
The Order Journal

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THE ORDER JOURNAL

The Order Journal, was conceived during the 20th Convention of the men's wing of the Western Buddhist Order (WBO), held in 1987. That same Convention saw the delivery of a number of lectures, some of which I had hoped would appear in the new publication. Yet the first issue appeared slightly over one year later, in November 1988, and despite my original expectations contained none of these talks. The summer of 1989 will be remembered for the 21st Convention, held at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, where the assembled Dharmacharis were treated to several more substantial lectures. In fact, by their length, and by their breadth and depth of thought, a number were best described as papers, and it was immediately obvious that they would be most appropriately printed in *The Order Journal*. So now, two years on, three of the articles in this second issue, were originally delivered by Dharmacharis at the 21st Convention of the men's wing of the WBO, and similar contributions will form articles in the third issue of *The Order Journal*, which will appear in the spring of 1990.

Another two of our present articles can claim verbal origins, one having been delivered as a paper at a University Philosophy Society, and the other on retreat at Taraloka, the latter being also the first contribution from a Dharmachariṇī.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise that, while this publication is at present known as *The Order Journal*, and is edited and written by members of the Western Buddhist Order, it is hoped that it will be of interest and use to others. Therefore, although for the meanwhile it is not being distributed through Centre bookshops, sales are not restricted to members of the Order. Where there is an interest, please encourage others to read, and of course buy, *The Order Journal*.

I would like to thank all the contributors, and also Elizabeth English for her help in the preparation of this issue.

STHIRAMATI

REFLECTIONS ON THE STREAM

by Dharmachari Ratnaguna

Last summer I stayed in France for two and a half months, and while I was there I spent some time thinking. It was a project that I set myself - to sit down and simply think. I wanted to see, after thirteen years as a practicing Buddhist, how much of the Dharma I had understood. I decided to use as my subject the first three of the ten fetters, the breaking of which meant that one had reached 'The Point of No Return' - that one had become a Stream Entrant. I wanted to reflect on these three fetters - on what they really were, how they manifested in my own life and the lives of others because, for members of the Western Buddhist Order - for people who have effectively Gone For Refuge - Stream Entry is our next immediate goal. That is what we are striving towards (assuming that we have not already reached that point). So, in thinking about these fetters, I saw myself as doing two things: firstly I was trying to develop the second level of Wisdom (*cinta-maya-pañña*) - I was trying to develop the capacity to think; and secondly, by using as my subject the first three fetters, I hoped to be able to weaken them a little in myself.

This article then is a result of my reflections on Stream Entry last summer in France, and further reflections since then. For clarity of exposition I have divided the article into four sections: the first deals with the first three fetters collectively; the second with each of the fetters separately; thirdly, I look at the Two Characteristics of the Stream Entrant; and finally, with the positive dimensions of the breaking of the first three fetters.

THE FIRST THREE FETTERS COLLECTIVELY

As has been pointed out by Sangharakshita and others, the first three fetters are predominantly intellectual in nature; Self-view is a view - an idea, a belief, that there is a self or a soul, which is immutable and separate; Doubt (more specifically, doubt in the Three Jewels) is the unwillingness to accept views that are in accordance with the way things really are; Dependence upon Rites and Rituals as Ends in Themselves is the view that certain actions are, in themselves, of a spiritual nature, regardless of the motivation of the person performing those actions.

However, predominantly intellectual though they may be, they are not exclusively so. If they were, it would be very easy for us to break them - one study group should be sufficient! As we all know, it is not easy to break the first three fetters, and what is more we all know why - because of our emotions. Underneath every view lurks an emotion, and the emotion which underlies the first three fetters is attachment. Attachment is, in fact, the basic human emotion, and it is attachment which prevents us from seeing things as they really are. In the *Āriyapariyesana Sutta* the Buddha tells how, after

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His Enlightenment, He wondered whether or not it would be possible to communicate His experience to others. He says:

"Then, monks, I thought, 'Now I have gained the Doctrine (Dharma, Reality), profound, hard to perceive, hard to know, tranquil, transcendent, beyond the sphere of reasoning, subtle, to be known only by the wise. Mankind is intent upon its attachments, and takes delight and pleasure in them. For mankind intent on its attachments it is hard to see this principle, namely, conditionedness, origination by way of cause (*paticca samuppada*). This principle, too, is hard to see, namely the cessation of all compound things, the renunciation of all clinging to rebirth, the extinction of craving, absence of passion, cessation, Nirvana.' " [1]

This warrants much reflection - its because of our attachments that we are unable to see things as they really are. It is because we want something from the world that we are not able to see the world as it is. Traditionally there are four modes of attachment (*upadāna*):

1. Attachment to sense pleasures.
2. Attachment to views.
3. Attachment to ethics and external observances, merely for their own sakes.
4. Attachment to the belief in a soul, self, or ego.

Now the last of these three modes of attachment corresponds to the first three fetters: the fourth mode of attachment corresponds to the first fetter (Self-View); the third mode of attachment is equivalent to the third fetter (Dependence on Rites and Rituals as Ends in Themselves); and the second mode of attachment corresponds to the second fetter (Doubt). This last correspondence may raise a few eyebrows, but I will explain how I came to this conclusion below when I discuss the second fetter. The main point that I want to make here is that the first three fetters represent a certain kind of attachment: attachment to views, ideas, opinions, beliefs. (The first mode of attachment, to sense pleasures, is not broken until the stage of the Non-Returner has been attained.)

But what is attachment? Attachment is emotional dependence. When we say that we are attached to something or someone what we really mean is that we are emotionally dependent on it, or them. In the FWBO and WBO we have heard a lot about emotional dependence...on a person (usually a sexual partner), and it is often assumed that if we are free of such a relationship then we are emotionally independent. This is not the case. The fact is that we are all emotionally dependent on something or someone. Otherwise we would all be Enlightened! So here we are concerned with an emotional dependence upon views, ideas, beliefs, opinions, and the Stream Entrant breaks free of this particular kind of emotional dependence.

I have been discussing the breaking of the first three fetters so far as if they were three separate and distinct fetters, but they are interrelated. When we break one fetter we break all three fetters. We cannot break the first fetter without at the same time breaking the other two. In a way there is only

one fetter, with three aspects. The basic fetter is self-view, while the second and third fetters are different aspects of that fetter. To see how this works out, let us now consider each of these aspects in turn.

THE FIRST THREE FETTERS SEPARATELY

The First Fetter: Self-View. (Pali: *sakkāyaditṭhi*)

This is said to be the basic wrong view from which all wrong views spring. We could say that it is the principal wrong view. Hence it is very difficult to understand. Very difficult even to think about. To think clearly about the first fetter is to break it. It's rather like a man, sitting on the branch of a tree, and at the same time sawing it off. In thinking clearly about self-view one is cutting off one's basic support for one's ignorance, and naturally one is reluctant to do so. Therefore, if this part of my article appears to you to be vague, woolly, indistinct, I hope you will forgive me!

Traditionally, self-view is a belief in a soul, self, or ego. It is the belief that behind, underneath, or inside the human personality resides an unchanging essence which either transmigrates from one rebirth to another (according to the eternalist view) or, alternatively, which is destroyed once the body dies (according to the nihilist view). As Buddhists, we don't believe either of these views, but that doesn't mean to say that we are therefore Stream Entrants. The significance of this fetter goes deeper than that.

Psychologically speaking, Self-View is an attachment to our view of ourselves; to our sense of identity; to our sense of who-we-are, and it has two aspects - the temporal and the spatial. We usually think of Self-View in terms of time - we say 'Fixed-Self-View', and Sangharakshita coined the term 'Habit' in his lecture *A Taste of Freedom*. As quite a lot has already been written and said on the temporal aspect, I will confine myself to the spatial aspect of this fetter.

Self-view, as well as being 'fixed' is also 'separate'. It is the belief that "I am separate" - that "I exist separately and independently from the rest of existence". And because we believe that we are separate, we try to control and manipulate life, as if we somehow stood outside of it. Sangharakshita expresses this attitude beautifully in his poem *Life is King*.

*Hour after hour, day
After day we try
To grasp the Ungraspable, pinpoint
The Unpredictable. Flowers
Wither when touched, ice
Suddenly cracks beneath our feet. Vainly
We try to track birdflight through the sky trace
Dumb fish through deep water, try
To anticipate the earned smile the soft
Reward, even*

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*Try to grasp our own lives. But Life
Slips through our fingers
like snow. Life
Cannot belong to us. We
belong to Life. Life
Is King. (2)*

"Life is King" - what this means is that life is greater than our own individual (separate) existence. We try to manipulate, to control life, to suit our own narrow wishes, but what we should really do is give ourselves up to life. That doesn't mean giving up responsibility for our actions of course, - it means giving up trying to make life, situations, people, fit in with our own narrow wishes.

This is what Going For Refuge really means. The phrase 'Going For Refuge' can easily be misunderstood; it can be seen (and often is seen) as a running away from life, from 'real life', or 'the real world', and hiding behind the safety of a 'religion'. But, Going For Refuge to the Three Jewels doesn't mean Going For Refuge from life, but, paradoxically, Going For Refuge to life. That is, it is a commitment to live in the best possible way - in a non-manipulative way - not trying to get from life what you can, but simply living life, as it is. *"Life does not belong to us, We belong to life"*.

We could say that Self-View is the fetter of subjectivity. To be subjective is to be overly concerned with oneself. To be pre-occupied with oneself, even obsessed with oneself. The subjective person looks out at the world only from his own point of view - he is attached to his own point of view. His mental state, his suffering, is the most important thing in the world to him. When we Go For Refuge we commit ourselves to realizing the Transcendental, i.e. the transcendence of the subject/object dichotomy. The Stream Entrant does not transcend the subject/object dichotomy of course, but he does transcend his own subjectivity. He sees and responds to the world not from his own narrow subjectivity, but from a wider awareness. The Stream Entrant is objective. This point will become clearer in the next section when I discuss the second fetter.

The Second Fetter: Doubt (Pali: *vicikicchā*)

Earlier on I correlated the second fetter with the second mode of attachment, attachment to views, and I promised then to explain how I had come to this conclusion.

Traditionally, the second fetter is doubt in the efficacy of the Three Jewels, but as with the first fetter, it is more subtle than a simple conscious belief, otherwise, as committed Buddhists, we would all have broken the second fetter long ago. Psychologically speaking, Doubt has been defined as the unwillingness to commit oneself. It is a 'sitting on the fence'. In his lecture *A Taste of Freedom*, Sangharakshita describes it as the state of 'vagueness.' But why are we unwilling to commit ourselves? Why do we sit on the fence?

Why do we remain vague, unclear, indistinct, woolly in our thinking? The answer of course is that we don't want to change. (At least a part of us does not want to change). But why do we not want to change? Because of our attachment to our self - to our sense of identity - our idea of who-we-are.

Doubt is the fetter of Self-View manifest in the realm of thought. Because of our attachment to our sense of identity we need a system of ideas and beliefs which confirm this sense of identity. The Scottish philosopher John MacMurray describes this process very well in the first of his three lectures on *Reason in the Emotional Life*. (Three lectures from a book called *Reason and Emotion* which Sangharakshita recommended at Guhyaloka last year, and which merits serious study, not least from the point of view of furthering our understanding of the first three fetters.) Before quoting at length from this lecture, I must define two key terms that MacMurray uses. He uses the word 'reason' in a very particular way. "Reason", he says, "is the capacity to behave in terms of the nature of the object, that is to say, to behave objectively. Reason is thus our capacity for objectivity." [3] Elsewhere he makes it clear that Reason is the faculty which apprehends things as they really are. It is not a merely rational faculty, but can enter into thought and emotion, and when it does, our thoughts and feelings are appropriate to every situation in which we find ourselves. They are 'adequate to Reality'. It is for this reason that Sangharakshita compared MacMurray's conception of Reason to the Buddhist conception of *prajñā*. This is also what he means when he uses the terms 'scientific knowledge' and 'science'. So, MacMurray says:

"Now, the main difficulty that faces us in the development of a scientific knowledge of the world lies not in the outside world but in our own emotional life. It is the desire to retain beliefs to which we are emotionally attached for one reason or other. It is the tendency to make the wish father to the thought. Science itself, therefore, is emotionally conditioned. If we are to be scientific in our thoughts, then, we must be ready to subordinate our wishes and desires to the nature of the world. So long as we want things to be other than they are we cannot see things as they are or act in terms of their real nature. We colour the world with our own illusions. Reason demands that our beliefs should conform to the nature of the world, not to the nature of our hopes and ideals.

"In this field, therefore, the discovery of truth must be from the subjective side a process of disillusionment. The strength of our opposition to the development of reason is measured by the strength of our dislike of being disillusioned. We should all admit, if it were put to us directly, that it is good to get rid of illusions, but in practice the process of disillusionment is painful and disheartening. We all confess to the desire to get at the truth, but in practice the desire for truth is the desire to be disillusioned. The real struggle centres in the emotional field, because reason is the impulse to overcome bias and prejudice in our own favour, and to allow our feelings and desires to be fashioned by things outside us, often by things over which we have no control. The effort to achieve this can rarely be pleasant or flattering to our self-esteem. Our

natural tendency is to feel and believe in the way that satisfies our impulses. We all like to feel that we are the central figure in the picture, and that our own fate ought to be different from that of everybody else. We feel that life should make an exception in our favour. The development of reason in us means overcoming all this". [4]

It should now be clear to you why I have correlated 'Doubt' with 'Attachment to Views', and also why I maintain that Doubt is Self-View manifest in the realm of thought.

Now, everyone has views. Whether or not we are conscious of them. Whether or not we are able to articulate them - we all have views. Only a *Tathāgata* has no views because He sees things as they really are. The Stream Entrant then, in that he is not fully Enlightened, holds views. But, in that he has some experience of the Transcendental, his views are 'perfumed' with Reality. He therefore only holds 'Right Views' - views that are in accordance with the way things really are. (His thoughts would be appropriate to Reality, to use MacMurray's phraseology). And because his views are 'perfumed' with Reality, he holds these views very lightly. He doesn't grasp them. He is not attached to them. Not emotionally dependent upon them. He doesn't feel upset or threatened when his views are challenged or attacked, because he sees that those views are merely views - they are not Reality itself; they are provisional, instrumental. The Stream Entrant is able to distinguish between thoughts and the things which those thoughts refer to. Between ideas and the Reality which those ideas point towards. He has thus overcome the fetter of literalism.

Therefore we, if we want to transform our effective Going For Refuge into Real Going For Refuge, must also strive to do this. We must, first of all, try to hold Right Views. But we must at the same time try to hold them very lightly. We must resist the temptation to grasp onto them, and thereby strangle the life out of them. If we do become attached to our views, even Right Views, they become a hindrance rather than a help to us.

These days there is a high premium put on thinking for oneself. People are often embarrassed if they don't have an opinion on every topic. In the FWBO we encourage people to think for themselves. But we have to beware. We have to be careful of pseudo-thinking, i.e. thought, not based on the principles of the Dharma, but on attachment to oneself - in other words, thought which is merely a rationalization of our Self-View. As in every sphere of activity there are two extremes to be avoided. In this case the extremes are, on the one hand, slavish adherence to what Buddhism generally, and Sangharakshita in particular says, without thinking it through for oneself and thereby 'making it ones own'. This leads to the "Bhante says" syndrome, where, in a discussion, someone quotes Sangharakshita, and that is supposed to be the end of the discussion. The other extreme is to think what one thinks because it suits one to think it: because it fits ones basic assumptions about life.

There have been some interesting letters and articles in *Shabda* recently, but what has struck me is that in some cases at least, there has been little, or

even no reference to what Buddhist tradition says, or what Sangharakshita thinks on these issues. You may think that is a good thing - it shows that Order members are beginning to think for themselves. But surely, as Buddhists and disciples of Sangharakshita, we should try to find out what the Buddha and other Enlightened teachers have said, and also what Sangharakshita thinks about an issue, before we confidently pitch in with our own ideas. Not that we should automatically step in line, but that we should carefully consider what they have said, and really try to understand what they meant and why they said it. I know that Sangharakshita himself carefully considers, in some cases for many years, before deciding to depart from Buddhist tradition, and I think that we should have the same care and consideration before we decide to depart from the Buddhist tradition, or from Sangharakshita's teachings.

The Third Fetter: Dependence on Rites and Rituals as Ends in Themselves.

(Pali: *sīlabbata-parāṃśa*)

If Doubt is the manifestation of Self-view in the sphere of thought, the third fetter is its manifestation in the sphere of action. It is our attachment to habitual forms of behaviour that strengthen and confirm our sense of identity. In traditional Buddhism, this is the fetter of unthinking religious piety. It is an expression of the wrong view that the performance of religious acts and ethical observances are effective, regardless of the motivation of the person performing those acts. As Buddhists, we know that motivation is primary. To perform a *pūjā* whilst thinking about something else renders the performance of that *pūjā* spiritually useless. To perform a seemingly ethical action, but doing it for forms sake, renders that action karmically neutral. We know this, - but that doesn't mean that we have broken this fetter. As with the other two fetters, it goes deeper than that.

This fetter represents an inability to see principles. The principles of the Dharma that underlie the various practices of Buddhism. It is the inability to see the universal principle behind the individual act - the unity underlying the diversity. It is to confuse method with doctrine: means and ends. In the sphere of thought, this manifests as literalism; the inability to distinguish the thought with the thing thought about - the words with the meaning. In the sphere of action, we cannot distinguish between the practice and the principle - the method and the doctrine. We think that they are the same, and this confusion - this superficial attitude which, in thought leads to literalism, in action leads to formalism.

We can see Buddhist institutions all over the world trapped by this fetter. Sangharakshita has very carefully distinguished between principle and practice, doctrine and method, and hence the FWBO has managed to avoid the more obvious pitfalls of formalism, and is an expression of Buddhism which is adapting itself to Western conditions. However, most people involved in the FWBO - even most Order members, are not Stream Entrants, so we are prone to the fetter of formalism, and it manifests in many small ways; having a set programme on a retreat because that is the programme which we always follow. (It may be that it would be the best programme for this particular retreat, but if so, that

would be a happy coincidence, for we haven't thought about it); running an FWBO centre in a certain prescribed way because that is the way FWBO centres are run. We have to be on our guard against this fetter in every area of our lives.

But this is all familiar ground. I would like to say something about a slightly different, although related danger which I see in our movement. Means and ends are both important, and they must be congruent. The practice must be expressive of the principle. I think that sometimes we undervalue the means in our eagerness to reach the goal. One of my favourite Pali words is *attha*, which means 'the good'. It also means 'the goal', implying that what is good is also that which helps you to reach the goal, and that which helps you to reach the goal is good for you. The means must be of the same nature as the end - it must have something of the end in it.

The phrase 'the end justifies the means' is used as a rationalization for using a 'means' which is not really a means, but merely an expedient. Using violence in order to achieve peace is an example of incongruent means and ends - violence cannot be a means to peace because violence leads to enmity, which is inimical to peace. So we must be sure that the 'means' that we are using are congruent with the 'end' that we desire. The Buddha was naturally ethical, so if we practice ethics, we help to bring about a mental state closer to that of the Buddha.

The danger that I see in our movement is in seeing the means only as a means, whereas the means is, at the same time, an end in itself. To see the means only as an end in itself is one extreme view, but to see the means only as a means to an end is the other extreme. Actually, the means is both. We practice ethics so that eventually we will gain Enlightenment and hence be naturally ethical; but we also practice ethics because to do so is good in itself. We work in right-livelihood businesses so that we can bring about a better society in the future; but we also work in them because they make life better now. We practice mindfulness so that one day we will become fully aware of Reality; but we also practice mindfulness because it enhances our life now. To see the means only as a means to an end is one-sided, and leads us to sacrificing the present moment for some time in the future.

So I think that we in the FWBO and the WBO are prone to this error. So eager are we to grow and to create positive conditions that we forget about our present experience of life. So many of us work for the movement in a willful, speedy, pressurised sort of way with a vague notion that working for the FWBO must be doing us good; but working for the FWBO will only do us good if it really is a spiritual practice - if it has something of the goal in it - i.e. if it is done mindfully, calmly, with awareness, with love, and with joy.

Perhaps this one-sidedness of so many people's approach to life and work accounts partly for the enormous popularity of the writings of Thich Nhat Hanh within the FWBO. He writes beautifully about mindfulness - about living in the

moment - about maintaining a state of calm, tranquillity and joy in whatever actions we perform. This perspective does seem to be missing in our movement.

THE TWO CHARACTERISTICS OF THE STREAM ENTRANT

The teaching of the ten fetters and the breaking of them is a negative formulation. I don't mean negative here in the sense of unskillful, of course, but negative in the sense that it is concerned with the breaking, or better, the transcending of unskillful tendencies, just as the ten precepts are concerned with abstaining from unskillful actions. However, we also have the positive formulations of the ten precepts, which emphasise the positive dimension of each of the precepts. It is not enough to abstain from harming living beings, we also try to treat them with loving kindness, and so on with all of the precepts. In the same way, I think that looking at the path in terms of the breaking of the ten fetters, on its own is not enough. It does not give us an inspiring enough picture. It is a formulation of the path in terms of freedom from. Freedom from the ten fetters. But freedom from implies freedom to. When we are free from something, we are therefore free to do something. And this aspect, freedom to, is not brought out very fully. In the case of the Stream Entrant there are the Two Characteristics which come close to providing this more positive way of looking at freedom. The Stream Entrant, being free from the first three fetters, is therefore free to have unshakeable faith in the Three Jewels, and to practice absolutely unblemished morality. These are the two positive attributes of the Stream Entrant, and they are often overlooked, so I would like to briefly discuss them here.

Unshakeable Faith in the Three Jewels.

Faith is the opposite of Doubt. To the extent that we have Faith in the Three Jewels, to that extent Doubt is not present. Once the fetter of Doubt is broken, our Faith is unshakeable. Therefore everything that I said in the earlier section on the second fetter is applicable here. I will not say much about Faith here then, in fact I will just say something about the connection between the emotion of Faith, and the ability to think.

If Doubt corresponds to the second mode of attachment, Attachment to Views, and if, therefore, someone who is bound by the fetter of Doubt is not really able to think clearly and objectively, and if Faith is the opposite of Doubt, it follows that Faith is therefore the state of freedom from our emotional dependence on views. Only someone who experiences the positive emotional state of Faith therefore is able to really think for themselves. To refer back to John MacMurray again, he says that, just as our thoughts about things can be right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, so can our feelings. Our emotional responses to the world can be appropriate or inappropriate - objective or subjective. A positive emotion is one that is appropriate to the way things really are. As, according to the *Abhidharma*, Faith is present in every positive mental state, then Faith is an emotion which is appropriate to life. It is objective. We could even go so far as to say that Faith is our desire for objectivity.

Perhaps the common conception of the Faith follower being the rather unthinking disciple is a misconception then. He may not know a lot about Buddhism, he may not be an academic, but I'm sure that he would be able to think clearly and objectively about those things that really matter when necessary.

Absolutely Unblemished Morality.

I have been thinking about this for some time. I've even wondered at times whether the Two Characteristics were canonical, or whether they might not be a later, commentarial addition. But yes, they are found in the Pali Canon - in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, where the Buddha tells Ānanda about 'The Mirror of The Dharma' [5] - this 'Mirror' being a way of telling whether or not one is a Stream Entrant - that is, by seeing whether or not one has the two Characteristics of the Stream Entrant. The difficulty that I had was that there is an apparent contradiction between the unblemished morality of the Stream Entrant, and the fact that he has not yet broken the fetters of sensual desire and ill-will. The problem is - how can someone still prone to these two fetters be at the same time ethically pure? Are not ill-will and sensual desire unskillful mental states?

The conclusion that I have come to is this: He is subject to unskillful states of mind, but does not act upon them. He feels them, but does not indulge them. He practices restraint. He does not react. He may feel sexual desire for instance, but does not act unskillfully on account of that desire. In his sexual relationships (if he has any) he is skilful, ethical, non-exploitative. He feels hatred, but does not give expression to that hatred. Not even in his mind. He is aware of it, and does not feed it.

"Morality" (according to John MacMurray) "is merely a demand for rational behaviour.....Morality demands that we should act 'in the light of eternity'-i.e. in terms of things as they really are, and of people as they really are, and not in terms of our subjective inclinations and private sympathies". [6] The Stream Entrant has absolutely unblemished morality because he has unshakeable faith: because he is able to be objective. To have unshakeable faith in the Three Jewels is to constantly Go For Refuge. It is equivalent to the Real Going For Refuge. And just as the practice of ethics (specifically the ten precepts) is the natural expression of someone who effectively Goes For Refuge, so absolutely unblemished morality is the natural expression of someone who Really Goes For Refuge.

If we want to become Stream Entrants then, we must look to our practice of ethics. We must hold up 'The Mirror of The Dharma' against our lives. We must try to live our lives with absolutely unblemished morality.

THE POSITIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE BREAKING OF THE FIRST THREE FETTERS

In the previous section I spoke of the need for a more overtly positive formulation of the breaking of the Ten Fetters. Not only in terms of 'freedom

from', but also in terms of 'freedom to'. The Two Characteristics of the Stream Entrant go some way to providing us with such a formulation, but, positive as they undoubtedly are, in my opinion they do not go far enough. For a more positive way of looking at the Stream Entrant we must turn from the Hīnayāna to the Mahāyāna. Risking a generalisation, I would say that, broadly speaking, the Hīnayāna speaks in terms of freedom from, while the Mahāyāna speaks in terms of freedom to.

The Mahāyāna is of course well known for its Bodhisattvas. (It has been called the *bodhisattvayāna*). There are Bodhisattvas representing every spiritual-cum-Transcendental quality - Wisdom, Compassion, Energy, Purity, etc. But, as far as I know, there is no Bodhisattva of Freedom. Perhaps this is because Freedom is an abstract concept. The word is meaningless by itself. When we talk about freedom we immediately have a problem: What do we mean by freedom? We need to know what it is that we are free from, or free to do. Freedom means different things to different people.

In a sense, all of the Bodhisattvas represent freedom. Freedom from unskillful emotions and wrong views. In thinking about the first three fetters and what they meant, and in trying to imagine what the positive dimension of the breaking of each one would be, I realised that the Three Protectors, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi, provide us with symbols of those positive dimensions.

