhisattvas have made their vows, they are free from fear and doubt, and are not fearful that they might fall back into inferior realms. Even if they know that they need to suffer extreme hardship for immeasurable aeons, they still cultivate diligently until they attain nirvana. They are never fearful nor doubtful, because they have deep faith that all dharmas from the beginningless beginning are originally in nirvana.

Commentary

The term "bodhisattvas" during Asvaghosha's time referred to Mahayanists who had vowed to seek salvation for other beings besides themselves. Nowadays, "Bodhisattvas" refer to enlightened beings who voluntarily delay their entry into Buddhahood so as to help all sentient beings.

The Tushita heaven is one of the many heavens of bliss where sentient beings go to because of their good karma. In Buddhist cosmology, the Tushita heaven, though being the abode of gods, is not very high in the spiritual hierarchy. It is only at the ninth level – our human realm is at the fifth level – in an ascending order to the highest at the 31st level. Levels 1 to 11 belong to the realms of desires (karma loka, yu jie); levels 12 to 27 to the realms of form (rupa loka, se jie); and levels 28 to 31 to the realms of non-form (arupa loka, wu se jie).

This passage illustrates four levels of spiritual development based on faith, and are figuratively described as "winning virtues", "slight overcoming", "through the teaching of power", and "determined effort". As his spiritual aspiration is awakened, the bodhisattva wins for himself the virtues of his faith. Then he overcomes the slight suffering he has to undergo for his existence in the phenomenal world to save others. He may seem to regress to evil states of existence so as to stimulate the innate spiritual power in him. Finally he is determined in his effort to attain Enlightenment.

This chapter and the last part of the previous one explains spiritual cultivation through faith, which is one of the three categories of spiritual cultivation, the other two being cultivation through understanding and cultivation through insight. Faith cultivation extends over countless life times, and the faithful, depending on whether he has good or weak spiritual roots, may progress or regress in his path, which is thus termed "undetermined". But if he passes a critical stage, he wins assurance of progress only, and his path is then said to be "determined".

Cultivation through faith can be approached in three main ways, namely through cultivating the direct mind, the deep mind and the compassionate mind. The countless expedient means to do so may be classified into four kinds: realizing that there is a spiritual dimension beside the physical, stop doing evil, increasing spiritual awareness, and determining to attain Enlightenment. The spiritual development of the aspirant can also be generalized into four levels, namely winning his faith, enduring slight suffering, arousing his spiritual courage, and making determined effort for spiritual fulfilment.

The spiritual path through faith alone is arduous and long. Nevertheless, spiritual development can be sped up tremendously with cultivation through understanding and through insight. This is explained in

the next chapter.

Chapter 25

Understanding and Insight, Not just Faith

The aspirant accepts the religion not just because he strongly believes in it or he appreciates its profound philosophy, but because he directly experiences some of its spiritual teaching.

3.95 Cultivation through Understanding

Original Text in Chinese

解行發心者，當知轉勝。以是菩薩從初正信已來，於第一阿僧祇劫將欲滿故，於真如法中，深解現前，所修離相。以知法性體無慳貪故，隨順修行檀波羅蜜。以知法性無染、離五欲過故，隨順修行尸羅波羅蜜。以知法性無苦、離瞋惱故，隨順修行羼提波羅蜜。以知法性無身心相、離懈怠故，隨順修行毘梨耶波羅蜜。以知法性常定、體無亂故，隨順修行禪波羅蜜。以知法性體明、離無明故，隨順修行般若波羅蜜。

Literal Translation

Those who have awakened the aspiration for spiritual cultivation through understanding, should know the turning of victory. Like bodhisattvas since the initial awakening, as in the first termination of carvings of immeasurable kalpas, as in the spiritual body of Zhen Ru, deep understanding reveals in front, so cultivate to be free from characteristics. Knowing that the body of spiritual nature has no covetousness, in conformity to it, cultivate the paramita of charity. Knowing that the spiritual nature has no defilement, free from carving of the five senses, in conformity to it, cultivate the paramita of discipline.

Knowing the spiritual nature has no suffering, being free from anger and anxiety, in conformity to it, cultivate the paramita of tolerance. Knowing the spiritual nature has no characteristics of body and heart, being free from indolence, in conformity to it, cultivate the paramita of effort. Knowing that spiritual nature is forever quiescent, no disorder in its body, in conformity to it, cultivate the paramita of meditation. Knowing the body of spiritual nature is bright, free from ignorance, in conformity to it, cultivate the paramita of wisdom.

Interpretation

It should be known that awakening the aspiration for spiritual cultivation through understanding, is more victorious than, or superior to, the cultivation through faith. This is because this kind of cultivation is practised by bodhisattvas since the time of their initial awakening till the first termination of their carvings which has been piled up for immeasurable kalpas. As they have a profound understanding of the Supreme Reality, they cultivate to be free from phenomenal characteristics.

Knowing that the essential nature of the Supreme Reality is free from covetousness, in conformity to this principle, they cultivate the paramita of charity. Knowing that the essential nature of the Supreme Reality has no defilement, and is free from the carving of the five senses, in conformity to this principle, they cultivate the paramita of discipline. Knowing the essential nature of the Supreme Reality has no suffering, and is being free from anger and anxiety, in conformity to this principle, they cultivate the paramita of tolerance.

Knowing the essential nature of the Supreme Reality has no characteristics of matter and mind, and is being free from indolence, in conformity to this principle, they cultivate the paramita of effort. Knowing that the essential nature of the Supreme Reality is forever quiescent, with no disorder in the ultimate, in conformity to this principle, they cultivate the paramita of meditation. Knowing the essential nature of the Supreme Reality is all-knowing, and is free from ignorance, in conformity to this principle, they cultivate the paramita of wisdom.

Commentary

While Theravada Buddhism emphasizes the Noble Eightfold Path in the approach to spiritual cultivation, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism emphasize the six paramitas or perfections. The Noble Eightfold Path refers to having right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right concentration, and right mindfulness. The six paramitas or perfections are those of charity, discipline, tolerance, effort, meditation and wisdom.

The practice of the six paramitas, which forms the fundamental spiritual path of bodhisattvas, is the result of having deep understand-

ing of the Buddhist higher wisdom regarding the Supreme Reality. In other words, Mahayanist devotees perfect their practice of charity, discipline, tolerance, effort, meditation and wisdom not because of blind faith in some religious authority, but because they understand the intimate relationship between Cosmic Reality and these paramitas, and they understand that these perfections will help them and others to attain Enlightenment.

How do these six paramitas lead to Enlightenment? Cosmic Reality is free from covetousness. Hence, any person who has greed, selfishness and other similar negative emotions is incongruous with Cosmic Reality, and therefore will be unable to actualize this reality. Practising charity is an excellent way to overcome these negative emotions.

The Supreme Reality is free from defilement brought about by the senses. Hence, a defiled person given to sensual gratification is in contradiction with the Supreme Reality. Practising moral discipline, like the five precepts of abstinence from killing, robbing, adultery, telling lies and malice, will eradicate these sensual defilement. It is significant to note that if a person commits immoral deeds, he will be unable to attain Cosmic Reality until he has purified himself, not because this is a punishment from some divine forces, but because being defiled he is simply incongruous with purity, which is an essential nature of Cosmic Reality.

There is no suffering in the Supreme Reality. Hence, if a person is angry, anxious or suffers from some negative emotions, he contradicts the essential nature of the Supreme Reality. Practising the perfection of tolerance is an excellent way to overcome harbouring these negative emotions.

The transcendental aspect of the Supreme Reality is undifferentiated, without any characteristics of mind or matter. Understanding this principle, the aspirant perfects his determined effort to free himself from the attachment to self and to phenomenal. He understands that any attachment will distance himself from transcendental Cosmic Reality.

Cosmic Reality in its absolute aspect is forever quiescent. Hence, the aspirant perfects his meditation so as to attain a state of no mind, for he understands that any arising thoughts will transport him to the phenomenal dimension.

The Supreme Reality is all-knowing. The aspirant must perfect his cultivation of wisdom and free himself from ignorance, or else it will generate a series of transformation into the phenomenal realm.

It is sometimes said that the Eightfold Path, with inclination towards cultivation through faith, is meant for ordinary people aiming to become arahats or bodhisattvas, whereas the six paramitas, with inclination towards cultivation through understanding, are meant for bodhisattvas aiming to become Suddhas. This statement is not always true. Although those who practise the Eightfold Path, including many Mahayanists, generally cultivate through faith, and those who practise the six paramitas generally have a deeper understanding of the Supreme Reality, it is also true that many who follow only the Eightfold Path have attained nirvana or Buddhahood, whereas many who follow the six paramitas have not achieved this supreme aim.

The crucial point is not whether one chooses the Eightfold Path or the six paramitas, but whether one cultivates through faith alone, or also with understanding. The eight precepts of the Eightfold Path can be divided into three groups, namely right speech, action and livelihood which constitute moral purity; right view and intention which constitute wisdom; and right effort, concentration and mindfulness which constitute meditation towards Enlightenment.

An aspirant who follows the Eightfold Path and who understands the higher wisdom of Buddhism, will have the right view regarding the nature of nirvana, not as an extinction of emotions, but as a direct experience of Cosmic Reality, and the right intention of not just becoming an arahat (who is at a comparatively low level of Enlightenment), but becoming a Buddha. With this understanding, and after acquiring moral purity, by persisting on right effort, concentration and meditation, he will certainly achieve Enlightenment.

On the other hand, a Buddhist devotee may practice the six paramitas, but if he does not understand the cosmic principles behind them, and practise them merely because they are mentioned in the scriptures, his spiritual progress will not be fast. His practice of the paramitas is then based on faith, and not on understanding.

The six paramitas, or perfections, may be divided into two categories. The first three paramitas of charity, discipline and tolerance are more related to the perfection of moral purity, while the last three

paramitas of effort, meditation and wisdom are more related to direct experience of Cosmic Reality.

Those who emphasize on the first three and neglect the latter three, will accumulate good karma and be blessed with rebirth to a higher station in the human realm or to the heavenly realms. Those who emphasize the latter three paramitas but neglect the first three, may be very knowledgeable in cosmic wisdom and probably acquire psychic or supernatural powers, but they still cannot attain Cosmic Reality because of their innate impurity. Thus, the practice of the six paramitas is sometimes described as the "cultivation of both blessings and wisdom" or "fu hui shuang xiu" in Chinese.

It should be noted that the division into the "blessing group" and the "wisdom group" of the six paramitas, as well as the division of the eight precepts in the Eight-fold Path into three groups of moral purity, wisdom and meditation, are for convenience. A devotee, whether he practises the Eight-fold Path or the six paramitas, should cultivate all the precepts or perfections simultaneously.

3.96 Cultivation through Insight

Original Text in Chinese

證發心者，從淨心地，乃至菩薩究竟地，證何境界？所謂眞如。以依轉識，說爲境界。而此證者，無有境界。惟眞如智，名爲法身。是菩薩於一念頃，能至十方無餘世界，供養諸佛，請轉法輪。惟爲開導利益眾生，不依文字。或示超地速成正覺，以爲怯弱眾生故。或說我於無量阿僧祇劫當成佛道，以爲懈怠眾生故。能示如是無數方便，不可思議。而實菩薩種性根等，發心則等，所證亦等，無有超過之法。以一切菩薩皆經三阿僧祇劫故。但隨眾生世界不同所見所聞根欲性異，故示所行亦有差別。

Literal Translation

Those who attain direct experience through the heart, from the stage of pure heart to the final stage of the bodhisattva's development. Experience what kind of realm? Called Zhen Ru. Turn to knowledge, described as realm. Actually so experienced, no realm. The wisdom of Zhen Ru is called the Spiritual Body. With one thought, bodhisattvas can reach ten directions of limitless realms of time and space, honour the Buddhas, request to turn the wheel of dharma. Thus enlighten and benefit all sentient beings, without dependent on language and words.

Such as to demonstrate in super speed how to attain Enlightenment, for the sake of those sentient beings who are doubtful and weak. Or illustrate the limitless kalpas of suffering to attain the Tao of Buddhahood, for the sake of overcoming the indolence of sentient beings. Capable of using countless expedient means, incredible and inexplicable. Actually the seeds, roots and natures of bodhisattvas, ways of awakening, all realizations, none surpasses the said stages. All bodhisattvas have passed through three kalpas of suffering, but according to the differences of sentient beings due to various kinds of spatial and temporal realms with differ-

ent sights and sounds and with different roots and nature, thus the practice has differences.

Interpretation

What kind of realm do those bodhisattvas from their first stage of pure heart to the final stage of perfect Enlightenment, realize when they attain direct experience of Cosmic Reality? Their experience is called Zhen Ru, Tathagata or the Supreme Reality. Although the Supreme Reality is beyond description and explanation, i.e. those who have not experienced the Supreme Reality directly will not understand whatever is described or explained about it, one has to turn to finite knowledge and describe it as a realm. Actually those who have experienced the Supreme Reality know that it is not a realm at all. It is an insight into Cosmic Reality, and is known as the Spiritual Body of the Buddha.

While bodhisattvas have attained Cosmic Reality which is undifferentiated, they can, on the other hand, in a single thought reach all directions of limitless realms of time and space, and request the Buddhas to preach their teachings without the use of language and words to enlighten and benefit sentient beings. For the sake of those sentient beings who are doubtful of spiritual cultivation and weak in their spiritual awareness, the bodhisattvas can demonstrate in super speed how to attain Enlightenment. Or, for sentient beings who are indolent, the bodhisattvas can illustrate the long suffering extending numerous aeons endured by aspirants in their way towards Buddhahood. The bodhisattvas are capable of using countless expedient means, which are incredible and inexplicable.

However, although it appears that some bodhisattvas attain Enlightenment faster than others, the seeds, roots and natures of all bodhisattvas, as well as their spiritual awakening and eventual realization are similar, without any bodhisattvas surpassing others. All bodhisattvas pass through similar stages of spiritual development over many aeons, but because of the different worlds of sentient beings due to their differences in space and time, in visual and audio experiences, in their awareness and nature, bodhisattvas use different expedient means to help sentient beings in their spiritual practice.

Commentary

The kind of spiritual cultivation mentioned here is cultivation through insight, which is the highest of the three categories of cultivation. Insight is obtained as the result of direct experience. In other words, the aspirant accepts the religion not just because he strongly believes in it or he appreciates its profound philosophy, but because he directly experiences some of its spiritual teaching.

For example, he practises charity and discipline, not merely because the scriptures say so, nor even because he intellectually understands that these two paramitas can help him in his spiritual progress, but because he discovers that through his charity and discipline, he intuitively experiences inner peace and spiritual satisfaction, which directly help him to enter deeper levels of consciousness. He also finds out that at times when he is uncharitable or indisciplined, he fails to reach such deep levels.

Some people may argue that beginners, even if they are charitable and disciplined, may not enter deep levels of meditation for spiritual growth. They will, then, be unable to verify how true is the teaching that practising charity and discipline will lead to spiritual development. Thus, they depend on faith, rather than insight, for their cultivation. Similarly, few Buddhists have experienced nirvana, and the explanation on nirvana by those who claim to have experienced it, may not necessarily be right or accurate, yet Buddhism postulates that by following certain ways, like the Eightfold Path and the six paramitas, aspirants can eventually attain nirvana. Is this not dependent on blind faith, instead of understanding or insight?

Although it is true that many followers, Buddhist or otherwise, base their religious belief totally on faith, the foundation of the Buddhist faith is grounded on deep understanding and direct experience. The Buddhist teaching is never derived from dogmas nor speculation, but from the wisdom and direct experience of its teachers, and the teaching is practical and always verifiable. For example, the force of authority of such basic Buddhist doctrines like the illusory nature of the phenomenal world, and the attainment of enlightenment through concerted practice in meditation, is derived not from claims of divine revelation, but from the attested fact that the aspirant can verify these truths himself.

Of course, a beginner will initially have little or no chance of testing the validity of these great truths – such as practising charity and discipline contributes towards spiritual growth, or cultivating the six paramitas leads to nirvana – just as a beginning science student will have little or no chance of testing whether atoms are really made up of neutrons, protons and electrons. But if the aspirant, spiritual or scientific, persists on his quest, he will eventually and certainly be able to verify the truths himself.

