



Buddhist Publication Society

Newsletter

No. 29
First Mailing 1995

Dhamma and Non-Duality — II

In this sequel to the previous essay, I intend to discuss three major areas of difference between the Buddha's Teaching, which we may refer to here as "the Ariyan Dhamma," and the philosophies of non-duality. These areas correspond to the three divisions of the Buddhist path—virtue, concentration, and wisdom.

In regard to virtue, the distinction between the two teachings is not immediately evident, as both generally affirm the importance of virtuous conduct at the start of training. The essential difference between them emerges, not at the outset, but only later, in the way they evaluate the role of morality in the advanced stages of the path. For the non-dual systems, all dualities are finally transcended in the realisation of the non-dual reality, the Absolute or fundamental ground. As the Absolute encompasses and transcends all diversity, for one who has realised it the distinctions between good and evil, virtue and non-virtue, lose their ultimate validity. Such distinctions, it is said, are valid only at the conventional level, not at the level of final realisation; they are binding on the trainee, not on the adept. Thus we find that in their historical forms (particularly in Hindu and Buddhist Tantra), philosophies of non-duality hold that the conduct of the enlightened sage cannot be circumscribed by moral rules. The sage has transcended all conventional distinctions of good and evil. He acts spontaneously from his intuition of the Ultimate and therefore is no longer bound by the rules of morality valid for those still struggling towards the light. His behaviour is an elusive, incomprehensible outflow of what has been called "crazy wisdom."

For the Ariyan Dhamma, the distinction between the two types of conduct, moral and immoral, is sharp and clear, and this distinction persists all the way through to the consummation of the path: "Bodily conduct is twofold, I say, to be cultivated and not to be cultivated, and such conduct is either the one or the other" (MN 114). The conduct of the ideal Buddhist sage, the arahant, necessarily embodies the highest standards of moral rectitude both in the spirit and in the letter, and for him conformity to the letter is spontaneous and natural. The Buddha says that the liberated one lives restrained by the rules of the Vinaya, seeing danger in the slightest faults. He cannot intentionally commit any breach of the moral precepts, nor would he ever pursue any course of action motivated by desire, hatred, delusion, or fear.

In the sphere of concentration, or meditation practice, we again find a striking difference in outlook between the non-dual systems and the Ariyan Dhamma. Since, for the non-dual systems, distinctions are ultimately unreal, meditation practice is not explicitly oriented towards the removal of mental defilements and the cultivation of virtuous states of mind. In these systems, it is often said that defilements are mere appearances devoid of intrinsic reality, even manifestations of the Absolute. Hence to engage in a programme of practice to overcome them is an exercise in futility, like fleeing from an apparition demon: to seek to eliminate defilements is to reinforce the illusion of duality. The meditative themes that ripple through the non-dual currents of thought declare: "no defilement and no purity"; "the defilements are in essence the same as transcendent wisdom"; "it is by passion that passion is removed."

In the Ariyan Dhamma, the practice of meditation unfolds from start to finish as a process of mental purification. The process begins with the recognition of the dangers in unwholesome

states: they are real pollutants of our being that need to be restrained and eliminated. The consummation is reached in the complete destruction of the defilements through the cultivation of their wholesome antidotes. The entire course of practice demands a recognition of the differences between the dark and bright qualities of the mind, and devolves on effort and diligence: “One does not tolerate an arisen unwholesome thought, one abandons it, dispels it, abolishes it, nullifies it” (MN 2). The hindrances are “causes of blindness, causes of ignorance, destructive to wisdom, not conducive to Nibbāna” (SN 46:40). The practice of meditation purges the mind of its corruptions, preparing the way for the destruction of the cankers (*āsavakkhaya*).

Finally, in the domain of wisdom, the Ariyan Dhamma and the non-dual systems once again move in contrary directions. In the non-dual systems the task of wisdom is to break through the diversified appearances (or the appearance of diversity) in order to discover the unifying reality that underlies them. Concrete phenomena, in their distinctions and their plurality, are mere appearance, while true reality is the One: either a substantial Absolute (the Atman, Brahman, the Godhead, etc.), or a metaphysical zero (Sunyata, the Void Nature of Mind, etc.). For such systems, liberation comes with the arrival at the fundamental unity in which opposites merge and distinctions evaporate like dew.

In the Ariyan Dhamma wisdom aims at seeing and knowing things as they really are (*yathābhūtāñānadassana*). Hence, to know things as they are, wisdom must respect phenomena in their precise particularity. Wisdom leaves diversity and plurality untouched. It instead seeks to uncover the characteristics of phenomena, to gain insight into their qualities and structures. It moves, not in the direction of an all-embracing identification with the All, but towards disengagement and detachment, release from the All. The cultivation of wisdom in no way “undermines” concrete phenomena by reducing them to appearances, nor does it treat them as windows opening to some fundamental ground. Instead it investigates and discerns, in order to understand things as they are: “And what does one understand as it really is? One understands: ‘Such is form, such its arising and passing away. Such is feeling ... perception ... formations ... consciousness, such its arising and passing away.’” “When one sees, ‘All formations are impermanent, all are suffering, everything is not self,’ one turns away from suffering: this is the path to purity.”