Avalokiteśvara provides us with the positive dimension of the breaking of the first fetter. Self-View is our attachment to our sense of identity. It is to identify too strongly with our own, separate existence. It is to live, as it were, outside of life, separate from life, and therefore manipulating other living beings for our own narrow wishes. It is to be subjective. When we free ourselves from this fetter then what are we free to do? To love. Love (or, to use the more precise Pali term, *mettā*), is the antithesis of Self-View. Love is a going outwards, an expansive attitude, that breaks down the protective barriers of separateness. It is an identification with all life. It is the feeling of empathy and solidarity with other living beings. That is why an *arahant*, someone who has completely transcended the false idea of a 'self' existing separately from others, has only love, or compassion for all living beings. That is why Wisdom and Compassion are conjoined; Wisdom is the seeing, the understanding, that in reality, there is no such thing as a separate self. Compassion is what that feels like. Of course the Stream Entrant is not an *arahant* - he has not completely transcended his idea of a self - but it is partially overcome. He realises that his 'self' is not fixed and that it is not separate from other 'selves', and so he is free to love others.

The word 'free' comes from the gothic word *freis*, which means 'free'. But the word *freis* is also allied to the word 'friend'. There is also a connection with the Gothic word *frijon* - to love. And this in turn is allied to the Sanskrit word *prī* - to love. Perhaps these connections with the words 'friend' and 'love' are significant. Perhaps they point to the fact that what we all

desire, what we all want to be free from, is our self-centredness, our sense of separateness, and to be free to love.

Just as Avalokiteśvara provides us with the positive dimension of the breaking of the first fetter, so Mañjuśrī provides us with the positive dimension of the breaking of the second fetter - Doubt (or Attachment to Views). Mañjuśrī symbolises Wisdom, Clarity, also culture and education. He symbolises the faculty of *prajñā*. The faculty which enables us to see things as they really are. (In John MacMurray's terms, Reason). So Mañjuśrī represents the freedom to see things as they really are. And also, the freedom to think clearly and objectively, in accordance with the principles of the Dharma, not in accordance with our subjective inclinations.

Lastly, Vajrapāṇi represents the positive dimension of the breaking of the third fetter - Dependence on Rites and Rituals as Ends in Themselves. Perhaps the connection is not so obvious here. I said earlier that the third fetter is the fetter of Self-View manifest in action. It is the expression of Self-View in what we do - in our habitual actions, which strengthen and confirm our sense of identity. Vajrapāṇi symbolises creative activity, free from the constraints of habitual conditioning. Because the Stream Entrant no longer has to protect his Self-View, he no longer has to perform those actions which confirm that Self-View. He is thus free to act - he is free to be creative. Vajrapāṇi symbolises that freedom.

And this brings me to the conclusion of this article. I've said that the first three fetters are predominantly intellectual in nature - that they represent attachment, or emotional dependence on three false ideas. These three false ideas, or wrong views are, in a sense, three aspects of one fetter, the fetter of Self-View, which is the basis of all wrong views. Self-View is attachment to our sense of identity - (not only 'Fixed' Self-View, but also 'Separate' Self-View.) Doubt is the aspect of that fetter in the sphere of thought - it is attachment to views which confirm our sense of identity. Our attachment to views prevents us from being able to think clearly and objectively, and it leads to literalism. The third fetter - Dependence on Rites and Rituals as Ends in Themselves, is that fetter in the sphere of action. (Formalism). I also said that both means and ends were important, and that the means had to be seen not only as a means, but also as an end in itself - otherwise we are in danger of an overly goal-orientated approach. I've spoken about the Two Characteristics of the Stream Entrant (unshakeable faith in The Three Jewels and absolutely unblemished morality) as representing the more positive aspects of Stream Entry, and finally, having said that even these Two Characteristics do not give us an inspiring enough picture, I turned to the Mahāyāna, and suggested the correlation of the Three Protectors, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi, as representing the positive dimensions of the breaking of the first three fetters; i.e. freedom to love, freedom to think, and freedom to act.

These then are some of my 'reflections on the stream'. The stream of Dharma. The stream of life. The stream of impermanence. When we break the

first three fetters we enter into this stream. We are fully immersed in the Dharma, in life, in the understanding of impermanence. The reflections on the stream are our actions of body, speech and mind, which flash and sparkle, brilliantly reflecting only light - the light of the sun, and of the clear blue sky above.



Notes

1. *Āriyapariyesana Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, 1.167.
trans. E. Thomas, *Early Buddhist Scriptures*, London 1935, p.23.
2. *Conquering New Worlds*, Sangharakshita, Glasgow 1986, p.46.
3. *Reason and Emotion*, London 1935, p.19.
4. *ibid.* p.21-23.
5. *Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* 2.9. trans. M. Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard*, London 1987, p.241
6. *Reason and Emotion*, p.23.

This article is a slightly adapted version of a talk I gave on the Convention of the men's wing of the Western Buddhist Order in August, 1989. I have adapted it in two ways; firstly, I have tried to make it less of a talk and more of an article; secondly, I have omitted two of the ideas from the talk, as Sangharakshita, who was present when I gave it, thought that they were incorrect or confusing. The first idea came in the section on the first fetter - 'Self-View'. I suggested that, as the Stream Entrant breaks the fetter of 'Fixed' Self-View, he realises the truth of impermanence - one of the three *lakkhaṇa*. The *arahant*, having broken amongst others the fetter of 'conceit' (*manas*), overcomes not only the idea of a 'Fixed' Self-View, but any idea of a Self whatsoever. He therefore realises the truth of *anattā* - insubstantiality, or No-Self. Taking this idea a step further, I suggested that, as the Spiral Path begins with the awareness of *dukkha*, that there was a correlative progression between the *putthujana* (the non-*Āryan* disciple), the Stream Entrant, and the *arahant*, with the three *lakkhaṇa*; *dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anattā*. Interesting as this idea may be, it is, unfortunately for me, wrong, or 'inappropriate to Reality'.

The second idea which I have omitted from the article had a section all to itself, entitled 'Stream Entry and Members of the Western Buddhist Order'. There I suggested that just as Real Going For Refuge meant the breaking, or the transcending of the first three fetters, effective Going For Refuge meant the temporary suspension of them. When we effectively Go For Refuge the first three fetters are temporarily inoperative. Sangharakshita thought this idea was confusing as it blurred the distinction between effective and Real Going For Refuge. Unfortunately, I was not able to see Sangharakshita to ask him whether he objected on doctrinal or methodological grounds - i.e. whether the idea was wrong, (doctrinally) or simply unhelpful (methodologically).

MAÑJUŚRĪ: ORIGINS, ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE (PART I - ORIGINS)

by Dharmachari Ānandaajyoti

"Who calms the flames of ambitions for one's own pleasure,
with the waters of long-cultivated compassion,
Who cuts the net of imaginative fabrications,
by seeing the reality of the profound as it is."

Tsong kha pa [1]

FOREWORD

The three articles of which what follows is the first are linked and comprise a study which is primarily historical-cum-textual in nature. [2] It does not attempt to deal with all aspects of the place of Mañjuśrī in the Buddhist tradition. A narrower and, where appropriate, more critical approach seemed preferable. As a result I have focused on three not un-related areas. In this article I look at Mañjuśrī as a figure, examining in some detail proposals made by scholars concerning his origins. In the second article I will review how he is presented within Mahāyāna sūtras, organizing the material in a way that, hopefully, throws light on how Mañjuśrī appears, by separating discussion of his roles and status. The two are, of course, interlinked, status often functioning as a pre-requisite for certain roles. At points in this discussion it will be relevant to contextualize some of the material in order to clarify its significance, not only for the wider textual tradition, but also for what it might indicate about questions concerning the origins and importance of a cult of Mañjuśrī, the topic of the third article. The assessment of where and when a sizable following or cult of Mañjuśrī might have developed is a difficult task, given the fragmentary nature of the evidence. It will also involve some consideration of broader issues concerning the position of early Mahāyāna 'on the ground'.

Apart from occasional reference I will not deal in these articles with the following areas: Iconography (In the sense of an account of Mañjuśrī's different forms and attributes); Mañjuśrī in tantric literature; Mañjuśrī in Tibetan Buddhism; and the non-sūtra traditions linking Mañjuśrī with the *Vaipulya sūtras*. Much, if not most, of this material falls into an historical period subsequent to that with which I deal. [3]

PART I : ORIGINS

What, then, can be said of the origins of Mañjuśrī as a figure? Is it possible to identify elements in his make-up in the sort of way that one can with the figures of, say, Śiva and Viṣṇu in the Hindu tradition? [4] In the

sūtras Mañjuśrī appears fully-formed as a Bodhisattva unlike Vajrapāṇi, for instance, who first appears as a *yakṣa* attendant of the Buddha, only later becoming a Bodhisattva. [5]

There have been suggestions however of Mañjuśrī's origins being connected with i) a *gandharva* named Pañcaśikha * ; ii) a chain of five mountain peaks surrounding lake Anavatapta in the Himalayas; iii) Brahmā; iv) Kārttikeya and v) Nepal. I will examine these proposals in turn.

1) Pañcaśikha

It was Marcelle Lalou [6] who first pointed to affinities between Mañjuśrī and Pañcaśikha (P. Pañcasikha) known in both Sanskrit and Pāli texts. Pañcaśikha is a *gandharva* (P. *gandhabba*) or celestial musician. The most immediate affinity according to Lalou is between Pañcaśikha's name and Mañjuśrī's epithet Pañcacīra. Pañcaśikha literally means 'Five-Crest' and Buddhaghosa [7] notes that he is so-called because he wears his hair in five tresses or bunches after the fashion of young men. It is important to observe here that Buddhaghosa's statement may be an attempt to make sense of what might have seemed to be rather an odd name. We shall see later that alternative derivations may make more sense. This is not to deny the possibility that a tradition may have grown up of Pañcaśikha wearing his hair as Buddhaghosa described.

Mañjuśrī's epithet Pañcacīra means 'Five-(hair)locks'. In the *Mañjuśrīmūla-kalpa* (hereafter MmK [8]) this clearly refers to his headdress. [9] The description is not however unambiguous and the Tibetan translators saw the term as designating two possibilities: as having five knotted locks of hair or as having a tiara with five points. [10]

A second connection concerns their qualities of voice and speech. In the *Sakkapañhasutta* (DN.II.263-289. [11]) Pañcaśikha acts as an intermediary between Sakka (Skt. Śakra), Lord of the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three (P. *Tāvātīpā*), and the Buddha. Sakka wants to talk with the Buddha, but feeling that he is not easy to approach, asks Pañcaśikha to put the Buddha in an amenable mood by playing and singing to him! - which Pañcaśikha does. The Buddha, revealing an aptitude for aesthetic appreciation, praises Pañcaśikha as follows,

"The sound of your strings, Five-Crest, so harmonizes with that of your song, and the sound of your voice with that of the strngs, that your lyre does not too much colour your song, nor your song too much colour your play." [12]

Being a *gandharva*, it is not surprising that Pañcaśikha is a good musician but here his abilities as a singer are stressed as well. Of Mañjuśrī's many epithets and names those that refer to the qualities of his voice are perhaps

* For simplicity I shall use the Sanskrit forms throughout, even when referring to Pāli texts.

the most numerous. Of his alternative names Mañjughoṣa ('sweet/gentle-voiced') is perhaps the best known. Others are Mañjusvara ('sweet/gentle-sounded/voiced'), and Mañjurava ('He whose song/noise is sweet/gentle'). His epithets include Vādirāja ('King of Speech'), and Vāgīśvara ('Lord of Speech').

Marcelle Lalou sees Mañjuśrī's standard epithet Kumārabhuta, meaning 'In the form of a youth' [13], as providing a further link with Pañcaśikha, for as a form of deva Pañcaśikha would also be always young and beautiful. Thus youth is a feature that both figures have in common, although Pañcaśikha does not seem to be any more especially youthful than other devas. Lalou goes so far as to conclude her discussion by suggesting that the popularity of both Pañcaśikha and Mañjuśrī derive from one mythic source: belief in a god that is eternally young. Such a conclusion, it seems to me, oversteps the evidence. It takes no account of Mañjuśrī's role within Mahāyāna *sūtras* as a *Bodhisattva* of particular importance, i.e. his role as a specifically Buddhist figure. Youth would no doubt render Mañjuśrī attractive and thus contribute to his popularity, but it is unlikely to have been its determining factor. Despite Mañjuśrī's particular epithet Kumārabhuta, youth is a characteristic shared by many figures in the Buddhist pantheon, especially Bodhisattvas, not all of whom gained the sort of popularity that Mañjuśrī did. In China, furthermore, Mañjuśrī often appeared to people in the form of an old man, or beggar. [14]

Pañcaśikha appears also in the *Mahāgovinda Sutta* (DN.II.220-252.) where he approaches the Buddha who is staying at the Vulture's Peak, and recounts events that he has witnessed in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three (including the sight of Brahmā Sanatkumāra manifesting as himself, i.e. as Pañcaśikha! [15]). In the version of this sutta found in the Sanskrit *Mahāvastu* [16] there is a longish section at the end (Skt. pp.215ff.) not found in the Pāli version where Pañcaśikha has the role of interlocutor with the Buddha. In this *sūtra* then, there is a much closer connection between Śākyamūni and Pañcaśikha. This could be seen as paralleling or even anticipating Mañjuśrī's important role as the major interlocutor in many Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

Mañjuśrī and Pañcaśikha share similarities then in the areas of name (Pañcacīra, Pañcaśikha), appearance (youth), qualities of voice and speech, and role (interlocutor and intermediary). Might Pañcaśikha be an earlier form of Mañjuśrī? David Snellgrove has argued that this is the case. In his *Buddhist Himalaya* [17] he suggests the following model: that Mañjuśrī's name was initially Pañcaśikha Mañjughoṣa where 'Mañjughoṣa' was an epithet of the figure whose name was Pañcaśikha. Later, he argues, the name became reversed to Mañjughoṣa Pañcaśikha, 'Pañcaśikha' becoming the epithet. Mañjughoṣa would then have to be Mañjuśrī's earliest name, its meaning of 'sweet-voiced' being also, of course, highly appropriate as an epithet for Pañcaśikha. Interestingly Louis de La Vallée Poussin believes that 'Mañjughoṣa' is indeed Mañjuśrī's oldest name [18] though unfortunately he gives no reasons, nor cites evidence.

Snellgrove's model does seem plausible given the affinities between Pañcaśikha and Mañjuśrī that have been discussed, but is there any textual evidence that links the two terms Mañjughoṣa and Pañcaśikha? Snellgrove

himself does not discuss any but Lamotte refers to an interesting passage in the Chinese translation of the *Dirghāgama* (Skt. equivalent of the Pāli *Dīgha Nikāya*) which describes the mountain Gandhamādana in the Himalayas and goes on to say,

"Miao Yin (Mañjuḥoṣa), king of the Gandharvas, surrounded by five hundred Gandharvas lives there." [19]

However although the king of the *gandharvas* is here called Mañjuḥoṣa he is not also named as Pañcaśikha. [20] Furthermore in the Pāli texts Pañcaśikha, though his voice is mellifluous does not have the epithet Mañjuḥoṣa (or a Pāli equivalent). So the connection is not quite made. It could perhaps be made indirectly if there were separate reference to Pañcaśikha as king of the *gandharvas*. Both Lamotte and J. Brough do refer to Pañcaśikha as king of the *gandharvas* [21], but Lamotte cites no sources and implies that he is following Lalou, whereas Brough's article is unclear as to whether his source actually refers to Pañcaśikha as a king. [22] As far as I can ascertain Pañcaśikha is not referred to as king of the *gandharvas* in the Pāli texts. Indeed in the *Sakkapañña sutta* Pañcaśikha himself refers to another - one Timberu - as king of the *gandharvas*. [DN.II.268.] In his *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* [23] Malalasekera has no reference to Pañcaśikha as king of the *gandharvas*. Malalasekera also suggests that the name was that of an office (like that of Sakka) as much as that of a person insofar as there are instances of people being reborn as Pañcaśikha. [24] At the end of the *Sakkapañña Sutta*, however, Sakka rewards Pañcaśikha for his services in helping him to meet the Buddha by giving him Bhaddā, Timberu's daughter, whom Pañcaśikha had fallen in love with and also saying that he shall be king of the *gandharvas* (presumably on the death of Timberu). Lalou notes this promise of Sakka [25] which perhaps accounts for the tendency of writers to assume Pañcaśikha's kingship. Sanskrit texts (for example the *Mahāvastu*, the *Avadānaśataka* and the *Samādhirājasūtra*) generally refer to Pañcaśikha in the same way that the Pāli texts do, as a well-known *gandharva* and as the name of an office. [26] I have come across just two references to Pañcaśikha as king of the *gandharvas* in Sanskrit both of which are pointed out by Lalou. One is in the *MmK* and the other in the *sūtra* section of the Tibetan Kanjur (bKa' 'gyur). [27]

A further difficulty concerns Pañcaśikha as an epithet of Mañjuśrī (or Mañjuḥoṣa). Though Snellgrove [28] says that Pañcaśikha was an epithet of Mañjuśrī, I have not been able to trace an instance. As we have seen Mañjuśrī does have the epithet Pañcacīra and although Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann in her study of Mañjuśrī's iconography (v. note 40.) comments that the *Sādhana-māla* preserves the epithet Pañcacīra Kumāra for a number of forms of Mañjuśrī she makes no mention of an epithet Pañcaśikha. The term *pañcaśikha* does appear in the *MmK* in association with Mañjuśrī [29], but as the name of a *mudrā*. [30]

11) A chain of five mountain peaks surrounding Lake Anavatapta in the Himalayas

In the passage quoted above, from the *Dirghāgama*, Mount Gandhamādana was referred to as the home of King Mañjuḥoṣa. Gandhamādana is part of a chain of mountains crowned with five peaks (*pañcaśikha* or *pañcaśīrṣa*) surrounding a lake. The lake's name is Anavatapta, famous as the source of the rivers Ganges, Indus and Oxus. In the commentary to the *Udāna* one finds the following,

"The lake Anavatapta is surrounded by five mountain peaks called respectively Sudarsana, Citra, Kāla, Gandhamādana, and Kailāsa." [31]

Thus the mountain Gandhamādana, which as we have seen is strongly associated with *gandharvas*, is part of a distinctive group of five peaks termed in Sanskrit *pañcaśikha*. This link of the geographical term *pañcaśikha* with the abode of King Mañjuḥoṣa could be seen as strengthening the possibility of an identification between him and Pañcaśikha. An alternative is that Pañcaśikha, being a celebrated *gandharva*, could derive his name from the geographical features of this area. In the Indian tradition *gandharvas* were generally thought to live in the Himalayas [32] and in the *Mañjarī Jātaka* of the *Mahāvastu* Pañcaśikha visits a hermit in the Himalayas to help persuade him develop generosity. [33] However in the *Mahāmāyūrī* Pañcaśikha is said to live in Kashmir. [34]

There is evidence that Mañjuśrī also is associated with Mt. Gandhamādana. In the *Mañjuśrīparinirvāṇa Sūtra* [35], which I shall discuss again in the next article, Mañjuśrī visits the Himalayas and converts five hundred hermits (*ṛṣis*) to the Dharma. Then, through his skill as an advanced Bodhisattva, he manifests a *parinirvāṇa*. His remains are taken to the diamond summit (*vajraśikha*) of Mt. Hiang Chan where, it is said, he will be honoured by innumerable devas, nāgas and yakṣas. Hiang Chan means 'mountain of perfumes' and must surely be, as Lamotte suggests [36], the Chinese translation of Gandhamādana, 'the mountain which intoxicates with its perfumes'.

As Mañjuśrī's popularity spread he came to be connected with various mountains in different parts of the Buddhist world. These mountains invariably were associated with a nearby lake: for example Mt. Gośṛṅga in Khotan and the famous Mt. Wu T'ai in China. Wu T'ai Shan, as its Sanskrit equivalent *pañcaśīrṣa* indicates, also has five peaks. This link with five-peaked mountains may be a result of Mañjuśrī's epithet Pañcacīra. On the other hand it might derive from an original association of Mañjuśrī with the Mt. Gandhamādana region. And the epithet Pañcacīra might itself ultimately derive from such a source.

111) Brahmā

Another figure that may well have had some influence on the make-up of Mañjuśrī is the god Brahmā from the Hindu tradition. Richard Robinson [37] has noted that Mañjuśrī's epithet Vāgīśvara, 'Lord of Speech' is also one of Brahmā's. A Pāli sutta in which Brahmā's qualities of speech are exemplified is the

Janavasabha Sutta [DN.II.200-218.]. Interestingly Pañcaśikha plays an important role here as well: he is the form in which Brahmā Sanatkumāra manifests to enable himself to appear to the assembled gods of the Heaven of The Thirty-Three. After appearing in this form which is said to outshine the other gods in splendour, Brahmā Sanatkumāra proceeds to discourse on the Dhamma. The *sūtra* describes his voice as, "fluent, intelligible, sweet, audible, continuous, distinct, deep and resonant". [38] Someone possessing a voice with these eight characteristics, the *sūtra* says, is said to be Brahmā-voiced. Brahmā's voice is also described as one that, although communicating with the assembly, does not penetrate beyond it. [39]

There is a further link with Brahmā in the *Janavasabha Sutta*: Brahmā is there called Sanatkumāra meaning 'Forever-a-youth'. As we have seen Mañjuśrī's standard epithet is Kumārabhūta, 'In the form of a youth'. Brahmā is termed Sanatkumāra because like all the gods he never grows old. We have seen how Mañjuśrī and Pañcaśikha share this sort of youth. As an epithet, Kumārabhūta may be more likely to derive from Brahmā Sanatkumāra than Pañcaśikha, though in the *Janavasabha Sutta* the two figures, interestingly, coincide.

Mañjuśrī also has Brahmā's roles of patron of science and lord of memory and inspiration. Moreover Brahmā's consort the goddess Sarasvatī, patroness of the arts and of learning, is found in some contexts as Mañjuśrī's consort. This association of Mañjuśrī with Sarasvatī need not however be a borrowing from Brahmā. In the first place Sarasvatī was an important figure in the Vedic period well before her connection with Brahmā. As the goddess of the river along which Vedic learning developed she was the inspirer of eloquence, known also as Vāgdevī, 'Goddess of speech'. Given the importance of qualities of speech in Mañjuśrī's make-up Sarasvatī would be an obvious choice of consort. Also, in the post-brāhmanical period Sarasvatī's role as the consort of Brahmā was not completely fixed. Sometimes she is described as Viṣṇu's consort; sometimes as both Brahmā's daughter and consort. As Mañjuśrī's consort, Sarasvatī only appears within the Vajrayāna meditation tradition so if there is an influence from Brahmā here it is a fairly late one. [40] An early appearance of Sarasvatī in the Buddhist tradition is in the *Suvarṇabhāṣasottamasūtra*, the 'Sūtra of Golden Light' where one of her skills is that of astrology. [41] In a Tibetan text Mañjuśrī teaches Padmasambhava astrology [42]: perhaps Mañjuśrī inherits this skill from his association with Sarasvatī.

iv) Kārttikeya

M. Lalou, as well as discussing Mañjuśrī's affinities with Pañcaśikha of the Pāli texts, suggests a relation with Kārttikeya. Pointing to the link already referred to between Pañcaśikha and Brahmā Sanatkumāra where the latter emanates as the former [43], she cites the *Harivaṃśa*, a Hindu text dealing primarily with the god Kṛṣṇa, as identifying Brahmā Sanatkumāra with Kārttikeya, who also has the epithet Kumāra. In the MmK Mañjuśrī has the epithet Kumāra (as opposed to Kumārabhūta) and there is a description of a Kārttikeya Mañjuśrī who is to be represented on a peacock, the usual throne of the brāhmanical

Kārttikeya (p.45. 1.12). In the same text (p.33 1.2) there is a mantra called Kārttikeya Mañjuśrī which is extolled as being particular to Mañjuśrī.

Lalou says of Mañjuśrī that he, "appears very much to be the Mahāyānist equivalent of the brāhmanical Kārttikeya". [44] I am not sure what she intends here. If she means that Kārttikeya is a prototype or antecedent of Mañjuśrī then her source references seem too late. The *Harivaṃśa* is usually dated as 300-500 A.D.. [45] There are also problems with the dating of the MmK. It is a composite work: as it stands it cannot be earlier than the eighth century, including, as it does, a history of Buddhism down to the beginning of the Pāla dynasty [46] though Alex Wayman (1985, p.6) suggests that parts could be fourth century. The very fact that one of the references cited by Marcelle Lalou concerns a mantra suggests that it is later rather than earlier, inasmuch as it is a more tantric element. Kārttikeya as an antecedent to Mañjuśrī seems therefore to be unlikely on the evidence provided.

On the other hand, if the suggestion is that Kārttikeya represents a structural parallel, then again the evidence is lacking. On the contrary, Kārttikeya seems to have very little in common with Mañjuśrī. He is endowed with six heads and six pairs of arms and legs. As the son of Agni, fostered by the Kṛttikās (the Pleiades, from whom his name, a patronymic, derives), he becomes the chief battle god of the Hindu pantheon. [47] Military exploits seem to be his sole interest. He does however possess in common with Mañjuśrī the epithet Kumāra but this refers to his bachelorhood, a state resulting, according to most accounts, from his dislike of women. Yet this common epithet of Kumāra could account both for the identification of Brahmā Sanatkumāra with Kārttikeya as well as for the evolution of a form of Mañjuśrī dubbed Kārttikeya Mañjuśrī (Lalou gives no details of the iconographic representation of the form beyond the peacock throne). But a shared epithet is not a sufficient basis upon which to establish any structural parallel; indeed in this case there seems to be little common area designated by the term.

v) Nepal

Benoytosh Bhattacharyya [48] puts forward the thesis that Mañjuśrī was a great man who brought civilization to Nepal from China and was subsequently deified. His source for this is the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* [49] which contains a legend of Mañjuśrī coming from China and creating Nepal (the Katmandu valley) by draining the lake that previously covered it. According to the legend, Mañjuśrī was living on Mount Pañcaśīrṣa in China with a number of disciples when, through supernormal means, he gained the knowledge that the Self-Existent (*Svayambhū*) Lord Ādibuddha had manifested on a hill near a lake called Kālihrada in Nepal. He sets off with his followers to pay homage but on arrival discovers that the abode of the Buddha is largely inaccessible because of a *nāga*-infested lake. He decides to drain the lake, doing so by cutting six valleys in the mountain range to its south with his sword. He also excavates another lake in which the *nāgas* of Kālihrada are invited to take up residence, and then builds a temple for the Ādibuddha (presumably on what is the present-day Svayambhū Hill), making a residence for himself nearby (there is a Mañjuśrī caitya on the

Svayambhū Hill close to the Svayambhū caitya). After creating a king of the newly formed land of Nepal from among his followers Mañjuśrī returns to China where he soon becomes a divine Bodhisattva leaving his material body behind. [50]

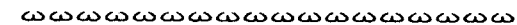
What is to be made of Bhattacharyya's interpretation of this material? Firstly the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* is not an early work: Mitra places it as tenth century. [51] Though this legendary material concerning Mañjuśrī may of course be earlier, one of its central terms, *svayambhū* ('self-existent'), the name of the Buddha whose manifestation precipitated Mañjuśrī's visit to Nepal, was not in use much before the sixth century. [52] As they stand, therefore, the legends must be more recent than references to Mañjuśrī in *sūtras* that can be dated as earlier by their known translations into Chinese. Bhattacharyya seems here to use his source material rather uncritically. This is coupled perhaps with a predisposition to see Bodhisattvas as deified humans and to read legends as elaborated and magical accounts of human happenings.