And just as a person who has no inclination towards science and therefore makes no attempt to study it, may never have seen sub-atomic particles at all in his countless life times, a person with no spiritual awareness and therefore makes no concerted effort to cultivate spiritually, may never have any inkling of cosmic reality despite his countless reincarnations. But, in Buddhism, every follower is able to verify his belief according to his level of development. Indeed, Buddhist masters, including the Buddha himself, have always advised their followers not to accept the teaching by basing on authority alone, but to evaluate the teaching according to their understanding and experience.

An aspirant in Buddhism will be able to verify many basic doctrines even if he happens to start from a relatively low developmental level. Most people, for example, can readily verify for themselves three of the Four Noble Truths. With some basic understanding of Buddhist philosophy and some effort in simple meditation, most people, no matter how comfortable or happy their normal lives may be, can realize and actually experience that there is suffering in living, that the cause of suffering is attachment, and that suffering can be removed if attachment is removed. For example, a proud owner of a new car will feel hurt if someone, even accidentally, scratches his car. If he reflects, he can realize that his hurt is due to his attachment to his car. If he can remove this attachment, he can eliminate his suffering.

The fourth noble truth, i.e. an effective way to eliminate attachment and consequently suffering is to practise the Eightfold Path or other expedient means like the six paramitas, may take a long time to accomplish if the aim is cosmic realization, though for prosaic needs like overcoming suffering due to a car scratch or to some interpersonal relationship, it can be accomplished in a relatively short time. The accomplishment, spiritual as well as prosaic, can be made faster if the

practice is based on understanding or insight, instead of on faith. The next chapter will elaborate on spiritual cultivation through insight, and also describe some amazing Buddhist wisdom on the supernatural and the cosmos.

Chapter 26

Insight and Metaphysics

The whole business of Buddhism, once we have laid aside its cultural and religious connotations, is the quest for this ultimate reality – in ways probably more profound and exciting than what is now done in physics, psychology, cosmology and other disciplines.

3.97 Three Kinds of Mind

Original Text in Chinese

又，是菩薩發心相者，有三種心微細之相。云何爲三？一者，真心，無分別故。二者，方便心，自然徧行利益眾生故。三者，業識心，微細起滅故。

Literal Translation

Then, the cultivation through insight of bodhisattvas, there are three kinds of heart characteristics. What three? One, true heart, no differentiation. Two, expedient heart, spontaneously practised for the benefit of sentient beings. Three, heart of karmic consciousness, subtly arising and ceasing.

Interpretation

Then, in the cultivation through insight as practised by bodhisattvas, there are three types of mind. What are the three kinds?

One, there is the true mind, which is undifferentiated.

Two, there is the mind of expedient means, which is spontaneously practised for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Three, there is the mind of karmic consciousness, which involves the subtle arising and cessation of phenomena.

Commentary

The three kinds of mind represent three levels of insight cultivation and attainment, and they correspond to the mind of the Buddha, the mind of the Bodhisattva, and the mind of ordinary people.

The highest level is the true mind, or the mind of the Buddha, which may be attained in an instant when Cosmic Reality is actualized, as in Chan or Zen Buddhism.

Phenomenally the true mind refers to the mind of the Enlightened being; transcendently it refers to the Universal Mind, or the mind of the Spiritual Body (Dharmakaya) of Supreme Reality.

The intermediate level is the mind of expedient means, or the mind of the Bodhisattva, which is manifested in various ways to help sentient beings. An excellent way to cultivate the Bodhisattva's mind is to practise the six paramitas. This mind of expedient means is the mind of the Bodhisattva's transformational body (nirmanakaya).

The lowest level is the karmic mind, or the mind of sentient beings, and is manifested as the individual minds of the aspirants in their spiritual development. An excellent way to cultivate the karmic mind is to practise meditation, resulting in a deeper understanding of and an insight into karma, leading eventually to its elimination. This karmic mind is the mind of the aspirant's physical body (rupakaya).

3.98 Wisdom of All Seeds

Original Text in Chinese

又，是菩薩功德成滿，於色究竟處示一切世間最高大身，謂以一念相應慧，無明頓盡，名一切種智。自然而有不思議業，能現十方利益眾生。問曰：虛空無邊故，世界無邊。世界無邊故，眾生無邊。眾生無邊故，心行差別亦復無邊。如是境界，不可分齊，難知難解。若無明斷，無有心想。云何能了，名一切種智？答曰：一切境界，本來一心，離於想念。以眾生妄見境界，故心有分齊。以妄起想念，不稱法性，故不能決了。諸佛如來，離於見想，無所不徧。心真實故，即見諸法之性。自體顯照一切妄法，有大智用無量方便。隨諸眾生所應得解，皆能開示種種法義。是故得名一切種智。

Literal Translation

Again, it is the bodhisattva's completion of merits, and he attains the highest realm of form, and manifests the highest and biggest body. In accordance with one thought in correspondence with wisdom, end of ignorance, named the wisdom of all seeds. Naturally this results in miraculous effects, able to manifest in ten directions to benefit sentient beings.

Question: Because of infinite emptiness, thus infinite worlds. Because of infinite worlds, thus infinite sentient beings. Because of infinite sentient beings, differences of heart and action are also infinite. Similarly the realms, cannot be analyzed and understood, difficult to know, difficult to explain. If ignorance is terminated, no heart to think. Then how to say the wisdom of all seeds?

Answer: All realms are originally one heart, difficult to be comprehended. Because sentient beings see realms in illusion, thus heart is differentiated. When thoughts arise from

the deluded heart, do not understand spiritual nature, hence cannot determine.

All Buddhas and Tathagata are difficult to be seen or conceived, nowhere they are not pervaded. Because of real, solid heart, able to see nature of all phenomena, own body reflects all defiled phenomena, possessing great application of wisdom and limitless expedient means, according to the response of sentient beings, able to be explained, able to enlighten various kinds of spiritual meanings, hence get the name of wisdom of all seeds.

Interpretation

After completing the meritorious deeds in his spiritual cultivation, the bodhisattva attains the highest of the realms of form, namely the Akanishta Heaven ('Akanittha' in Pali), where he manifests the highest and biggest bodily form, and in an instant of thought in correspondence with cosmic wisdom, he terminates all his ignorance, and acquires what is called the wisdom of all seeds. Naturally this attainment results in him having incredible miraculous effects, being able to manifest himself in all realms to help sentient beings.

Now let us examine the following question. Because of infinite emptiness, there are infinite worlds. Because of infinite worlds, there are infinite sentient beings. Because of infinite sentient beings, there are great varieties of minds and activities, which consequently result in great varieties of realms of existence. Because of the great varieties, these different realms cannot be easily analysed and understood, and it is difficult to know or explain them. If ignorance is terminated, there is no mind to think. Then, how is it possible to say the Enlightened Bodhisattva has the wisdom of all seeds?

Here is the answer. All phenomenal realms are originally manifested from the one and only Universal Mind. Because of their illusion, sentient beings perceive cosmic reality as phenomenal realms. Thus the undifferentiated Universal Mind is perceived as differentiated beings, objects, processes, ideas and countless other things, not only by humans in the human realm, but also by all other sentient beings in all the other countless realms of existence. When thoughts arise from the deluded minds

of ordinary people, they do not understand the essential nature of the Supreme Reality. Hence, they cannot determine for themselves that the Supreme Reality is the one and only Universal Mind.

Although it is difficult to see or conceive of all the Buddhas of previous aeons, as well as the Tathagata or the Supreme Reality, there is nowhere they do not penetrate into. Because his mind is true and real, i.e. Enlightened, the Bodhisattva is able to see into the ultimate nature of all phenomena; and because of his Enlightenment, all defiled phenomena are also reflected in his own phenomenal body, as he has transcended the illusory difference between subject and object. The Enlightened Bodhisattva possesses great wisdom which he can apply widely, and possesses limitless expedient means with which he can explain to sentient beings according to their needs, and Enlighten them on various kinds of spiritual significance. Hence, it is called the wisdom of all seeds (from which all sorts of questions and difficulties may arise).

Commentary

Buddhism, especially Theravada Buddhism, is sometimes regarded by misinformed people as a philosophy of life, and not a religion, because they erroneously believe that Buddhism is only concerned with moral living, without any metaphysical dimension, a hierarchy of deities nor a personal God. They also point out that the Buddha is not a prophet nor a God, but a great teacher. This mis-conception, however, is not so often directed at Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, because here a hierarchy of Bodhisattvas, whom many people correspond with the Western concept of gods, is popularly known.

Actually Buddhism probably has the most extensive and profound metaphysical lore in the world. The breadth and depth of its knowledge, measured against the latest discoveries (rediscoveries?) of science, is simply astounding.

While some religions talk about three or four metaphysical levels – hell, world and heaven – Buddhism has more than thirty levels, each with sub-levels and sub-sub-levels. For example, the lowest level, known as Niraya or the Realm of Hell, comprises sixteen hells, each with four hellish divisions, each again with four gates opening to four smaller hells.

But the number of heavens far, far exceed the number of hells. While there is only one hellish realm, there are twenty six heavenly realms (from level 6 to level 31 in the list below), each with its own different heavens. For example, at the Catumaharajika heavenly realm (level 6), there are four heavens; and at the Tavatimsa heavenly realm, there are thirty three heavens!

The following list shows the thirty one realms of existence expounded in Theravada Buddhism. The names are in Pali. Levels 1 to 11, the lowest groups, are the realms of desires (Kama Loka), levels 12 to 27 are the realms of form (Rupa Loka), and levels 28 to 31 are the realms of non-form (Arupa Loka).

Hence, devas or gods who exist in any of the heavenly realms from level 6 to 11 still have desires; like the Greek and Roman gods, they may fight or make love to one another. The Brahma gods who exist at the heavenly realms from level 12 to level 27 are free from desires, but they still retain their form. Enlightened beings like arahats, sravakas, pratyeka-buddhas, bodhisattvas and celestial buddhas, at the four highest levels have discarded both desires and form.

The Thirty One Realms of Existence

31. Nevasannanasanna Yatana – Sphere of Neither Perception Nor Non-Perception.
30. Akincanna Yatana – Sphere of No-Thingness.
29. Vinnananca Yatana – Sphere of Infinite Consciousness.
28. Akasananca Yatana – Sphere of Infinite Space.
27. Akanittha Brahma – Heaven of Non-Thought.
26. Sudassi Brahma – Heaven of Perfected Form.
25. Sudassa Brahma – Heaven of Blissful Manifestation.
24. Atappa Brahma – Heaven of Blissful Sight.
23. Aviha Brahma – Heaven of Non-Activity.
22. Asannasatta Brahma – Heaven of No-Worry.

21. Vehapphala Brahma – Heaven of Great Reward.
20. Subhakinha Brahma – Heaven of Pervading Tranquility.
19. Appamana Brahma – Heaven of Infinite Tranquility.
18. Parittasubha Brahma – Heaven of Mino Tranquility.
17. Abhassara Brahma – Heaven of Extreme Radiant Tranquility.
16. Appamanabha Brahma – Heaven of Infinite Radiance.
15. Parittabba Brahma – Heaven of Minor Radiance.
14. Maha Brahma – Heaven of Great Brahmas.
13. Purohita Brahma – Heaven of Ministerial Brahmas.
12. Parisajja Brahma – Heaven of Popular Brahmas.
11. Paranimmita-Vasavatti Deva – Heaven of Enjoying Spontaneity.
10. Nimmana-Rati Deva – Heaven of Happiness.
9. Tusita Deva – Heaven of Pleasures.
8. Yama Deva – Heaven of Yama.
7. Tavatimsa Deva – Realm of Thirty Three Heavens.
6. Catumaharajika Deva – Realm of Four Heavenly Kings.
5. Manussa Loka – Human Realm.
4. Tiracchana Yoni – Realm of Creatures.
3. Peta Loka – Realm of Hungry Ghosts.
2. Asura Nikaya – Realm of Demons.
1. Niraya – Realm of Hells.

All these thirty one realms are found in our own world, which is literally a speck of dust in the Buddhist cosmology. Countless worlds like ours, numbering "like the sands of Ganges", each with their numerous realms of existence like the thirty one realms mentioned above, form our galaxy.

Our galaxy, known by the poetic name of "Twenty Tiers of Temporal and Spatial Dimensions Like a Lotus Blossom", where our world is located at the thirteenth tier, is only one of the countless galaxies in our universe. Like what our modern astro-physicists have found, Buddhist masters have taught since long ago, that ours is only one of countless universes! Compared to the eight-sphere cosmological model of Ptolemy with the earth as the centre, or similar models of many religions, Buddhist cosmological knowledge must strike many people as astonishingly rich and accurate.

If you think that Buddhist metaphysicians are extremely imaginative to have thought of such an elaborate system of supernatural realms, or extremely lucky that their cosmological knowledge agrees with that of modern astronomy, you are mistaken. Buddhist teaching, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is never derived from speculation; it is always obtained from insight and experience. Such information is taught in Buddhist scriptures because many masters have personally experienced its validity.

It should be remembered that many amazing "truths" such as time and space are merely human constructs, sub-atomic particles are not ultimately real, and the universe is not created by any creator, have been taught by Buddhist masters centuries before Einstein's theory of relativity, Bohr's principle of complementarity, and Hubble's big bang singularity. Before science has re-established these "facts", many people thought the Buddhist masters were talking non-sense. There are still many "absurd" pronouncements in Buddhist philosophy; modern scientists would get much inspiration for their new theories and research programmes if they look deeper into this ancient wisdom.

It is incorrect to say that in Buddhism there is no hierarchy of gods or a personal God. The Buddhist hierarchy of gods, especially in Mahayana and Vajrayana, is indeed elaborate. Many Mahayanists and Vajrayanists worship Bodhisattva Kuan Yin and Bodhisattva Tara respectively as their personal God. In fact, in Buddhist philosophy a

Bodhisattva is at a much higher hierarchy than gods, who often have to follow the Bodhisattva's bidding.

The Buddhist concept of "God" (instead of "a God") is quite different from the conventional Western concept of a Divine Being who is personal and almighty, and who is differentiated from his worshippers. What Westerners would call God is called by Buddhists the Tathagata or the Eternal Buddha. However, the Tathagata is impersonal, and being omniscient, it is not differentiated nor separated from all its worshippers. The Tathagata or the Eternal Buddha, therefore, is different from the celestial Buddhas, who are actually personifications of the Tathagata.

Celestial Buddhas like all other divine beings, are phenomenal in nature; the Tathagata is transcendental. The Tathagata is similar to what inspired saints meant by God in such ecstatic exclamations as "I am in God and God is in me", and "There is only God, and nothing else exists besides God".

3.99 Manifestation of the Buddha

Original Text in Chinese

又問曰：若諸佛有自然業，能現一切處，利益眾生者，一切眾生，若見其身，若觀神變，若聞其說，無不得利。云何世間多不能見？答曰：諸佛如來法身平等，徧一切處，無有作意故，而說自然。但依眾生心現。眾生心者，猶如於鏡。鏡若有垢，色像不現。如是眾生心若有垢，法身不現故。

Literal Translation

Another question: If all Buddhas have spontaneous effects, able to manifest everything and everywhere to benefit sentient beings, if see their bodies, if see changes of gods, if hear Buddhas speak, not unable to get benefits. Why not frequently seen in the world?

Answer: All Buddhas and Tathagata are undifferentiated in their Spiritual Body, pervade everywhere, never make any ideas, hence say to be spontaneous. But appear according to the hearts of sentient beings. The hearts of sentient beings are like mirrors. If mirrors are dusty, forms are not reflected. Similarly, if the hearts of sentient beings are defiled, the Spiritual Body is not manifested.

Interpretation

Here is another question. If all the celestial Buddhas have the power of performing miraculous effects spontaneously, and are able to manifest everything and everywhere for the benefit of sentient beings; and if seeing their personification into physical bodies, witnessing miracles performed by them, and hearing their preaching, are all beneficial, why is it that these manifestations are not frequently seen in the world?

The answer is as follows. All celestial Buddhas and the Tathagata are undifferentiated in the form of the Supreme Reality, which pervades everywhere and are never determined by the thoughts of sentient beings.

Hence, they are said to be spontaneous. But they appear to sentient beings according to the condition of the sentient beings' minds. The minds of sentient beings are like mirrors. If the mirrors are covered with dust, forms are not clearly reflected in the mirror. Similarly, if the minds of sentient beings are defiled, the Supreme Reality will not be manifested in its transcendental dimension.

Commentary

The term "Buddhas" here refers to all the Buddhas who have appeared in all phenomenal realms (in addition to our human realm) in countless aeons in the past, present and future. When they appear to unenlightened sentient beings to help them, the Buddhas are manifested in their physical bodies (rupakaya). When they appear in the astral spheres (which are still in the phenomenal dimension, although not in our physical plane), and are seen by Enlightened beings, they are manifested in their reward bodies (sambhogakaya).