Spiritual systems are coloured as much by their favourite similes as by their formulated tenets. For the non-dual systems, two similes stand out as predominant. One is space, which simultaneously encompasses all and permeates all yet is nothing concrete in itself; the other is the ocean, which remains self-identical beneath the changing multitude of its waves. The similes used within the Ariyan Dhamma are highly diverse, but one theme that unites many of them is acuity of vision—vision which discerns the panorama of visible forms clearly and precisely, each in its own individuality: “It is just as if there were a lake in a mountain recess, clear, limpid, undisturbed, so that a man with good sight standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish swimming about and resting. He might think: ‘There is this lake, clear, limpid, undisturbed, and there are these shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also these shoals of fish swimming about and resting.’ So too a monk understands as it actually is: ‘This is suffering, this is the origin of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’ When he knows and sees thus his mind is liberated from the cankers, and with the mind’s liberation he knows that he is liberated” (MN 39).

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Publications

Recent Releases

- *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Original translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, revised and edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi. This book offers a complete translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, a collection of 152 “middle length” discourses of the Buddha. Many of these are among the most profound and inspiring in the Pali Canon. Produced as a high-quality hardback, 3 volumes in one, with notes, glossary, indexes. For sale in Asia only. (Outside Asia available from Wisdom Publications, Boston.) Books are due by late May.

Hardback: 1,420 pages 160 mm x 235 mm
U.S. \$50.00; SL Rs. 2,400. Order No. BP 218H

- *Nyanaponika: A Farewell Tribute*. Edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi. A commemoration volume in honour of our late Founding-President, Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathera. Includes a biographical sketch, bibliography, appreciations, excerpts from his writings, documents, and photographs.

Softback: 80 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$2.50; SL Rs. 100. Order No. BP 6115

- *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*. G.P. Malalasekera. Reprint of an old classic by the doyen of Sri Lanka’s Oriental scholars. In a little more than 300 pages, the author admirably surveys Sri Lanka’s rich legacy of Pali Buddhist literature, from the earliest period to the present century. This is a gracefully written history of Sri Lankan Buddhism as reflected in its Pali literary heritage.

Softback: 350 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$15.00; SL Rs. 350. Order No. BP 6105

Back in Print

- *The Path of Freedom: The Vimuttimaggā*. Translated from the Chinese by N.R.M. Ehara, Soma Thera, Kheminda Thera. Written in Pali in Sri Lanka during the first century A.C., the Vimuttimaggā *survived* only in a Chinese translation, from which the present rendering has been made. Ascribed to the Arahant Upatissa, the work is a meditation manual similar in structure to the Visuddhimaggā, but less analytical and more practical in its treatment of meditation.

Softback: 424 pages 152 mm x 227 mm
U.S. \$20.00; Rs. 450. Order No. BP 208S

- *The Progress of Insight*. Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw. In this booklet the great Burmese meditation master charts the entire “way of mindfulness” up to its culmination, with emphasis on the advanced stages of the path.

Softback: 64 pages 124 mm x 182 mm
U.S. \$3.00; SL Rs. 75. Order No. BP 504S

- *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Bhikkhu Bodhi. Explains each path factor from the *angle* of both theory and practice, with a final chapter showing how the eight factors function in unison to bring realisation of the Buddhist goal.

Softback: 144 pages 124 mm x 182 mm
U.S. \$5.00 ; SL Rs.150. Order No. BP 105S

In Preparation

- *The Great Discourse on Causation: The Mahānidāna Suttanta & Its Commentaries.* Translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Reprint; planned for July 1995.
 - *The Seven Contemplations of Insight.* Ven. Matara Sri Ñāṇarama Mahathera. This is a profound examination of the “seven contemplations” of classical Buddhism and of the actual way they are experienced in the course of meditation. By one of Sri Lanka’s foremost meditation masters of recent times. Planned for late 1995 or early 1996.
 - *Great Disciples of the Buddha.* Ven. Nyanaponika Thera & Hellmuth Hecker. This volume will combine all past issues of our Wheel titles in the “Lives of the Disciples” series. Planned for late 1995.
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Notes and News

Ven. Nyanaponika Commemorated. On the 21st January the BPS held an almsgiving at the Society’s headquarters to commemorate the third month death anniversary of our revered Founding-President, Ven. Nyanaponika Mahathera. On the following weekend, the BPS management and staff brought the Mahathera’s bodily remains to Island Hermitage, Dodanduwa, for interment. We broke the journey in Colombo, and on Saturday evening, 28th January, held a Bodhi Puja at the Sambodhi Vihara in honour of Ven. Nyanaponika. This ceremony, which gave many Colombo friends of the BPS the opportunity to pay final respects, was splendidly arranged by Ven. Kusaladhamma Thera of the Vihara, with the assistance of the German Cultural Institute. Early the next day we left for Island Hermitage. On arrival a short ceremony was held at the monks’ cemetery, followed by an alms offering and talks in the alms hall. Ven. Nyanaponika’s grave lies a few metres from that of his teacher, Ven. Nyanatiloka, founder of the Island Hermitage. His tombstone bears as its inscription the short text from the Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta that he had explained so beautifully in his essay, “Protection through Satipaṭṭhāna”: *Attanaṃ rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati; paraṃ rakkhanto attanaṃ rakkhati*, “One who protects himself protects others; one who protects others protects himself.” Thus even in death, the Mahathera continues to proclaim the Buddha’s message of Satipaṭṭhāna.