This account of Mañjuśrī's origins is finally rendered untenable by the research of John Brough [53] which shows that much of this legendary material concerning Nepal probably originated in Khotan and was later attached to Nepal by Tibetans, possibly from about the tenth century. [54] Brough illustrates in considerable detail how legends concerning Khotan parallel those dealing with Nepal. I shall mention two instances that are particularly striking. Firstly, the country of Khotan is also created by the draining of a lake: the *Gośṛṅga-vyākaraṇa* recounts that Śākyamuni arrives at the hill of Gośṛṅga, and seeing a lake asks Śāriputra and Vaiśrāvaṇa to give the land borders. This they do, respectively using a monk's staff and lance, by draining the lake and transferring it and its inhabitants to another position nearby. Secondly, the same text recounts that Mañjuśrī gave his special blessing and protection to a site on the hill Gośṛṅga where a monastery would later arise. Gośṛṅga, like Svayambhū Hill in Nepal, was the chief centre of Buddhism in Khotan. Brough gives a number of reasons why Khotan should have priority as the provenance for these legends. There is not the space to detail them here, except to mention that the *Svayambhū Purāṇa* lists Gośṛṅga as an earlier name of Svayambhū Hill. The reason why this cycle of legends should be transferred to Nepal may be connected, Brough suggests, with the name Li. Li Yul was the old Tibetan name for Khotan (yul means 'land'), but after its disappearance as an independent kingdom there seems to have arisen uncertainty about the location of Li Yul. By the time of the compilation of the Tibetan *Kanjur* Li Yul seems to have become identified with Nepal. The legends associated with the land of Li could then become attached to Nepal and the Nepalese, who revered the Tibetans in the religious sphere, may have adopted these traditions as their own. Finally, the element in the Nepalese legend that describes Mañjuśrī coming from China could have come from China itself or even from India, as by the seventh century Indians thought of Mañjuśrī as residing in China. [55]

In conclusion, as a figure Mañjuśrī's origins most probably lie in India. His affinities with Pañcaśikha are striking, though as a result of the difficulties mentioned I do not think they are as conclusive as M. Lalou and

others suggest. Mañjuśrī's association with Gandhamādana and the five-peaked range of which it is a part could be the source of his enduring link with five-peaked mountains and other 'number five' symbols. There also seems to be an input from the figure of Brahmā, though one from Kārttikeya seems very doubtful. The suggestion that Mañjuśrī is a deified human from China is both historically and critically naive.

To say that Mañjuśrī's origins as a figure are probably Indian is not, of course, to say that the origins of a cult of Mañjuśrī are Indian. The geographical locus or loci where a figure becomes popular may be far from where that figure itself originates. This second, and also complex, question will be discussed in the third article. From what we have seen, although Mañjuśrī's origins as a figure are obscure, there does seem to be some substantial non-Buddhist input. Nevertheless as de La Vallée Poussin says, he is "*an entirely Buddhist personage in definition if not in origin*". [56] This becomes clear through an analysis of Mañjuśrī's role in the *sūtras* of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the subject of the next article.



Abbreviations:

Av	<i>Avadāna-śataka</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
J	<i>Jātaka</i>
MmK	<i>Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa</i>
Mv	<i>Mahāvastu</i>
P	Pāli
PTS	Pāli Text Society
Skt	Sanskrit

Notes

1. From *The Ocean of Clouds of Praises of the Guru Mañjughoṣa*. In Thurman, R. (ed.) *The Life and Teachings of Tsong Khapa*, Dharamsala 1982, p.188.
2. The three parts of this study are an expanded and modified version of a piece of work submitted to the University of Bristol in 1988 as part of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies.
3. I would like to deal with some of this material in the future, though my present plan is to produce next a translation from the French of the *Mañjuśrīparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, a short but important *sūtra* concerning devotion to Mañjuśrī, to round off the three parts of the present study.
4. Both Śiva and Viṣṇu started as relatively minor figures in the Vedas and through a process of accretion and promotion in status became each the supreme deity for their respective followers. The notion of *avatāras* aided this process for Viṣṇu; Śiva became a complex composite figure with

- tensions between the various strands in his nature, most notably the ascetic and the erotic. v. Brockington, J. L. *The Sacred Thread*, Edinburgh 1981, pp.64-73; Hopkins, T. L. *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, California 1971, pp.87-89.
5. v. Snellgrove, D.L. *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, London & Boston 1987, pp.134-6.
 6. Lalou, M. *Iconographie des Étoffes Peintes dans le Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, Paris 1930, pp.66-70.
 7. Buddhaghosa. *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* II, p.647. Quoted in Lamotte, E. *Mañjuśrī* in *T'oung Pao*, pp.1-96, 1960, p.2, n.3.
 8. I have adopted Mmk as an abbreviation for the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* rather than the more obvious MMK as the latter is often used by scholars for Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās*.
 9. v. Mmk Ch.IV p.62; Ch.V p.68: quoted in Lalou, 1930, p.66.
 10. v. Lalou, 1930, pp.66-7. But the general Sanskrit use of the term *cīra* seems to refer to a lock or braid of hair and not a diadem. Five such braids were worn by youths when dressed for festivals. So Mañjuśrī's head would be adorned like that of a youth. v. Edgerton, F. *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, New Haven, 1953, entry '*cīra*', p.231. This would tally with Mañjuśrī's epithet Kumārabhūta, 'in the form of a youth'. Perhaps as Mañjuśrī's iconography came to be more clearly established the meaning of 'prince' for *kumāra* became more prominent i.e. he was seen as being adorned like a prince. Seeing the epithet *Pañcacīra* as referring to a tiara would then make more sense. Lalou also notes (p.67, n.3) references to a headdress of five locks or braids being worn by ascetics, *kṣatriya* and children.
 11. References are to volume and page numbers of the PTS editions of the text in Pāli.
 12. Rhys-Davids, T. W. & C.A.F. (trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha, Part II*, London 1910, p.302.
 13. The alternative rendering 'being a prince' I will discuss in the next article.
 14. v. Birnbaum, R. article, *Mañjuśrī* in Eliade (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York 1987, pp. 174-5; Welch, H. *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900-1950*, Harvard 1967, p.307; Luk, C. (trans.) *Empty Cloud, The Autobiography of the Chinese Zen Master Xu Yun*, Shaftesbury, Dorset 1988, p.14ff.
 15. DN.II.230 (*Dialogues of the Buddha Part II*, p.266). This paradox is suggestive of the composite nature of many of the Pāli texts, where a number of standard passages of varying lengths may be joined together to form a *sūtra*. This probably has its roots in the oral nature of the early tradition. v. Cousins, L. S. *Pāli Oral Literature*, in P. Denwood & A. Platigorsky (eds.), *Buddhist Studies Ancient & Modern*, London 1983 for an interesting perspective on this.
 16. v. *Mahāvastu Sūtra* (Mv.III.197-224), in Jones, J. J. (trans.) *The Mahāvastu* Vol. III, London, 1956, pp. 193-219.
 17. Snellgrove, D. L. *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford, 1957, pp.61-2.
 18. De La Vallée Poussin, L. *Mañjuśrī*, article in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings (ed.), 1908, p.405.
 19. My translation from Lamotte, 1960, p.34; original text given as: T1.K.30 p.117a.

20. Alex. Wayman implies that he is, but I think that Wayman has misread a summarising passage by Lamotte. v. Wayman, A. *Chanting the Names of Mañjuśrī*, Boston & London 1985, p.5; Lamotte, 1960, p.34.
21. v. Lamotte, 1960, p.2; Brough, J. *Legends of Khotan and Nepal*, in *The Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies*, Vol.XII 1948, p.333.
22. Brough is describing an account in the *Gośṛṅgavyākaraṇa* of the bringing of Buddhism to Khotan. Śākyamuni is depicted as visiting the country with a retinue. Brough adds, "Among his attendants on this occasion the text mentions the *gandharva*-king, *Pañcaśikha*". It is unclear from this whether the text simply refers to *Pañcaśikha* and Brough is taking it for granted that he is king of the *gandharva*, or whether the text refers to *Pañcaśikha* specifically as king. I have not been able to check with the original text.
23. Malalasekera, G.P. *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, London 1960, Vol. II, p.107.
24. v. the *Biḷḷarakosiya Jātaka* (J.IV.69.); the *Sudhābhōjana Jātaka* (J.V.412.) and its Skt. parallel, the *Manjarī Jātaka* in the *Mahāvastu* (Mv.II.49.).
25. Lalou, 1930, p.69, n.2.
26. v. Mv.III.197; III.215; Av.I.95; I.113; *Samādhi*.19;37; cited in Edgerton, F. 1953, p.315.
27. v. Lalou op.cit; Mmk 46.1. and *mDa*III.f.123b where Indra charges *Pañcaśikha* to summon the *nāga* kings. Unfortunately Lalou does not give the edition of the *Kanjur*.
28. Snellgrove, 1957, p.61; 1987, p.59 & p.367.
29. v. Lalou, 1930, p.25.
30. Edgerton 1953 points out that as a *mudrā* the term *pañcaśikha* is primarily feminine in form, i.e. *pañcaśikhā*.
31. My translation from Lamotte, 1960, p.35.
32. In the Brahmanical cosmology, whose structure was largely adopted by Buddhism, the abode of the *gandharva* is the foothills of Mt. Meru. Though they are said to have cities of their own, they are most often found in Indra's heaven where they play their musical instruments for his entertainment. The *gandharva* were famed for their fondness for, and power over, women, as well as for their dislike of the *nāga*. v. Ions, V. *Indian Mythology*, London (2nd.ed.), 1986, pp.77; 118-9.
33. Mv.II.48ff.
34. Cited by Lamotte, 1930 p.3. who also refers to A. Foucher's suggestion that his repeated representation in Gandhāra art points to *Pañcaśikha* enjoying great popularity in North-West India.
35. Extant in Chinese, into which it was translated at the end of the third century.
36. Lamotte, 1960, pp.33-4.
37. R. Robertson, 1977, p.104.
38. Rhys-Davids, T. W. & C.A.F. 1910, p.245.
39. In the verses of praise (*stuti*) by Vajrayudha that form the core of the *Mañjughoṣa sādhanā* practiced in the Western Buddhist Order it will be remembered that *Mañjughoṣa*'s voice is described as 'sixty-four fold', "resounding loud as thunder, waking the sleep of the *kleśas*, unfastening the iron fetters of *karma*, dispersing the darkness of ignorance" (v. Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels, An Introduction to Buddhism*, London 1977,

- p.191.). Brahmā's voice is also referred to as sixty-four fold. v. Sangharakshita, *The Mañjuśrī Stuti Sadhana Seminar*, unedited transcript, p.22
40. There is a problem concerning the Sanskrit sources for Sarasvatī as the consort of Mañjuśrī. Alex Wayman in *The Goddess Sarasvatī - From India To Tibet* (v. Wayman, A. *Buddhist Insight*, Delhi, 1984, pp.431-9.) discusses this. He reports Mallman's comment that she had not found any such connection in her research (v. de Mallmann, Marie-Thérèse *Etude iconographique sūtra Mañjuśrī*, Paris, 1964). In Bhattacharyya's study (Bhattacharyya, B. *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Calcutta, 1958.), based primarily on Abhayākaragupta's *Sādhana-mālā*, Mañjuśrī is generally depicted alone. There is just one form of Mañjuśrī, called Mañjuvajra, where he is described as being in union with a consort and here she is un-named, referred to simply as his *Prāññā*. Bhattacharyya also mentions a form of Mañjuśrī, called Sthiracakra, who holds a consort, again un-named, on his knee. A. Getty who also lists this form regards it as archaic (v. Getty, A. *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, Delhi, 1962 [repr. of 1928 ed.], p.113). Where then does the association of Mañjuśrī and Sarasvatī come from? By the time of Tibetan collections of *sādhana* Sarasvatī is clearly named as Mañjuśrī's consort (v. Wayman, 1984, p.438-9.). Wayman suggests, following a hint from a *Sarasvatī sādhana*, that the association of Mañjuśrī with Sarasvatī should be looked for in a Sanskrit text dealing with his wrathful form, Yamāri or Yamāntaka. If this is the case then Sarasvatī did not become Mañjuśrī's consort until the appearance of *anuttarayoga* tantras and her appearance as the consort of Mañjuśrī in his more standard peaceful form comes later.
 41. v. Emmerick, R.E. (trans.) *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, London 1970, pp.44-6.
 42. v. An epitome of the *Life and Teachings of Tibet's Great Guru Padmasambhava*, in Evans-Wentz (ed.), *The Tibetan Book of The Great Liberation*, Oxford 1954, pp.135-6.
 43. v. *Janavasabha Sutta* (DN.II.200-218.).
 44. My trans. of Lalou, 1930, p.69: "...paraît bien être l'équivalent Mahāyaniste du Kārttikeya brahmanique."
 45. v. O'Flaherty, W. *Hindu Myths*, London 1975, p.17; Brockington, 1981, p.61.
 46. v. Warder, A. K. *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi 1970, pp.485-7.
 47. v. Ions, V. *Indian Mythology*, London 1983 (revised ed.), pp.80-1.
 48. v. Bhattacharyya, 1958, pp.101-3.
 49. Bhattacharyya uses Mitra, R. *Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, pp.249-258 as a source.
 50. There are variants to the story as retold by Bhattacharyya, Getty, Snellgrove, and Brough. Brough (1948) has made a detailed study of the source texts so I have relied largely on his retelling.
 51. According to Getty, 1962, p.111.
 52. v. Snellgrove, 1957, p.95.
 53. Brough, 1948, pp.333-9.
 54. Snellgrove, 1987, p.366.
 55. This point will be dealt with in the third article.
 56. De La Vallée Poussin, in Hastings (ed.), 1908, p.405.

THE AGE OF CONVERSION IN SCANDINAVIA

by Dharmachari Dhīrānanda

Introduction

I want to take you back in time, no less than 1000 years, but remain in this part of the world, as it was then. Northern Europe had for centuries been dominated by the Germanic, or Gothic, tribes that had poured over the rest of the European continent, as far as North Africa, with such tremendous force, defeating the original Celtic or Latin populations, only to be assimilated in the end by the same races and cultures they had defeated. This happened in what is now Italy, France and Spain. But in Northern Europe, including the British islands, these same Germanic, or Gothic, tribes gradually formed countries, independent kingdoms, which are the countries we know of today: England, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and so on.

During the period 700-1100 CE in North European history, commonly known as the Viking Age, the dynamic centre of political events in this part of the world is the Scandinavian peninsula. From here, from what is now Denmark, Sweden and Norway, a tremendous expansion originates, across continents and oceans, spanning literally over half the globe, from Greenland and the American continent, in North and West, to Russia and Constantinople, in East and South. During this period one can truly talk about Scandinavia, with the words of the sixth century historian Jordanes, as *officina gentium*, "a factory of peoples", or *vagina nationum*, "a womb of nations".

The term 'viking' is of uncertain origin. It may be connected with the word *vík*, which means 'bay'. Originally it was used to describe the expeditions, or raids - for warfare, or trade, or both - that groups of Scandinavian men regularly ventured upon. Danes and Norwegians mainly went in 'West-viking' as it was called, in longships along what is now the German, Flemish and French coastline, up the rivers into the European mainland, and across the North Sea to the British islands. The viking raids on England lasted from 787 to 1066 CE - for nearly three centuries. To begin with there were only minor raids on rich monasteries or abbeys near the coast. After they had earned their share of silver and gold the 'vikings' pulled away before any counter attack could be organized. Gradually, however, vikings started to colonize East Anglia and Northumbria and through the exploits of such illustrious characters as Ragnar Shaggybritches and his two sons, Halfdan and Ivar the Boneless, they managed to establish the famous 'Danelaw', stretching from the Thames estuary to the mouth of the Mersey.

This period of viking colonization of England culminates in a Danish dynasty on the English throne from 980-1066 CE. Of the Danish kings that ruled England, Canute is the most famous. Far from being just a brutal viking

chieftain, Canute was, by the standard of those days, a statesman of some distinction. He did not see himself as king of Denmark ruling over England as a crown colony, but considered himself primarily as king of England, and was concerned to unite and strengthen this new kingdom. He was an internationalist, one might say, and in this typical of the viking. The whole world was their country, they felt as much at home in the Arctic Sea as in the Mediterranean world.

Swedish vikings mainly went in 'East-viking', across the Baltic, into Russia where they made settlements, along the rivers Dnieper and Volga up to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, respectively, and beyond. On the whole these exploits were more for trade than warfare. Constantinople, or Miklagård - the Great City - as they called it, became a focal point for trade with distant parts of the world. Many stayed there. Famous was the Emperor's vanguard which consisted entirely of tall Scandinavian warriors.

Swedish vikings seem to have travelled even further East, at least as far as Baghdad. In 1956 a unique archeological find was made at Helg in Lake Mälaren, not far from Stockholm. It was a small Buddha image carved in stone. When Dharmachari Ratnaprabha and I, some time ago, made investigations into this Buddha image, we first of all found out that it is most likely a representation of a Medicine Buddha. Moreover, and even more interesting, we discovered that its place of origin was the Swat Valley, in what is now Pakistan. This valley is thought by some scholars to be the legendary Uḍḍiyāna, the birth place of Padmasambhava, and a great centre of Tantric Buddhism from 6th century CE onwards. Did Swedish vikings get as far East as Uḍḍiyāna? Did they in fact meet with living Buddhism? Or did they simply purchase this small Buddha image at the market in Constantinople, perhaps to be used as an amulet, and in reality never reached beyond the Arab world? We will probably never know.

What is certain is that vikings travelling East had very much contact indeed with distant cultures and religions. Not only did they meet with the Christianity of the Roman Church, but with the Christianity of the Orthodox, Byzantine, Church. It is perhaps only a coincidence that Sweden did not become part of the Orthodox world, rather than of the Roman Catholic and later Protestant world. The Russian state that adopted Orthodox Christianity in 988 CE had been founded largely by descendants of Swedish settlers. Moreover, on their route along Volga, Swedish vikings encountered populations adhering to other faiths than Christianity, like Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Islam. They had prolonged and lively contact with a part of the world which at this particular time in history was a huge melting pot where cultures and religions were mingled and transformed and new ones were created.

To what extent were these vikings, unsophisticated and practically minded warriors and merchants as they no doubt were, affected by these higher cultures and higher values which they met with? Unfortunately we know very little about this, for reasons I will go into later.

We shall now turn our attention to Norway. Whereas Sweden, or rather the Svea kingdom, the central part of modern Sweden, with Uppsala as its centre, had been a strong kingdom for centuries, Norway was not united under one king until 870 CE when Harald Hairfair appeared on the scene. His name alludes to the vow he made not to cut his hair before he was king of the whole of Norway. He is described in the sagas as the archetypal hero king, invincible in battle and with a genius for artistic effect. He formed a *hird*, a court, which became a pattern for Norwegian saga kings, consisting of carefully selected men, known for their faithfulness to the king, their fighting abilities, their courage, their wit and their ability to entertain. Closest to himself he kept eight *skalds*, or bards, whose function was not only to entertain with their verses, but to record for posterity, in elevated and glorified form, every important deed or word of the king or of his closest retainers. [1]

Not everyone in Norway liked the political changes that Harald Hairfair brought with him. Many local chieftains, rather than submitting to the king, decided to emigrate. This was one of the factors responsible for the colonization of Iceland round about this time. But not only Norwegians were attracted to this new found land. A fair number of Swedes and Danes also went to Iceland, as well as Northmen from the British islands, some of them with Celtic blood in their veins. It is possible that this latter admixture of a Celtic element into the brew of Scandinavian Pagan culture had something to do with the peculiar Icelandic character that we meet in the sagas and in the scaldic poetry of the time, this combination of intense self-control and restraint, on the one hand, and passionate strife and wild imagination, on the other.

The Pagan character

Let us now consider what the Scandinavian Pagans were like. Brian Branston describes them in the following way: "*In character, these Northmen were brave, fiercely independent, hard, often cruel, grimly humorous, industrious, enterprising, active, selfish, faithful to death. Their dispositions were shaped by the barren soils, rocks, moors, and mountains and the sea fiords, curled fingers reaching far into their homeland and beckoning them away. Their deeply indented coastline was vast, endless.*" [2]

Their code of ethics could be summed up under three headings: self-reliance, personal loyalty to one's leader, and obligations to one's kin. 'Honour' was an immensely important concept. As it says in the 10th century *Havamal* poems ("*The Words of the High One*"): "*Cattle die, kindred die, we ourselves die; but I know one thing that never dies - the fair fame of him who has earned it.*" [3] In these often cited words much of the Pagan philosophy is summed up.

The Northman was intensely concerned about his own honour. He knew that his words and his deeds, especially at crucial moments in his life, would be remembered, and remembered long after he himself had passed away. He would therefore rather die than break a promise, or show weakness or fear. He was equally concerned about the collective honour of his family. If a man was

killed in a fight his kindred felt an obligation to take revenge, either by taking the life of the man responsible for the killing, or someone of his kin. This is the traditional pattern of blood revenge, the only form of justice known in primitive societies. It was not only manslaughter that commanded revenge. In Icelandic sagas verbal insults play an important part in almost every violent feud. Most of these insults seem to involve an accusation of sexual perversion or a lack of manhood.

I have not said anything explicitly about the women of this era. In the sagas they are usually depicted as strong willed, determined, independent and in many respects equal to their men. Some authors have suggested that the women of this period represent a *prepatriarchal* type of woman. [4] Be that as it may, I think that most of what I say about the pagan character is valid for women as well as for men.

A common pattern in sagas is the women's role of goading their men to avenge a dishonour which the men themselves, well knowing the ardours of blood revenge, might have allowed to pass. When it comes to manipulating men by means of their easily offended pride in their manhood, women seem to have been universally successful. "*Cold are the counsels of women*", says one of the characters in *Njal's Saga* as he gives in to his niece who is urging him to avenge her husband who has just been killed. [5]

The role of the Sagas

It is not difficult to see what an integral part of this life the saga literature, or rather saga telling, played. It was through the sagas 'the fair fame of him who had earned it' continued to live long after 'cattle had died, kindred had died, and we ourselves had died'. Whereas the object of *skaldic* poetry, the other main literary form, was to give a momentary image of an event or an experience, like a flash of lightning illuminating the human situation, the object of the sagas, especially the family sagas, was to represent the great river of time, flowing ceaselessly, linking event to event in accordance with a profound and mysterious pattern that we only occasionally intuit. Life and saga seem to have been perfectly intertwined for these people, life being the subject matter of saga, and saga being the mirror of life.

Incidentally, by comparison, how different the situation is for us. No one will remember what we say, or what we do, at least that is the case for most of us. We live, on the whole, anonymously, and we die anonymously. Consequently, it is easy to feel that what we say, or do, makes no difference. And because we live so anonymously, because what we say and do is not recorded and mirrored back to us, in fact seem hardly noticed at all, we become less aware of what we say and do as well as of the consequences of our words and actions. The sagas offered a powerful means of developing reflexive consciousness, which we unfortunately have no equivalent of today.

Pagan mythology

Apart from family sagas, that describe historical characters and historical events, there were also the 'ancient sagas' describing adventures in a mythic past. Together with the *skaldic* poetry these sagas give us an idea of the myths and religious beliefs of our ancestors.

It is difficult to say exactly how important the gods of the North European pantheon (Odin, Thor, Frey and Freya, to name some of the most prominent) really were to the people of those days. In the family sagas the gods are rarely mentioned. When they are mentioned they seem to be conceived of as a kind of supernatural friend, with whom you pledge allegiance, which involves certain obligations in return for support in times of need. Worship, or admiration, rarely seems to have been directed to the gods as such, but to the *hero*, whether human or divine. One could very well describe the religion of the Northmen as *hero-worship*, or a *cult of the individual*. To this the sagas bear ample evidence.

The gods of the Northmen were broadly of two kinds. Firstly there were fertility gods and goddesses, like Frey and Freya, as well as Njord, the god of the sea, who was responsible for the harvest of the sea, so important for a population that lived largely on fishing. Secondly there were gods of more or less pronounced shamanic origin. As they are the most characteristic of the gods of the North I will say something about them, and about the shamanistic element in North European paganism in general. [6]

Shamanism

Shamanism is a form of divination and healing that has been widely practiced amongst nomadic people, particularly amongst American Indians, Eskimos, Lapps and certain Siberian populations. With the use of drumming, dancing, hallucinogenic drugs, and meditative techniques the *shaman* achieves an altered state of consciousness in which he can communicate with spirits, discover hidden causes of diseases and find the power and knowledge to help the tribe to survive and maintain the balance with nature and natural forces. [7]

Shamanism as such, *sejd*, was commonly practiced by the Northmen. Of the gods Odin is supremely connected with shamanism. One of his many names is in fact 'The Great Shaman'. He is the god of wisdom, symbolised by the two ravens sitting on each shoulder: *Hugin* and *Munin*, 'mind' and 'memory'. He is a master of shape-changing and other magical displays. Not only can he heal illness. He can even, as we are told in *Havamal*, raise the dead. Moreover, he is a god connected with the dead: *Valfader*, 'father of the slain', is one of his names. He is, like Mercury, a *psychopompos*, 'leader of souls', which again suggests a shamanic trait. Odin is the god of ecstasy and inspiration, of poetic inspiration as well as inspiration of fearlessness in battle.

The most obvious evidence that Odin above all is 'The Great Shaman' is the many myths describing how he won his wisdom. Several of them include suffering,

privation or self sacrifice, leading to something which exactly corresponds to the crisis that the shaman has to undergo before his initiation. In one of these myths Odin gives one of his eyes in return for a drink of the mead of wisdom. [8] In *Havamal*, in which Odin himself is speaking, it is described how he sacrifices himself in order to win wisdom:

"I'm aware that I hung
on the windy tree,
 swung three nights all of nine;
gashed with a blade
blooded for Odin,
 myself an offering to myself
knotted to that tree
no man knows
 whither the root of it runs.

None gave me bread,
none gave me drink,
 down to the depths I peered
to snatch up runes
with a roaring screech
 and fall in a dizzied faint!