In other words, when the Buddha appeared on earth as Siddharta Guatama Sakyamuni, ordinary people saw him in the physical body. If an advanced aspirant in his deep meditation meets the Buddha, or if a pious devotee with good karma after leaving this world meets the Buddha in a heavenly realm, both of them see the Buddha manifested in his reward body.

If you feel uneasy finding descriptions like meeting the Buddha in a heavenly realm, take comfort that modern science is saying similar things. Prof. Paul Davies reports that "many physicists these days are inclining towards the so-called Everett many-universes interpretation of the quantum theory. ... According to Everett, every possible world is actually realized, with all the alternative worlds coexisting in parallel."

And what do these universes or alternative worlds look like? Paul Davies later says, "The universe we perceive is necessarily selected by us, from the elementary requirement that life, and hence consciousness, can only develop under the appropriate physical conditions."

The whole business of Buddhism, once we have laid aside its cultural and religious connotations, is the quest for this ultimate reality – in ways probably more profound and exciting than what is now done in physics, psychology, cosmology and other disciplines. For centuries

Buddhism has expostulated that the ultimate transcendental reality is manifested as countless different worlds in numerous planes, according to the perception of their inhabitants. Buddhism is concerned not just to understand this reality, but more importantly to experience it directly, not as a detached observer but as an integral, organic whole of the cosmic reality itself.

Buddhists call the Cosmic Reality, which in its phenomenal aspect includes everything there is, physically and non-physically, the Tathagata, Zhen Ru or the Eternal Buddha. Nevertheless, Buddhists are aware that the Tathagata, as mentioned in Asvaghosha's passage above, is manifested differently to different people (and non-human beings) according to their minds. To physicists, the ultimate reality may be called unified energy fields; to psychologists, the universal consciousness; to those of other religious or cultural labels, God, Allah, Brahman, Tao and other names.

What is more significant is not just an intellectual understanding of the Supreme Reality, but a direct experience of it. So far Asvaghosha has given us a detailed and fascinating explanation of the Supreme Reality, and the three main approaches of spiritual cultivation. In subsequent chapters, he describes some methods to accomplish this most noble of all endeavour.

Chapter 27

Four Faiths and Five Perceptions

The motto of Bodhisattvas is "Seek, and ye shall be given". This is a great cosmic truth which, understandably, many uninitiated people find it hard to believe.

4.1 The Essential Path of Meditation

Original Text in Chinese

已說解釋分，次說修行信心分。是中依未入正定聚眾生故說修行信心。何等信心？云何修行？略說信心有四種。云何爲四？

Literal Translation

Already described the explanation part, then describe cultivation of faith part. This is for sentient beings who have not entered the right stillness, thus say cultivate the faith. What kind of faith? What cultivation? Generally speaking, four kinds of faith. What four?

Interpretation

The part on the explanation of the Supreme Reality has been described; now the part on the cultivation of faith is described. This part is for people who have not been initiated into right meditation; thus it is said to cultivate the faith. What kind of faith is it? What is the cultivation of faith like? Generally speaking, there are four kinds of faith. What are the four kinds?

Commentary

Asvaghosha's work is divided into five parts: reasons for writing the work (Chapter 5), establishing the meaning (Chapter 6), explanation of Supreme Reality (Chapters 7 to 25), cultivating the faith (Chapters 26 to 28), and encouraging benefits (Chapters 29, 30). After the detailed explanation of the Supreme Reality, the cultivation of the faith is now described.

Asvaghosha explains that this part is specially for those who have not been properly initiated into right meditation, which is here called "right stillness", or "zheng ding" in Chinese. The sanskrit word for

meditation is "dhyana", transcribed as "ch'an" in Chinese, and "Zen" in Japanese.

Meditation is the essential path to enlightenment in all schools of Buddhism – a crucial point surprisingly and unfortunately many Buddhists are not aware of! The Buddha himself said in the Satipatthana Sutta (Discourse on Mindfulness), considered by many as the Buddha's most important sermon on mind development, that meditation is the one and only way for the realization of nirvana.

Meditation is also explicitly mentioned as the essential path in yoga, Taoist and Confucianist cultivation. Christian and Muslim saints who have described their ecstatic union with God, recorded that they achieved their highest spiritual fulfilment during meditation. Augustine, as recorded in his Confessions, teaches the contemplation of God by banishing all images, thoughts, and sense perceptions, and then concentrating the deepest part of the mind to find God. In his Contemplative Disciplines in Sufism, Mir Valiuddin, a Muslim master, advocates the turning away of the five emotional senses from the world and fixing it on God.

4.2 Four Kinds of Faith

Original Text in Chinese

一者，信根本。所謂樂念真如法故。二者，信佛有無量功德。常念，親近，供養，恭敬，發起善根，願求一切智故。三者，信法有大利益。常念修行諸波羅蜜故。四者，信僧能正修行自利利他，常樂親近諸菩薩眾，求學如實行故。

Literal Translation

One, have faith in the original root, thus joyfully think of the principle of Zhen Ru. Two, have faith that the Buddhas has infinite merits. Ever thinking of him, being close to him, support and honour him, awaken good spiritual roots, and seek the all-embracing wisdom. Three, have faith that the Dharma will bring great benefits, ever thinking of cultivating the paramitas. Four, have faith that monks are able to cultivate rightly for themselves and for others. Frequently be happy to be close to bodhisattvas, seek instruction for the right cultivation.

Interpretation

There are four kinds of faith in the Mahayana. One, have faith in the Ultimate Source, thus joyfully thinking of the transcendental Supreme Reality.

Two, have faith that the Buddha has infinite merits, ever thinking of him, being close to him, supporting and honouring him, so as to awaken good spiritual roots, and seek the all-embracing wisdom taught by the Buddha.

Three, have faith that the Dharma, or the Buddhist teaching, will bring great benefits, and always think of cultivating the paramitas, or perfection of charity, discipline, tolerance, effort, meditation and wisdom.

Four, have faith that monks are able to cultivate rightly for themselves and for others. Frequently be happy to be close to bodhisattvas, and seek instruction from them for the right cultivation to attain enlightenment.

Commentary

One may wonder why faith is emphasized here when followers are advised not to base one's religion on faith alone, but on understanding and insight. The emphasis is "not on faith alone"; Buddhism never suggests "not to have faith at all". In other words, Buddhism requires its followers not to be superstitious or to accept any teaching blindly, but to believe intelligently and experientially. Once we have intellectually verified our belief, and intuitively experienced its teaching, our faith in the religion will be strong and unwavering.

The four kinds of faith refer to faith in the Tathagata, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Tathagata, or Supreme Reality, is undifferentiated and transcendental – corresponding to the Western concept of the Omnipresent and Omniscient God. The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are the phenomenal manifestations of the Tathagata. Ordinary people are unable to perceive or experience the Tathagata. So they see the Body of the Tathagata personified as the Buddha.

Similarly, as it is beyond their ability to perceive the characteristics of the Tathagata, these cosmic characteristics are manifested as the Dharma, or the Buddhist teaching. As they are unable to comprehend the universal applications of the Supreme Reality, these cosmic applications are manifested as the Sangha, or the community of monks or bodhisattvas who have vowed to help sentient beings to achieve enlightenment.

Hence, for ordinary people who have not attained the level whereby they can actualize the Supreme Reality on their own, they take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, which are referred to as the Triple Gem of Buddhism. As mentioned in the beginning of the book, "to take refuge" does not mean hiding behind some sanctuary or authority; the English expression is a rather inappropriate translation for

the Sanskrit "namo", or the Chinese "gui ming", which means devoting one's life to a noble cause.

4.3 Five Movements

Original Text in Chinese

修行有五門，能成此信。云何爲五？一者，施門。二者，戒門。三者，忍門。四者，進門。五者，止觀門。

Literal Translation

Cultivation has five doors to succeed in this faith. What five? One, charity door. Two, morality door. Three, tolerance door. Four, progress door. Five, zhi-guan (stillness-insight) door.

Interpretation

There are five ways of spiritual cultivation in this faith. What are the five ways? One, the way of charity. Two, the way of moral discipline. Three, the way of tolerance. Four, the way of progress through perseverance. Five, the way of tranquility and insight meditation.

Commentary

This is the fifth part of the theme of Asvaghosha's book, namely "One heart, two gates, three bigs, four faiths, five movements", which explains that there is one and only Universal Mind which is manifested in two aspects, phenomenal and transcendental.

The Universal Mind is found in three universal dimensions in limitless forms, limitless characteristics, and limited applications, and in the timeless past, present and future.

To understand and experience this cosmic reality, we need four faiths, in the Supreme Reality, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha; and the five ways to realize this is charity, morality, tolerance, perseverance and meditation.

The five ways mentioned here are the practice of the six paramitas. The fifth and sixth paramitas, meditation and wisdom, are intimately related. Wisdom, meaning the higher wisdom regarding the beauty and

mysteries of cosmic reality, is acquired through meditation. Meditation is conveniently described in two inter-related aspects, stillness and insight.

It should also be noted that these five ways of spiritual cultivation are not stages in the sense that the aspirant needs to master one stage before going to the next. All the five ways, or methods, are to be practised simultaneously.

4.4 The Perfection of Charity

Original Text in Chinese

云何修行【施門】？若見一切來求索者，所有財物，隨力施與，以自捨慳貪，令彼歡喜。若見厄難、恐怖、危逼，隨己堪任，施與無畏。若有眾生來求法者，隨己能解，方便為說，不應貪求名利恭敬。惟念自利利他，迴向善提故。

Literal Translation

How to cultivate the charity door? If see any coming to seek in their needs, all money and materials, according to our capability, be given, thus releasing ourselves of covetousness, and making the seekers happy. If see hardship, terror, danger, according to our power, release without fear. If sentient beings come to seek spiritual teaching, according to our understanding and ability, with expedient means explain. Never expect fame nor reward nor honour. Only think this practice benefits ourselves and others, progressing towards bodhi.

Interpretation

How do we cultivate the perfection of charity? If we see any persons coming to us to seek in their needs, we give them all money and materials according to our capability, thus releasing ourselves of the attachment to covetousness, and also making the seekers happy.

If we see any hardship, terror, or danger suffered by other people, we release these suffering for them according to our power. If sentient beings come to seek spiritual teaching, we explain to them using appropriate expedient means according to our understanding and ability.

In practising charity, we must never expect any fame, reward nor honour in return. We only think of this practice benefiting ourselves and others, thus helping both ourselves and others to progress towards bodhi, i.e. Enlightenment.

Commentary

Thus, the motto of Bodhisattvas is "Seek, and ye shall be given". This is a great cosmic truth which, understandably, many uninitiated people find it hard to believe. Remember, the Bodhisattva represents the highest ideal of Mahayanist and Vajrayanist aspirants, and it is a cardinal percept in Buddhism not to tell lies. Of course, one must be reasonable in his seeking. If you seek to have a loving family, you may not get it the next day, but if you are sincere in your seeking, you will eventually get it somehow.

Bodhisattvas have vowed to help all sentient beings attain the highest, greatest goal anyone can ever obtain, i.e. spiritual realization of the Supreme Reality. Helping someone to own his dream car or even to become a king, is a comparatively trifle task; but a Bodhisattva will still help him (the seeker, if he persists in wanting to become a king, would probably become one numerous reincarnations later), as satisfying his desire is one sure way of releasing his karmic burden so that he can progress towards Enlightenment.

The essence of charity is giving without expecting any return. There are three broad categories of giving: giving material goods (including money), giving care and service, and giving knowledge. It should be noted that we should give according to our ability. Hence, if someone seeks spiritual instruction, we should give according to our understanding and experience, and not have dogmas and superstitions thrust upon him.

4.5 The Perfection of Morality

Original Text in Chinese

云何修行戒門？所謂不殺、不盜、不姪、不兩舌、不惡口、不妄言、不嫉語。遠離貪嫉、欺詐、諂曲、瞋恚、邪見。若出家者，爲折伏煩惱故，亦應遠離憤鬧，常處寂靜，修習少欲知足頭陀等行。乃至小罪，心生怖畏，慚愧改悔。不得輕於如來所制禁戒。當護譏嫌，不令眾生妄起過罪故。

Literal Translation

How to cultivate morality? This is non-killing, non-stealing, non-committing adultery, non-double-tongued, non-slandering, non-lying, non-jealousy, and free from greed, cheating, deceit, flattery, anger and hatred, and biased view. If out of the family, for overcoming defilement, should distance from noise and disorder, always live in quietude, practise austerity of wanting little and knowing contentment. For small sins, heart filled with awe, regret and repent. Must not take lightly the Tathagata's moral rules. Should guard against ridicule and short-coming, not causing sentient beings arising offence.

Interpretation

How to cultivate the perfection of morality? This include not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to be double-tongued, not to slander, not to lie, not to be jealous, and to be free from greed, cheating, deceit, flattery, anger and hatred, and perverse views.

For those who have left family life and enter monkhood, in order to overcome defilement of the phenomenal world, they should distance themselves from the noise and disorder of society, always live in quietude, and practise the austerity of needing little and knowing contentment. Even for slight faults, their heart should be filled with the awe of wrong-doing, and they should regret and repent.

They must not take lightly any of the unwritten moral rules of the Supreme Reality, i.e. universal moral precepts applicable to all cultures and religions. They should guard against any form of ridicule and short-coming, which may allow the lay people to take offence at the monkhood and mock it in derision.

Commentary

The Buddha's teaching on morality can be divided into three main categories: prohibitions for eliminating evil deeds, obligations for doing good; and behaviour for benefiting others.

Generally, there are three prohibitions for the body, four for the mouth, and three for the will, making what some people regard as the Buddhist Ten Commandments: not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery; not to be double-tongued, not to slander, not to lie, not to flatter; not to be greedy, not to harbour anger and hatred, and not to have perverse views.

Getting away from the hustle and bustle of the world, and spending time in quietude so as to tune into Cosmic Reality more easily, are examples of doing good for ourselves; and the practice of charity as mentioned in the previous passage is a sure way of helping others.

4.6 The Perfection of Tolerance

Original Text in Chinese

云何修行【忍門】？所謂應忍他人之惱，心不懷報。亦當忍於利衰、毀譽、稱譏、苦樂等法故。

Literal Translation

How to cultivate tolerance? This is tolerating the annoyance of other people, without feeling of vengeance, and being patient in gain or loss, dishonour or honour, praise or blame, suffering or joy, and other phenomena.

Interpretation

How to cultivate the perfection of tolerance? This is tolerating the annoyance of other people, without feeling of vengeance, and being detached irrespective of gain or loss, dishonour or honour, praise or blame, suffering or joy, and other phenomena that can arouse strong emotions.

Commentary

It is no co-incidence that not a drop of blood is shed in the name of Buddhism – an achievement that is the more remarkable when throughout history the world has been frequently marred by religious wars. Tolerance is a hallmark of Buddhist teaching. Buddhists are tolerant not because they are particularly altruistic, nor because their masters and scriptures advise so, but because tolerance is an intrinsic requirement for attaining Enlightenment.

If an aspirant is not tolerant, he simply cannot achieve the highest spiritual fulfillment, because intolerance causes attachment to emotions, which is incongruous to cosmic realization. Hence, when a Buddhist says he is tolerant of other religion, it is not said out of courtesy, but out of his realization that there are other ways to spiritual fulfillment, as well as his innate spiritual requirement.

One should not be mistaken that Buddhists are without emotions. Buddhists experience emotions like other people, but they are not controlled by emotions. They are not easily moved, for example, by gains or loss, honour or dishonour, because they understand that all these phenomena are illusory and transient.

4.7 The Perfection of Perseverance

Original Text in Chinese

云何修行【進門】？所謂於諸善事，心不懈退。立志堅強，遠離怯弱。當念過去久遠已來，虛受一切身心大苦，無有利益。是故應勤修諸功德，自利利他，速離眾苦。

Literal Translation

How to cultivate perseverance? This is adherence to kind deeds, heart never weary nor retreat, make aim resolute and strong, distance from fear and weakness, should remember since long past have endured all forms of great suffering of body and heart, with no benefit. Hence, should cultivate all merits, benefit oneself and others, liberate from the suffering of sentient beings.