Wellbeing I won
and wisdom too,
 I grew and joyed in my growth;
from a word to a word
I was led to a word
 from a deed to another deed." [9]

In the first stanza Odin describes how he sacrifices himself, hanging from *Yggdrasil*, the World Tree. In the second the crisis is depicted in characteristic terms. Finally, in the last stanza, Odin describes the wisdom that arises after the self-sacrifice and the crisis, quite clearly suggesting a spiritual experience. The verse speaks not only of wisdom, but of well-being and growth. Moreover, it describes, in somewhat cryptic terms, a deeper understanding into the inter-connectedness of things.

It is often said about the shaman that he derives his knowledge and power from his ability to see the inter-connectedness of all things, his ability to experience the wholeness of the world as reflected in each and every phenomenon. Underlying this is a belief in, or a vision of, the world, the totality of existence, as a living wholeness. [10]

The concept of Fate

This awareness of the interconnectedness of all things finds an expression in the idea of 'fate', an immensely important concept in North European Paganism. Whether personified as elusive female deities, the three *Norns*, or conceived of

as an impersonal principle, 'fate' stands above and beyond all things, including the gods. It is the fate of the gods to be destroyed at Ragnar 'k, 'The Twilight of the Gods'. [11]

In its relatively undeveloped form the belief in fate approximates what we usually mean by 'fatalism', i.e. that everything that happens to us is predestined. A man is born with a certain amount of luck, *hamingja* [12] or *gaefu* which will last him only so long. He who is sensitive enough, can see whether someone is a lucky man or an unlucky man, whether someone has got much luck in store, or is running out of luck and is *feiginn*, a doomed man.

In the family sagas of later date, with their often profound insights into human psychology, the idea of fate has developed into an understanding of actions and their consequences, that is much more in accordance with *karma* as we understand it in Buddhism. Human beings are not just victims of a blind fate, they can alter the course of events through deliberate actions. At the same time, 'fate' represents the limits to which external events can be influenced, limits one has to learn to accept. [13] Fearlessness, the quality we perhaps most of all admire in our Pagan ancestors, stems from this understanding, that we cannot run away from our fate - in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, the knowledge that "nothing can happen to us that does not intrinsically belong to us". [14]

Conversion to Christianity

We are now in a position to take a look at what I have termed 'The Age of Conversion in Scandinavia'. What I immediately refer to is, of course, the conversion to Christianity that took place approximately 1000 years ago, when one after the other of the Scandinavian countries became Christian.

The European continent and the British islands had been Christian for centuries when Pagan vikings poured over them in the 9th and 10th century CE. As many of the targets for their attacks were Christian monasteries and abbeys the clergymen had many good reasons to try to convert the wild Northmen. As early as 830 CE a German missionary called Ansgar ventured all the way to Uppsala to meet the Svea king, presumably confident that he would become a martyr. If that indeed had been his hope, he was in for a disappointment. He was most civilly received and his preaching perfectly tolerated. The king even seems to have been impressed by what this small but strong-willed man had to say about White Christ and our fate after death.

But no lasting impression was made on the Swedes. Uppsala was the age old centre of Scandinavian Paganism and was to remain so until 1080 CE when the Pagan Tempel that enshrined the famous images of Odin, Thor and Frey was finally burnt. In remote parts of Sweden pagan beliefs and costumes survived as late as the 15th century CE. In Icelandic sagas Sweden is described as an inveterately heathen country with endless forests full of *berserkr* and *troll*.

Whereas Ragnar Shaggybritches and his sons had been Pagan heroes with little interest in the Christian religion, their later Danish ancestors living in England inevitably became influenced by the religion that by now had the greater part of Europe in its grip. Towards the end of 10th century CE one after the other of the viking chieftains converted to Christianity and Christianity became the state religion of Denmark.

What made these viking chieftains forsake their own ancient beliefs and convert to Christianity? Or, put differently, what was the appeal of Christianity that North European Paganism no more than any other brand of the Pagan religions of Europe could match? It is of course a far too complex question for me to go into in this context. Let me just mention a few factors that seem to have been of importance here.

Firstly, the conversion to Christianity was far more a question of politics than of spiritual principles. The Roman Catholic Church was establishing itself as the single most powerful body in the Western world, in temporal as well as in spiritual terms. Many of the viking chieftains and kings saw conversion to Christianity as a way of creating a political link with the rest of Europe, or, alternatively, as a way to centralize power in their home countries. As is commonly known monotheism and monarchy go well together. Moreover, the Church was immensely rich and many of the vikings greedy. Hence, many viking chieftains were paid huge amounts for their baptism.

Secondly, the inherent tolerance of North European Paganism, as a polytheistic religion, had something to do with the relative ease with which many of the Northmen converted to Christianity. They did not mind the worship of another god, as such, and some of those who converted to Christianity in fact continued to practice polytheism. For instance we are told about Helgi the Lean who believed in Christ and called his estate in Iceland *Kristnes* (Christ's Headland); but when in trouble or when he was at sea he never neglected to invoke the help of Thor.

Thirdly, to be fair, the higher culture that was part and parcel of the Christian 'package deal' must have made a strong appeal on the more intelligent and sensitive of the Northmen. The opportunity to learn and read Latin opened completely new vistas to them. They could now take part, not only of the world of the Bible, but of the great works of Antiquity: Homer, Aristotle, Virgil, etc.. The significant number of characters in Icelandic sagas who, after the conversion, enter monasteries or go on pilgrimage to Rome suggest a cultural and spiritual reason behind the conversion.

Whatever the reasons for conversion were, one thing is clear. It was not because of any notion of 'Christian love' or 'forgiveness' as opposed to Pagan power and brutality. Christianity of those days had little in common with the sentimental form of Christianity that came in vogue in 18th and 19th century CE. Christian clergymen stressed two things when they argued with Pagan Northmen. Firstly, the superiority of Christ over the old gods in terms of the prosperity and good fortune he bestowed on his believers. Secondly, the

consequences after death of believing, or not believing in Christ. There were some great hellfire preachers in those days.

Not all were impressed by these hellfire sermons, though. We are told of one viking chieftain who listened carefully to what the priest had to say about punishment in hell of those who were unbelievers. He then asked the priest: "Suppose I get baptised now. What about my ancestors who are already dead? Are they in hell and will they remain so?" The priest had to admit that this was the case, whereupon the chieftain exclaimed: "In that case I'd rather go to hell with them." [15]

However, gradually, the notion of a hell, a place of eternal damnation, of torment unimaginable and unrelenting, trickled into the minds of these guilt-free and fearless people and started to have an effect. There is a moving scene in one of the sagas describing an aged Norwegian poet and warrior, who late in life had converted to Christianity, confessing on his deathbed: "Never in life have I ever feared anyone or anything. But now, facing death, I must admit that I fear eternal damnation. When I was young I had a sharp tongue." [16]

Of all the Scandinavians the Norwegians seem to have been the most fierce and warlike. This is also reflected in the way that Norway was Christianized. Up until 995 CE Norway was almost totally Pagan, and that in spite of having had a Christian king for a short while! This king was Hakon the Good, king Athelstan's foster-son, who had been brought up at the English court. After a few miserable attempts to introduce the Christian faith to the staunch Norwegians he had to start practicing his own faith in secret, in order to remain safe on the throne. It is told that he once was about to get into trouble when he crossed himself in public, but was rescued in the last minute by a quick-witted retainer who exclaimed: "Our king makes the hammer sign, like the rest of us." [17]

If Hakon was no hero king his successor was all the more. Olaf Trygvason started his career in England where he also was baptized. He is described as the all-time hero: seven feet tall, stronger than any man, he could wield a sword equally well with both hands, swim like a seal and balance along the bulwark of a ship juggling with three swords in the air. In 995 CE he came upon the Norwegians like a hailstorm, converting them to Christianity with sweet words, when that worked; when that did not work, with hell fire sermons; and when that did not work, with fire and iron. In five years time he had crushed all resistance and everyone in Norway was, at least officially, Christian. [18]

Some found it more difficult to give up the old ways than others. One of the most distinguished poets of the time, Hallfred Vandrdaskald, was one of them. His second name means something like 'the trouble-making skald'. When Hallfred offered king Olaf his services, the king was hesitant because of Hallfred's reputation. "I want you to promise me one thing, king. If I enter into your service, I want you never to reject me", Hallfred said to the king. "But if you displease me?", asked the king. "Then kill me!"

A warm friendship developed between the two and Olaf never felt obliged to kill Hallfred, even though he on more than one occasion was severely tried by him. At one famous occasion the king asked Hallfred to sing a poem, which he did. It was a poem that praised the old gods, Odin and Thor, who give inspiration and strength to men of old. The king was much displeased and asked Hallfred to sing another, better poem. Hallfred now made a verse in which he admitted that Christ was the god that everyone had to believe in nowadays, but that he, as a poet, remained indebted to the old gods who had bestowed poetic inspiration on him and all other poets. The king was still displeased and demanded of Hallfred that he improved his verses, whereupon Hallfred made a verse with much the same meaning as the previous, only more subtle. In the end the king grunted and left the issue at that.

Hallfred remained true to his pagan imagination until the end. His death is described in one of the sagas. He was crossing the Atlantic, from Norway to Iceland, when he suddenly fell ill. With him was two of his sons. As he felt death approaching he saw a huge, iron clad woman walking on the waves towards the ship. Realizing that this was his *fygia*, the protector of the family, he asked his eldest son if he was willing to receive the *fygia*. The eldest son declined. Hallfred then asked his younger son if he was willing to receive the *fygia* and the younger son accepted, whereupon Hallfred breathed his last. [19]

Olaf Trygvason himself vanished from the scene as dramatically as he had appeared. Interestingly enough it was a woman who caused his downfall. Olaf had made a proposal of marriage to the far famed Swedish ex-queen, Sigrid Great in Counsel. Sigrid had been married to the Svea king, Erik the Victorious, but had, for one reason or another, left him. When Olaf proposed to her she accepted, but when he demanded of her that she gave up her Pagan beliefs and got baptised, she blankly refused. King Olaf became infuriated and gave her some mortal insults before he left her place. But Sigrid was not a woman to play with. She had her contacts both with the Swedish and the Danish court and, pulling the right strings, she managed to get the Swedish and Danish king together with a Norwegian earl to send a united fleet that met king Olaf's fleet, headed by Olaf's own famous ship 'Long Serpent', in an epic battle at Svolder, in the year 1000 CE. [20]

Olaf lost the battle and was killed, and for a few years Christianity lost some ground again. But soon another Olaf appeared on the scene, Olaf Haraldsson, later to be Saint Olaf. Saint Olaf was short and stout. His red hair and beard, and the way he wielded his battle axe gave him a resemblance of Thor with his hammer, which explains why he, as a saint, later became so popular amongst Norwegian and Swedish peasants. Saint Olaf seems to have made a similar impact on people as his previous namesake. In *The Olaf Sagas*, Snorre Sturlason tells us about an incidence which highlights the point I made earlier about hero worship being the true religion of the Northmen.

It tells us about a man called Arnljot, who lives like a kind of outlaw up in the North. He is described as extremely handsome and strong, with no one his equal in battle. It is said of him that he neither paid obeidance to the

old gods nor to Christ but rather trusted in his own strength and power (*matr* and *megin*). When he heard about king Olaf, however, he got irresistably drawn towards the man and decided to seek him up. When Arnljot came before king Olaf he fell down on his knees. The king told him to stand up and asked him what his name was and what he believed in. "I'm Arnljot and I have so far believed in my own strength and power. But now, when I see you king, I think I will rather believe in you." King Olaf, being a good Christian, of course replied: "It is not me you should believe in, but Christ, who is your creator." [21]

On the strength of his faith in the king Arnljot accepted baptism and stayed close to the king during the few days that remained until the battle at Sticklastad in 1030 CE, where both of them were killed. An army of Norwegian peasants defeated the king, but it was not long before the king was sanctified and a cathedral built over his remains (today, Trondheim's cathedral). Christianity had finally got the upper hand in Norway.

Let us now cross over to Iceland and see what the situation was like there. From its first colonization 874 CE Iceland had been a republic and one of the earliest experiments in democracy. The country was administered by chieftains who also fulfilled the function of priests, but their power rested ultimately with the free-holding farmers who made up the core of the community. Once a year, in late June, the *Althing* (General Assembly), the main judicial, legislative, and social event of the year, was held for two weeks. [22]

When in year 1000 CE Iceland officially converted to Christianity it was as a result of an *Althing* decree. Since the opinions were divided, one man had been appointed by the *Althing* to make a decision on behalf of all Icelanders whether to convert to Christianity or not. It is said that he withdrew in solitude for three days and after that announced his decision. The decree, which was accepted by the *Althing*, declared that everyone in Iceland should be Christian but - and this is a very interesting reservation - those who wanted were allowed to worship the old gods in secret! [23]

This curiously inconsistent addition to the general decree, which later was omitted, seems to have had far reaching consequences. Everywhere in Scandinavia, except on Iceland, Paganism, skaldic poetry, and the saga tradition disappeared, almost without a trace, as a result of ruthless suppression from Christianity. But in Iceland pagan traditions survived. In the 13th century CE Snorre Sturlason could write his saga about Egil Skallagrimson [24], the most un-Christian character imaginable, as well as his *Edda* [25], his guide to the poet, which is a wonderfully readable introduction to Pagan mythology. It may be that this little reservation in the *Althing* decree, made all the difference. In that case we are greatly indebted to the prescient man who engineered it.

So Iceland become Christian and this happened at the very apex of its heroic age. Many of the most famous sagas, notably *Njal's Saga*, describe events taking place round about this time. If we compare *Njal's Saga* with, let us say, *Egil's Saga*, where the action takes place 100 years earlier, we find a noticable difference. Whereas in *Egil's Saga* the characters are relatively stereotyped

and crude, and the action rather simple and straightforward, in *Njal's Saga* the characters are much more complex, struggling with inner conflicts and moral dilemmas arising out of the events of the saga. This apparent evolution of the saga literature could have easily been explained by an improvement in the art of composing sagas, were it not for the fact that most of these family sagas were written down at the same time, in 13th century CE, by the same authors. The difference in character between sagas that describe earlier events and those that describe events round about the conversion is therefore probably not due to the authors' aptitude, but to the intrinsic nature of their motifs. The characters described in *Njal's Saga*, for instance, are more developed, as human beings, than those described in *Egil's Saga*.

Njal's saga

In *Njal's Saga* [26], written down in the 13th century by an unknown author, the conversion to Christianity is mentioned and the theme developed to some extent. But the principle matter of the saga, its true *leitmotif*, or even message - and no one who has read the saga can doubt that, very definitely, there is such - seems to be something else.

The key is perhaps to be found in the main character, Njal, a farmer-sage with the celtic name of Neil. [27] In chapter 20 of the saga he is described in the following words: "A man called Njal, the son of Thorgerir Gollnir, lived at Bergthorsknoll in the Land-Isles. ... (And the saga goes on to give a long genealogy)... Njal was wealthy and handsome, but he had one peculiarity: he could not grow a beard. He was so skilled in law that no one was considered his equal. He was a wise and prescient man. His advice was sound and benevolent, and always turned out well for those who followed it. He was a gentle man of great integrity; he remembered the past and discerned the future, and solved the problems of any man who came to him for help. His wife was called Bergthora, the daughter of Skarp-Hedin. She was an exceptional and courageous woman, but a little harsh-natured. They had six children, three sons and three daughters, all of whom are concerned in this saga later."

In this short passage many events to come are foreshadowed, like the mentioning of Njal's beardlessness and Bergthora's being "a little harsh-natured". The most important features of Njal's character are also described. Njal is no violent viking hero. In fact, throughout the saga he neither bears weapon against anyone, nor lays counsel for harming anyone. He is altogether benevolent, which is not to say that he is not firm, courageous, and, at times, cunning. He is also one of the most respected men on Iceland.

It is true that Njal, when Christianity arrives, gives the new religion his support and expresses his opinion that it is far superior to the old religion. But I think it would be wrong, therefore, to assume that Njal, in his character, is fundamentally influenced by Christianity as such. Whether we see Njal predominately as a historical, or as a fictional, character - which is a matter of dispute - he represents an archetype inherent in Paganism, rather than in Christianity. Njal is the wise counsellor, the sage who remembers the past and

discerns the future. He sees the inter-connectedness of things and has a vision of the wholeness of existence. Njal is an embodiment of the *shaman*. His practical wisdom, his common sense, his cunning, his psychic powers and his heroism distinguish him from the Christian saint, with whom he indeed has little in common. An interesting detail is the fact that Njal cannot grow a beard, perhaps suggesting an androgynous element in his nature, something he, in that case, also has in common with the *shaman*. Njal is, moreover, a law-man, a law-giver, another shamanic function and something of utmost importance in the later developments of Scandinavian Paganism. The importance that is given to the subject matter of law can be seen from the disposition of the saga itself. A great part of the saga is devoted to detailed descriptions of legal proceedings, something which often strikes a modern reader as rather odd.

Let us for a moment consider the original function of the saga: to describe heroic deeds; in the words of a 13th century Icelandic scribe: "*Sagas about worthy men are useful to know, because they show us noble deeds and brave feats, whereas illdeeds are manifestations of indolence; thus, such sagas point to the distinction between good and evil for those who wish to understand it*".

Njal's Saga then represents an increasing interest in heroic deeds done in a peaceful, rather than violent, spirit, with the action taking place at the *Althing* rather than at the battlefield. Njal's main concern is not primarily his own welfare, or even that of his family, though he is concerned with that too. Primarily, it is the welfare of the whole of society that Njal is concerned with. As he says in a famous phrase: "*With law the land will be built, with lawlessness laid waste*". As a character Njal embodies the heroic ideal developed to a new, higher level.

This development also means that the ancient principle of blood revenge is replaced by the principle of legal justice as we understand it today. The principle of *retsliation* is replaced by the principle of *reconciliation*. This shift represents a radically new way of solving human conflicts. Instead of paying back, measure for measure, any real, or imagined, offence - which in principle leads to an endless chain of retaliation - one tries to find a settlement which can satisfy all parties involved, without anyone having to 'loose face'. Through this the social homeostasis is maintained and 'land can be built'. (This, incidentally, is something different from 'turning the other cheek' in the Christian sense, the attitude of the masochist who in this way only encourages those working from the 'power mode'.)

Now, this art of reconciliation, of peace engineering, is not an easy matter, in those days no more than in our time, and *Njal's Saga* gives ample proof of this. More often than not the forces of reconciliation have to succumb to the forces of retaliation. *Njal's Saga* is apocalyptic in its vision. Njal himself, with his whole family, is burned to death at Bergthorsknoll, in one of the most intense scenes in the whole of saga literature. [28] Right at the end of the saga, after a description of the battle of Clontarf, a man called Dorrud has a terrible vision, in which the real leading characters of the saga finally show themselves. On the morning of Good Friday, Dorrud went outside his house and

saw twelve riders approach a woman's bower and disappear inside. He walked over to the bower and peered through a window; inside, he could see women with a loom set up before them. Men's heads were used in place of weights, and men's intestines for the weft and warp; a sword served as the beater, and the shuttle was an arrow. He heard the women chant verses.

"Blood rains
From the cloudy web
On the broad loom
Of slaughter.
The web of man,
Grey as armour,
Is now being woven;
The Valkyries
Will cross it
With a crimson weft."

And the valkyries went on to chant more verses. [29]

Conclusion

It is time to sum up and draw a few conclusions. I have tried to present a few glimpses of an exciting period in our common history, the transition from Paganism to Christianity. I have tried to point to some elements in North European Paganism that are not always sufficiently stressed: that it, above all, is a religion of hero worship, or a cult of the individual; that the sense of responsibility that rests with the individual, and the individual alone, is paramount; that the saga tradition is an integral, and essential, part of this culture; that there is a strong shamanic element in North European Paganism pertaining to its more 'spiritual' aspect.

I have further tried to point to some lines of development within Paganism itself, possibly as a result of contact with Christianity and other spiritual traditions. Firstly, there seems to be a change in the conception of 'fate', from what is in effect 'fatalism', to what represents an understanding of actions and their consequences, and which approaches *karma* as understood by Buddhism. Secondly, the heroic ideal is developed to a new level, where the hero no longer is concerned mainly to win his own ends, but to promote the welfare of the whole of the society to which he belongs. The principle of retaliation is superseded by the principle of reconciliation. The object for the hero is no longer war and conquest, but peace and stability of the society.

These developments within Paganism were brought to an abrupt end with the conversion to Christianity. Pagan culture was obliterated by Christian proselytes: temples were burnt, old beliefs and customs suppressed, until they were forgotten. Only Iceland has been spared this fate. Here the sagas and the myths survived, and have survived up to present date. Yet the Pagan spirit itself did not survive even on Iceland. A century or so after the conversion the heroic age had definitely passed. The individual's sense of power and

responsibility gradually diminished and was assumed by external authorities, such as God and the Church on the one hand, and the State on the other. A period of endless power struggle and petty fighting, of nameless and ignoble killing, followed; until finally, in 1262 CE, the republic came to an end. Iceland lost its independence to Norway.

The rest of the story we all know. Scandinavia became part of Medieval Christian Europe, for better or worse. What would have happened if the Pagan culture had not been so violently suppressed by Christianity, and in many parts of Scandinavia virtually obliterated, we will of course never know. One can only speculate.

In one way or another Paganism of course did survive, could not but survive. Paganism represented, and perhaps still represents, an important part of the Scandinavian mentality and way of life, as well as of the Scandinavian 'collective unconscious'. The question should perhaps therefore be: What would have happened if Paganism had been allowed to develop *freely*, and *consciously*? And conversely: What have been the consequences of the collective repression of aspects of our psyche that Christianity has imposed on generations of North Europeans? Might this be a social and cultural neurosis, of which we now see the results?

I have abstained from much explicit criticism of Christianity, or even comparisons between Paganism and Christianity. There is, however, one final point I would like to make in this connection. In Paganism, in spite of its imperfections and shortcomings, there is an element pointing in the direction of psychic wholeness and a vision of existence in its wholeness, particularly through the medium of myths and symbols. In Christianity there is an element which, on the contrary, leads to a psychic split and a fragmentation of our world view. Man, and the world, is divided into absolute dualities such as 'good' and 'evil', 'body' and 'soul', and so on. Christianity has its own myths and symbols, but a rigid and dogmatic approach to them tends to kill them as myths and symbols. And when the *symbolical*, that which 'throws together', is done away with, it opens the door for its literal opposite: the *diabolical*, that which 'throws apart'.

I recently read about a female priest, that is a Christian priest, in Denmark, who was performing Pagan dances and told sagas about Pagan gods in Church. The reason she gave for doing this was that people today are perplexed; they have lost the thread. We have to go back to where we lost the thread, she said. Perhaps we lost the thread 1000 years ago. Perhaps it is not until now, after 1000 years in spiritual darkness and slavery, that we really begin to see some light again, the dawn of a new awareness of psychic wholeness and of the essential wholeness of existence. Perhaps we are experiencing the dawn of a new Conversion, the birth of a new world religion, far superior to the old.

One of the things that is unique in our time is that spiritual teachings from the East, in particular Buddhism, have come to the West. We - all members

of the Western Buddhist Order - are not only witnessing the meeting between Buddhism and Western culture - *we are making it happen*. The Buddha image came to this part of the world more than 1000 years ago. Yet it is not until now that the Buddha's teaching has arrived.

Let me bring this discussion to an end with a Buddhist symbol, a symbol of psychic wholeness, since psychic wholeness is perhaps what Buddhism is all about. I am thinking about the *maṇḍala*, and more specifically, the *maṇḍala* of the Five Buddhas. If we see the different cultures of mankind as different aspects of a global culture, we could perhaps make correspondences between certain cultures and certain Buddhas, or Buddha families. What would then be more natural than to establish a connection between North European Paganism and Amoghasiddhi, the Buddha of the North, and to make Amoghasiddhi the patron of this particular cultural heritage? Or, in other terms, *with our cultural heritage, to Go for Refuge to Bhagavan Buddha Amoghasiddhi?*

After all, in North European Paganism action is supreme; Amoghasiddhi is the Buddha of *Infallible Success* in action. In North European Paganism the responsibility of the individual is paramount; Amoghasiddhi's family is the *Karma* family. North European Paganism is the way of the warrior; one of Amoghasiddhi's emblems is the sword. Valour is the greatest virtue in North European Paganism; Amoghasiddhi holds his right hand in the gesture of fearlessness.

Moreover, North European Paganism has a strong shamanic element in it; is Amoghasiddhi not the Great Shaman, the Transcendental Shaman if you like. He is of the colour green, associated with the element air, just like the *shaman* who travels through air. Just as the *shaman* is associated with birds, and dresses in bird's feathers, Amoghasiddhi sits on a throne of *shang-shang* birds, half bird, half man. If that is not enough to convince us of the connection between Amoghasiddhi and the *shaman*, there is another hint in the fact that the original name of the Buddha of the North was 'Lord of the Drum'; and what is the *shaman* without his drum.

In his left hand Amoghasiddhi, as the Transcendental Shaman, holds the mysterious *viśvavajra*, the double diamond sceptre, a symbol of the fundamental unity of existence and of the power that arises from the realization of this unity. Of this power Amoghasiddhi, as the ultimate hero, is making use, not to destroy enemies, or even to subdue or dominate them, but to promote peace and concord, through actions guided by his Wisdom of Infallible Success.

In this way, by the mysterious alchemy of the Higher Evolution of Man, the Heroic Ideal which originates as the Way of the Warrior culminates in a symbol of unity and peace.