Interpretation

How to cultivate the perfection of perseverance? The aspirant should adhere to performing kind deeds, never becoming weary nor retreat from the spiritual task. He should make the aim of attaining Enlightenment resolute and strong, and distance himself from fear and weakness. He should remember that since time long past he has endured all forms of great suffering of body and mind, without any spiritual realization. Hence, given a rare opportunity now, he should cultivate all merits, so as to benefit himself and others, to be liberated from the suffering of samsara endured by all sentient beings.

Commentary

To be born a human is itself a great achievement; to have spiritual awareness and be blessed with a way to spiritual fulfilment is a rare opportunity. It is indeed very foolish not to make good use of this rare opportunity, which may occur only once in countless life times.

Cultivating for spiritual realization is not a short or easy task, but its accomplishment is certain if our aim is clear and resolute, and we persevere.

4.8 Different Rates of Progress

Original Text in Chinese

復次，若人雖修行信心，以從先世已來，多有重罪惡業障故，為邪魔諸鬼之所惱亂。或為世間事務種種牽纏。或為病苦所惱。有如是等眾多障礙，是故應當勇猛精勤。晝夜六時禮拜諸佛。誠心懺悔，勸請隨喜。迴向菩提，常不休廢。得免諸障，善根增長故。

Literal Translation

Then, although some people cultivate the faith, from past lives, hindered by heavy sins and bad karma, troubled by Mara and demons. Or entangled in various forms of worldly affairs, or afflicted by suffering of various illness. If there are many such hindrances, then must courageously persevere. Day and night at six o'clock pray to the Buddhas. Sincerely repent, rejoice in the goodness of others, progress towards bodhi. Always not abandon, able to surmount various hindrances, increase good roots.

Interpretation

Then, although some people cultivate the faith, they do not make much progress. This is because they are hindered by the grave sins and bad karma they acquired from past lives. Or they may be troubled by Mara, the evil Tempter, and his demons. Or they are entangled in various forms of worldly affairs, or afflicted by suffering of various illness.

If they face such hindrances, they must courageously persevere. Morning and night at six o'clock they should pray to the celestial Buddhas to seek their help. They should sincerely repent whatever wrong doings they have done, including those of their previous lives, as well as rejoice in the goodness of others people, and direct whatever merits so acquired towards bodhi, or Enlightenment. If they never abandon these practices, they will be able to surmount the various hindrances due to their bad karma, and so increase their good spiritual roots.

Commentary

Because of karma, different people are at different stages of spiritual development. Only the very lucky minority are spiritually awakened and aware of the cultivation of the paramitas or other methods towards cosmic realization. Most people are at developmental stages similar to those described above.

They may be weighed down by bad karma of previous lives, deluded by Mara with such temptations like money, wine and women (this does not imply that Buddhist teaching is against money, wine and women; but we should be aware that they, more easily than most other factors, can be abused to corrupt us), entangled in the mad rat race, or handicapped by crippling diseases.

It is unlikely for these people to have higher wisdom nor be able to practise meditation efficaciously. For them it is more appropriate to pray to the Buddhas and other divine beings for help and guidance, to purify themselves by leading a moral life, as well as to rejoice at the good fortune of other people. Their cultivation is mainly through faith, but it does not mean they depend on blind belief or superstition. They should also evaluate their faith against understanding and experience at their own level.

For example, they pray to the Buddhas not because they want some divine force to help them win their rat race, but because they understand that their pious act can remind them of the Buddha's teaching, which they should make some effort to learn. As they progress in their faith, they should experience some inner peace, and even be calm though they may make some loss. Otherwise, their faith is wrong, or they have practised a right faith wrongly.

Chapter 28

Meditation, the Essential Path

The technique taught here by Asvaghosha is bafflingly simple – so simple that many uninitiated people would wonder whether it is really possible to attain Cosmic Reality with it.

4.9 Essential Path to Nirvana

Original Text in Chinese

云何修行【止觀門】？所言止者，謂止一切境界相，隨順奢摩他觀義故。所言觀者，謂分別因緣生滅相，隨順毘鉢舍那觀義故。云何隨順？以此二義漸漸修習，不相捨離，雙現前故。

Literal Translation

How to cultivate the door of zhi-guan? By zhi (stillness) is meant to still every characteristic, following the significance of samatha. By guan (perception) is meant to perceive clearly the characteristics of cause and effect, life and death, following the significance of vipasyana. What is meant by following? This is gradually cultivating these two significances, without separating, both appearing.

Interpretation

How to cultivate the perfection of zhi-guan, or stillness and perception? By zhi (stillness) is meant to still every characteristic or thoughts that arise in the mind, following the significance of samatha. By guan (perception) is meant to perceive clearly the characteristics of karma (cause and effect) and samsara (cycle of life and death) following the significance of vipasyana.

What is meant by following samatha and vipasyana? This is gradually cultivating these two types of meditation, without separating one type of meditation from another during practice, so that both stillness meditation and perception meditation are cultivated as one process.

Commentary

Meditation is the essential path to nirvana; hence, it is probably more widely and deeply practised and studied in Buddhism than in anywhere else. Buddhist meditation can be divided into two main categories,

namely samatha meditation, or tranquility meditation, and vipasyana meditation, or insight meditation. In Chinese, tranquility and insight meditation are collectively referred to as "zhi-guan".

The classification into samatha and vipasyana meditation is for convenience of study and practice. It is important to know that both these two types of meditation are necessary for attaining the highest spiritual fulfilment. Asvaghosha explicitly advises that the two types are not meant to be practised one after the other, but to be practised together in the same meditation.

4.10 Tranquility Meditation

Original Text in Chinese

若修止者，住於靜處，端坐正意，不依氣息，不依形色，不依於空，不依地水火風，乃至不依見聞覺知。一切諸想，隨念皆除。亦遣除想，以一切法本來無想，念念不生，念念不滅。亦不得隨心外念境界。後以心除心。心若馳散，即當攝來，住於正念。是正念者，當知唯心，無外境界。即復此心亦無自相，念念不可得。若從坐起、去來、進止，有所施作，於一切時，常念方便，隨順觀察，久習淳熟，其心得住。以心住故，漸漸猛利，隨順得入真如三昧。深伏煩惱，信心增長，速成不退。惟除疑惑、不信、誹謗，重罪業障、我慢、懈怠，如是等人所不能入。

Literal Translation

For cultivating zhi, stay at quiet place, sit upright with righteous will, not dependent on breathing, not dependent on form and substance, not dependent on emptiness, not dependent on earth, water, fire, wind, and even not dependent on seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing. All thoughts eliminated, including the thought eliminated. All phenomena originally without thought, no thoughts arising, no thoughts ceasing.

Not follow the heart to think of phenomenal world, then use heart to eliminate heart. If heart is distracted, immediately bring back, abide to right thought. If right thought, should know only the heart, no external world. Then this heart has no own characteristics, no thoughts arising. If sitting up, go come, enter stop, with activities, at all times, always think of expedient means, observe and examine, long practice become familiar, the heart is abided.

As heart abided, gradually great benefit, subsequently enter samadhi of Zhen Ru, deeply overcome defilement, faith increased, fast progress without retreat. But with doubts, disbelief, slandering, bad karma due to grave sins, self conceit, laziness, and the like cannot enter.

Interpretation

For cultivating the perfection of zhi, or tranquility meditation, stay at a quiet place, and sit upright with righteous intention. In this meditation method, it is not necessary to depend on breathing, nor on any form and substance as a meditation object. It is not necessary to depend on emptiness, nor on the four elements of earth, water, fire and air, nor on any phenomena derived from seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing.

All thoughts as soon as they arise should be eliminated, and even this thought of eliminating thoughts should not arise. As all phenomena are originally without thought in its transcendental aspect, thoughts neither arise nor cease in the Supreme Reality. In tranquility meditation, it is not letting the mind first meditate on some aspects of the external world, then letting the mind to eliminate whatever thoughts are in the mind.

In the meditation of perfect stillness, if the mind is distracted, immediately bring it back and let it abide to the right mental state. If the right mental state is attained, one would know the Mind only, without any awareness of the external world. Then this Mind, being undifferentiated, has no characteristics whatsoever, with no thoughts arising.

When the aspirant has completed his meditation and rise up from his sitting position, whether going or coming, advancing or remaining still, or involved in any other activities, he should at all times be mindful of these expedient means of tranquility meditation, and observe and examine his progress. After long practice, he will become familiar with tranquility meditation, and his mind will be still.

As his mind is still, gradually as he progresses, he will obtain great benefit, and subsequently enter the samadhi of Zhen Ru, or the Enlightenment of Cosmic Reality. He will thoroughly eradicate his defilement, strengthen his faith, and attain fast progress without any retrogression. But people with doubts, disbelief, ill feelings and ill words for others, bad karma due to grave sins, self-conceit, laziness, and the like cannot attain the Enlightenment of Cosmic Reality.

Commentary

From my many years in the practice and study of meditation, I find the above passage one of the best explanations on meditation. It speaks well for Asvaghosha's writing skill that few people can actually believe

that in this short passage is contained all the necessary and invaluable information concerning tranquility meditation.

There are indeed as many meditation techniques as there are meditators. Nevertheless, meditation teachers have devised numerous useful techniques to help students attain a one-pointed mind or an "empty" mind. Some of these techniques involve focusing the mind on an external object like a Buddha statue or a stone, or an internal point like the navel or the third eye. Some focus on various forms of breathing, others on a mystical combination of sounds like mantras. Some may use kasinas or tools representing the four elements or appropriate colours, like a disk of clay representing earth. Others may meditate on patterns of thoughts, like diffusing loving-kindness to four directions to all creatures, or on a seemingly illogical question of a koan.

Asvaghosha does not recommend any of these techniques, because they first let the mind meditate on some thoughts, then let the mind eliminate the same thoughts. Asvaghosha's method is direct, aiming at the void or stillness at the very first instant, and preventing thoughts from arising. This kind of mental state, Asvaghosha expounds, is the essential nature of Cosmic Reality, where thoughts neither arise nor cease.

As soon as the mind wanders, as it usually does, the meditator gently but resolutely brings it back to the natural state of Cosmic Reality. How does he know whether it is the natural state of Cosmic Reality? When he has attained this state, he will be blissfully unaware of the phenomenal world; he has attained samadhi, or stillness, where he and Cosmic Reality is one.

I believe that this passage may be mainly instrumental for creating an interesting situation regarding Buddhist mediation practice. Most Theravadins, like the Sinhalese, and many Vajrayanists, like the Tibetans, use the one-pointed mind approach in their meditation, whereas most Mahayanists, like the Chinese and the Japanese, use the empty-mind approach.

The technique taught here by Asvaghosha is bafflingly simple – so simple that many uninitiated people would wonder whether it is really possible to attain Cosmic Reality with it. But the practice demands much time, effort and discipline. Persevering at it is probably the most formidable hurdle, the hurdle that most aspirants tumble.

Yet. it is not enough just to slog at it; the aspirant must constantly observe and examine himself, not just to make sure he practises the meditation correctly, but more importantly that he is free from doubts, disbelief, ill feelings and ill words for others, bad karma due to grave sins, self-conceit, laziness, and similar negative attitudes. Asvaghosha's warning is not merely meant as moralization to influence people from doing bad; his is actually a statement of cosmic truth. These negative factors are incongruous with Cosmic Reality; anyone with these factors just cannot attain cosmic realization.

4.11 Samadhi

Original Text in Chinese

復次，依是三昧故，則知法界一相。謂一切諸佛法身，與眾生身平等無二。即名一行三昧。當知真如是三昧根本。若人修行，漸漸能生無量三昧。

Literal Translation

Next, attaining samadhi, should know Spiritual Realm has only one characteristic. The Spiritual Body of all Buddhas is the same as the body of sentient beings, and not two. Thus it is named one movement of samadhi. Should know that Zhen Ru is the source of samadhi. If cultivate, gradually create unlimited samadhi.

Interpretation

Next, with the attainment of samadhi, we should know that the one and only Spiritual Realm (Dharmadhatu), or Universal Mind, is undifferentiated. The whole of the Spiritual Body (Dharmakaya) of all Buddhas is the same as the total body of sentient beings: they are not two different entities.

In other words, transcendental reality is the same as the phenomenal world: they are non-dualistic and non-polaristic. Thus, this is called the unity of samadhi. We should also know that Zhen Ru, or the Supreme Reality, is the source of samadhi, or Enlightenment. Thus, if the aspirant continues in his spiritual cultivation, he will gradually attains unlimited forms of samadhi.

Commentary

In Buddhist literature, there are many terms to refer to the Supreme Reality or Ultimate Truth. Some examples are Spiritual Realm, Spiritual Body, Universal Mind, No Mind, Original Face, Thus-Come, Thusness, Suchness, the Eternal Buddha, and the Tathagata.

In Theravada literature, samadhi is often mentioned as one-pointed mind, mental concentration, or the elimination of sensory impressions from the mind. In Mahayana, samadhi is mentioned as stillness of the mind, awareness, or mindfulness. In Vajrayana, it is mentioned as one-pointed mind, mental stabilization, and relaxed concentration. Actually the various interpretations are the same; the apparent difference is due to linguistic rather than ontological reasons.

There are many kinds of samadhi. Some examples are as follows. When mental concentration is just becoming intense, it is known as upacara samadhi; when mental concentration is advanced to an ecstatic state, it is appana samadhi. When the one-pointed mind is associated with the mundane phenomenal realms, it is lokiya samadhi; when it is transcendental, it is lokuttara samadhi.

Samadhi can also be classified according to the main method employed to attain it. When samadhi is attained mainly through the will, it is chanda samadhi; through energy, viriya samadhi; through consciousness, citta samadhi; through investigative knowledge, vimamsa samadhi.

Samadhi is also classified according to the realms it is specially associated with: with the realm of desires, kamavacara samadhi; the realm of form, rupavacara samadhi; the realm of non-form, arupavacara samadhi; not associated with any of these realms, apariyapama samadhi.

4.12 Pit-Falls in Meditation

Original Text in Chinese

或有眾生，無善根力，則為諸魔外道鬼神之所惑亂。若於坐中現形恐怖，或現端正男女等相。當念唯心，境界則滅，終不為惱。或現天像、菩薩像，亦作如來像，相好具足。或說陀羅尼。或說布施、持戒、忍辱、精進、禪定、智慧。或說平等空無相、無願、無怨、無親、無因、無果，畢竟空寂，是真涅槃。或令人知宿命過去之事，亦知未來之事。得他心智，辯才無礙，能令眾生貪著世間名利之事。又令人數瞋數喜，性無常準。或多慈愛多睡多病，其心懈怠或率起精進，後便休廢，生於不信，多疑多慮。或捨本勝行，更修雜業。若著世事種種牽纏。亦能使人得諸三昧少分相似。皆是外道所得，非真三昧。

或復令人，若一日，若二日，若三日，乃至七日，住於定中。得自然香美飲食，身心適悅，不飢不渴，使人愛著。或亦令人食無分齊，乍多乍少，顏色變異。以是義故，行者常應智慧觀察，勿令此心墮於邪網。當勤正念，不取不著，則能遠離是諸業障。應知外道所有三昧，皆不離見愛我慢之心，貪著世間名利恭敬故。真如三昧者，不住見相，不住得相，乃至出定，亦無懈怠。所有煩惱漸漸微薄。若諸凡夫不習此三昧法，得入如來種性，無有是處。以修世間諸禪三昧，多起味著，依於我見，繫屬三界，與外道共。若離善知識所護，則起外道見故。

Literal Translation

May be there are sentient beings with no power of good roots, thus troubled and deluded by Mara and demons of other practices. During sitting may reveal manifestations which are terrifying, or manifested as righteous men and women. Should realize it is mind only, thus phenomenal realms disappear.

Or reveal heavenly scenes, scenes of Bodhisattvas, even appear as the Tathagata, complete with good characteristics,

or say mantras, or say charity, discipline, tolerance, perseverance, meditation, wisdom.

Or say undifferentiated emptiness without characteristics, no vows, no blames, no affection, no cause, no effect, perfectly empty and quiet, is the real nirvana.

Or allow people to see into the past, know the future, know other's thoughts, unquestionable abilities, able to cause sentient beings crave for fame and reward of the world.

Or cause people to be frequently angry, frequently happy, with no exactness of nature. Or often compassionate and loving, often sleepy, often sick, their heart indolent or suddenly energetic, then negligent and futile, losing faith, much skeptical and much anxious.

Or abandon this excellent practice, and cultivate miscellaneous effects. Or be fettered by various worldly affairs. Also can cause people to attain some semblance of samadhi, this is the attainment of other faiths, not real samadhi.

Or enable people, perhaps one day, or two days, or three days, up to seven days, remain in stillness. Enjoy natural, fragrant and beautiful food and drinks, body and mind comfortable, not hungry and not thirsty, cause people to desire them, or to eat without balance, sometimes much sometimes little, the countenance changes. For this significance, the aspirant should always observe and examine with insight and wisdom, must not let the heart fall into the evil net. Must employ the right intention, not grasp and not attach, thus can distant from these karmic hindrances. Should know that samadhi of other faiths, not free from perverse views, craving and conceited heart, covetously attached to the fame, reward and honour of the world.

The samadhi of Zhen Ru is not abided to the characteristic of seeing, not abided to the characteristic of getting, even coming out of stillness, neither indolent nor conceited. All defilements gradually become less and thin. If ordinary people do not practise this samadhi technique, able to enter

the Tathagata, no such cases. If cultivate samadhi of various chan (dhyana) of the world, much arise stillness, attached to self, bound to the three realms, same as other faiths. If away from the protection of kind knowledge, thus arise views of other faiths.

Interpretation

There may be sentient beings who are not developed spiritually, and thus are troubled and deluded by Mara, the Evil Tempter, and demons found in other spiritual practices. During meditation, these evil forces of Mara and demons may reveal themselves as manifestations which are terrifying, or they may be manifested as righteous men and women. If the aspirants realize that everything is mind only, these manifestations of the phenomenal realms will disappear.

These forces may reveal themselves as heavenly scenes, scenes of Bodhisattvas, or they may even appear as the Tathagata, complete with all the good characteristics of Buddhahood. Or they may recite mantras, or preach charity, discipline, tolerance, perseverance, meditation and wisdom. Or they may talk about the undifferentiated emptiness being without characteristics, without vows, blames, affection, cause or effect, and which being perfectly empty and quiet, is the real nirvana.

Or they allow people who have achieved samadhi to see into the past, know the future, be able to read other's thoughts, and have unquestionable abilities. Hence, these evil forces are able to cause sentient beings crave for fame and reward of the world. Or they may cause people to be frequently angry and frequently happy, thus losing the essential harmony of their own nature. At times these people are often compassionate and loving; at other times they are often sleepy and sick, and their mind become indolent or suddenly they become energetic, only to lapse into states of negligence and futility, losing their faith, and becoming much skeptical and anxious. The aspirants may even abandon this excellent practice of samadhi, and follow other miscellaneous faiths. Or they may be fettered by various worldly affairs.

These evil forces can cause people to attain some semblance of samadhi, which is the attainment of other faiths, and which is not the real form of samadhi in Buddhism. Or they enable people to remain

in meditation for perhaps one day, or two days, or three days, or up to seven days. The unsuspecting aspirants may enjoy natural, fragrant and beautiful food and drinks, and their body and mind become comfortable. The evil forces may cause people to be free from hunger and thirst, and cause people to desire delicious food and drinks, or make them eat out of balance, sometimes much and sometimes little, with the result that they cannot maintain a calm countenance.

For these reasons, the aspirants should always observe and examine themselves with insight and wisdom, must not let their mind fall into the evil net. They must employ the right intention, without grasping at nor attaching to phenomena. In this way they can free themselves from these karmic hindrances. They should know that the samadhi practised by other faiths are not free from perverse views, craving and being conceit, covetously attached to the fame, reward and honour of the world.

The samadhi of Zhen Ru, or the Supreme Reality, is not abided to the characteristic of seeing any phenomenal objects, nor abided to the characteristic of getting any phenomenal rewards. Even when the aspirants come out of samadhi, they are neither indolent nor conceited. All their defilements will gradually become less and then be eradicated.

There have been no cases of ordinary people who have not practised this samadhi technique, who are able to enter the Tathagata. The cultivation of samadhi in various worldly meditation practices, as practised in other faiths, will bring about samadhi too, but it is usually attached to self, bound to the three realms of desires, form and non-form. If the aspirants are kept away from the protection of higher wisdom, it is easy for them to fall victims to the perverse views of other faiths.

Commentary

Here Asvaghosha gives a helpful description of the pit-falls to be avoided in samadhi. Broadly speaking these pit-falls can be divided into four main groups.

One, the meditator may experience frightful visions. Two, the visions may appear to be holy or righteous. Three, the meditator may acquire psychic or supernatural powers. Four, the meditator may become disorientated. To overcome these pit-falls, the meditator should

realize that all these phenomena are illusory, and he should persist on his training without carving or attachment.

These pit-falls are brought about by Mara and his demons, who may be interpreted at four levels depending on one's attitude and development. Firstly, these evil forces are symbolic, representing whatever that hinders spiritual development, such as an inability to keep the mind still during meditation or corrupted monetary temptation. Secondly, the evil forces, whether manifested in the forms of demons or heavenly beings, are imaginary. Thirdly, these beings are actually in the astral plane, which become visible to us during deep meditation. Fourthly they have no substantial existence, but are psychic manifestations of some karmic effect.

One should note that these evil forces may impersonate divine beings like Bodhisattva or Buddhas to mislead the aspirant. How does the naive aspirant differentiate these impersonations from the genuine Bodhisattvas and Buddhas who may sometimes appear before pious devotees? If the aspirant becomes conceited or arrogant, thinking that they are privileged ones endowed with special powers by divine beings, it is a tell-tale sign that they have been tempted by Mara and his demons.

Genuine powers derived from meditation practice belong to a different category from tricks provided by Mara and his demons. These powers are often employed by Bodhisattvas to save sentient beings. Nevertheless, if the aspirant becomes attached to these powers, they become a hindrance to his spiritual progress.

4.13 Ten Benefits of Samadhi

Original Text in Chinese

復次，精勤專心修學此三昧者，現世當得十種利益。云何爲十？一者，常爲十方諸佛菩薩之所護念。二者，不爲諸魔惡鬼所能恐怖。三者，不爲九十五種外道鬼神之所惑亂。四者，速離誹謗甚深之法，重罪業障漸漸微薄。五者，滅一切疑諸惡覺觀。六者，於如來境界信得增長。七者，遠離憂悔，於生死中勇猛不怯。八者，其心柔和，捨於憍慢，不爲他人所惱。九者，雖未得定，於一切時一切境界處，則能減損煩惱，不樂世間。十者，若得三昧，不爲外緣一切音聲之所驚動。

Literal Translation

Those who diligently and whole-heartedly cultivate this samadhi, this life obtains ten benefits. What ten? One, always protected and thought of by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Two, cannot be terrified by Mara and demons. Three, cannot be deluded by the spirits and gods of ninety five outside doctrines. Four, distance from deep slandering of the faith, heavy sins and bad karma gradually become less and thin. Five, eradicate all doubts and perverse views.

Six, strengthen the faith in the Tathagata realm. Seven, distance from anxiety, courageously progress in life and death. Eight, their hearts are warm and harmonious, abandon arrogance and conceit, not troubled by other people. Nine, thought not yet attained stillness, with all time and all space, able to eliminate defilement, not take pleasure in worldly affairs. Ten, if attained samadhi, cannot be startled by any external sounds.

Interpretation

Those who diligently and whole-heartedly cultivate the perfection of meditation to attain this samadhi, can obtain ten benefits in this life. What are the ten benefits?

One, they are always protected by all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Two, they cannot be terrified by Mara and demons. Three, they cannot be deluded by the spirits and gods of the ninety five non-Buddhist doctrines (that were in India during the time of Siddharta Guatama.) Four, they are free from the intense slandering attacks on Buddhism by other people, and their grave sins and bad karma of the past will be gradually eliminated. Five, they can eradicate all doubts and perverse views.

Six, they can strengthen their faith in the Buddhist teaching concerning the Supreme Reality. Seven, they are free from sorrow and remorse, and while still in the cycle of birth and rebirth they can courageously progress towards nirvana. Eight, they are warm and harmonious, free from arrogance and conceit, and not troubled by other people. Nine, even if they have not attained samadhi, their right practice of meditation is able to eliminate defilement at all time and in all space, and they do not take pleasure in worldly affairs. Ten, if they have attained samadhi, their mental concentration cannot be disturbed by any external stimuli.

Commentary

These are the ten benefits one will get if he practises tranquility meditation correctly. If a person practises for some time, say a few years, but still do not get such benefits, it suggests that either he is too heavily burdened with past bad karma, in which case he should first purify himself by praying to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and practise moral precepts, as explained earlier; or he may be morally ready but practises the meditation incorrectly, in which case he should seek the help of a competent meditation teacher.

If he experiences negative results, like feeling of anxiety or seeing frightful visions, he has tumbled into some pit-falls; he must consult a master.

Tranquility or samatha meditation is only one aspect of Buddhist meditation essential for Enlightenment. The other aspect, insight or vipasyana meditation is explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 29

Insight Meditation

Although to Enlightened beings the paradise is an illusion, to those of lesser spiritual development being in paradise is certainly a worthy, blissful achievement.

4.14 Perfection of Insight Meditation

Original Text in Chinese

復次，若人惟修於止，則心沈沒，或起懈怠，不樂眾善，遠離大悲。是故修觀。

Literal Translation

Again, if a person cultivates zhi (stillness), his heart becomes sunken, or become slothful, not happy in doing public kindness, far away from great compassion. Thus, must cultivate guan (insight).

Interpretation

Again, if a person only cultivates zhi (stillness), i.e. if he only practises tranquility meditation, his mind may become complacent or slothful, and he may not rejoice in helping other sentient beings achieve enlightenment, thereby alienating himself from the Mahayanist ideal of universal salvation. Thus, he must also cultivate guan (insight), or insight meditation.

Commentary

The importance of practising both tranquility meditation and insight meditation is again emphasized. The grave danger of practising only tranquility meditation is that the aspirant may become complacent, lazy and lose sight of the Mahayana ideal of helping others to achieve salvation. Tranquility meditation and insight meditation is sometimes referred to as concentration and contemplation respectively.

When the mind has become still or concentrated in tranquility meditation, the aspirant reflects or contemplate on the ultimate truths of cosmic reality. Reflection or contemplation is of four kinds: phenomena characteristics reflection (fa-xiang guan), great compassion reflection

(da-bei guan), great vow reflection (da-yuan guan), and effort-progress reflection (jing-jin guan).

4.15 Reflection on the Characteristics of Phenomena

Original Text in Chinese

修習觀者，當觀一切世間有爲之法，無得久停，須與變壞。一切心行，念念生滅，以是故苦。應觀過去所念諸法，恍忽如夢。應觀現在所念諸法，猶如電光。應觀未來所念諸法，猶如於雲忽爾而起。應觀世間一切有身，悉皆不淨，種種穢污，無一可樂。

Literal Translation

The aspirant who cultivates guan, should see all conditioned phenomena of the world, no permanence, instantly destroyed. Everything is heart activity, thoughts arising and ceasing, thus suffering. Should reflect all past phenomena that were conceived, misty like dreams. Should reflect all present phenomena now being conceived, just like lightning flashes. Should reflect all future phenomena that will be conceived, just like clouds arising. Should reflect all worldly forms are impure, various types of pollution, not one can be rejoiced in.

Interpretation

The aspirant who cultivates insight meditation should reflect that all conditioned phenomena of the world have no permanence; all phenomena that arise are instantly destroyed. All events are the result of the mind only; all thoughts constantly arise and cease. This impermanence of all phenomena, including all life, is suffering.

The aspirant should reflect that all past phenomena that were conceived are misty like dreams; all present phenomena now being conceived are just like lightning flashes; all future phenomena that will be conceived are just like clouds arising. He should reflect that everything that has form in the phenomenal world is impure, that all forms are

merely various types of pollution, without anything that can be rejoiced in.

Commentary

In this passage the reflection on the characteristics of phenomena is described. There are four essential characteristics of the phenomenal world, and the insight into them involves the reflection on non-permanence (wu chang guan), the reflection on suffering (ku guan), the reflection on non-self (wu wo guan), and the reflection on impurity (bu jing guan).

It must be remembered that the four reflections on impermanence, suffering, non-self and impurity are expedient means to help aspirants attain Enlightenment. These reflections should not be mis-understood as being negative, pessimistic or nihilistic. If someone is dreaming, and enjoys his dream, Buddhist philosophy has nothing against his legitimate enjoyment.

But, out of compassion, Buddhist teachers would tell him that his dreamy pleasure is impermanent, that being ignorant of this truth is suffering, that the "I" in his dream is not his real self, and that everything in his dream is "impure", meaning it is not of his waking existence. The teachers inform him that he would have greater joy if he wakes up, but they would never wake him against his wish.

Similarly, transposed to a higher plane, Buddhism teaches that what we think is the real objective world is actually an illusion, and whatever worldly pleasures (as well as sufferings) are illusory. What is ultimately real is Cosmic Reality, which is eternal, blissful, transcendental and pure. Buddhism does not only explain this cosmic truth, but provides a practical way to attain this Cosmic Reality.

4.16 Reflection on Great Compassion

Original Text in Chinese

如是當念一切眾生，從無始世來，皆因無明所熏習故，令心生滅，已受一切身心大苦。現在即有無量逼迫。未來世苦，亦無分齊，難捨難離，而不覺知。眾生如是，甚為可愍。

Literal Translation

Thus reflect that all sentient beings from beginningless beginning, because of permeation of ignorance, cause their heart to have life-death, endure all sufferings of body and heart. At present there is infinite pressure, suffering in future lives, no release, difficult to be liberated, yet no awareness. Sentient beings are thus, greatly pitied.

Interpretation

During insight meditation, the aspirant should reflect that all sentient beings from the beginningless beginning, because of the permeation of ignorance, have allowed their minds to remain in samsara, and have endured all forms of sufferings of the mind and body. At present they are under infinite pressure, and will continue to suffer in their future lives. Their sufferings are difficult to be relieved, and they are difficult to be liberated, yet they are not aware of their miserable situation. Thus, sentient beings are to be greatly pitied.

Commentary

Buddhism is famous for its teaching of compassion. This compassion for all sentient beings is the result of a deep understanding of their recurrent suffering in samsara, which can be eliminated if they are aware of the higher wisdom concerning Cosmic Reality.

The fundamental reason why people suffer continuously is not because some divine power punishes them for their grave sins, not even

because they cannot satisfy their craving or they have to endure pains of sickness and death, but because of their ignorance that attachment to self and phenomena will create karma which perpetuates their continual existence in samsara.

Once they have understood this great cosmic truth, and persevere to attain Cosmic Reality, they can eliminate suffering and enjoy eternal bliss. Mahayanist and Vajrayanist Buddhists are dedicated to help others to attain Cosmic Reality, and their dedication is idealized in the Bodhisattva's vow described below.

4.17 Reflection on Great Vow

Original Text in Chinese

作此思惟，即應勇猛立大誓願。願令我心離分別故，徧於十方修行一切諸善功德，盡其未來，以無量方便救拔一切苦惱眾生，令得涅槃第一義樂。

Literal Translation

Make such reflection, hence courageously make great vow. May my heart be liberated from differentiation, pervade the ten directions and cultivate all kindness and merits, until the endless future, employ unlimited expedient means to save all suffering, defiled sentient beings, to attain the number one joy of nirvana.

Interpretation

After reflecting on the great compassion for the suffering of sentient beings, the aspirant should courageously make a great vow: May my mind be liberated from the illusory differentiation of the phenomenal world, and may I pervade all space and time and cultivate all kind deeds and merits till the endless future, employing unlimited expedient means to save all suffering, defiled sentient beings, to help them attain the highest joy of nirvana.

Commentary

This is the Bodhisattva's vow of great compassion. The Western Vajrayana master, Lama Anagarika Govinda, reports that his teacher, Tomo Geshe, chose to be reborn (although being Enlightened he does not have to come back to the phenomenal world if he does not wish to) because he wanted to continue his Bodhisattva's vow, which is summarized as follows: "Whatever be the highest perfection of the human mind, may I realise it for the benefit of all living beings. Even though I may have to take upon myself all the sufferings of the world, I will

not forsake my aim and my fellow-creature in order to win salvation for myself only."

4.18 Reflection on Effort-Progress

Original Text in Chinese

以起如是願故，於一切時，一切處，所有眾善，隨己堪能，不捨修學，心無懈怠。惟除坐時專念於止。若餘一切，悉當觀察應作不應作。

Literal Translation

Thus because of awakening of vow, at all times, at all places, all compassionate beings, according to own ability, without abandoning cultivation, heart without indolence. When sitting and concentrating on stillness, if eliminate all, must reflect proper to do or not to do.