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## Notes

1. Snorre Sturlasson, *King Harald's Saga*, trs. Magnus Magnusson & Herman Palsson, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1960
2. Brian Branston, *Gods of the North*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1980
3. "Deyr f9, deyja fraendr, deyr sjair hit sama; ek veit einn at aldri deyr: domr of daudan hvern". lit.: "Cattle die, kindred die, we ourselves die; I know one thing that never dies: the verdict over every dead man". The *Poetic Edda*, *The Words of the High One*, trs. H.A. Bellows, American Scandinavian Foundation and Oxford University Press.
4. Lindow et al., *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, Odense University Press, 1986, art. *Annat er vart edli The type of the prepatriarchal woman in Old Norse literature*, by Anne Heinrichs (Berlin).
5. *Njal's Saga*, trs. Magnus Magnusson & Hermann Palsson, Penguin Classics, Harondsworth, 1960, chapter 116
6. Of Northern gods and goddesses several have strong shamanic traits, in particular Freya, Loke and Odin. For a discussion on Odin as *shaman*, see H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*.
7. There are many books available on Shamanism by Anglo-Saxon authors. A straight forward introduction is offered by Ward Rutherford, *Shamanism, The Foundations of Magic*, The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire. Another introduction to Shamanism, which gives instructions for those who want to try out some of the Shamanic practices for themselves, is Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman. A Guide to Power and Healing*, Cox & Wyman Ltd., England.
8. "I know it all, Odin, /where you hid your eye, /deep in the wide-famed /well of Mimir; /every morning /does Mimir drink /mead from Valf'dr's pledge..." The *Poetic Edda*, *V'luspa* 28. See also Branston, *Gods of the North*, p. 114
9. The *Poetic Edda*, *Havamal* 138, 139, 141
10. The increasing interest in Paganism and Shamanism which we see today seems to be connected with the emergence of the *holistic paradigm*. Buddhism already plays an important part in this development influencing the Peace Movement and the Ecology Movement in the West.
11. The concept of 'fate' and other related topics is discussed by M.I. Steblin-Kamensky in his fascinating book *The Saga Mind*, in the chapters "What is good and what is evil?", and "Can time be stable and what is death?". Odense University Press, 1973
12. *Hamingja* is a complex concept, which apart from 'luck' also means 'psychic power'. The *hamingja* is often personified as an animal, a wolf, an eagle, or a polar bear.
13. Though much has been written about 'fate' in Icelandic sagas, no one has, to my knowledge, tried to relate 'fate' to karma in the Buddhist sense.
14. R.M. Rilke in *Letters to a Young Poet*. Quoted by Lama Govinda in *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, Ch.2 *Epilogue and Synthesis*
15. I have not been able to find the original source for this dialogue which takes place between the Frisian chieftain Radbod and the missionary Willibrord.
16. *The Saga Of Hallfred the Troublesome Scald*, trs. Alan Boucher, Iceland Review, Reykjav'k, 1983

17. Snorre Sturlasson, *Heimskringla, Sagas of Norse Kings*, Everyman's Library. Hakon the Good, King Athelstan's foster-son, Ch. XVIII
18. Snorre Sturlasson, *Heimskringla, The Olaf Sagas*, Everyman's Library.
19. *The Saga of Hallfred the Troublesome Scald*.
20. *The Olaf Sagas, Olaf Tryggvasson's Saga*, Ch. LXVIII
21. *ibid. Olaf Haraldsson's Saga*, Ch. CCXXVII
22. For an introduction to the early political history of Iceland, see Magnus Magnusson, *Iceland Saga*, Ch. 7
23. *ibid.* Ch. 10
24. *Egil's Saga*, trs. Hermann Palsson & Paul Edwards, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 1976
25. *The Prose Edda (Snorri's Edda)*, trs. A.G. Brodeur, American Scandinavian Foundation and Oxford University Press, 1916
26. *Njal's Saga*, trs. Magnus Magnusson & Hermann Palsson, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1960
27. For anyone interested in a scholarly analysis of *Njal's Saga* I recommend Lars L'nnroth's *Njal's Saga, A critical Introduction*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1976
28. *Njal's Saga*, Ch. 127-130
29. *ibid.* 157

## HISTORY AND THE NYINGMAPAS

by Dharmachari Advayacitta

### Introduction.

In a review of David Snellgrove's 'Indo-Tibetan Buddhism' written for *Golden Drum* (November 1988), I made an assertion to the effect that, to understand Buddhist history, it is important to be a practising Buddhist. This assertion had been made in response to reading a variety of books 'about' Buddhism, written by non-Buddhists, and which so often seemed to miss the point, or to have blind-spots about the Dharma.\* David Snellgrove's book was an example. Despite some excellent scholarship, it frequently contains errors which are obvious if one is trying to practise the Dharma, and one has a little familiarity with the process of spiritual development. Familiarity with the phenomena to which Buddhist doctrinal categories refer gives one a deeper understanding of the terms and teachings employed, or so I would contend. Indeed I do not see how one can understand Buddhist history except in a superficial manner without having some experience of the phenomena with which the Dharma is concerned. How much can a scholar with no experience of *dhyaṇa* really understand a particular Buddhist text referring to *dhyaṇa*? If his understanding of that text can be no more than superficial, how legitimate can be any conclusions he makes about that text and its place in Buddhist history? One could replace *dhyaṇa* with a host of other doctrinal terms whose meaning becomes clearer through actual practice.

I do not think that this difficulty for the scholar is unique to the study of Buddhist history. One could take the history of a purely intellectual discipline such as physics and make a similar judgement. Can a historian with no understanding of mathematical physics really understand the history of physics except superficially? If you cannot understand, for example, Einstein's derivation of the special theory of relativity, how much can you understand its place in the history of physics? (I have used this example because textbooks are frequently wrong about how and why Einstein derived the theory.) To use other examples, can the tone-deaf have much understanding of the history of music, or the blind of the history of painting? They might be able to memorise words written by others about music or painting, but what understanding would that entail? Similarly one might 'know' that Buddhism can be described as the threefold path of *śīla*, *saṃādhi* and *prajñā*, but that does not necessarily entail

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\* In a recent discussion Sthiramati urged me to write about this topic for *The Order Journal*. Since then I have also been asked to publish a talk on the history of the Nyingmapas, given at the 21st Convention of the Western Buddhist Order (WBO), and as this talk itself raises the same issue, I thought I would present it here with some introductory thoughts about the study, and writing, of history.

understanding what those terms mean, nor being able to judge whether or not particular religious practices are conducive to the development of *śīla*, *saṁādhi* and *prajñā*.

I do not mean that just because one is a 'Buddhist' one is therefore more able to understand Buddhist history, nor that non-Buddhists cannot understand it at all. Nor is it an argument that any aspect of human experience can only, or best, be understood by those with that experience - for it may be permeated by delusion. (An extreme example of this would be the schizophrenic, whose understanding of the nature of his hallucinations is false, believing them to be real, rather than the products of his own mind).

The problem of lack of understanding because of lack of experience is compounded by the existence of *micchādiṭṭhi* (Pali: 'false view') or ideological assumptions which distort one's experience and interpretation of the world. With academic scholarship this problem is particularly acute because there can be hidden (or not so hidden) ideological assumptions which permeate the scholar's attempt to be 'objective'. Indeed, the term 'objective', and also its frequent accompaniment 'scientific', is best viewed as an ideological construct, and part of an ideology which rules certain evidence 'out of court' on *a priori* grounds, because such evidence conflicts with ideological assumptions. Proponents of this ideology then often go on to assume there is no evidence against their ideology. The evidence I am alluding to is anything of a religious, spiritual or even paranormal nature, which is readily dismissable by such scholars as 'subjective', 'superstitious', and 'unscientific'. What such scholarship achieves is an intellectual 'sleight of hand', in which unsettling evidence is ignored and assumed *a priori* to be invalid and even non-existent. The sleight of hand is reinforced by the use of a language imbued with ideological assumptions which renders statements about religious and spiritual matters apparently (but spuriously) meaningless. A classic example would be Peter Berger's book, *The Social Reality of Religion*, in which religious statements about any higher reality are 'bracketed', i.e. assumed to have no real epistemological value, and therefore are not admissible evidence against his thesis that religious language and practice is a form of alienation. His conclusion stems from his *a priori* assumption, not from any evidence he discusses in the book (which can only really demonstrate that some religious practice and language is a form of alienation).

Clearly, any scholar who is part of this ideological tradition (which one could characterise as the 'liberal/scientific' and its offshoots) will bring his distorting assumptions to bear on the study of Buddhist history. He will discount certain evidence and reinterpret other evidence so that it is apparently explicable in terms of his ideology; *dhyāna* will thus be misunderstood as 'trance', for example.

What then ought to characterise a Buddhist approach to Buddhist history? Presumably one imbued with a skilful motivation, which follows the ten precepts, including the tenth precept about avoiding *micchadassanā*. More specifically, what are fruitful questions for a Buddhist to ask about Buddhist history? One,

at least, which occurred to me, was the following: what factors keep a Buddhist school or tradition spiritually vital, i.e. maintaining genuine insight within its members? One can then look at the history of Buddhism to investigate the differences between the apparently more vital schools and the others. This question is obviously important if we are considering the future of the Western Buddhist Order.

In my talk on the Nyingmapas I was concerned to come up with some tentative answers regarding their spiritual vitality. My answers should be seen as no more than hypotheses, and certainly not as an exhaustive set. I am well aware that I am not a history scholar. The sources of my evidence are also all secondary and even tertiary and there are gaps in the evidence which I had available to me. One thing I am concerned not to do is help create a WBO ideology which perpetuates a distorted interpretation of history in order to maintain the WBO as a 'group' which thereby loses what spiritual vitality it has. Ideological interpretations of history can be potent factors in maintaining 'group' identity and cohesiveness (for example the 'Whig interpretation' of English history). The other thing I was concerned to do in my talk was to juxtapose different approaches to history. I started off in more 'academic' fashion, then shifted to a more 'Nyingmapa' approach, and ended up perhaps in 'WBO mode'. I hope that this juxtaposition helps one question assumptions underlying each approach.

#### THE NYINGMAPAS

*"Homage to Śrī Samantabhadra.  
Homage to the beginningless primordial Lord,  
An ocean great and full of capabilities,  
Whose range of wisdom and depth of tenderness cannot be fathomed,  
Who is the birthplace of the wish-fulfilling gem,  
The Buddhas and their spiritual sons, and  
From whom cloudbanks of prosperity and bliss arise."*

With this homage to the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, or Kuntuzangpo (kun tu bzang po) as the Tibetans call him, there begins the *Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*, a work by the great Tibetan practitioner and scholar Longchenpa.

Now I wonder how many of you are familiar with Longchenpa's teachings? Probably few of you. This might have something to do with his translator, Herbert Guenther, whose translations are at times not exactly easy to penetrate. It also might have something to do with Longchenpa being a member of the 'Old School' of Tibetan Buddhism, the Nyingmapas. Nyingmapa teachings and information about the Nyingmapas can still be quite difficult to come by, as I discovered when preparing this talk. The Nyingmapa tradition is also a very rich one, with complex teachings which are amongst the most profound in Buddhism. These factors also make it difficult to study and assimilate what information one can come across about the Nyingmapas and their doctrines and practices.

Personally I have long felt attracted to the Nyingmapas, although I have never been able to explain why. I am also aware that, through Sangharakshita, the WBO has connections with the Nyingmapa tradition. Sometimes, I confess, I have considered those connections to be so strong that I thought that secretly the members of the WBO were really a bunch of Nyingmapas, and a jolly good thing too. My talk tonight is an expression of my affection for the Nyingmapa tradition. I hope it will give you an introduction to this, if you know little about them. I also hope that it will bring out to some extent the significance of the Nyingmapas for us.

I expect you know that there are different schools of Buddhism in Tibet. You probably know that there are the 'newer' schools, such as the Gelugpas (dge lugs pa), which stem from the later, or 'second' diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. You also probably know that the most ancient school, the Nyingmapas, differs from the others by stemming from the earlier, or 'first' diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet.

This picture of the Buddhist schools in Tibet, and of the Nyingmapas, is true to a certain extent, but it is really an over-simplification. It would be false to understand the Nyingmapas as a distinct and self-recognised school or order which was founded with the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet and which continued as a unitary ecclesiastical entity until today. The situation is more complex. You might be surprised to learn that the first head of the Nyingmapas was Dudjom Rimpoche, one of Bhante's teachers, who died in 1987. The name 'Nyingmapa' also appeared relatively late in their history. It dates from the 'second diffusion'. The Nyingmapas only banded together under a common cause then, in response to the rise of the other schools. Before this there were just the diverse traditions and lineages of early Tibetan Buddhism. In other words the practitioners of all the earlier Buddhist traditions in Tibet only grouped themselves together in response to other Buddhist schools growing up on the basis of the second wave of Buddhist teachings arriving from India.

So if we use the term Nyingmapa for the time before then we must not understand it to mean a school or order. It is just a designation for anyone who followed the earlier Buddhist teachings in Tibet. Even after the Nyingmapas grouped themselves together it is well to remember that that was a fairly 'loose' arrangement, at least on an ecclesiastical level. The Nyingmapas were rather different in this regard to the Gelugpas. In this talk I shall be using the title 'Nyingmapa' to refer both to the later school and to the people from whose teachings and lineages that school developed, who practised the Buddhism which entered Tibet before the 'second diffusion'.

Now the history of the Nyingmapas is intimately bound up with the history of Tibetan Buddhism as a whole. Of course before the second diffusion the two are synonymous. Let us look at this history. If you pick up a book on Tibetan history you will probably come across a story like this:

In the first half of the seventh century there was a Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo (srong brtsan sgam po). He, following the efforts of his father, united

the whole of Tibet, which until then had been a collection of independent principalities. Songtsen Gampo had two wives in particular. Both were foreign princesses, one Chinese (named Wen Ch'eng), the other Nepalese, and both were Buddhists. When each came to Tibet she brought with her her religion and a Buddha *rūpa*. Songtsen Gampo, whom the Tibetans regard as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, built a temple for each *rūpa* and himself practised Buddhism. Tibet up till then had been a somewhat barbarous land; the Tibetans had painted their faces red, they had followed a primitive religion called Bon, and had been illiterate. Songtsen Gampo set about making some improvements. He discouraged red faces, encouraged Buddhism, and sent one of his ministers off to India to learn how to write. The minister, Thon-mi Sambhota, devised a Tibetan script based upon an Indian script and even wrote a grammar of the Tibetan language. Soon after he did this Buddhist texts were translated into Tibetan for the first time.

However there were problems. These came from the resistance of the conservative aristocracy and their allies, the Bon priests. It was not until over a hundred years later, in the eighth century, during the reign of king Trison Detsun (khri strong lde brstan), that Buddhism really began to 'take off' in Tibet. Trison Detsun was a convinced Buddhist, and he set about propagating the Dharma with renewed vigour. He sent off Tibetans, such as Vairocana, to India to study. He also invited many foreign teachers to Tibet: teachers such as the Chinese monk Hua-shang Mahāyāna and the Indians, Vimalamitra and Śāntarakṣita.

This renewed propagation of the Dharma stirred up the opposition, this time not only from the aristocracy and Bon priests, but also from the gods and demons of Tibet. On the advice of Śāntarakṣita the king invited to Tibet the great yogin and exorcist Padmasambhava. Padmasambhava came and converted the gods and demons of Tibet. After this the first monastery, Samye (bsam-yas), could be built, and Tibetans were ordained as monks for the first time. The Bon opposition was settled by the holding of a great debate at Samye, between the Buddhists and the Bon priests. The Buddhists won the debate and Bon was banished from the land.

All was not yet settled, however. There were disagreements between the teachings of the Indian Buddhists and the Chinese. These disagreements centred upon the discrepancy between the gradualist Indian approach and the 'sudden' approach of the Chinese, who were practitioners of Chan. The Chan teachings were held to contradict the existence of an elaborate path and all that went with it - preliminary spiritual practice, *dāna*, and even the financial support of monasteries. So there was another debate at Samye, between the Chinese and Indians. The Indian side won, and thenceforth the Indian teachings were officially encouraged and the Chinese forbidden. Buddhism then made great strides in Tibet, encouraged by Trison Detsun and by his two successors, Sanalek (sad na legs) and Ralpajen (ral pa can).

Unfortunately the progress of the Dharma brought about a reaction. The Bon aristocracy and priesthood hit back. Ralpajen was murdered and the new king,

his brother Langdarma (glang dar ma), ascended to the throne. Langdarma persecuted Buddhists and proscribed Buddhism. He dispossessed and destroyed its monasteries. Then Langdarma himself was killed and Tibet was plunged into a period of anarchy. It was not ruled as a whole again for another two centuries but split up again into separate regions. During these two centuries Buddhism, without any central control, degenerated. It became adulterated by Bon, and the practice of the Tantra descended to the level of a perverted literalism. Genuine spiritual practice waned and nearly disappeared. The monastic tradition withered.

However there dawned the period of the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. Through the encouragement of the kings of western Tibet, Tibetans once again made contact with the genuine Indian Buddhist traditions. Tibetans like Marpa (mar pa) went to India. Indians such as Atiśa went to Tibet. Correct practice was once again established and the monastic tradition revived. Moreover new texts were brought from India. New and more strict translations were made of the Indian texts. Relatively quickly a new orthodoxy grew up, based upon the newer Indian teachings and the newer, stricter translations of Indian texts. Only the newer texts, the *sarma* (*gsar ma*), were accepted as valid. The old texts, the *nyingma*, were disparaged, and were not included in the orthodox canon, the *Tenjur* (*bstan 'gyur*) and *Kanjur* (*bka' 'gyur*), which was compiled around that time. No texts were included without an extant Sanskrit original.

Not only were the old texts, the *nyingma* (*rnying ma*), disparaged, but so also was the practice of the people who followed them, the *nyingmapa*, as they were named at this time. They were looked down upon because their Dharma was adulterated with Bon practices, because they had non-Indian teachings, and also because their main teachings seemed to contradict the doctrine of *śūnyatā*.

The new schools of Buddhism, the Kargyu (*bka' brgyud*), Sakya (*sa skya*), and Kadam (*bka' gdams*), grew rapidly. They developed large monasteries and even attracted and cultivated secular power. First the Sakya and then later the Gelug (who were the reformed Kadam school) gained secular control of a united Tibet. The Gelug ruled Tibet throughout the agency of the Dalai Lama, until the Chinese invasion in the 1950s.

So the story goes. You will find it, with added details and minor variations, in various books on Tibet. The problem with this story is that large parts of it are false. There are distortions and fabrications in the events it describes, and it presents a one-sided picture of the Nyingmapas and early Tibetan Buddhism. Let us try to get a less distorted picture. First let us consider the situation of Tibet at the time of the king Songtsen Gampo, during the first half of the seventh century.

Of course Tibet is and was part of Asia. When Songtsen Gampo was alive Asia was in a state of flux. In China, to the east and north east of Tibet, it was the beginning of the Tang dynasty. Buddhism had been in China for several centuries. Soon after the accession to the throne by T'ai Tsung, who is really

the founder of the Tang dynasty, Buddhism was suppressed for a while. Later on in his reign Buddhism once again came back into favour, and T'ai Tsung even supported the famous monk Hsüan Tsang. Hsüan Tsang himself had by then made an epic pilgrimage from China to India, a pilgrimage which is recorded in great detail and which is very informative about Asia and Buddhism at that time. [1]

Hsüan Tsang had gone from China across the lands to the north and west of Tibet and into India by way of what is now called Kashmir. All the way along his route he travelled through Buddhist cultures. He travelled along the silk route, visiting places like Turfan, Kucha and Khotan where Buddhism had flourished in both Mahāyāna and Hinayāna forms for centuries. These areas had already lost some independence, being under the overall control of the Turks. They lost their independence more completely when the armies of T'ai Tsung overwhelmed them, signifying the new political and military strength of the Chinese.

Hsüan Tsang travelled into northern India, which was ruled by king Harṣa. Throughout northern India both Buddhism and a revived Hinduism lived side by side. Kings tolerated and even encouraged both religions. Harṣa himself received Hsüan Tsang, as had all the kings along the pilgrimage route, for Hsüan Tsang was not just a learned monk but would have been seen as an emissary of the Chinese emperor (although he actually left China against the emperor's command). South of Harṣa's kingdom were other Indian kingdoms, such as that of Mahārāṣṭra (whose kings were Śaivite Hindus though tolerant of Buddhism), often at war with Harṣa.

Further west of Tibet was the Persian kingdom of the Sassanids. At the time of Songtsen Gampo this was first weakened in battle with the Eastern Roman Empire and then conquered by the Arabs, who took with them their new religion, Islam. (Mohammed himself died about halfway through Songtsen Gampo's reign in Tibet.) This new religion would rapidly make its presence felt further east. [2]

In the middle of this Asian flux of kingdoms and religions the new kingdom of Tibet came on the scene. Once Songtsen Gampo had unified Tibet it became a major military power which even the military might of the Tang Chinese could not match. It is interesting to learn how Songtsen Gampo acquired his Chinese wife, Wen Ch'eng (the one who brought the Buddha *rūpa* with her to Tibet). He asked the Chinese emperor T'ai Tsung for a princess to be his wife. T'ai Tsung refused. Songtsen Gampo then went to battle, defeating the Chinese, a rather interesting occupation for a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara. He was then given Wen Ch'eng to be one of his wives. Over the next century and a half the Tibetans even conquered parts of central Asia and China, these territories being under Tibetan control at the time of Trison Detsun.

Now if one contemplates Tibet's geographical position a question arises, for Tibet in the early seventh century was surrounded by countries where Buddhism had flourished for centuries. Why then had Buddhism taken so long to get to Tibet?

Well, this is perhaps the first distortion of the usual, 'official' history of Tibet. Most probably Buddhism had been known in Tibet well before the time of Songtsen Gampo. [3] There is even a legend that Buddhist texts fell from the sky during the reign of one of his ancestors. There are also historical indications that some Tibetans at least practised the Dharma before Songtsen Gampo's time, like the records of a Tibetan becoming the abbot of a Chinese monastery in the fourth century. There is also the question of the Bon religion. It would appear that this was not, at the time of Songtsen Gampo, simply a 'primitive' religion. It would appear that within the Bon tradition (or rather what was later called Bon, the term being an anachronism when applied to the indigenous Tibetan religion of this period) there was a form of Buddhism, albeit heterodox. [4] The heterodoxy of the early Bon Buddhist teaching lay in their attributing their Buddhist doctrines not to the Buddha Śākyamuni but to an earlier teacher known as Sherab (*gshen rab*), which is a title meaning 'best of holy beings'. The Bon tradition also claimed that its teachings came into Tibet from 'Tazig', which is what the Tibetans called the region of Central Asia to the west of Tibet, i.e. Buddhist Central Asia.

So there are indications that Buddhism entered quite early into Tibet. Whenever it did, it is clear that Tibetan Buddhism, that is Nyingmapa Buddhism, was influenced by the types of Buddhism that spread along the silk route from India to China. By the time of Trison Detsun that influence would have been strengthened by Tibet's military control of the areas along the silk route and of parts of China. That there was such influence is evident within the doctrines of the Nyingmapas. First of all there is an early Nyingmapa emphasis on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the *sūtra* which became the basis for the Chinese Hua Yen school. This emphasis forms one strand in later Nyingmapa tradition, and is evident 6-700 years later in the writings of Longchenpa.

Another such influence, and a very important one, is the Nyingmapa focus upon the Buddha Samantabhadra, who is for them the personification of the *Dharmakāya*. This emphasis upon Samantabhadra is only reflected elsewhere by the tantric school of the far east, Shingon.

There are further Chinese influences on the Nyingmapas, those of the Chan school. It is very unlikely that, at a debate at Samye, the Chinese Chan teachers 'lost', and it is unlikely too that they were banished from Tibet. Chinese sources even say that the Chinese won the debate, however it probably never happened in the first place. [5] Rather than a debate, Trison Detsun questioned Chinese and other teachers extensively on difficult matters of doctrine (we have examples of this). The influence of the Chinese was not suddenly curtailed but instead waned, as Tibet lost control of its Chinese territories and Chinese monks were no longer at the beck and call of Tibetan kings. Chan did have an influence on the Nyingmapa tradition. Indeed Longchenpa wrote, hundreds of years later, that what the Chan monk Hua-shang Mahāyāna had said at Samye had been the truth.

Another possible influence on the Nyingmapas was Bon, or so-called Bon. The Nyingmapas certainly did not adopt Sherab instead of the Buddha. The

charge that the Nyingmapas Buddhism became adulterated by Bon is difficult to take seriously. If they were affected by Buddhist elements within Bon then so what? As for the more shamanistic side of Bon, or rather of earlier Tibetan religion, Buddhism has always shown itself able to absorb and transform the pre-existing pagan religion of a country. Nyingmapa Buddhism was no exception. Indeed I would contend that it transformed the pagan shamanism of Tibet in a particularly successful way - which was highly important to the psyche of the Tibetans, and which paved the way for a real conversion of the Tibetans to Buddhism. [6] This process is possibly symbolised by Padmasambhava's overcoming and converting the gods and demons of Tibet.

The 'official' Tibetan history has other distortions within it. There is, for example, the role of Bon in the opposition to Buddhism. This was probably much less than it is supposed to have been. Indeed the situation, both religious and political, around the Tibetan throne was much more complex. [7] The aristocracy certainly resisted the power of the Tibetan kings, but Bon played a minor role in this. Indeed even the 'Buddhist' king Trison Detsun, like all other Tibetan kings, continued Bon rites and traditions. Then, later, Langdarma's persecution of the monasteries may have had much more to do with the growth of the monasteries' secular power than with religion as such. Considerations such as the monasteries' servants right to avoid military service may well have been undermining Tibet's military power by the time of Langdarma, and therefore could have been likely reasons for his actions.

Perhaps we ought to consider briefly why the 'official' history contains its distortions. Why is it not more accurate? Delusion is of course one of the three unskillful roots. We do not just perceive the present through the projections and distortions of our own delusion; importantly too, our attitude to and 'perception' of the past can be similarly affected. When writing 'history' it is easy for belief and vested interest to distort the picture - by omissions, over- and under-emphases, and even by downright lies. Given that the 'facts' about the past are difficult to come by, such distortion is very easy. The Tibetan histories were written by followers of the new schools, who accepted the later Indian Buddhist tradition as orthodox. When they wrote history they emphasised the Indian elements in the earlier tradition. They also wrote at a time when religion did play a major role in military conflicts within Tibet - for the Sakayas and their supporters were fighting other Buddhists. Such a religious-come-political conflict could have influenced the historians' understanding of the political situation at the earlier time of the 'religious kings' - so that they magnified the religious element. [8]

Although the historians emphasised the Indian element when writing the history of early Tibetan Buddhism, this did not stop the newer schools from emphasising the non-Indian elements when criticising the Nyingmapas, and accusing them of heterodoxy and what amounts to 'heresy'. These accusations are rather ironic. The non-Indian Buddhist influences on the Nyingmapas were all acceptably orthodox forms of Asian Buddhism. On the other hand the Indian *tantra* of the new schools are arguably influenced heavily by Hindu ideas and terminology. [9]

The Nyingmapas were also accused of degeneracy, through weakening of the monastic tradition and because of taking sexual aspects of tantric practices too literally. Perhaps Nyingmapa monasticism did become lax, at times at least; perhaps some did practise a corrupt tantrism, but whether the charge of degeneracy is true of the Nyingmapas as a whole is another matter. It is interesting to note that the charge of laxity has continued down the centuries despite, for example, the reputation of the Nyingmapa monastery of Mindroling (smin grol gling) being the strictest monastery in Tibet. I wonder whether the charges of laxity and degeneracy have something to do with religious literalism when faced with the more spiritually vital approach of the Nyingmapas to questions about the distinctions between monks and laypeople.