Interpretation

Thus, having made the great vow, at all times and at all places, all compassionate bodhisattvas according to their ability, should practise the cultivation of the five perfections consistently and unfaltering. When practising meditation and concentrating on stillness, when the bodhisattvas mediate on eliminating all suffering, they must reflect on what is proper to do or not to do.

Commentary

This is the fourth reflection of the four reflections in insight meditation, whereby the aspirants or bodhisattvas (i.e. those dedicated to achieve salvation for themselves as well as for others), reflect on their determination to attain nirvana by persevering in their five cultivations.

These five cultivations correspond to the six paramitas or perfections of the bodhisattva's path, namely charity, discipline, tolerance, perseverance, meditation and wisdom. As wisdom is derived from meditation, these two paramitas are combined into one cultivation, but it is conveniently divided into tranquility meditation and insight meditation.

It is significant Asvaghosha advises that even in performing kind deeds, the bodhisattvas must reflect whether the deeds should be done

or not. Some people may think this is an excuse for bodhisattvas to avoid fulfilling their motto "Seek, and ye shalt be answered". It is not. It is a reminder that what may appear to be a kind deed may actually be a distractor.

For example, when a sick person beseeches a bodhisattva to relieve him of his sickness, it will be better for the sick person if the bodhisattva does not do so if that sickness is a karmic burden that person has to undergo, or a mean for him to learn some important lesson. If the sickness is relieved, the patient would have to bear the burden some other time, or he may miss the opportunity to benefit from an important lesson.

4.19 Tranquility and Insight

Original Text in Chinese

若行、若住、若臥、若起，皆應止觀俱行。所謂雖念諸法自性不生，而復即念因緣和合、善惡之業、苦樂等報，不失不壞。雖念因緣善惡業報，而亦即念性不可得。若修止者，對治凡夫住著世間，能捨二乘怯弱之見。若修觀者，對治二乘不起大悲狹劣心過，遠離凡夫不修善根。以此義故，是止觀二門，共相助成，不相捨離。若止觀不具，則無能入菩提之道。

Literal Translation

While walking, resting, lying down or rising up, should practise stillness and reflection together. Thus although reflect all spontaneous phenomena not arising, also reflect harmony of cause and effect, good and bad karma, joy and sorrow are replied accordingly, never lost never damaged. Although reflecting on the karmic effect of good and bad, also reflect that nature cannot be obtained.

If cultivate stillness, remedy for ordinary people's attachment to phenomenal world, able to overcome the fear and weakness of Hinayanists. If cultivate reflection, remedy the non-awakening of great compassion of Hinayanists' narrow heart, liberate ordinary people from non-cultivation of good roots.

Thus the meaning, is the two gates of zhi guan, mutually aiding each other to succeed, not to be mutually separated. If zhi guan are not complementary, cannot enter the tao of bodhi.

Interpretation

While walking, resting, lying down or rising up, the aspirant should practise tranquility meditation and insight meditation together. Thus while in tranquility he perceives that the ultimate reality is actually undifferentiated (i.e. all spontaneous phenomena not arising), he must also reflect with insight that in the phenomenal world, the operation of karma is inevitable, that good and bad causes always produce the

appropriate effects, that joy and sorrow are always returned accordingly, that the working of karma is never lost nor altered.

On the other hand, while from tranquility mediation we understand that karma will certainly bring about its unmistakable results, from insight meditation we know that nothing can be added to nor subtracted from Cosmic Reality.

The cultivation of tranquility is a remedy for ordinary people who have attachment to the phenomenal world. It also overcomes the fear and weakness of Hinayanists due to their inadequate understanding of Cosmic Reality. The cultivation of insight meditation is a remedy for the narrow thinking of the Hinayanists who do not exhibit the awakening of great compassion of the Mahayanists (and Vajrayanists). It also free ordinary people from their weakness of not performing charity with the result of cultivating of good spiritual roots.

Thus, this is the significance of the twin cultivation of tranquility meditation and insight meditation, which mutually complement each other in helping aspirants to succeed in their spiritual effort. These two kinds of meditation are not to be practised separately. If tranquility and insight are not present simultaneously, the aspirants cannot enter the way of Enlightenment.

Commentary

Here Asvaghosha gives a concise and profound explanation on the importance of practising both tranquility and insight meditation. The two types of meditation are also important in Theravada Buddhism. Bha Vana, a Theravada master, says:

At the outset you should be clear on one thing, that you need to practise both these types of meditation. You sometimes hear that only Vipassana Meditation is necessary, that it is the best and most effective meditation. This is only partly true. You need both types of meditation, just like a bird needs both, not just one wing, in order to fly, and a man needs both feet, not one foot, in order to walk.

But the kinds of reflection or contemplation in Theravada are different from those of the Mahayana. While the Mahayanists reflect on the illusion of the phenomena world, compassion, the great vow, and perseverance of cultivation, the Hinayanists contemplate on imperma-

nence, suffering and non-self, with emphasis on awareness of the body, the feelings, and the mind.

Hence, insight meditation in Theravada Buddhism is mainly concerned with only the first kind of Mahayanist reflections, leaving out the other three kinds. As a result, the Mahayanists claim, Hinayanists succeed only in eliminating the attachment to self, but failing to eliminate the attachment to phenomena, and also lacking the compassion for the Enlightenment of other people.

Asvaghosha explains that the insight meditation of Mahayana can overcome these two weaknesses in Hinayana Buddhism, namely their fear of samsara and their disinterest in universal salvation. The Hinayanist fear of samsara is due to their inadequate understanding that samsara and nirvana are actually the same. Their apparent difference is because of different perspective: samsara is the phenomenal, while nirvana is the transcendental aspect of the same Cosmic Reality.

Because of this inadequate understanding, the Hinayanist concept of nirvana seems to be extinction – extinction of self as well as extinction of samsara. Mahayanists answer that the crucial point is not extinction but a change of perspective. What is self and samsara in the phenomenal perspective become Universal Mind and undifferentiated Cosmic Reality in the transcendental perspective.

Of course, Asvaghosha's comment on the Hinayanist weaknesses is due to his compassion and sincerity, certainly not to belittle the Hinayana philosophy. It is also significant that his comment was made many centuries before Theravada Buddhism, which has succeeded to most of the Hinayana philosophy, became a prominent school in the world today.

4.20 Amitabha Buddha

Original Text in Chinese

復次，眾生初學是法，欲求正信，其心怯弱。以住於娑婆世界，自畏不能常值諸佛，親承供養。懼謂信心難可成就，意欲退者。當知如來有勝方便，攝護信心。謂以專意念佛因緣，隨順得生他方佛土，常見於佛，永離惡道。如修多羅說，若人專念西方極樂世界阿彌陀佛，所修善根迴向願求生彼世界，即得往生。常見佛故，終無有退。若觀彼佛真如法身，常勤修習，畢竟得生住正定故。

Literal Translation

Then, sentient beings first learn this method, desirous to seek the right faith, their hearts afraid and weak. Because live in the realm of suo po, worry that they cannot pay homage to the celestial Buddhas and personally serve them. Fearful that their faith cannot be perfected, intention retrogresses. Should know that the Tathagata has excellent expedient means, protect their faith, so as to whole-heartedly with cause and effect meditate on the Buddha, then reborn in the Buddha land, always see the Buddha, forever away from the way of evil.

As the sutra says, if people whole-heartedly meditate on Amitabha Buddha of the Western Paradise of Eternal Bliss, all the good roots so cultivated directed towards reborn in that world, then succeed reborn there. Because always seeing the Buddha, ultimately without retrogression. If perceive the Supreme Body of this Buddha, persevere in cultivation, ultimately succeed to be reborn in right stillness.

Interpretation

Then, when sentient beings first learn of this method, and are desirous to seek the right faith, they may be afraid and weak. Because they live in the suo po galaxy, i.e. our galaxy where the attachment to worldly matters is prominent, they are worry that they cannot pay homage to the celestial Buddhas and personally serve them. Thus they are fearful that their faith cannot be perfected, and their intention to

attain spiritual fulfilment may retrogress. They should know that the Tathagata has excellent expedient means to protect their faith. If they whole-heartedly meditate on and recite the name of the Buddha, then they will be reborn in the Buddha land. There, as they always see the Buddha, they are forever away from the way of evil.

As the sutra says, if people whole-heartedly meditate on and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha of the Western Paradise of Eternal Bliss, and direct all the merits so cultivated towards rebirth in that world, then they will succeed to be reborn there. Because they always see the Buddha in the Buddha land, their spiritual development will not suffer any retrogression. If they can perceive the Supreme Body of Amitabha Buddha, and persevere in their cultivation, they will ultimately succeed to attain nirvana.

Commentary

This passage is particularly significant to the Jing Tu, or Pure Land, school of Buddhism, one of the most popular Mahayana schools today. The Pure Land school believes that if the devotees sincerely and constantly recite the name of Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of the Western Paradise, they will be reborn there. The Western Paradise is the Buddha land of eternal bliss, where the devotees can continue their spiritual cultivation and inevitably attain nirvana.

If you think this belief is naive, as many people do, you will probably be shocked or comforted, depending on your attitude, to discover that when physicists set up their apparatus to measure light as waves, it turns out to be waves, but when they set up their apparatus to measure light as particles, it turns out to be particles!

Yet, not too long ago, waves and particles were considered to be exclusive. Alastair Rae sums up the general opinion of today's scientists by saying that in quantum physics, which has been exclaimed as the greatest scientific achievement of the twentieth century, "the role of the observer is crucial in understanding any physical process. So crucial in fact that some people have been led to believe that it is the observer's mind that is the only reality – that everything else including the whole physical universe is illusion."

According to Buddhist philosophy, the Western Paradise is also an illusion: it is, like all other heavens, still in the phenomenal dimension. But to devotees who have not reached the understanding or direct experience stage of spiritual cultivation, the "illusory" heaven is "real"; just as the sparse, constantly moving electrons of a table look solid and stationary to us in our ordinary consciousness. Because the paradise is an illusion, it is possible for the devotees to experience the paradise, if their minds are focussed one-pointedly on it after countless meditations and recitations.

Although to Enlightened beings the paradise is an illusion, to those of lesser spiritual development beings in paradise, it is certainly a worthy, blissful achievement. Further, under the compassionate guidance of Amitabha Buddha in the Western Paradise, devotees will eventually attain Cosmic Reality.

Chapter 30

Buddhism and Modern Science

What is amazing is not only these discoveries, thought to be impossible a few decades ago, are made by world-renowned scientists now, but also they have been taught by Buddhist masters since ancient time.

5.1 The Way of Mahayana

Original Text in Chinese

已說修行信心分，次說勸修利益分。如是摩訶衍諸佛秘藏，我已總說。若有眾生欲於如來甚深境界得生正信，遠離誹謗，入大乘道，當持此論，思量修習，究竟能至無上之道。

Literal Translation

Already said cultivation of faith, the secret treasury of all celestial Buddhas, I have already said. If sentient beings desire the right faith through the deep realm of Zu Lai, distance from slandering, enter the way of Mahayana, regarding this treatise, great study and cultivation, ultimately attain the highest way.

Interpretation

Already the cultivation of faith, which is the secret treasury of all celestial Buddhas, have been explained. If sentient beings desire to attain the right faith through the profound study and practice of Buddhism, they should distance themselves from slandering others, enter the way of the Mahayana belief, study this treatise and practise the spiritual cultivation explained in it. In this way they will ultimately attain the highest spiritual fulfillment.

Commentary

Three important points are emphasized here. One, Buddhists are reminded not to talk ill of other religions. The Buddha himself teaches the freedom of worship. In the Brahmajala Sutra, the Buddha says, "If others speak against me or my religion, that is no reason why you should be angry. If you do so, you will not know, if what they say is true or false."

Two, the teaching is Mahayanist, including, among other doctrines, a belief in the personal soul at the phenomenal level, but no soul at the

transcendental level. Nirvana is not an extinction of any sort, but a direct experience of the ultimate reality.

Three, the highest spiritual attainment is experiential, not intellectual, though an intellectual understanding of its philosophy is very helpful. Hence, the path to religious fulfillment is practical cultivation, not book learning.

5.2 Three Groups of Merits

Original Text in Chinese

若人聞是法已，不生怯弱，當知此人定紹佛種，必為諸佛之所授記。假使有人能化三千大千世界滿中眾生，令行十善，不如有人於一食頃正思此法，過前功德，不可為喻。復次，若人受持此論，觀察修行，若一日一夜，所有功德，無量無邊，不可得說。假令十方一切諸佛，各於無量無邊阿僧祇劫，歎其功德，亦不能盡。何以故？謂法性功德無有盡故。此人功德亦復如是無有邊際。

Literal Translation

If a person hears this teaching, without fear nor weakness, should know this person sure to receive the Buddha's seed, must be accepted by all celestial Buddhas. If a person can reform all sentient beings in three thousands great worlds, cause them to practise the ten kind deeds, not comparable to the person during one meal reflects correctly on this teaching, the former merits not comparable.

Then, if someone receives this treatise, reflects and cultivates, if one day one night, all merits obtained, no measures no limits, indescribable. Suppose cause ten directions Buddhas, during limitless and boundless kalpas, praise its merits, still cannot exhaust. Why? Because the merits of Spiritual Nature are boundless, this person's merits have no limit.

Interpretation

If a person hears this teaching, and practises it without fear nor weakness, it should be known that this person is sure to be a potential buddha, and will definitely be accepted and taught by all celestial Buddhas.

Suppose there is a person who can reform all sentient beings in all the universes, and enable them to practise the ten Buddhist precepts, the

merits of this person are not comparable to the merits of another person, if during the time taken to eat one meal the latter reflects correctly on this teaching.

Again, if someone receives this treatise, reflects upon it and practises its cultivation, even for one day and night, the merits obtained are immeasurable, limitless and indescribable. Suppose all the Buddhas in ten directions praise the merits of this teaching for limitless and boundless aeons, the merits still cannot be exhausted.

Why? Because the merits of the Supreme Reality are boundless; similarly, the merits of a person who practises cultivation to attain Supreme Reality are limitless.

Commentary

The merits mentioned in this passage can be divided into three groups, namely the merits of listening to the correct teaching, the merits of reflecting on the correct teaching, and the merits of practising the correct teaching.

It is easy to think that the benefits of these merits are exaggerated. Deeper study reveals that here Asvaghosha uses hyperboles to bring home some very important truths to help aspirants.

Listening to, or in modern times reading about, the teaching marks the first awakening of spiritual aspiration. (In the early phrases of Buddhism, the teaching was not written down, but recited to followers.) Without this crucial first step, a person may remain in samsara for aeons without any spiritual awareness, but once spiritual aspiration is aroused, attaining nirvana is a matter of time.

The path towards nirvana can be divided into three parts, namely moral purity, understanding and direct experience. When someone succeeds in reforming others to practise the ten Buddhist precepts (of not killing, not lying, etc.), he succeeds in the first part of moral purity, which is a probation leading to the second part. When someone reflects correctly on the teaching, he acquires cosmic understanding, thus starting the second part of his spiritual path.

Buddhism, as mentioned earlier, is practical. All its philosophy is directed to help the devotee achieve a direct experience of cosmic reality. All the study and intellectual reflection on Buddhist teaching merely

makes him knowledgeable, which is at the second part of his spiritual journey; it is only through practising the teaching, such as the Eightfold Path and the six paramitas, that the aspirant proceeds along the final part towards nirvana.

Thus, a day of spiritual cultivation is worth more than a lifetime of reading scriptures. It was for this reason of not wanting his disciples to be tied down to book learning but to get on with the practical work of meditation towards Enlightenment that Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Chan (or Zen) Buddhism, dramatically asked them to burn their books.

5.3 Consequence of Disbelief

Original Text in Chinese

其有眾生，於此論中，毀謗不信，所獲罪報，經無量劫，受大苦惱。是故眾生但應信仰，不應誹謗，以深自害，亦害他人，斷絕一切三寶之種。以一切如來，皆依此法得涅槃故。一切菩薩，因之修行，入佛智故。

Literal Translation

Among sentient beings, regarding this treatise, disparage and disbelieve, the result of this sin, for countless kalpas, endure great sufferings. Hence, sentient beings should believe, never disparage, for deeply harm themselves, and also others, severing the seed of the Triple Gems. All Ju Lai according to this teaching achieve nirvana. All Bodhisattvas, because of this cultivation, enter the wisdom of the Buddha.

Interpretation

Among sentient beings there are some who disparage this treatise and disbelieve the teaching. The result of this is that they have to endure great sufferings for countless kalpas. Hence, sentient beings should believe in this teaching, never disparage it, for doing so would deeply harm themselves as well as others, and also may severe the potential blessings of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha for all humanity.

All celestial Buddhas attained their supreme Enlightenment by following this teaching. All Bodhisattvas enter Buddhahood because they practise the spiritual cultivation taught by this teaching.

Commentary

It must be noted that those sentient beings who disparage and disbelieve the teaching, suffer for aeons not because of any curse made by anybody, nor any punishment meted out by any divine authority. They

suffer because their own disbelief regarding the phenomenal and transcendental aspects of the Supreme Reality deprives them of any attempt to liberate themselves from samsara.

This passage and the previous one illustrate the importance of understanding the higher wisdom of Buddhism. Without this higher understanding it is easy to mistakenly think that Buddhist teaching is punitive or its claim widely exaggerated.

5.4 The Bodhisattva's Path

Original Text in Chinese

當知過去菩薩，已依此法得成淨信。現在菩薩，今依此法得成淨信。未來菩薩，當依此法，得成淨信。是故眾生應勸修學。

Literal Translation

Should know that past bodhisattvas, according to this teaching, achieved the faith of purity. Present bodhisattvas, according to this teaching, achieve the faith of purity. Future bodhisattvas, according to this teaching, will achieve the faith of purity. Hence, sentient beings should cultivate diligently.

Interpretation

It should be known that past bodhisattvas achieved Enlightenment by practising this teaching; present bodhisattvas achieve Enlightenment by practising this teaching; and future bodhisattvas will achieve Enlightenment by practising this teaching. Hence, sentient beings should diligently practise the spiritual cultivation taught in the teaching.

Commentary

The term "bodhisattvas" is used here to refer to all Mahayanist devotees who cultivate for their own and others' Enlightenment. Without exception, all those who have attained perfect Enlightenment practised the teaching explained by Asvaghosha's Awakening of Faith in Mahayana.

In a nutshell, the teaching expounds that due to our ignorance we mistake an illusion of the Supreme Reality as the objective reality, but if we understand this, and diligently practise spiritual cultivation, such as the five perfections mentioned by Asvaghosha, we can eventually realize the supreme spiritual fulfilment, thereby liberating ourselves from the

suffering of continual existence in the phenomenal world, and achieving everlasting joy in the omnipresent, omniscient and transcendental Cosmic Reality.

The teaching that our world is an illusion, and the quest to actualize our original Cosmic Reality are, of course, not confined to Buddhism or to Eastern wisdom. Western philosophers and scientists, from the past till the present, have also addressed themselves to these ideals and endeavour. Illustrating with Plato's famous analogy on illusion and reality, the modern world-renowned physicist, Sir James Jeans, provides a striking description that reminds us of the amazing similarity between Buddhist philosophy and new physics.

Thus, dualism of appearance and reality pervades the history of philosophy again dating back to Plato. In his famous parable, Plato depicts mankind as chained in a cave in such a way that they can look only on the wall which forms the back of the cave; they cannot see the busy life outside, but only the shadows – the appearances – which objects moving in the sunshine cast on the walls of the cave. For the captives in the cave, the shadows constitute the whole world of appearances – the phenomenal world – while the world of reality lies forever beyond their ken.

Our phenomenal world consists of the activities of matter and photons; the theatre of this activity is space and time. Thus the walls of the cave – in which we are imprisoned are space and time; the shadows of reality which are projected on the walls by the sunshine outside are the material particles which we see moving against a background of space and time, while the reality outside the cave which produces these shadow is outside space and time.

As the new physics has shown, all earlier systems of physics, from the Newtonian mechanics down to the old quantum theory, fell into the error of identifying appearances with reality; they confined their attention to the walls of the cave, without ever being conscious of a deeper reality beyond. The new quantum theory has shown that we must probe the deeper substratum of reality before we can understand the world of appearance, even to the extent of predicting the results of experiment.

More amazing discoveries in science await us. Michael Talbot reports the following thought-provoking revelations in his book, *Beyond the*

Quantum:

Aspect's experiment proved one of the following two possibilities: Either objective reality does not exist and it is meaningless for us to speak of things or objects as having any reality above and beyond the mind of an observer, or faster-than-light communication with the future and the past is possible. On these two points the conclusions of the Aspect experiment are unequivocal. These are not hypothetical assertions. At least one of the above two option must now be accepted as fact.

In 1981, Cambridge biologist Rupert Sheldrake published a theory proposing that the form and natural intelligence of animals and even human beings is moulded and influenced by a ghostly new type of field that is able to communicate across both space and time.

The same year, David Bohm, a theoretical physicist at the University of London and the author of one of the standard textbooks on quantum theory, proposed that the workings of the subatomic world only make sense if we assume the existence of other more complex dimensions beyond our own.

In 1983, Sir Fred Hoyle, the founder of the Cambridge Institute of Theoretical Astronomy and the man responsible for our current understanding of the origin of all heavy elements in the universe, proposed that within the laws of physics there is not only mathematical evidence that the universe was designed by some sort of cosmic intelligence, but that intelligence is unfathomably old, billions of years older than the age of the known universe.

And in 1964, Nobel Prize-winning neurophysiologist Sir John Eccles announced the discovery of what he believes to be biochemical evidence supporting the existence of the human soul.

What is amazing is not only these discoveries, thought to be impossible a few decades ago, are made by world-renowned scientists now, but also they have been taught by Buddhist masters since ancient time. More amazing still is that the Buddhist teaching on these revelations are more profound and comprehensive than what modern science attempts to explain.

As one of the themes discussed in this book, Buddhist philosophy has explained in detail how the illusory, phenomenal world is the product of the defiled mind. While light may take light-years to reach the outer stars, as mentioned in numerous scriptures the mind of Buddhas and other advanced masters can reach distant galaxies, in the past, present or future, instantaneously!

The Buddhist concepts of the *alaya* consciousness and of the void being pregnant with life can provide rich material for research into both Sheldrake's morpho-genetic field and Carl Jung's universal mind. Buddhist metaphysics has long taught that there are numerous planes in each of the countless worlds in the countless galaxies. On our earth alone, there are more than thirty planes of existence. Hence, not only sub-atomic particles but even large-scale phenomena exist in different dimensions.

If we human beings see these sub-atomic particles as phenomena according to our mental and physical set-up, isn't it reasonable to believe that other beings in other dimensions also interpret the sub-atomic particles according to their set-up. If we fail to see these other phenomena, it is because of our different set-up as well as our ignorance. The doctrine of inter-penetrating realms is an eminent feature of the Hua Yen, or Garland, school where countless worlds of galaxies can exist in a single sub-atomic particle!

Buddhist cosmology explains that while our universe is about 12.8 billion years old, both the cosmos and cosmic intelligence is beginningless and endless. The doctrine of "one thought creating countless worlds" of the Tian Tai school, which suggests that cosmic intelligence which is originally undifferentiated and transcendental can be transformed into limitless entities of differentiated intelligence that exist phenomenally, should provide a fascinating back-drop to any investigation into Hoyle's theory.

The existence of the soul, human and otherwise, in the phenomenal dimension has long been established in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. Researchers studying further into the discovery of Sir John Eccles would probably be excited to know that according to Buddhist teaching, besides carrying biochemical material, known in Buddhist terminology as *rupa*, the soul also carries the other four aggregates of thoughts, feelings, activities and intellect.

An inevitable question is how could the ancient Buddhist masters have such wide and deep knowledge when they did not even use a simple microscope. Whereas scientists use expensive instruments, including the gigantic bubble chamber to bombard sub-atomic particles, the Buddhist masters used their highly trained mind in deep levels of meditation. And when we remember that the investigation into reality has been carried out in Buddhism over much longer time, in more lands and by more people than ever has been done in modern science, it comes as no surprise that in many ways such knowledge obtained in Buddhism even surpasses that in modern science.

Chapter 31

Blessings to All Beings

May whatever merits I obtain from this endeavour
Be given to all sentient beings for their gain

Original Text in Chinese

諸佛甚深廣大義，我今隨分總持說，廻此功德如法性，普
利一切眾生界。

Literal Translation

The celestial Buddhas deep and great meaning
I have faithfully and generally explained
Following this merit of the Spiritual Nature
All blessings to the realms of sentient beings

Interpretation

The profound and great teaching of the Buddhas
Have I faithfully and generally explained
May whatever merits I obtain from this endeavour
Be given to all sentient beings for their gain

Commentary

This great work of Asvaghosha starts with an adoration to the Buddhas, and ends with a prayer for the blessings of all sentient beings.

This short concluding prayer manifests two eminent features of Buddhism, namely profound wisdom concerning Cosmic Reality, and great compassion for all sentient beings.

Chapter 32

From Samsara to Nirvana

All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have attained their perfect Enlightenment through the way explained in this treatise. All sentient beings too can similarly attain Enlightenment here and now.

Asvaghosha's Great Work

Asvaghosha's "Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" is undoubtedly one of the greatest works in the world. Not only it forms the basis of Mahayana Buddhism, it also provides astonishing knowledge on cosmology, physics and psychology that modern sciences are beginning to rediscover! Most importantly, it explains the philosophy and practice for aspirants of any religion or lack of it to attain the highest spiritual fulfilment.

The treatise is divided into five parts, namely the reasons for its writing, the gist of the treatise, the philosophy of cosmic reality, the methods for its attainment, and the benefits so obtained. This great teaching is summarized in this chapter.

The chief reason for writing this treatise is to help sentient beings overcome suffering and attain eternal bliss. Other reasons include explaining the Tathagata, or the Supreme Reality, strengthening the faith of both backward and advanced devotees, providing expedient means for spiritual cultivation, explaining tranquility and insight meditation, helping followers of the Pure Land School to reach the Western Paradise, and enumerating the benefits of spiritual development.

Although the teaching is already found in Buddhist scriptures, it is still presented here in the treatise because of variances in students' abilities, teachers' instruction, and learning situations. This teaching is the vehicle used by all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in their attainment of Enlightenment.

The Universal Mind and Enlightenment

The ultimate reality, known as the Universal Mind, can be manifested in the phenomenal and the transcendental aspects, and expressed in three dimensions of universal form, characteristics and uses. The transcendental aspect is undifferentiated and absolute, beyond time and space; the phenomenal aspect is an illusion with myriad separate entities and countless differentiated characteristics. Spiritual realization is overcoming this illusion, and directly experiencing Cosmic Reality as the undifferentiated, absolute truth.

Actually the ultimate reality cannot be accurately described and conceptualized, because all words being based on illusion are at best an imitation of reality. Nevertheless, despite their imperfection, words are still used to explain the teaching so that sentient beings can eventually attain direct experience of the Supreme Reality.

The Supreme Reality may be described as the Void or the Non-void! It is void to Enlightened beings, but non-void to ordinary people whose minds are shrouded by defilement. It is called the Void because since the timeless beginning there has never been any differentiation of phenomena. But sentient beings in their delusion experience the Void as the phenomenal world in terms of countless phenomena existing as separate, individual entities, and is therefore called the Non-void.

Why are sentient beings deluded? This is because in the Universal Mind there are two attributes, namely the birthless-deathless attribute which is experienced in Enlightenment, and the life-death attribute which is the ordinary non-Enlightened existence.

Enlightenment can be classified in many ways. The primeval cosmic reality in its undifferentiated, transcendental state is called original Enlightenment. Because of ignorance, sentient beings perceive Cosmic Reality as the phenomenal world in a state of non-Enlightenment. When they have eliminated ignorance and return to the primeval state, it is called actualized Enlightenment.

If the adept attains Cosmic Reality completely and becomes a Buddha, it is called perfect Enlightenment; if not, it is non-perfect Enlightenment, which is further classified into Enlightenment of the initiated (when the adept realizes the futility of evil deeds), Enlightenment of resemblance (when he succeeds in eliminating attachment to the phe-

nominal realm), and Enlightenment of convergence (when he experiences the transcendental aspect of the Supreme Reality).

The path towards perfect Enlightenment or Buddhahood is to eliminate all thoughts. Thoughts generate differentiation and thus prevent sentient beings from experiencing transcendental Cosmic Reality. The nature of thought in the mind can be described as arising, abiding, changing and stopping. Thoughts are related to ignorance, which means the lack of cosmic wisdom concerning transcendental reality.

The relationship of mind, thought and ignorance is often compared to that of water, waves and wind. Originally the mind is pure and tranquil. But when there is ignorance, thoughts move in the mind, just like when there is wind, the waves move in water. If ignorance ceases, thoughts cease, and the illusion of phenomena and self also ceases, thus achieving Enlightenment.

There are four characteristics of Enlightenment, figuratively described as:

1. Empty Mirror of Reality,
2. Manifested Mirror of Reality,
3. Non-Phenomenal Mirror,
4. External Developmental Mirror.

The Empty Mirror of Reality is free from all phenomenal characteristics, and cannot be seen by non-Enlightened persons. The Manifested Mirror of Reality, a contrast to the Empty Mirror, is a mental reflection of the phenomenal world. The Non-Phenomenal Mirror is free from emotional and intellectual hindrance. The External Developmental Mirror is manifested according to the thoughts of the Enlightened person.

Characteristics of Non-Enlightenment

Non-Enlightenment means not knowing the Cosmic Reality behind the illusory world of phenomena. There are three characteristics of non-Enlightenment:

1. karma, because of thoughts arising in the mind,
2. perceiving ability, because of karma,
3. illusory phenomenal realm, because of perceiving ability.

The phenomenal realm is characterized by six factors: intellect, continuity, attachment, verbalization, karma and suffering.

With intellect, the mind starts to discriminate, resulting in likes and dislikes. Thoughts continue to arise from the mind, and this brings about awareness of joy and sorrow. As we continuously think of the realm of objects, we become attached to its joy and sorrow. Because of our attachment to the phenomenal world, we give distorted names to objects and their attributes. Due to this verbalization and the continued attachment to objects and attributes, we create further karmic effects. As a result, there is suffering because the karmic effects perpetuate the cycle of birth and rebirth.

Notwithstanding this, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are both the same and different! They are the same because they all come from the Tathagata, or Supreme Reality. Hence, the path to Enlightenment is not to create, but to actualize, because Enlightenment is originally present. On the other hand, Enlightenment and non-Enlightenment are different because although they share the same ultimate source, the former is pure while the latter is defiled, and in a state of defilement transcendental reality is perceived as differentiated phenomenal worlds.

The state of non-Enlightenment with the result that sentient beings perceive Cosmic Reality as differentiated phenomena, is a function of their consciousness. Consciousness may be classified into the following five types:

1. karma consciousness, which is due to the force of ignorance;

2. transformation consciousness, which is due to the activated mind experiencing the realm of phenomena;
3. perception consciousness, which is the ability to perceive every thing in the phenomenal world;
4. knowledge consciousness, which is used for differentiating various phenomena;
5. memory consciousness, which is used for remembering characteristics of phenomena that are continually arising, for holding countless karmic effects, and for activating and maturing these karmic effects.

All realms of existence are created by consciousness. Apart from the mind, in which consciousness operates, the phenomenal world we experience through the defilement of our six senses does not exist. All things and processes are actually an integrated organic unity, but we see them as separate and differentiated because the mind interprets them so. Hence all phenomena are like images in a mirror, having no real form.

We discriminate phenomena because of the continuity of arising thoughts. As phenomena arise, they are differentiated according to our six senses into six defilements. This ability is known as intellect consciousness. As a person continues to perceive and to desire, his intellect consciousness is strengthened, thus intensifying his attachment to himself as an individual person and to phenomena as real occurrences. These two categories of attachment – attachment to self and attachment to phenomena – are fundamental causes of spiritual ignorance.

Originally ignorance is present in the serenity of primordial nature. Affected by ignorance, thoughts arise, making the mind defiled. There are six kinds of defiled mind resulting from:

1. mutual-reaction with attachment;
2. mutual-reaction with continuity;
3. mutual-reaction with discriminating consciousness;
4. disharmonious-reaction with the realm of objects;

5. disharmonious-reaction with perception;
6. disharmonious-reaction with karmic effect.

In mutual-reaction the interaction between the mind and the phenomenal world is direct; whereas in disharmonious-reaction it is inverse.