Since the beginnings of Buddhism in Tibet the Nyingmapas have occupied an important, and at times difficult, place. After the 'persecution' of Langdarma, when the original monasteries were destroyed, the Nyingmapa traditions and lineages survived, and even flourished, without large monasteries or central control. Their ecclesiastical units were small, even very small communities. Lamas could be celibate or married. Around where a lama lived would grow up a small community engaged in spiritual practice, and guided by the lama. There are examples of this in the *Life of Milarepa*. There would be monks, laypeople, tantric yogins, even *ngakpa* (*sngags pa*), or sorcerers, all practising together as a spiritual community, with little emphasis on the distinction between monk and lay. Such communities had an intimate relationship with ordinary Tibetans. Later on, as the new schools developed large monasteries, the Nyingmapas followed suit to a certain extent, developing monasteries of their own, such as Mindroling. It seems that these did not replace the earlier network of smaller communities but were an addition to them.

Because, on the whole, the Nyingmapas were not dependent on large monasteries, they experienced less keenly the problems associated with such monasteries - for in Tibet large monasteries usually meant secular power, and secular power has its problems, as the Dalai Lamas were to discover. Moreover the small scale units, and a possible lack of interest in secular power, of the Nyingmapas meant that at times they were ignored in the power battles of Tibet. Instead of being so involved with secular politics I would assume that the Nyingmapas could concentrate on spiritual matters. [10]

Over the centuries the Nyingmapas preserved high standards of spiritual practice. They also ordered their teachings and practices, many of which are amongst the most profound in Buddhism, into a rich and complex system which united them into a distinct tradition. Let us turn to these teachings and practices.

Usually we think of Buddhism as having had three distinct *yānas*, or vehicles. The Nyingmapas view the matter somewhat differently. They recognise nine *yānas*, most of which can be practised within the Nyingmapa tradition. These nine *yānas* can also be seen as the progressive stages of one spiritual path. They are thus graded into a series of increasing spiritual profundity. It is best to consider them in groups of three. Firstly there are the three

vehicles which correspond to the practices associated with the *sūtras*, both Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna - the vehicles of the *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva*. The second group of three are the three levels of the outer *tantra* (*kriyāyoga*, *upāyoga*, *yoga*). The last group of three are the levels of the inner *tantra* (*mahāyoga*, *anuyoga*, *atiyoga*). I shall concentrate upon describing something of the lineages of of the last group of three, the inner *tantra*. For it is the Nyingmapa inner *tantra* which is perhaps the quintessential part of the Nyingmapa tradition. I shall talk first of all about two types of 'transmission lineages' of the inner *tantra*, and then about the ninth vehicle, the innermost *tantra*, the *atiyoga*, or Dzogchen (*rdzogs chen*).

The teaching lineages through which the Nyingmapa inner *tantra* are transmitted are rather extraordinary. These lineages can be divided into two: *ka'ma* (*bka' ma*) and *terma* (*gter ma*), or the 'continuous' and the 'continuing' transmissions. The *ka'ma* or continuous transmission is traditionally regarded as being unbounded by time and space, independent even of the existence of the Buddhadharmā within the world. The *ka'ma* transmissions are teachings emanating from a Transcendental source, which are given to human or non-human beings, and then passed on from teacher to pupil down to the present day. Such teachings can even originate now. Their ultimate source is the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra, who transmits his teachings instantaneously to anyone with the necessarily very high degree of spiritual development. Often the teachings are transmitted down via Vajrasattva, or by *Saṃbhogakāya* forms or other tantric deities. They may be received by human beings through direct meditative or visionary experience, or may reach human beings through the agency of not quite so human beings like Padmasambhava and Garab Dorje (*dga' rab rdo rje*). They may also come through the agency of the *ḍākinī*. They may be passed from teacher to pupil by 'mind to mind' transmission, via a symbolic 'pointing out', or in the usual way via communication with the voice, the particular method depending on the level of spiritual development. [11] I shall give an example later when I discuss Dzogchen.

Related to the *ka'ma* teachings, and in fact a direct expression of them, are the *terma* teachings, or 'continuing' transmission. These contain the same doctrines as the *ka'ma* teachings from which they derive. *Terma* means 'treasure, hidden treasure', and about *terma* Dudjom Rinpoche made an interesting claim when he said that the Tibetans live by the *terma*, implying that they are central to Tibetan Buddhist practice.

I expect that you are familiar, to a certain extent, with the *terma* tradition, and know that, for example, the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or *Bardo Thodol* (*bar do thos grol*), is a *terma*. It was discovered by Karma Lingpa (*karma gling pa*) on the mountain of Gampo-dar. You are probably familiar with the idea that a *terma* is a text, or occasionally another object, discovered in some place where it has previously been concealed. What you make of *terma* depends on your point of view. If you are a sceptical western scholar, or even a strict Gelugpa, you probably see the *terma* tradition as a clever piece of deception which tries to give older Nyingmapa teachings, dismissed by other schools, a renewed but bogus authority through passing them off as the

teachings of Padmasambhava. If you are a Nyingmapa you view the matter very differently.

For the Nyingmapas *terma* are teachings which were originally given, usually by Padmasambhava, occasionally by Vimalamitra or Vairocana, to their spiritually developed disciples. They were implanted within the pure depths of the disciples' minds by a process which is called 'mind-mandate transmission'. Along with this highly specific transmission Padmasambhava (or one of the other two) would make a 'prediction' that the teaching so transmitted would be recollected by someone who was a manifestation of that disciple, at a particular time and place. The 'prediction' is traditionally regarded as not so much a prediction, more the actual cause of the recollection. The manifestation of the disciple, who recollects the *terma*, is known as a *terton* (*gter bston*). Once the *terton* has recollected the teaching and it has been written down the recollection of it fades from his mind.

There are two types of *terma*: mind *terma* and earth *terma*. Mind *terma* are those recollected without the help of a discovered external object, whilst earth *terma* are recollected with such help. The external object might be a text, or a Buddha image or other object. Whether a *terma* is an earth or a mind *terma*, it usually manifests first of all in the form of a 'symbolic script'. This script can be a more or less condensed version of Tibetan, or of Sanskrit or another Indian language. It may also be in the language of the *dākinī*. The script may only be a letter or two, or a few words. Sometimes it is a complete text. When the *terton* reads it it may be completely clear and its meaning readily apparent. Or both the form of the script and its meaning can be unclear and can keep changing as the *terton* tries to read it. Even a letter or two of symbolic script may unlock the *terton*'s recollection of the original teaching given by Padmasambhava.

The symbolic script may be on paper, called a 'yellow scroll', or hidden in a natural phenomenon or other object. With mind *terma* the symbolic script manifests directly within the mind of the *terton*, who then tries to read and understand it. With some mind *terma* there is no script, and the teaching is recollected more directly.

Before setting out to recover an earth *terma*, whose existence would have been brought to his notice, for example by the *dākinī*, the *terton* must correctly perform preliminary spiritual practice. This may be specified by a 'prophetic guide', a set of instructions given him in a vision or by the *dākinī*. Then he must swap the *terma* for another ritual object, or even replace the *terma* after use. After reading it he must meditate upon it to fully realise its meaning. Only when the time is right, which may be years later, can he begin using the *terma* to teach others.

As an example of a *terma* being discovered I will read an account given by Rizin Jigme Lingpa, a *terton* who lived in the eighteenth century, and who was the founder of the Longchen Nyingthig branch of Dzogchen practice.

"...during the evening of the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month of the Female Fire Ox year, a fiery devotion toward the great master Guru Padmasambhava arose within me, filling my eyes with tears. Memories from a remote past flashed across my mind, and with overwhelming sadness I thought, 'Here is this land of red-faced men, people live mired in hatred, lust, and ignorance, wallowing in nothing but the most vicious of actions. There is nothing left but a pale shadow of the teachings, and I myself feel like an orphan abandoned in the wilderness. You, compassionate protector, greater than any other Buddha, have left this land and gone to the Copper-Coloured Mountain. Will I ever be able to meet you?'"

Tormented by sorrow, I wept. Just at that moment, the air around me became filled with light, and suddenly, standing before me, I beheld a beautiful white snow lioness. I took my seat on her back and we leaped into the sky. Soon we arrived at Jarungkhashor, the great stūpa of Nepal. There, on the eastern side of the stūpa, stood the *dākinī* of the dharmakāya wisdom.

She handed me a sealed flat wooden casket, and said:

For those with pure perception,

You are king Trison Detsen.

For those whose perception is less pure,

You are Senge Repa, the cotton-clad Lion Yogi.

Here is the Heart Treasure of Samantabhadra,

The symbol of the infinite mind of the Vidhyādhara Padma,

The great secret treasure of the *dākinī*s.

Having spoken thus, she vanished, leaving me quite shaken. Then, filled with great joy, I opened the casket. Within, I found five scrolls of yellow parchment and seven small crystals the size of a pea. As I unrolled the largest of the scrolls, the air was suffused with an indescribable fragrance of medicinal herbs and camphor, and my entire being seemed to quiver with the mystery of it. A thought, unbidden, made itself clear in my mind: "Rahula protects this treasure. It is extremely powerful and should be approached with great caution." With reverence and awe I slowly unfurled the scroll. It bore the image of a stupa completely covered with *dākinī* script, seemingly beyond the reach of human understanding. Unable to decipher it, I began to roll the parchment closed when, suddenly, like a mirage, the stūpa disappeared and the *dākinī* script dissolved and reformed into Tibetan script. It was a text on the Great Compassionate One. This entire text arose as clearly as if it were an image in a mirror. After some time it again grew difficult to read, becoming progressively less clear..." (fr. *Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, see bibliography)

There have been many *terton* in Tibetan history. Longchenpa was a *terton*, for example. The first was Sangye Lama (*sangs rgyas*), who discovered texts on Padmasambhava, Avalokiteśvara and Dzogchen in a pillar in a temple, in the twelfth century. Nyingmapa tradition recognises major and minor *terton*. The greatest are known as the 'five kings of the *terton*': the last of these lived in the nineteenth century and was Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo. *Terma* and *terton*

have been found throughout Tibetan history from the twelfth century down to the present day.

For the Nyingmapas *terma* have a purpose over and above that of the *ka'ma* lineages. This purpose is fourfold:

1. that the doctrine shall not disappear
2. that instructions are not adulterated
3. that blessings do not fade
4. that the transmission lineages be shortened.

Clearly their purpose is important, and the Nyingmapas regard the *terma* tradition, as well as the *ka'ma* tradition that is its origin, as the source of ever-renewed spiritual vitality. [12]

Both the *ka'ma* and *terma* teachings contain a wide variety of different texts and practices. However there seem to be three important strands. These are: *sādhana*s of Avalokiteśvara, *sādhana*s of Padmasambhava, and teachings about Dzogchen, the 'Great Perfection'.

To the third of these we must now turn. Dzogchen, the 'Great Perfection', is traditionally regarded as emanating from Samantabhadra. It reached Tibet through the agency of three people, Vairocana, Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava, who each taught it to their most gifted disciples. Important to remember is that the Dzogchen teachings were practised, and at difficult times preserved, by the non-monastic *saṅgha*.

The teachings and practices of Dzogchen are particularly associated with a place of great symbolic import to the Nyingmapas: the land of Uḍḍiyāna, or Urgyen, and in particular to the lake known as Dhānakoṣa. Uḍḍiyāna is often identified with the Swat valley in northwest India. Whether it is really there, or somewhere else entirely, is another matter. Whichever, the Dhānakoṣa lake in Urgyen features prominently in Nyingmapa traditions and is central to the lineages of Dzogchen. Once, a long time ago, there was a virgin *bhikṣuṇī* named Sudhanā. One day she was bathing in the Dhānakoṣa lake when she suddenly saw a brilliant light coming from the east. From this there emerged a sun and moon. Thereupon the sun entered her body from the top, the moon from the bottom. Vajrapāṇi then manifested as a great golden swan, accompanied by four other swans. They came to the lake and showered themselves with water. The four accompanying swans flew off but the golden swan approached Sudhanā and touched the region of her heart *cakra* with his beak. Thereupon a bright light appeared and dissolved into her body, as she beheld the world as perfect and clear.

Sudhanā, we are told, had no idea of the significance of this event. But later a light came forth from her body, and manifested itself as a beautiful infant. Alas, ashamed at what people might think of her having a child, she threw the infant into a pit of ashes. A few days later, however, full of remorse, she went back to the pit, and discovered the child playing happily there. She named him 'Corpse of Bliss'.

The child grew, spontaneously reciting *tantra* as if from memory. One day he asked his 'mother' whether he could visit Vajrasattva. Though told that this was difficult if not impossible he disappeared for a day. When he reappeared he mentioned that he had been talking to Vajrasattva, who had taught him Dzogchen. The king of Uḍḍiyāna came to know of him, and delighted in his company so much that he called him 'Joyous Vajra', which in Tibetan is Garab Dorje. At the age of seven he defeated the learned pandits of Uḍḍiyāna in debate, and his fame spread. Hearing of him, and that he was reputedly teaching doctrines 'beyond cause and effect' that apparently contradicted Buddhism, the great pandit Mañjuśrīmitra went to Uḍḍiyāna in order to defeat him in debate. But when Mañjuśrīmitra saw the child he realised that his own motives were unskilful, and confessed them to the boy. The child accepted Mañjuśrīmitra as a disciple. In a temple, on an island in the Dhānakoṣa lake, Garab Dorje taught Mañjuśrīmitra the practices of Dzogchen. [13]

According to other sources Garab Dorje also taught Mañjuśrīmitra in the cremation ground of Sitavana, in Bodhgaya. At his death, if such it can be called, Garab Dorje appeared in a mass of light, surrounded by *gṛhṇī*, and presented Mañjuśrīmitra with a golden box containing the complete scripture of Dzogchen. This was later arranged by Mañjuśrīmitra's disciples into three sections of precepts: the space class (*long de*), the mind class (*sems de*) and the secret precept class (*man ngag de*). From Mañjuśrīmitra the teachings passed eventually to the three people who took them to Tibet. [14]

What then are the teachings of Dzogchen? I had best answer this by paraphrasing Dzogchen teachers: All phenomena are empty of inherent self-existence and are of the nature of the great primordial wisdom of the spontaneously arising *Dharmakāya*. The manifestation of phenomena is the play of the mind, which in its essential nature is unaffected by phenomena, being empty, liberated and pure from the beginningless beginning. The apparent natures of a subject and object are false, there being no such duality. Nor is there a duality between *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, which themselves are but phenomena that arise in the mind. The empty essence of the mind is the *Dharmakāya*; the radiant clear nature of the mind is the *Sambhogakāya*; the unimpeded universal compassion of the mind is the *Nirmāṇakāya*.

Dzogchen teachings thus emphasise the mind. They are related to the teachings of the Yogācāra school of Indian Buddhism. The Nyingmapas have described them by the terms 'simply mind' (*sems tsam*) and 'mind tendency', which recall the 'mind only' epithet for Yogācāra teachings. This emphasis on the mind, together with the apparent suggestion that there is an eternal substantial mind underlying all phenomena, have resulted in the criticism that Dzogchen is not Buddhist, but is a teaching that contradicts the doctrine of *sūnyatā*. Dzogchen is heresy, so runs the argument, and the Nyingmapas heretics. Yet Dzogchen insists that the nature of the mind is emptiness, *sūnyatā*.

The teachings of Dzogchen are perhaps most pithily expressed in some lines from a Nyingmapa *tantra* called the *Sang-ba Nying-po*, lines which we know as part of the *Confunder of Hell Sādhana of Vajrasattva*.

*E Ma O, Dharma wondrous strange  
 Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones  
 Within the birthless all things take their birth  
 Yet in what's born there is no birth...*

The profundity of Dzogchen teachings is paralleled by the high spiritual level required to practise them. For at the heart of Dzogchen practice is the achievement and maintenance of a state of non-dual contemplation, throughout one's activities. The non-dual state is first 'pointed out' to the disciple by his teacher. The disciple must then maintain it.

About this 'pointing out' one teacher said this: "*When the two sit down to identify the Great Perfection the student is an ordinary being, but upon identifying his own mind he is freed, and when he arises he is an Ariyan.*" This being the case it is clear that not everyone will be capable of practising Dzogchen. The same teacher estimated that in a hundred thousand trainees perhaps one or two might be capable of being directly introduced to the non-dual state. [15] Another teacher put it more hopefully, saying that practising Dzogchen on such a level is within the capabilities of an 'ordinary person'. However he went on to describe the necessary qualities such an 'ordinary person' must have. These include the ability to cooperate unreservedly with one's teacher, unwavering commitment, and unbroken mindfulness. [16] I wonder how many 'ordinary people' there are in a hundred thousand trainees.

In case you are personally thinking of practising Dzogchen on this level, perhaps it would be well to reflect on Milarepa's attempt to do so. Before he went to Marpa, Milarepa stayed with a Dzogchen teacher who attempted to 'point out' the non-dual state. This attempt was unsuccessful, and Milarepa simply lazed around as a result, misunderstanding the lama's instructions. He was then sent packing, off to Marpa to try the hard way of becoming enlightened, rather than Dzogchen's 'easy way'.

For most people, like Milarepa, the easy way, of a direct introduction to the non-dual state, is out of the question. They have to practise the gradual path. Within the Nyingmapa tradition this gradual path is a progressive development through the stages of the *tantra*, including such practices as the four foundation *yogas*.

I should mention, however, that there are other approaches to Dzogchen which do not proceed from the bottom up through the different levels of tantric practice, but which start as near the top as the pupil is capable. [17] There is also an approach to Dzogchen which does not consider it 'tantric' at all. This approach has emphases, for example on mindfulness, which remind me of the 'early Buddhism' of the Pali Canon.

Now once the disciple has had the non-dual state successfully pointed-out then he tries to maintain it through all his activities. This is achieved by 'relaxing', neither grasping nor rejecting any phenomena that arise. Through this any *samskāra* that arise 'self-liberate' in the non-dual state. It was this

'relaxing' that Milarepa was trying to achieve. With continuous practice of this 'spontaneously self-liberating' non-dual contemplation the practitioner is able to purify his karmic obscurations more and more thoroughly. Once this purification has proceeded to a certain point the practitioner can enter upon the highest stage of Dzogchen practice, the *todgal*. Then, should he reach the higher levels of *todgal* this achievement will inevitably result in a rather extraordinary phenomenon. At the time of 'death', as it were, the practitioner's body changes into what is called the 'rainbow body' or 'body of light'. Nothing is left of his or her old body but the nails and hair. There is really no physical death at all, merely a transformation from an ordinary physical body into the body of light, a process which apparently takes seven days. Moreover if the practitioner reaches the very highest stage of *todgal* practice then he achieves what is known as the 'Great Transfer', his body transforming into the body of light whilst still actually living, with none of the phenomena of a physical death ever occurring. The person who achieves the Great Transfer instead gradually becomes invisible to people with ordinary karmically obscured vision. Traditionally Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra are held to have achieved the Great Transfer.

Mention of Padmasambhava brings me to a consideration of his place in the Nyingmapa tradition. His is the figure of central importance to the Nyingmapas. Although they certainly do recognise other early teachers of importance such as Vimalamitra or Vairocana, it is Padmasambhava who is venerated and most highly revered. Not only is he seen as the most important figure in the Dzogchen and other tantric lineages, he is held to be the main initiator of the *termas* which have constantly revitalised the tradition.

But the question has been asked as to how much Padmasambhava himself actually achieved. What was he really responsible for? Indeed some have even questioned whether he ever actually existed. If one reads a *terma* about his life one comes across a curious mixture. The *Life and Liberation (Padma Kai Thang)* is a strange blend of legend, symbolic spiritual biography, and historical and quasi-historical information. A scholar could easily dismiss much of it as providing little historical evidence for Padmasambhava's own existence. Moreover in reading it one is left with the impression that Padmasambhava has so many names and assumed so many different forms that 'he' is in fact many people. Of hard historical information outside the *termas* there is little if anything, and it would appear that the stories about him grew over the centuries.

How you decide who Padmasambhava 'really' was is probably dependent on your 'world-view'. Whoever he really was, and whatever he really did there is one aspect of the figure of Padmasambhava that is of crucial importance: the figure of Padmasambhava, the stories about him, and the *terma* tradition associated with him, I would contend were together the unifying factor of the Nyingmapa tradition. Padmasambhava was the embodiment, the personification of the Dharma as practised by the Nyingmapas.

Personally I doubt whether Padmasambhava was an invention. With teachers of the stature of Vimalamitra around there would have been no need for the Nyingmapas to invent a Dzogchen teacher named Padmasambhava.

Since the time of Padmasambhava perhaps there is one Nyingmapa amongst the many *terton*, teachers and practitioners who deserves special mention. That person is Longchenpa. There is a saying current among the Nyingmapas that Padmasambhava pointed to the door but Longchenpa opened it.

Longchenpa, or the 'all understanding' Longchen-rab-byams pa Dri-med Od-zer, was born in the year 1308 CE, into a family that could trace its ancestry back to Ye Shes dbang po, one of the 'seven chosen ones' selected from the nobility to be ordained at Samye by Śāntarakṣita. When he was eleven he himself was ordained at Samye. Thereafter he studied and practised intensively, both under Nyingmapa teachers and under those from other schools such as the Sakyapa and Kargyupa. In his late twenties he had a vision of Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyel, during which he was given the name 'Dri-Med Od-zer'. As a result of this he practised the Kha Do Nying Thig - the Dzogchen teachings which stemmed from Padmasambhava. Then he met an outstanding teacher named Kumārārāja, who initiated him into the *Vimala Nying Thig* - the Dzogchen teachings coming from Vimalamitra.

Longchenpa died aged 56 after writing an enormous number of works. At the heart of his writing was an emphasis on the unitary nature of Buddhism, in which he synthesised the various different strands of Buddhism into a coherent whole, based upon the foundation of his own practice of Dzogchen. His works are revered for their profundity, for combining high scholarship with the fruits of his own spiritual experience. Much of his work is written in verse. Perhaps among his most important writings are those known as the *Seven Treasures* (or *Seven Treasuries*) which are expositions of Dzogchen. Very important too is his work *The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease* which I quoted at the beginning. This work is an exposition of the spiritual path from the standpoint of a Dzogchenpa; it takes one gradually through the stages of practice, discussing the important aspects of each stage. It seems to have a structure reminiscent of Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, but written with poetry akin to that of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Something I find interesting about the early chapters of this work are their emphases on friendship, Going for Refuge, the *brahmā vihāras*, and the ten precepts (as practised by the Western Buddhist Order).

After Longchenpa there have been many practitioners and scholars of high repute in the Nyingmapa tradition, that I have no time to describe. It is a tradition as rich in personalities as it is in teachings.

The later tradition can perhaps be summarised briefly by saying that it has developed into various 'sub-schools', each of which has focussed upon a particular *terma* or set of *terma*. The last four hundred years have seen the development of monasteries, such as Mindroling, each monastery being the focus of a subschool specialising in the practice of particular *terma*. At times in

their later history the Nyingmapas have had difficulty, as far as I can gather. Often misrepresented, they also seem to have been suppressed at times - although the references I have come across about this are tantalisingly slight. It would appear that they have occasionally been on the receiving end of less than skilful behaviour by some Gelugpas. Their relationship with the Gelugpas is in any case complex. Looked down upon by some Gelugpas, and possibly suppressed by them, they have nevertheless had a direct connection with the Dalai Lamas, some of whom have had Nyingmapa teachers and been initiated into the Dzogchen tradition. There is even a suggestion that the Nyingmapa connections of some of the earlier Dalai Lamas were factors in the power struggles at the top of the Gelugpa hierarchy/Tibetan government.

Overall it would appear that, despite occasional suppression, and in contradiction to the charges of heterodoxy and heresy, the Nyingmapas have retained to this day, for over twelve hundred years, what Sangharakshita has described as 'tremendous spiritual vitality'. [18]

Now I hope that in twelve hundred years time, assuming the human race is still in existence, that the continuation of the Western Buddhist Order will merit the description of 'tremendous spiritual vitality'. What then can we learn from them? What significance does the Nyingmapa tradition have for us?

Well, thinking about these questions I have come up with a few suggestions as to the factors which have kept the Nyingmapa tradition spiritually vital for so long. These are of course suggestions. I would have to have much more access to information about the Nyingmapas to do more than suggest them tentatively. These possible factors are:

1. The Nyingmapas had a unified spiritual tradition. Out of the richness of their heritage they created a unitary framework which all could agree to. This framework centred upon the figure of Padmasambhava, and on the Dzogchen and *terma* traditions. Whether Padmasambhava himself was responsible for this, or whether it is the work of many Nyingmapas, is a matter of opinion.
2. They maintained a high level of spiritual practice. The continuation of the Dzogchen tradition in any meaningful sense implies the existence of 'stream entrants' at the very least, throughout Nyingmapa history.
3. They were concerned with the spirit of the teachings rather than the letter (which, according to Guenther distinguishes their translations from those of the more literally minded newer schools), and were very concerned with actual spiritual experience rather than intellectual game-playing. [19]
4. The divide between monks and laypeople was relatively insignificant, the importance of Going for Refuge being recognised, and there being a sense of spiritual community which went across ecclesiastical divisions.
5. They were in intimate contact with ordinary Tibetans, and successfully incorporated and transformed psychologically important aspects of earlier

Tibetan culture, especially the shamanistic/ magical/ non-rational side of Tibetan culture. They continued to value the 'non-rational'.

6. They had scholars of high quality, who were not just mere scholars.
7. Because they had a genuine spiritual hierarchy they did not fall into the trap of forming a large ecclesiastical bureaucracy, with highly centralised ecclesiastical power. They therefore avoided the problems associated with such bureaucracies.
8. They avoided, on the whole, large monastic structures, and through this tended to avoid the corrupting influence of the secular power politics which went with large monastic structures in Tibet.

These are of course just hypotheses. If they are correct ones, then there arises the question as to which of these interdependent factors is most important. I'll finish my talk by quoting Longchenpa; perhaps he gives the possible answer:

*"If the qualities of having taken refuge could be given concrete form,  
They would be wider than the sky and their merits would be even vaster.  
Which intelligent person would not rely on  
What is the foundation of all positive qualities?  
I bow my head in faith  
To the helper of all beings who, renouncing evil, go to inner peace.  
And I take refuge in the excellent leader who is the wish-granting tree  
of the merits of the three realms  
And the origin of prosperity and happiness."*

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Notes.

1. See Le Grousset, *In the Footsteps of the Buddha* (London 1930) for an account of Hsüan Tsang's pilgrimage.
2. To complete the picture, in south east Asia at that time there were Buddhist kingdoms such as Śrīvijaya and Dvāravati, although Hindu influence was also strong there. This was a time before the Burmese and Thai peoples had travelled south to settle in south east Asia.
3. Various scholars mention this possibility. Guenther discusses it at length in *Early forms of Tibetan Buddhism*, although some of his conclusions in this seem a little speculative.
4. David Snellgrove is the main proponent of this thesis.
5. See Snellgrove's *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* on this point, and for a full discussion of the distortions within the standard Tibetan history, and the reasons for them.
6. The conclusions in this paragraph are speculations on my part, or hypotheses to be put to the test of further study.
7. See Snellgrove, op.cit.
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. The points I make about the Nyingmapas in this and the previous paragraph are impressions culled from a variety of scant references. Since I gave the talk I have come across Per Kvaerne's conclusions, e.g. "They [the Nyingmapas] developed no centralised leadership or organised hierarchy, they avoided involvement in the political struggles of the times and their monastic centres remained small and scattered." He does not however give references for the evidence on which he bases his statements. The assertion about spiritual communities remains my own impression.
11. For discussions of the ka'ma lineages see Dowman's commentaries in *Sky Dancer*, and also *Crystal Mirror*, the series of booklets brought out by Terthang Tulku and his group.
12. See Tulku Thondup Rimpoché's *Hidden Teachings of Tibet* for a full exposition of the terma tradition.
13. There are various versions of the life of Garab Dorje, of which the account I give is a compilation. See, e.g. Namkhai Norbu *The Crystal and the Way of Light*.
14. This sentence blandly summarises an extraordinary story.
15. Khetsun Sangpo Rinbochay, in *Tantric Practice in Nyingma*
16. Namkhai Norbu, *The Crystal and the Way of Light*.
17. *ibid.*
18. Sangharakshita, in his preface to the Tharpa edition of *A Survey of Buddhism*.
19. Guenther stresses the difference between the Nyingmapa approach to language and translation and that of the other Tibetan schools.

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The translation of Dudjom Rinpoche's authoritative work on the history of the Nyingmapas still awaits publication at the time of writing.

NIETZSCHE'S PROBLEM WITH SOCRATES

by Dharmachari Vipassī

In an early section of *Twilight of the Idols* Friedrich Nietzsche raises what he calls 'The Problem of Socrates', and his conclusion is that Socrates makes a tyrant of reason. In what follows I try to consider this claim, but I should make it plain from the outset that I am no more in pursuit of the historical Socrates than I take it Nietzsche is. Whether we are reflecting about the Socrates of traditional anecdote or the Socrates whose views and character are represented in Plato's dialogues, it is his role as an exemplar that is the main interest.

One aspect of my discussion will concern the distinction between the classical virtues of continence and temperance. I take this to be a distinction of immense importance for ethics, and it is instructive to see the uncertainty with which Plato handles it. Thus his description of the *sophron* (someone who is temperate) in the *Republic* seems really to be of Aristotle's *enkrates* (someone who is continent), whereas there are passages in the *Symposium* in which Plato seems to display a much firmer grasp of the distinctive character of temperance. Thus someone who has turned his attention towards moral beauty is that much more detached from physical beauty, so that he does not exercise *self-control* in turning his attention from the one to the other.

Nietzsche, like everybody else, recognises that

"there is a time with all passions when they are merely fatalities, when they drag their victim down with the weight of their folly." [1]

But his conclusion is that this 'enemy within' should be valued: "one is fruitful only at the cost of being rich in contradictions; one remains young only on condition that the soul does not relax, does not long for peace." [2] I take the implication to be that the passions are thus eventually converted into something else, that there is

"a later, very much later time when they are wedded with the spirit, when they are 'spiritualised'" [3]

Radical hostility is not the right attitude. In fact it is likely to be symptomatic of degeneracy.

If Socrates really tried to make a tyrant of reason, the question arises, why did he feel he needed to? Nietzsche offers a reconstruction of the thought-process:

"Socrates saw behind his aristocratic Athenians; he grasped that his case ... was no longer exceptional. The same kind of degeneration was everywhere silently preparing itself; the old Athens was coming to an end. - And Socrates understood that all the world had need of him - his expedient, his cure, his personal art of self-preservation ... Everywhere the instincts were in anarchy; everywhere people were but five steps from excess ... 'The instincts want to play the tyrant; we must devise a counter-tyrant who is stronger'." [4]

The references to the old Athens coming to an end and the degeneration everywhere silently preparing itself are two symptoms of what Nietzsche calls *decadence*. The *Phaedo* presents Socrates' dying words as "Crito, I owe a cock to Asclepius" [5]. Since one apparently gave a cock to Asclepius on recovering from an illness, Nietzsche takes this obscure remark to imply that, so far as Socrates was concerned, his whole life had been an illness. Nietzsche's response to this is to say that to think that is itself a symptom of being sick. In fact both Plato and Socrates are presented as 'declining types', as 'symptoms of decay'. They were, Nietzsche thought, in some way in *physiological* accord since they had to stand in the same negative relation to life. The formula for *decadence* is to have to combat one's instincts: "as long as life is ascending, happiness and instinct are one". [6]

One of the dangers of disagreeing with this last assertion, that happiness and instinct are one, is that one may thereby be convicted precisely of *decadence*. But although there are problems of interpretation I am unable to go into here, it does not seem necessarily the case that in an ascending life happiness and instinct are one. The difficulty is that Nietzsche sometimes seems to have in mind something like an instinct for distinctively human growth, and to that extent one is inclined to agree with him when he says

"I call an animal, a species, an individual depraved when it loses its instincts, when it chooses, when it prefers what is harmful to it."

But it still seems possible that opposition to, or at least fruitful engagement with, *particular* instincts, is required if the instinct for growth is to flourish. Particular instincts may be an impediment to growth, and in that case it is not a sign of degeneration or depravity to be in opposition to them though, again, that rather depends on what form this opposition is to take. It seems to me important to separate the phenomena and the explanation in Nietzsche's account of *decadence*. The phenomena that Nietzsche targets with such clarity and mischief are compatible, I think, with other explanations than the one he offers in terms of degeneration. They are compatible, for instance, with a confusion of mind, a misunderstanding of the process of growth. It is a sign of life to be capable of change. The material and social conditions, the predictable contingencies, to which a community is more or less adapted may change in some significant way. A people's energies may be roughly adapted to the demands made upon them, and those energies be available in particular instinctual or conditioned responses, and while these demands continue to be made there is no particular problem with surplus energy. But when the conditions change, surplus

energy, seeking release, might very well express itself in bizarre forms, or along previous pathways that are now dysfunctional or non-functional. One image of this, an image, indeed, of a regression to a life in which instinct and happiness are one, is the phenomenon of football hooliganism. Its participants appear to have discovered ways of reproducing the conditions under which an instinctual knowledge that all males share can be given expression. Opposing sides collude in bringing about situations which they experience not only as exhilarating, but also as terrifying, in which, nevertheless, they know what to do, are fully engaged, are at a peak of alertness, feel themselves alive.

But let us return to the discussion of the tyranny of reason with the reminder that the reconstruction of the Socratic thought-process concluded as follows:

"the instincts want to play the tyrant; we must devise a counter-tyrant who is stronger." [7]

The Socratic tendency is clearly being represented as in favour of repression rather than transformation. So what was Socrates' 'case'? What was the nature of his cure, his personal art of self-preservation? By way of illustration Nietzsche relates his own version of a classical anecdote:

"A foreigner passing through Athens who knew how to read faces told Socrates to his face ... that he contained within him every kind of foul vice and lust. And Socrates answered merely: 'You know me, sir'." [8]

This then is Socrates' case, that he contained within him 'every kind of foul vice and lust', and his remedy, indeed, is to have a way precisely to 'contain' them. Nietzsche goes on,

"When that physiognomist had revealed to Socrates what he was, a cave of every evil lust, the great ironist uttered a phrase that provides the key to him. 'That is true', he said, 'but I have become master of them all'." [9]

There is incidentally, no explicit reference to a tyranny of reason in the telling of this anecdote. We shall see, though, that in the *Republic* the 'element of control' or mastery is 'due to Reason', though that is not quite to say that reason is the *agent* of control. Nietzsche's little narrative draws on more than one source. There seems to be a stronger charge of moral disgust in his version than there is, say, in Cicero's, which is more relaxed:

"We've read how Zopyrus the physiognomist claimed to be able to identify a man's moral character from his external appearance, his eyes, looks and face, and how he identifies Socrates as a dolt and a dunderhead, describing those features as blocked up and clogged. He added that he was a womaniser - which is said to have made Alcibiades burst into a roar of laughter." [10]

Elsewhere, Cicero returns to the incident:

"Those who are said to be naturally hot-tempered, sentimental, grudging, etc., are endowed with a sickness of soul, but can be cured, as in the story of Socrates. Zopyrus claimed that he could identify a man's character from his face, and attributed to Socrates a whole agglomeration of vices. The audience, who could not discern these vices in Socrates, laughed at him, but Socrates rescued him, saying that he had the vices at birth, but had overpowered them by reason." [11]

Cicero also remarks that the Stoics had taken over from Socrates the view that a fool is a sick man, and in the *Republic* Plato represents Socrates as describing virtue as a kind of mental health and vice as a kind of sickness. Virtue is an attribute of wisdom, vice of folly. Nietzsche's final comment in the section on Socrates is this:

"Socrates wanted to die - it was not Athens, it was he who handed himself the poison cup, who compelled Athens to hand him the poison cup ... 'Socrates is no physician', he said softly to himself: 'death alone is a physician here ... Socrates himself has only been a long time sick.'" [12]

In the *Republic* Socrates is made to say that wisdom consists in knowing how to maintain that balanced harmony of mind which expresses itself in a natural tendency to justice, and that ignorance is the cause of actions that are destructive of the disposition. If it were to be found that Socrates' remedy issued in the lack of balance that produced injustice, then we should have to correlate the charge that Socrates was sick with the charge that he was guilty of folly.

We do not perhaps need to labour the point that in neither version of the anecdote are we talking about the transformation of energies, but rather of containment, though admittedly, the Ciceronian version is not entirely clear. Containment is suggested by the phrase 'overpowered by reason', but not by the remark that he had the vices at birth, with its implication that he had them no longer. It depends on what we take Cicero to think is constituted by no longer 'having' certain vices, and whether indeed it is sufficient, for meriting this description, that one does not allow them expression. Nietzsche, at least, allows Socrates to admit that Zopyrus has recognised him for what he is, though the essential proviso is that he is master of them all. There are other versions of the anecdote. In the early third century C.E., Alexander of Aphrodisias has Socrates improving his natural character by philosophical discipline, and John Cassian's version runs as follows:

"Socrates ... was not ashamed to make the following admission about himself. A 'physiognomer' looked closely at him and said, 'You've a pederast's eyes'. Socrates' disciples rushed at him and were for avenging the insult to their master, but Socrates apparently checked their indignation by saying, 'Hold it, friends, I am. But I control myself.'" [13]

It looks as though Socrates' so called remedy amounts to having discovered some method of keeping the relevant impulses at bay. The implication of such a

remedy, though, is that were he to relax his vigilance, the impulses would seek an outlet as before, unless, of course, under the rigours of the regime, they had become, as we shall see Blake saying shortly, 'only the shadow of desire'. Another possible consequence of this regime is indicated in Blake's rancid reference to that pale religious lechery that wishes but acts not. Nietzsche himself is at his best in identifying and drawing out the consequences of this so-called remedy, whether he is talking about its source in Socrates or about what he calls 'the final exhaustion of Chinadom', represented by 'that old mandarin Kant'. In effect, the Socrates of tradition, as presented in the variants of this anecdote, exemplifies the virtue of continence or self-control. Nietzsche's point, I take it, is not against particular acts of self-control, but against a *life* of continence, the real, and unacceptable ethical cost of which he is at pains to spell out. For example, if what Socrates is made to call in the *Republic* the 'worse elements' are to be mastered or kept under control, then what is required is constant *vigilance* as well as self-restraint. The worse elements need to be *patrolled* if they are to be kept under control. The cost that I have referred to is the expenditure of energy that is required by the logistics of vigilance and control. What we are describing in fact, is a state of great instability, though this is not perhaps apparent in the case of such a virtuoso of continence as the Socrates of tradition. Schiller, for instance, had no illusions about the usual outcome of a struggle between reason and impulse, and that was why, though saddled with Kant's conception of practical reason, he tried to find ways in which the force of impulse could be made to flow with reason. A familiar consequence of such a repressive remedy is resentment. The person who feels this resentment does not necessarily know its real object, and they will seem to have on their hands, as their resentment starts to bite, a further impulse that needs to be controlled, and so on. Nietzsche's references to enervation and a negative relation to life become more plausible as we see the psyche become increasingly embattled. The cost in sheer exhaustion and oppression is a reduction in the energy available for right action.

I suggested just now that the Socrates of tradition is presented and commended in effect as a sort of virtuoso of continence. I say continence rather than merely containment because the context is clearly an ethical one: it is vices and bad impulses that he contains. Someone who is continent is able to do something they take to be good, or avoid doing something they take to be harmful, by restraining contrary impulses. In these little anecdotes, though, Socrates possesses only what we could call negative continence. There is no reference to doing good rather than merely avoiding evil. But a positive continence leads naturally in the direction of temperance. What we have to understand is *how* someone might become temperate. Attention to the good, the striving to act in its light, can help to strengthen and concentrate a person's motivational powers, in a way that makes sense of the idea of a passage from mere continence to the virtue of temperance.

I said at the beginning that Plato instructively hovers between an account of continence and an account of temperance. In the *Republic* Socrates is made to talk of harmony, but what he presents us with is in reality merely control. In the *Symposium*, on the other hand, Plato seems quite close to describing the

quite different psychology of someone who is temperate. It is as though he is in the midst of discovering a difference between two possibilities, which are, of course, more clearly distinguished by Aristotle. What is instructive is that it reveals something of the movement of mind that accompanies, sometimes hinders, sometimes facilitates, the struggle that seems necessary in moving from the one state to the other. I think that one can only escape the Nietzschean criticisms if one can show that Socrates' remedy of self-control is a phase in a person's ethical development rather than the ghastly *cul de sac* that Nietzsche and Blake point to so percipiently.

What I want to do now is attend to what the woman from Mantinea tells us in the *Symposium*, and comment on the incident in which Alcibiades relates how he failed to seduce Socrates.

Socrates' contribution to the speeches is to say what Diotima told him about the ascent to absolute beauty. He does not speak on his own behalf. Again, it is left to Alcibiades to describe Socrates' character and his demeanour in specific contexts. This latter description is crucial, dramatically, because, without making it explicit, Plato effectively describes a demeanour which is internally related to a particular step on the ladder. We make sense of that demeanour by locating it in relation to the stages of ascent, and the anecdote provides an exemplar by reference to which we can see how a person's being on a particular step of the ladder is manifested in characteristic behaviour. Thus, someone would be deluded if they thought they had reached a certain stage of development, but did not manifest a similar kind of demeanour. Better still, it is left to us to draw our own conclusions about where Socrates stands, though he himself leaves it in no doubt where he thinks Alcibiades stands.

Diotima describes the stages on the path to the perfect revelation of absolute beauty, beginning "*with examples of beauty in this world, and using them as steps to ascend continually with that absolute beauty as one's aim, from one instance of physical beauty to two and from two to all, then from physical beauty to moral beauty, and from moral beauty to the beauty of knowledge*" and so on until one knows at last what absolute beauty is.

Diotima remarks to Socrates that once he has seen that,

"You will not value it in terms of gold or rich clothing or the beauty of boys and young men, the sight of whom at present throws you and many people like you into such an ecstasy that, provided that you could always enjoy the sight and company of your darlings, you would be content to go without food and drink, if that were possible, and to pass your whole time with them in the contemplation of their beauty." [14]

It is perhaps somewhat perilous to begin to describe the psychology of temperance by means of such a comparison. But it does very well as an *image* of a radical change in the direction of a person's affective attention, whatever we might want to say in the end about the notion of absolute beauty: not only a change in its direction, but also in its concentration. The picture is that of

someone who has begun to live at a different pitch of energy, and in a world that is consonant with that pitch of energy. I say 'affective attention' because I want to include the thought that in this process of concentration and strengthening one's physical and emotional energies are engaged. If it is the case that the pitch of someone's energies has increased through the gradual sustaining of this direction of attention then the idea that such a person will value absolute beauty beyond "*gold or rich clothing or the beauty of boys or young men*" is a matter of how they find these things ordered in their actual preferences. One might helpfully talk here of the preferences of sensibility, to indicate that we are not talking about a merely intellectual preference but a reordering of desires with consequences which show the difference between continence and temperance:

"Having his eyes fixed upon beauty in the widest sense, he may no longer be the slave of a base and mean-spirited devotion to an individual example of beauty, whether the object of his love be a boy or a man or an activity." [15]

What I am suggesting is that we can make sense of this active re-evaluation by seeing it simply as the *finding*, say, beauty of soul more important to one than physical beauty. One could say, that in your heart you prefer the one to the other, and that relatively to your degree of engagement, there is no difficulty in letting go of the one in favour of the other. I am trying to distinguish here between *finding* that one's preferences have shifted, one's attention engaged elsewhere, and merely believing that one's preferences ought to shift, *believing* that beauty of soul is more valuable than physical beauty. This freedom from attachments seems to me to be compatible with *appreciating* 'individual examples of beauty'. The point is that under the condition of a greater absorption elsewhere, such a person can disengage their attention if it is necessary: they are able to let go of it without this being an exercise in self-control.

I referred a little earlier to 'a world which is consonant with' this different pitch of energy, and I want to try to explain what I mean by that now. We need to take seriously a problem of Diotima's which could easily be passed over as merely charming, but which is vital for what she is given to say about the nature of love. In the ascent to absolute beauty, one first falls in love with some beautiful person and *begets noble sentiments in partnership with him*. [16] Diotima has pointed out already, perhaps somewhat exclusively, that there are some,

"whose creative desire is of the soul, and who long to beget spiritually, not physically, the progeny which it is the nature of the soul to create and bring to birth." [17]

This progeny is said to be wisdom and virtue. But the beginning of noble sentiments in partnership with another is, of course, precisely an activity of the soul, and this helps us to understand what someone comes to appreciate who starts to value beauty of soul, viz., that whose progeny is wisdom and virtue.

Better, they come to appreciate *someone* in a way whose natural issue is the partnership described. It is, after all, the case that when we fall in love we enjoy, at least temporarily, a heightened awareness of the other and a consequent access of sensibility, a care for their welfare, and even an appreciation of the qualities of others. In other words the lover discovers the world I have indicated under the condition of falling in love, and perhaps the ascent from physical beauty to moral beauty depends upon seeing that such a world, with such people in it, is independent of the original condition of its discovery. Plato is not merely concerned with the contemplation of beauty, then, but with the begetting of ideas and sentiments in partnership with others, a process which Plato here connects with an *appreciation* of 'activities and institutions', but which is more closely connected than that, since what is begotten, I suggest, is a form of life, from the beginning shared with others, which is sustainable only at a particular pitch or concentration of one's energies. The reference, then, to a world, is intended to explain in what precisely a person's energies come to be absorbed and drawn out, a form of life which can only be sustained at a particular pitch of concentration and can only be sustained in partnership with others, a form of life to which only souls give birth, and whose nature is ethical. At this point temperance starts to look incidental, at least for anyone who has become established in this form of life. One only remarks it because it eludes one, as the world and partnership associated with it go in and out of focus, are held together and drift away.

Diotima has already gone into detail, describing, for instance, how a person would fall in love with a particular boy and 'beget noble sentiments in partnership with him'. She then remarks, rather ruthlessly, that they will later observe *"that physical beauty in any person is closely akin to physical beauty in any other, and that if he is to make beauty of outward form the object of his quest, it is great folly not to acknowledge that the beauty exhibited in all bodies is one and the same"*. Diotima seems to offer here the sort of consideration that might help one to loosen one's dependence upon someone's physical beauty, and seems to lose sight of the noble sentiments that one begets in partnership with them, sentiments which one would think must go some way to explaining the possibility of ascent to an appreciation of the beauty of soul which she is about to discuss. Diotima says that once a person has reached this conclusion, he will become a lover of all physical beauty, and will relax the intensity of his passion for one particular person, *"because he will realise that such a passion is beneath him and of small account"*. It might have been better to put this somewhat differently, to say that the intensity of the passion simply relaxes because the attention has been absorbed elsewhere, and that seeing that such a passion is beneath one is a consequence and not a cause of this. The next stage is to reckon beauty of soul more valuable than beauty of body. I take it that this means something like: one starts to *find* beauty of soul more interesting, more worthwhile, more engaging, than beauty of body, and this marks a further relaxing of the *orexis*, marks a further change in a person's affective and appetitive disposition. Such a person will *"be led to consider physical beauty taken as a whole a poor thing in comparison"*. Again, we need to be clear that what is meant is that such a person starts to *consider* physical beauty a poor thing in comparison. It is a switch of attention to

other objects of desire, which could be articulated as the finding the one a poor thing by comparison with the other: they are more absorbed by the one than the other. It need not be the case that they no longer *appreciate* physical beauty, but that they are no longer attached to it: greater pleasures are to be found elsewhere. Physical beauty does not detain them in the same way.

I have not really stressed enough how a higher pitch of concentration engages the whole person, so that such a life is one in which one is physically content. This is important for what we should say when we return to our initial theme about the supposed tyranny of reason and the willingness or otherwise of desire. It seems to me that it is only against the genuinely erotic background sketched by Diotima, and the phases of its ascent, that one can begin to see how some initial kind of self-control, as opposed to a *life* of continence, might be necessary for establishing ourselves in the world I described, and to see how the physical desires might become willing partners. Self-control becomes less important when the recalcitrant energies that require it flow in the direction of one's engagement and contribute to its vitality. But the development of concentration is a delicate and precarious activity which depends upon at least occasional self-restraint, since the gathering of subtle energies can be wrecked by self-indulgence. Such a need for self-restraint does not obviously derive from *decadence* or degeneracy.

I come now to what I take to be the real point of the Alcibiades incident. I think it would be a mistake to think of it as an illustration of massive self-control on the part of Socrates, that he does not succumb to Alcibiades' charms. Perhaps the point is that the latter's demeanour, and consequently his physical presence, was less than charming on that occasion. Walter Hamilton plausibly presents Alcibiades as the real suitor: *"in terms of Diotima's doctrine, it is clear that what draws him to Socrates is beauty of soul"* [18] It would be a nice touch if we could present Alcibiades as *not understanding* the nature of Socrates' indifference to his overtures on the night in question. He is made to say,

"but once you see beneath the surface you will discover a degree of self-control of which you can hardly form a notion." [19]

It would be nice touch because it would connect with the representation of him as not understanding the nature of the beauty of the soul that attracts him and makes him feel ashamed of his own imperfections:

"He compels me to realise that I am a mass of imperfections and yet persistently neglect my own true interests by engaging in public life."

[20]

His not understanding the real relations of things in this connection sets limits on what he takes the possibilities to be. The suggestion is that he has a sense that he is neglecting his own true interests without really knowing what those true interests are. Not understanding where they lie makes possible

his delusion about the possible ways in which they can be discovered and realised:

"Believing that he was serious in his admiration of my charms, I supposed that a wonderful piece of good luck had befallen me; I should now be able, in return for my favours, to find out all that Socrates knew; for you must know that there was no limit to the pride that I felt in my good looks."

[21]

I take the point to be that Alcibiades has no conception of the way in which one comes to find out all that Socrates knows and that it is made in the latter's blistering response:

"You must be a very sharp fellow, Alcibiades, if what you say about me is true, and I really have a power which might help you to improve yourself. You must see in me a beauty which is incomparable and far superior to your own physical good looks, and if, having made the discovery, you are trying to get a share of it by exchanging your beauty for mine, you obviously mean to get much the better of the bargain; you are trying to get true beauty in return for sham; in fact what you are proposing is to exchange dress for gold. But look more closely, my good friend, and make quite sure that you are not mistaken in your estimate of my worth. A man's mental vision does not begin to be keen until his physical vision is past its prime, and you are far from having reached that point." [22]

In other words, 'you happen to be right about the nature of my worth, but you are in no position to see it or judge its significance'. The remark that "a man's mental vision does not begin to be keen until his physical vision is past its prime, and you are far from having reached that point" is, dramatically, the response to Alcibiades' thought that he was on the verge of finding out all that Socrates knew.

What I want to draw from this exchange is the vital thought that one's understanding, or lack of understanding, of the realities that Plato seeks to describe, determines the world in which one takes oneself to be operating, and determines among other things, what one takes one's own, or anyone else's, true interests to be. The essential background of such judgments is an accumulated knowledge or human experience, constantly open to doubt, qualification, correction, confirmation. Our conception of the good or harm that can befall us depends upon our understanding of the way the world really is. It seems to me that the real task of the moral philosopher is to try to describe the way the world really is.

I now return to Plato's *Republic*, partly to see whether it provides evidence for the charge that Socrates makes a tyrant of reason, and partly to see what our previous discussion does for our assessment of Plato's doctrine of the soul.

It is a common first response to Glaucon's claim that no one is just save under compulsion to protest that human beings are not really like that, that

there is at least as much altruism in the world as ruthless egotism, and that Glaucon is merely passing on a cynical or pessimistic view of human nature. Socrates does not in fact disagree with the assessment. What he offers instead is a *diagnosis* of the conditions under which injustice emerges, and a corresponding account of the conditions under which a person will be disposed to be just. Such opposite dispositions are in reality reflections of the state of the soul. Injustice, we could say, is the natural expression of a state of the soul in which the elements are unbalanced or out of harmony. If, by contrast, the soul is properly organised, then this will have its own consequences for action. Plato distinguished three elements: reason, spirit, and appetite. They are in the right relation to each other if reason rules, spirit obeys and supports reason, and if both of these together prevent appetite from taking its fill. Plato conceives and explicitly presents this right relation between the three elements as one of unity and harmony. Harmony produces justice, and conflict produces injustice. A person in whom the right relation between the elements exists is described as 'self-controlled':

"Then don't we call (someone) self-controlled when all these three elements are in harmonious agreement, when reason and its subordinates are all agreed that reason should rule and there is no dissension?" [23]

It seems reasonable to respond to this by saying that the existence of a proper relation between the elements certainly does not entail any kind of harmony. No doubt Kant, for instance, would want to say that a right relation exists between pure practical reason and inclination so long as we are able to act in the light of rational judgments and resist the sway of contrary inclinations, but I am sure that he would not want to think of this as a state of *harmony*. In fact I am inclined to see something faintly sinister in Plato's description of the regime of reason as one of harmonious agreement. He certainly recognises the importance of agreement, but gives us no reason in the text to believe that such harmony exists. There can, after all, be more than one reason for the absence of dissent. Perhaps what we really have here is one of those unreliable political statements put out by the Ministry of Reason. In effect Plato stresses the importance of the psyche being integrated into a harmonious, unified whole, and claims that in the 'self-controlled' man this is indeed the case. But we don't seem to have any good reason to believe that there is harmony. He says, for example,

"Properly trained, reason and spirit must be put in charge of appetite ... they must prevent it taking its fill." [24]

There is no reason to suppose that the appetites, which are described as "*naturally insatiable*" [25], are going to be satisfied with this arrangement, or consent to it. The real picture seems better expressed by Blake's famous lines:

"Those who restrain desire do so only because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer, or reason, usurps its place and governs the unwilling."