What is defilement and ignorance? Defilement is mental disturbance, marring our awareness that cosmic reality is undifferentiated and transcendental, thus hindering our spiritual realization. Ignorance is hinderance to wisdom, preventing our understanding of the spontaneous operation of karma in the phenomenal world.

Actually there is only one reality, but because of mental defilement, there arises duality – the subject and the object, or the knower and the known. The knower sees the known as the illusory phenomenal world, which is differentiated into countless entities. In cosmic reality there is no arising of differentiated characteristics, no subject and object, no knower and the known.

Because of defilement and ignorance, samsara or the characteristics of existence in the phenomenal world results. These characteristics of the phenomenal world can be divided into two main groups, namely gross mutual-reaction with the mind, and fine disharmonious-reaction with the mind. The fine and gross groups can be further divided into fine and gross again, making four types.

Permeation of Transcendental and Phenomenal

Why do people not see Cosmic Reality as the undifferentiated absolute, but as the differentiated phenomenal world? There is constant and mutual influence between the ultimate reality and the phenomenal world, known in Buddhist terminology as permeation of the pure and the defiled. There are four stages of permeation, and they are known as:

1. the Tathagata, which means Thusness or the Supreme Reality;
2. ignorance, which is the cause of all differentiation;
3. the defiled mind, known as karmic consciousness;
4. the delude realm, known as the six defilements.

The Tathagata is initially undifferentiated, but after permeation by ignorance, there is differentiation. Ignorance arises because it is originally present in the Tathagata, or cosmic reality. Because of ignorance, thoughts arise in the defiled mind with the result that countless types of karmic effects are generated, and experienced by people through their six senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, feeling and thought as the six defilements. Once the wheel of karma operates, it perpetuates endless cycles of birth and rebirth, which bring mental and physical suffering to sentient beings.

Beside this downward permeation which causes ordinary people to perceive the pure cosmic reality as the defiled phenomenal world, there is also the upward permeation which purifies devotees so that they can achieve cosmic realization.

The eternal and omnipresent Tathagata permeates ignorance, enabling spiritually awakened people to reject the suffering of samsara, and aspires to the bliss of nirvana. Hence the aspirants acquire higher wisdom and strengthen their faith, knowing that the phenomenal world is an illusion of their defiled minds, and that their own nature is actually an integral expression of Cosmic Reality.

They start to cultivate to liberate themselves from the phenomenal realms, as they truly understand that there are no realms beyond thoughts. Finally, ignorance is eliminated and the force of karma ceases. As all characteristics of the individual mind are terminated, the aspirants merge into the Universal Mind, attaining nirvana.

How does the Tathagata permeates into the defiled world and influence people to work towards spiritual fulfilment? The influence of the Tathagata can be of many and various forms, such as through sights or thoughts, or in the persons of their parents, relatives, friends, or even enemies, or through occurrences of loving kindness and all other myriad actions and effects. The effects may be immediate or may take a long time.

The Tathagata can also be personified as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who have vowed to save all sentient beings irrespective of their religions, and who may manifest their deeds in various ways that sentient beings can see and hear.

The permeation may be pre-mutual-reaction, where the aspirants have not directly experienced cosmic realization, and hence they are mainly dependent on the force of their faith in their spiritual cultivation. The permeation may be post-mutual-reaction, where the adepts have directly interacted with Cosmic Reality, and hence they can use their spiritual force to cultivate spontaneously.

The Three Universals

The Universal Mind or the Supreme Reality, besides being manifested in the two aspects of the transcendental and the phenomenal, is expressed by the three universals of forms, characteristics and applications. In other words, Cosmic Reality can appear in the phenomenal dimension in limitless forms, limitless features and limited uses.

Spatially, everything there is, is included in Cosmic Reality. Temporally, it has no beginning and no end. It is infinite and eternal.

Cosmic Reality can satisfy all needs in the phenomenal world. It possesses great wisdom to overcome ignorance, purity to eliminate all defilement, permanence to overcome impermanence, joy to overcome suffering, spontaneous self to overcome uncertainty regarding souls, and consciousness to overcome all problems.

Cosmic Reality is regarded as the Spiritual Body (Dharmakaya) of the Eternal Buddha, manifested as celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with great compassion to eliminate the sufferings of all sentient beings. The Spiritual Body manifests in two ways to help sentient beings – as the Transformational Body and the Reward Body of the Buddha.

Ordinary people perceive reality as differentiated into countless phenomena, and this differentiation is according to the transformational processes of their consciousness. Different beings, like humans, ghosts and gods, will see the same ultimate reality differently. Thus these illusory phenomenal worlds are called the Transformational Body (Nirmanakaya) of the Buddha. Because they do not understand that the appearances of these phenomenal worlds are actually the results of consciousness transformation, they erroneously think the appearances come from outside them as objective reality.

The Reward Body (Sambhogakaya) is what Bodhisattvas and other highly developed beings experience, but what ordinary people may not see because they lack the spiritual power. The Reward Body may be manifested in countless forms, the forms with countless characteristics, and the characteristics with countless benefits in all phenomenal realms of time and space. Nevertheless, despite their forms, characteristics and benefits, Bodhisattvas and other developed beings understand that these manifestations are expressions of the mind.

Perverse Views

To help people be liberated from their illusion so as to see reality as it is, great masters have taught various doctrines. But if these doctrines are not properly understood, they may give rise to false views. The following are some examples.

Hearing the sutras mention that Cosmic Reality is ultimately quiescent like empty space, ordinary people, not realizing that this doctrine is meant to negate the concept of the Eternal Buddha as a Being, may actually think that empty space is the nature of the Buddha. To rectify this, we should know that all forms in the phenomenal world originate from the Mind. But if we conceptualize the universe as having no phenomena, then it is not possible to conceptualize Cosmic Reality with characteristic of empty space, because the concept of empty space is possible only in relation to the concept of phenomena. Cosmic Reality pervades everywhere; it is not empty space.

Secondly, the sutra mentions that all dharmas, including those of Cosmic Reality and nirvana, are empty. Those who do not know that this statement is meant to help people overcome their attachment to phenomena, may actually believe that the nature of Cosmic Reality and nirvana is really empty. To rectify this mis-conception, we should understand that Cosmic Reality is actually endowed with limitless merits to bring benefits to humanity, and nirvana is the direct experience of this reality. The dharmas are empty; Cosmic Reality itself is teeming with consciousness.

Thirdly, the sutra says that the Tathagata-garbha, or the Universal Storehouse, is provided with dharmas sufficient for use in all sorts of forms and characteristics in the phenomenal world. Some people may mistakenly think that the Tathagata, or the Supreme Reality, has plurality of mind and matter. To rectify the mis-conception, it should be pointed out that from the transcendental perspective the Tathagata-garbha is seen as undifferentiated mind; and from the phenomenal perspective the Tathagata-garbha is manifested as differentiated material entities. The Tathagata, therefore, is not a polarity of mind and matter; rather, mind and matter are two aspects of the same reality seen from two different perspectives.

Fourthly, the sutra says that all phenomena are possible because of

the Tathagata-garbha, and all phenomena are dependent of the Supreme Reality. This can be mistaken as saying that all phenomena in samsara are found in the Supreme Reality. It should be noted that phenomena are conditioned, i.e. their existence in samsara is due to some prior conditions, but they are actually an illusion of the defiled mind. In transcendental reality, phenomena are non-existent.

Fifthly, it is said in the sutra that in the Tathagata-garbha is contained the origination of the phenomenal world, as well as the attainment of nirvana. This may be mistaken as saying that as nirvana has a beginning, it also has an end. It should be explained that the Tathagata-garbha has no beginning. The Tathagata or Cosmic Reality also has no beginning and no end. Nirvana, corresponding to the eternal Cosmic Reality, has no end too.

Mis-conceptions resulting from the attachment to dharma are now described. Because the Buddha's teaching is not completely understood, Hinayanists mistakenly believe that nirvana is extinction. It should be explained that the five skandhas or aggregates of form, perception, feelings, activities and thoughts that constitute a person, are unborn by nature, i.e. they are neither born nor not born. Therefore, there is no extinction of the five aggregates when a person attains nirvana, because what is involved is not destruction of any dharmas (no dharmas are added nor subtracted), but a transformation of perspective from the phenomenal to the transcendental, whereby the dharmas previously experienced as phenomena in samsara are now an integral part of Cosmic Reality in nirvana.

To be perfectly Enlightened, besides freeing ourselves from attachment to self and phenomena, we must also understand that the phenomenal world and Cosmic Reality are actually relative, and not absolutely different. Although Cosmic Reality is inexplicable, the Buddha used language provisionally to guide sentient beings. Those who understand the teaching, can free themselves from thoughts, and attain Enlightenment. But if they cling to thoughts, it will cause their minds to remain defiled, with the result that they cannot enter Cosmic Reality.

Three Kinds of Cultivation

In Buddhist teaching, spiritual aspirants can be described as "undetermined" and "determined". The undetermined are those whose spiritual development may progress or retrogress according to their karma. After a very, very long time covering many, many reincarnations, their faith may be strengthened and they will reach a developmental stage when they will never retrogress. They are then said to have become the determined.

For those whose spiritual roots are weak because of deep and thick defilements in their past lives, the good karma they gather is sufficient only to enable them to be reborn in the human or heavenly realms. Nevertheless, even for the spiritually backward, if circumstances are favourable, like when they have the opportunity to meet Bodhisattvas or other religious teachers, they may develop aspirations for nirvana.

Cultivation for nirvana can be divided into three main categories, namely cultivation through faith, through understanding, and through insight.

Cultivation through faith is the most popular approach, and suggests a strong personal belief, often without the need for reason or understanding. Faith is cultivated in three ways, known as the cultivation of the direct mind, the deep mind and the compassionate mind. These involve respectively believing in Buddhist doctrines, joyfully accumulating the merits of performing kind deeds, and helping others in their spiritual development. Various expedient means are used to help the aspirants, such as expedient means for practising fundamental doctrines, for stopping further evil karma, for awakening spiritual awareness, and for developing this awareness.

Cultivation through understanding is superior to cultivation through faith. It requires that aspirants clearly understand what to practise and why they do so. This approach is extensively used by bodhisattvas, who have deep understanding of Cosmic Reality and accordingly cultivate the six paramitas or perfections.

Knowing that Cosmic Reality is free from covetousness, they cultivate charity. Knowing that Cosmic Reality is free from defilement, they cultivate discipline. Knowing that negative emotions like anger and anxiety are incongruous to Cosmic Reality, they cultivate toler-

ance. Knowing Cosmic Reality has no characteristics of indolence, they cultivate effort. Knowing that Cosmic Reality is forever quiescent, they cultivate meditation. Knowing that Cosmic Reality is all-knowing, they cultivate wisdom. The crucial point is that they cultivate these perfections not because religious doctrines say so, but because they understand the relationship between their cultivation and the attainment of Enlightenment.

Cultivation through insight is the most advanced approach, and it involves direct experience. Insight into the ultimate reality is derived from meditation. Three types of mind are to be cultivated: true mind, mind of expedient means, and mind of karma consciousness.

In the cultivation of the mind of karmic consciousness, which represents the mind of ordinary people, the aspirant develops insight into the cause of suffering in samsara. In cultivating the mind of expedient means, which represents the mind of the Bodhisattva, the aspirant practises the paramitas for the benefits of all sentient beings. In cultivating the true mind, which represents the mind of the Eternal Buddha, the aspirant attains nirvana.

If celestial Buddhas have miraculous powers, why are their manifestations not frequently seen? All celestial Buddhas are undifferentiated in the form of the Supreme Reality, but they appear to sentient beings according to the conditions of the sentient beings' minds which are like mirrors. If these minds are defiled, the Supreme Reality will not be manifested in its transcendental dimension, just as a mirror covered with dust will not effectively reflect light.

To experience the Supreme Reality, it is necessary to cultivate the faith. There are four kinds of faith in the Mahayana: faith in the Ultimate Source, faith in the Buddha, faith in the Dharma, and faith in the Sangha.

Five Ways of Cultivation

There are five ways of spiritual cultivation in this faith, which are the ways of charity, discipline, tolerance, perseverance, and meditation.

In the cultivation of charity, we give generously according to our ability, material assistance, service and knowledge to whoever seek them. To cultivate discipline, we practise moral precepts, live in quietude and practise austerity, and guard against ridicule and derision. To cultivate tolerance, we discard any feeling of vengeance, and become detached irrespective of gain or loss. For the cultivation of perseverance, we adhere to performing kind deeds, are never weary of nor retreat from our spiritual task.

There are people who make little progress although they practise the faith diligently. This is because they are burdened by bad karma in their past lives, tempted by evil forces, entangled in world affairs, or afflicted by various diseases. They can overcome these hindrances if they seek the help of the celestial Buddhas and persevere in their spiritual cultivation. They must also sincerely repent their wrongs as well as rejoice in the happiness of other people.

The cultivation of zhi-guan (stillness and perception), or meditation, is essential for attaining nirvana. There are two aspects, namely tranquility meditation and insight meditation, and both aspects must be practised simultaneously.

In tranquility meditation, the aspirant stills his mind and eliminates all thoughts. If the mind is distracted, he brings it back to stillness where there is no awareness of the external world. When he succeeds in keeping his mind still, he attains samadhi, or mental concentration. He realizes that the Universal Mind is undifferentiated, that there is no dualism, and that transcendental reality is the same as the phenomenal world.

Sentient beings who are inadequately developed may be troubled by evil forces during meditation. These forces can manifest themselves in many ways, such as terrifying demons, pious people, heavenly scenes, supernatural abilities, and disoriented life styles. But if the aspirants do not allow any attachment to arise, and understand that these manifestations are only illusions of the mind, these hindrances will disappear.

Those who practise this samadhi or mental concentration diligently

and correctly will obtain the following ten benefits: always protected by all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, cannot be terrified by demons, cannot be deluded by spirits and gods of other beliefs, free from slanders, eliminate bad karma, eradicate all doubts and perverse views, strengthen their faith, free from sorrow and remorse, untroubled by other people, eliminate all defilement, cannot be disturbed by external stimuli during meditation.

If an aspirant only cultivates tranquility meditation, he may become complacent or slothful, and lack the zest to help others achieve salvation. Thus, he must also cultivate insight meditation.

In insight meditation, the aspirant reflects that all phenomena are impermanent and illusory, and all events are the result of the mind only. He also reflects that at present as well as in the timeless past and future, sentient beings suffer in samsara, yet they are not aware of their suffering. Thirdly, reflecting on the great compassion for all sentient beings, the aspirant courageously makes a great vow to liberate himself and other beings from illusion, and attain the highest nirvana. Then the aspirant resolves to practise the five perfections consistently and unfaltering.

At all time the aspirant should practise tranquility meditation and insight meditation together. Thus while in tranquility he reflects that the ultimate reality is actually undifferentiated, he also reflects with insight that in the phenomenal world the operation of karma with countless differentiated events is inevitable. On the other hand, while reflecting in tranquility meditation that karma will certainly bring about its unmistakable results, from insight meditation the aspirant knows that nothing can be added to nor subtracted from Cosmic Reality.

Tranquility meditation is a remedy to overcome attachment to the phenomenal world, as well as the fear and weakness of Hinayanists due to their inadequate understanding of Cosmic Reality. Insight meditation overcomes the narrow thinking of Hinayanists who lack the great compassion of the Mahayanists, as well as the weakness of ordinary people for not cultivating charity.

Those people who seek spiritual fulfillment but are doubtful of their ability to cultivate successfully, should know that the Tathagata has excellent expedient means to help everybody. If they whole-heartedly recite the name of Amitabha Buddha of the Western Paradise of Eter-

nal Bliss, and direct all the merits so obtained towards rebirth in that paradise, they will be reborn in that Buddha land. There, under the guidance of Amitabha Buddha, they will continue to develop until they attain nirvana.

Aspirants who distance themselves from slandering others, enter the way of the Mahayana, and study this treatise and practise the cultivation explained in it, will be sure of attaining the highest spiritual fulfillment. Besides practising moral purity, aspirants must reflect on the truth of the teaching, and most important of all actually practise the time-tested methods diligently and consistently.

Those who disparage this treatise will have to suffer for countless aeons, not because of any outside force punishing them, but because as they do not believe in the great truth that the phenomenal world is an illusion of the transcendental absolute, they will not be able to liberate themselves from the illusion and attain Cosmic Reality. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have attained their perfect Enlightenment through the way explained in this treatise. All sentient beings too can similarly attain Enlightenment here and now.