And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive, till it is only the shadow of desire." [26]

If we return to our original question and ask whether Nietzsche was right to say that Socrates makes a tyrant of reason, then the answer, 'Yes, he does', starts to look plausible. However, we are faced with the small difficulty of not knowing what it really means to say that reason rules or plays the tyrant. Let us leave that aside for the moment and continue with our metaphors of domination and oppression. It does seem to be the case that if there is anything that corresponds to the idea of reason 'ruling' then it 'governs the unwilling'. Someone might want to claim, the weight of a whole tradition behind them, that our bodily natures are radically unruly and that there is no alternative to suppressing their impulses, whether we call this suppression a tyranny of reason or anything else. But such an objector seems to me rightly the object of Nietzsche's suspicion: what is the case with someone whose experience leads them to suppose that their physical natures are radically unruly? Such a view appears to me to derive from a particular, contingent, experience of the body. To put the matter more boldly, it shows a failure of understanding. It is worth seeing how Plato seems to be the victim of this limited experience.

Reason and spirit are put in charge of appetite,

"which forms the greater part of each man's make-up and is naturally insatiable. They must prevent it talking its fill of the so-called physical pleasures, for otherwise it will get too large and strong to mind its own business and will try to subject and control the other elements, which it has no right to do, and so wreck life completely." [27]

What this reveals is a particular experience of the body, one that is dependent upon specific conditions. The same experience is reflected in the following passage about reason and appetite:

"We can call the reflective element in the mind the reason and the element with which it feels hunger and thirst, and the agitations of sex, the irrational element - an element closely connected with pleasure and satisfaction." [28]

But it is a commonplace that the appetites only appear insatiable, only appear to increase their demands as they take their fill, when we have no other sources of pleasure or satisfaction. By contrast, the world of feeling and partnership that a person begins to inhabit as their energies become more concentrated is itself a place of physical satisfaction. Practices such as meditation and *hatha yoga* can bring about a subtle change in the experience of the bodily appetites. Certainly they take their fill, but anyone who has any sensitivity to their own body can distinguish between what the body in such a state is satisfied with and what we are simply forcing upon it, or forcing it to do. Their taking their fill does not increase their demands. The need for ever greater stimulation is not a sign of insatiability but of emotional disorder.

This is a claim about the way the world really is. If someone does not realise that things are thus and so, then that failure of understanding sets limits on what could be a rational strategy for them in dealing with the problem of the passions. There is a point in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* where Blake describes reason as the bound or outward circumference of energy. I have always found this an intriguing saying, and it seems to me to offer a better metaphor than that of the rule, or indeed the slavery, of reason. We act within the bounds, if not of reason, then at least of our understanding. [29]

In any event it turns out that reason is powerless to rule. It needs the support of spirit. Socrates is made to say that the element of control is due to reason, but that the role of spirit is to obey and support it:

"And don't we often see a man whose desires are trying to force him to do something his reason disapproves of cursing himself and getting indignant with them? It is like a struggle between political factions, with indignation fighting on the side of reason." [30]

But if it is true that in Plato's regime reason governs the unwilling, we do not really have an harmonious agreement at all but conflict, precisely that lack of balance which Plato connects with a disposition to act unjustly. Thus he explains the existence of injustice in the individual by saying that,

"It must be some kind of internal quarrel between these ... three elements, when they interfere with each other and trespass on each other's functions, or when one of them sets itself up to control the whole when it has no business to do so, because its natural role is one of subordination to the control of its superior. This sort of situation, when the elements of the mind are in confusion, is what produces injustice, indiscipline, ignorance and vice of all kinds." [31]

The urgency of the need for control, the need for continence, seems to me to have determined Plato's conception of what an integrated unity could look like. His reasoning is already disposed in favour of the metaphor of rule by the reality that confronted him in his own person, and his instinctive response to it. His strategy is borrowed from the received political resort to force. The fact that the metaphor suggests itself at all reflects a minor state of emergency. But as I have already said, this rational strategy is an option only within the limits of a particular understanding of the nature of the body. This would make Plato a sort of reformed Alcibiades. The possibility of Plato seeing that reason might be usurping its place is foreclosed by the very metaphor of rule that determines his thinking. Reason is conceived as the ruling element and this puts limits on what could count as harmony between the different elements, as though someone were to say, 'I'm the king, and I want to stand in harmonious relations with the rest of you'.

But if it turned out that reason were usurping its place, we should have to say that it was not minding its own business. It would be an element which had set itself up to rule the whole when it had no business to do so. Such

conflict, by Plato's own reckoning, would have consequences in unjust behaviour. I think that Nietzsche is often simply spelling out those consequences.

Finally, there is something not quite right about the way in which this impressive connection between justice and harmony is expressed. It tempts one to think that if only one could gather together the elements into some sort of unity, justice would somehow look after itself, when, in reality, it is the harmony that has to look after itself. The natural connection between harmony of soul and justice is established for us in the discovery of a relation to others in which one finds oneself fully integrated. When that dissolves one may find oneself wondering how one can return to that happy state of harmony rather than wondering how one can find one's way back to that relation to others.

My conclusion is that it is an oversimplification to say that Socrates makes a tyrant of reason. We act to try to stop our passions becoming fatalities, dragging us down under the weight of their folly, or wrecking life completely, but the limits of our understanding determines that we exercise a tyranny over ourselves, since we can see no option but containment. The strategy itself is an old, instinctive, one. As understanding grows, other possibilities suggest themselves.

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Notes

This article was originally delivered as 'work in progress', to the Philosophy Society of University College, Swansea.

1. *Twilight of the Idols*, trs. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1968, p.42
2. *ibid.* p.44
3. *ibid.* p.42
4. *ibid.* p.32
5. *ibid.* p.29
6. *ibid.* p.34
7. *ibid.* p.33
8. *ibid.* p.30
9. *ibid.* p.33
10. *Socrates - a source book*, ed. J. Ferguson, London 1970, p.192
11. *ibid.* p.193
12. *Twilight of the Idols*, p.34
13. Ferguson, p.314
14. *The Symposium*, trs. W. Hamilton, Harmondsworth 1951, p.94
15. *ibid.* p.93
16. *ibid.* p.92
17. *ibid.* p.90
18. *ibid.* introduction, p.28
19. *ibid.* p.102-3
20. *ibid.* p.101
21. *ibid.* p.103
22. *ibid.* p.106
23. *The Republic*, trs. D. Lee, Harmondsworth 1955, p.219
24. *ibid.*
25. *ibid.*
26. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, ed. J. Bronowski, *William Blake*, Harmondsworth 1958, p.95
27. *The Republic*, p.219
28. *ibid.* p.215
29. *op. cit.* p.94
30. *The Republic*, p.216
31. *ibid.* p.221-2

THE YIDAM REFUGE

by Dharmacharini Guṇabhadri

Yidam is a Tibetan word, meaning 'oath-bound', bound by an oath. It is sometimes translated as 'guarantor', one who guarantees (the attainment of Enlightenment). It is equivalent to the Sanskrit term *iṣṭadevatā*, which is one's chosen or selected divinity. In other words, the yidam is that special aspect of the Dharma (or of Reality), through which we can approach the Enlightenment experience, embodied in a concrete form or image. Strictly speaking, the yidam is a wrathful form of the Anuttarayoga Tantra (the highest stage of Tantric practice), usually represented in yab yum posture, but we can use the term more loosely and by yidam refer to the Buddha- or Bodhisattva-figure to whom we are particularly devoted, and to whom we go for refuge. *

If we go for refuge to a particular yidam, to Tārā, Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrasattva and so on, for us the whole of the Dharma is contained in, embodied in this yidam-figure. What we usually learn from books, we can learn through contact with and direct experience of our yidam, through our meditation practice. Instead of reading books about the Dharma, we can focus our attention on our yidam, develop a friendship with our yidam; and this in itself can bring us to insight experience, nourish us spiritually, and even take us all the way to Enlightenment.

Now how do we do this? How do we develop a friendship with a yidam? How do we 'bind' ourselves to a particular yidam-figure? I am not going to give you a straight-down-the-line answer. There is no straight-down-the-line answer. What I will do (which is all I can do) is offer you a glimpse of my own explorations; and this is only to the extent that those explorations can be put into words, and to the extent that I am able to evoke and convey something of them to you. I would like us to look at the yidam-refuge and explore the nature of our relationship with the yidam under the following overlapping headings:

1. The yidam as our friend and lover.
2. Fidelity to our yidam.
3. The yidam and our world (bringing the yidam into everyday experience).
4. The yidam's transforming power.

I would like to use *Endymion*, a long poem by Keats, as an illustration and a point of reference, using it as a sort of mirror.

*"...once more I raised
My sight right upward: but it was quite dazed
by a bright something, sailing down apace,
Making me quickly veil my eyes and face;
Again I looked, and, O ye deities
Who from Olympus watch our destinies!*

*Whence that completed form of all completeness?
Whence came that high perfection of all sweetness?
Speak, stubborn earth, and tell me where, O where
Hast thou a symbol of her golden hair?
Not oat-sheaves drooping in the western sun;
Not - thy soft hand, fair sister! let me shun
Such follying before thee - yet she had,
Indeed, locks bright enough to make me mad;
And they were simply gordianed up and braided,
Leaving, in naked comeliness, unshaded,
Her pearl-round ears, white neck, and orb'd brow;
The which were blended in, I know not how,
With such a paradise of lips and eyes,
Blush-tinted cheeks, half smiles, and faintest sighs,
That, when I think thereon, my spirit clings
And plays about its fancy, till the stings
Of human neighbourhood envenom all.*

*Unto what awful power shall I call?
To what high fane? - Ah! see her hovering feet,
More blue-veined, more soft, more whitely sweet
Than those of sea-born Venus, when she rose
From out her cradle shell. The wind out-blows
Her scarf into a fluttering pavilion;
'Tis blue, and over-spangled with a million
Of little eyes, as though thou wert to shed,
Over the darkest, lushest blue-bell bed,
Handfuls of daisies...
And then, towards me, like a very maid,
Came blushing, waning, willing, and afraid,
And pressed me by the hand: Ah! 't was too much;
Methought I fainted at the charmed touch,
Yet held my recollection, even as one
Who dives three fathoms where the waters run
Gurgling in beds of coral: for anon,
I felt up-mounted in that region
Where falling stars dart their artillery forth,
And eagles struggle with the buffeting north
That balances the heavy meteor-stone -
Felt too, I was not fearful, nor alone,
But lapped and lulled along the dangerous sky.
Soon, as it seemed, we left our journeying high,
and straightway into frightful eddies swooped,
Such as aye muster where grey time has scooped
Huge dens and caverns in a mountain's side,
There hollow sounds aroused me, and I sighed
To faint once more by looking on my bliss -
I was distracted; madly did I kiss
The wooing arms which held me, and did give*

My eyes at once to death - but 'twas to live,
 To take in draughts of life from the gold fount
 Of kind and passionate looks; to count, and count
 The moments, by some greedy help that seemed
 A second self, that each might be redeemed
 And plundered of its load of blessedness.
 Ah, desperate mortal! I e'en dared to press,
 Her very cheek against my crowned lip.
 And, at that moment, felt my body dip
 Into a warmer air - a moment more,
 Our feet were soft in flowers. There was store
 Of newest joys upon that alp..." [1]

Endymion's vision is of the kind that might be experienced in a state of *dhyāna*, a vision that appears before him, again and again: in dreams, in meditation, at unexpected moments; at times he asks for it to come. It is a vision of a beautiful woman, a goddess. This goddess loves Endymion, and wants to unite with him as a mortal. Endymion himself becomes obsessed, lives for nothing else but to join with this vision, this beloved. But Endymion's vision is not just something visual. It is a complete experience. All his senses are involved: he sees, he hears, he feels and smells, is moved and touched and yearns and loves. Nothing in this world can touch upon, is good enough in comparison with, or engages him as much as the experience of this beauty, as this communication with the beautiful goddess. So we see that Endymion is profoundly moved and stirred by his contact with the goddess. There is a strong emotional aspect in the vision. We see Endymion's love and passion, his *experience* of beauty.

We can have this same experience with our yidam. The form of the yidam, the particular Buddha or Bodhisattva we are visualizing in meditation, is subtle, but the experience of the Buddha or Bodhisattva is very concrete. We don't just vaguely think about the form of the yidam, it is not just a mental picture we build up - but we have a very vivid experience of it. To get a vivid experience, we need to involve our emotions. This is where the yidam as our friend and lover comes in, the first of our headings. We shall be looking at this aspect in some depth, for I think it is a very important aspect of the yidam refuge.

1. The yidam as friend and lover

We can't go for refuge just intellectually. To really go for refuge there has to be a living spark of devotion, or faith. We need faith, or devotion, to be able to move towards our goal. This devotion is most easily channelled toward a being, a body of a being, rather than to something in the abstract. The form of the yidam can be this body. Its beauty, its colour, its qualities and light, draw us. This is the form of our aspiration, our vision. This is what we want to become, what we want to go for refuge to.

We love the beauty and gentle expression of Mañjuśrī's face; his 16 year old, amber body, seated in meditation posture, holding his sword - the

Prajñāpāramitā text held close to his heart. We are drawn towards the delicate gentleness of Tārā's caring posture and features; the way in which she sits with her one hand holding lotuses in the gesture of fearlessness, and her other hand stretching out, giving; seated with one leg in meditation posture and the other stepping into the world, ready to act out of compassion. We feel refreshed when gazing upon the radiant clear white face of Vajrasattva, showering us with milk-like bliss, that helps us contact once again our own inner purity. We feel their qualities. We hear their mantra. The same is true whatever Buddha or Bodhisattva we choose: Vajrapāṇi, Avalokiteśvara, Prajñāpāramitā and so on. We like their form, their implements, the qualities they convey; and we want to become like them, move towards these Bodhisattvas, move towards our vision.

Yet how do we move towards our vision? How can we move towards what we aspire to become? This is where our emotions come in. In response to the yidam's qualities and beauty, we experience a strong emotion of love, or even desire, which drives us. This is the dynamic aspect of our going for refuge. We want to move towards the yidam. We want the yidam to move towards us. We want to embrace the yidam, receive what the yidam has to offer. We want to unite with the yidam. Just as one flings oneself into the arms of a lover, one goes for refuge to one's yidam.

Let us consider the first stage of our relationship with a lover, 'falling in love'. We see a beautiful person, with some very lovely qualities. When we're with them, we feel uplifted, we feel inspired. Usually, to begin with, we think that the lover has all those wonderful qualities that we don't have, and therefore we want continually to be in the lover's company, in order to experience those qualities. Now, the same may happen when we first meet our yidam. For some people, it is love at first sight (or hearing). For others it is a more gradual process, a slow but sure maturing process of our love for the yidam. The yidam possesses qualities that we have not fully developed in ourselves; or qualities in ourselves of which we are not conscious. So we need contact with the yidam in order to recognize and learn about those qualities. We need contact with Mañjuśrī to learn about wisdom; we need contact with Tārā to learn about compassion; contact with Vajrapāṇi, to learn about energy.

Now, in non-growth love relationships, this projection of qualities onto the lover is unconscious, and so things progress no further. We need the lover continually, to be able to experience these qualities. Without the lover we have no access to them. With the yidam, however, we engage in this process of projection consciously. We use the projection to come to recognize hidden aspects of ourselves. We see those qualities out there in the figure of the yidam, and use the projection, learn to *own* the projection. Slowly, slowly - by opening ourselves more and more to the 'personality' of the yidam, to its qualities, and emblems - we come to imbibe these qualities ourselves.

Through visualizing the yidam, we contemplate, become absorbed in it. By becoming absorbed in the yidam (and this can be compared to being in close embrace with a lover) we absorb at the same time its spiritual qualities; we experience what the yidam represents, and through experiencing its qualities, we

can come to understand it. Having once experienced, having once understood, having once become the yidam, we can then come back to that experience in ourselves again and again. We know that aspect of the Dharma from then on. Each yidam embodies the whole of the Dharma, under a particular aspect. When we become intimate with someone we really love, it touches and changes us very deeply and delicately. In the same way, becoming 'spiritually intimate' with our yidam touches us very deeply and changes us. Eventually, the yidam is absorbed in us and we have become absorbed into the yidam. We have incorporated the yidam's qualities. We have absorbed that particular aspect of the Dharma. However, because we forget, we have to come back to the yidam again and again. Slowly slowly, though, we become more and more like the yidam and eventually, when we have imbibed all the qualities, we become enlightened.

That is the mechanism. The important thing to remember is that the emotional experience we can have with the yidam is like that of love. Just as Endymion loves his goddess and is profoundly moved by his experience of her - it affects all he does in daily life - we can love our yidam, and be profoundly moved by the experience. But what happens with Endymion after he has had his vision? I am afraid to say, he falls asleep, and in this way he loses his vision. Does this not ring a bell? Only too often we are profoundly moved by something we found a source of inspiration and suddenly a haze, a veil, comes over us, our state of mind grows dull: we lose our vision. On waking up, Endymion moans,

"...Ah! my sighs, my tears,
My clenched hands - for lo! the poppies hung
Dew-dabbled on their stalks, the ouzel sung
A heavy ditty, and the sullen day
Had chidden herald Hesperus away,
With leaden looks: the solitary breeze
Blustered, and slept, and its wild self did tease
With wayward melancholy; and I thought,
Mark me, Peona! that sometimes it brought
Faint fare-thee-wells, and sigh-shrilled adieus! -
Away I wandered - all the pleasant hues
Of heaven and earth had faded: deepest shade
Were deepest dungeons; heaths and sunny glades
Were full of pestilent light; our taintless rills
Seemed sooty, and o'er-spread with upturned gills
Of dying fish; the vermeil rose had blown
In frightful scarlet, and its thorns out-grown
Like spiked aloe..." (2)

Endymion has lost his vision, and perceives the world - in comparison with his visionary experience of the goddess - as soiled and unattractive. All colours, in comparison to what he had seen, seem faint and dull. All forms are ugly. The light of the sun is painful. Endymion is not happy and wants to cling onto, search back for his visionary experience. He experiences a split between the beauty and emotional fulfilment of his vision and that of his worldly life. He knows a higher beauty in his vision, and what he used to see

as beautiful in the world, he now perceives as ugly in comparison with the beautiful goddess and the realms to which she takes him. Throughout the poem, we see Endymion searching for the goddess. His lust is not for worldly life. His heart is set upon the goddess. In every corner, cave, mountain-dwelling, or brook, flutter of wings or change of light, he is ready to catch a glimpse of his goddess again. He constantly bears her in mind and cannot forget her. Although Endymion loses this vision again and again, he is ever keen to regain it - in fact he wants nothing else. He displays an attitude of utter loyalty to his goddess, to his vision, and is not happy when he is not in communication with her. This brings us to the second of our headings, namely the 'question of,

2. Fidelity to our yidam

This attitude that Endymion portrays we also can cultivate towards our yidam. In meditation we may have a strong experience of our yidam. We experience its qualities, we experience its essence, and we become that experience ourselves, in the course of the meditation. But then, we lose it in everyday life. We are in touch with compassion when meeting Tārā in meditation, but we lose it when we come out of meditation. We are in touch, to some extent, with Mañjughoṣa's wisdom, Vajrasattva's purity, but we lose it in daily living. So what we need is a way to keep in contact with our yidam in daily life - a thread of connection that is continuous. This brings us back to the original meaning of the word 'yidam', which is 'oath-bound'. We need to bind ourselves to the yidam by an oath, as it were. We need to form a very special link that we do our utmost not to sever. When we take a friendship seriously, we make a point of spending time with our friend. We can do the same with our yidam. We can resolve to meet it in meditation: we do our visualization-practice daily. We can recite the mantra as often as we can, or at least be in contact with the mantra throughout the day (and night). This keeps us connected with our yidam. We try to keep a thread of reflection, to keep the yidam as a constant companion in our mind, continually connecting ourselves with it by reciting the mantra, recollecting its image or the qualities, staying in touch with it through our love. We treat the yidam as a good friend, and ask it for favours. In the Vajrasattva practice we chant the mantra:

"...vajrasattvatvenopatiṣṭa	stand by me
dṛḍho me bhava	stand firm for me, be strong for me
sutoṣyo me bhava	be contented with me
supoṣyo me bhava	be pleased with me
anurakto me bhava	love me passionately..."

We try to be like the yidam, not in any wilful way but from within, through a genuine identification with it. We try not to let present impressions cause us to forget our practice, cause us to forget the qualities we are trying to develop. Thus the yidam comes to occupy the centre of our attention, not just in meditation, but throughout our daily life as well.

Now, when we are thus faithful to our yidam in daily life, we find that an interesting thing starts to happen. By being in intimate contact with it in

meditation-practice - by loving it passionately, by merging with it - we become like it during that time and absorb its qualities. This enables us to be like the yidam in everyday life. By trying to put these qualities into practice in everyday life, we also find we can meet our yidam more easily in meditation. The yidam is a very faithful friend. When we are ready to meet, it will be there. It is usually we who are unfaithful to the yidam. But if we practise fidelity and so reflect on the Dharma, the yidam's qualities, throughout the day, if we have the yidam constantly in our mind, if we allow this experience of being with our yidam to change ourselves and our life in every aspect, we will see that our whole world changes. It changes into a world which is more like the yidam's world. This brings us to the third of our headings, namely,

3. The yidam and our world (bringing the yidam into everyday experience)

The beauty and love we experience through the yidam is not something distinct and separate. No, we begin to see beauty everywhere, and therefore take delight in and love everything and everybody. So our relationship with the yidam is not exclusive. Through perceiving its beauty, we can actually learn to see this same beauty everywhere around us, in all we see and do. Through openness to, and love for, our yidam, we can become more emotionally open to all around us, we can love more. Through our contact with the yidam, with its qualities and attendant emotions, we learn to open up to the experience of those qualities and emotions in ourselves. We become capable of perceiving and experiencing those qualities and emotions anywhere and not just in relation to the yidam.

We perceive the quality of Tārā's tenderness in a gentle action of care by a mother towards her child, perhaps. Or we perceive it in the delicacy of a pink and fragrant flower in a spring garden. We see Tārā shining through in the eyes of a painting. We hear Mañjuśrī as two friends communicate with each other, or when we are stimulated by someone's eloquence, or by clear and cutting perception. We feel Vajrasattva's presence in the innocence and purity of a landscape, or meet him in someone's radiantly bright face. Thus we do not meet the yidam only in our meditation practice, but the yidam comes to meet us in our everyday life. It comes to meet us through the eyes of a lover. It comes to meet us in the gesture of a beckoning hand; through the beauty of a flower; in the smile of a stranger. It comes to meet us in the wisdom of an old woman; in the light that shines and filters through a canopy onto some tables on a terrace in a little village in the South of France. It comes to meet us through the sound of the buzzing cars in the High Street; through the exchange of coins between shop assistant and customer. It can meet us anywhere, at any time, in any place, if we're open to it. The more we get to know our yidam in our meditation practice - its form, its qualities, its texture - the more we will be able to recognize it in our everyday life. The more we are able to imbibe the qualities of our yidam (consciously), the more we will be able to bring our yidam into the experience of our own and other people's world.

This is what Endymion did not yet see, when he had lost his vision after falling asleep, and found himself perceiving his ordinary world as dull and

unattractive. This is what we often do not see, for example, when we come off retreat and find our experience of the world unpleasant and demanding. Endymion, in the progression of the poem, comes to an understanding of this and realizes in the end that for him there is no difference between his visionary goddess and an earthly maiden. We, too, have to come gradually to an understanding like this. Not just intellectually, but deeply emotionally. We have to come to experience that the yidam is no different from our everyday world. We have to come to experience our yidam, the Dharma, in everything we do, everything and everyone we see and engage with in the world. If we can do this, then I think we are well on our way to transcending the dichotomy between vision and worldly experience, Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa.

4. The yidam's transforming power

The power of the yidam to transform our lives has emerged in the previous sections. We have seen that through loving the yidam we come to embody his or her qualities ourselves and therefore become the yidam. We have seen that by being faithful to the yidam, we come to experience the world as more like that of the yidam. He or she becomes a part of our everyday world. The force of this transforming power is expressed by Endymion who, having asked where happiness lies, answers,

*"...In that which beckons
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence; till we shine
Full alchemized, and free of space..."* [3]

It is important to understand that the yidam is not a being distinct from, alien to ourselves before we begin to meditate upon it. It is the potential, the curled-up serpent lying dormant within us; so that as we develop a relationship it is with our qualities, qualities that we are now ready to bring out into the open. It follows from this that the yidam's transforming power is no other than our own. But we can only become this potential, this image, if we are prepared to let go of our own self-view. We can only become it, if we are prepared to change, if we are prepared to die.

If we truly perceive and see our yidam, then we will perceive what lies beyond the outer, subtle form of the yidam (*samayasattva*) and come to experience the spiritual essence (the *jñānasattva*) of the yidam, which transcends subject and object, transcends the distinction between the yidam and ourselves. In the words of Endymion:

*"...that moment have we stepped
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a floating spirit's..."* [4]

This then is our experience of the Dharma. Both the yidam and ourselves participate in this experience. There is no difference between ourselves and the yidam any longer.

"...there are entanglements, enthrallments far
 More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
 To the chief intensity; the crown of these
 Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
 Upon the forehead of humanity.
 All its more ponderous and bulky worth
 Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth
 A steady splendour; but at the tip-top,
 There hangs by unseen film, an orb'd drop
 Of light, and that is love: its influence,
 Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
 At which we start and fret; till in the end,
 Melting into its radiance, we blend,
 Mingle, and so become a part of it -
 Nor with aught else can our souls interknit
 So wingedly. When we combine therewith,
 Life's self is nourished by its proper pith,
 And we are nurtured like a pelican brood." [5]

The yidam is a gateway that we can use to participate in the Enlightenment experience. Our love and friendship for the yidam is a gateway through which we can pass towards Enlightenment. Through our love for the yidam, our fidelity to its qualities, through our perception and experience of the yidam's beauty, we can enter a new world, can gain a new experience, can transform ourselves and transform the world around us.

Finally, we have to leave both the selves that we know and the yidam that we know behind...

Notes:

This is the edited text of a talk given at Tārāloka, in April 1989.

* Information from *Questions and Answers on Creative Symbols of the Tantric Path to Enlightenment (Refuge Tree and Guru)* - Sangharakshita

1. John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, London 1973; p.123-124 verses 600-666
2. *ibid.* p.125 verses 681-698
3. *ibid.* p.127-128 verses 777-780
4. *ibid.* p.128 verses 795-797
5. *ibid.* p.128 verses 797-815

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