Majjhima Nikāya Project. We wish to thank our Asian members and friends who so generously responded to our brochure on the Majjhima Nikāya with donations and advance orders for the book. Over half the edition was sold before the books even came from the press. We thank especially Mudita Dhamma Book Centre in Penang for launching a promotion campaign among Malaysian Buddhists on our behalf. Though the books were expected in February, owing to press delays they will arrive only in May.

Translations. Readers of German will be pleased to learn that Karl Eugen Neumann’s classic German translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, *Mittlere Sammlung*, long out of print, has recently been republished. Neumann’s translation, still the only complete translation of the Majjhima into German, is regarded as a literary masterpiece. The book is reissued in a high quality edition, three volumes in one, approx. 1200 pages, priced at DM 98. For orders or information, contact the publisher (not BPS): BeyerleinSteinschulte Verlag, Herrnschrot, D-95236 Stammbach, Germany; Tel. 09256/460.

Also available in German is Amadeo Solé-Leris’s *Tranquillity and Insight* (BPS, 1992), published under the title *Die Meditation die der Buddha selber lehrte* (Herder/Spektrum).

A Pali Primer. Students of the Dhamma who have always wanted to learn Pali but could not figure out where to start now have a guide to rescue them from their dilemma. The guide is Lily

de Silva's *Pali Primer*—an elementary grammar with exercises that is simple, practical, and well planned. The book is meant for beginners and serves as a stepping stone towards A.K. Warder's (somewhat mistitled) *Introduction to Pali*. *Pali Primer* is published by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403 Maharashtra, India. It is priced at Ind. Rs. 70. Copies will be available at the BPS, though we are still awaiting their arrival.

Bank Cheques. If you have received back any cheques originally made out to the BPS, with indications that they were cashed by any individual or organisation other than the Buddhist Publication Society, we would appreciate it if you would kindly let us know. Please write to Mr. T.B. Talwate, Executive Director of BPS, enclosing a photocopy of the cheques (front and back faces). We suggest that the letter be registered for extra security.

New Catalogue. A new international catalogue is currently in the press, and an update supplement to the Sri Lankan catalogue is available for local members. If you wish to receive an update sheet, write to the Administrative Secretary, enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope.

Book Review

Insight Meditation: The Practice of Freedom. Joseph Goldstein. Boston & London: Shambala, 1993. Hardback, 194 pp. U.S. \$18, £13.99.

Joseph Goldstein's earlier book, *The Experience of Insight*, was subtitled "A Simple and Direct Guide to Buddhist Meditation." Let me say at once that his new book, too, is another excellent example of the eminently Buddhist qualities of simplicity and directness. Goldstein is, of course, one of the most experienced and active teachers of vipassanā meditation in the West. Co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, he has travelled extensively for years to conduct retreats in many countries.

Like his previous books, the present volume is clearly the distillation of many years' practical experience in teaching the Dhamma to Westerners who come to it from a very different culture and, in many cases, without any prior knowledge of the Buddha's actual teachings. The emphasis throughout is on a simple, practical approach, expressed in straightforward, modern Western parlance, with a lively awareness of the specific problems involved in the meeting of cultures. So, for instance, the chapter on how to handle parents who are upset because their children have taken up that alien thing, "Buddhist" meditation.

Specific Dhamma teachings are kept to the irreducible minimum, and presented as part of a non-specialised discourse, rather than in a systematic manner. There is a brief introduction to the Four Noble Truths, and some discussion of the relations between karma and non-self, but Goldstein's primary concern is to convey a bedrock understanding of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, and of how to deal with the deep roots of desire, aversion, and ignorance in ourselves. Never in a theoretical manner, but always for the concrete purpose of achieving, through the practice of meditation, the insight that shall set us free. There is hardly any "technical" terminology, but what there is, is mostly in Pali, reflecting the original tradition in which the author was trained by his teachers such as Anagarika Munindra, Sri S.N. Goenka, and Dipa Ma (Mrs. Nana Bala Barua). It is worth noting that none of these teachers is a monastic. We are dealing here with the lay tradition of insight meditation, which is becoming increasingly important in our times. While the author brings in some references to Chinese, Zen, and Tibetan sources when they come in useful to make a particular point, his presentation is clearly rooted in Theravada. Still, he maintains throughout a refreshingly non-denominational stance. He never becomes embroiled in the captious exercise of comparing or contrasting traditions, but

gets on with the business of conveying the essence of the Buddha's message in the plainest possible terms. He rightly stresses the importance of mindfulness of the body, not only in retreats, but also, and especially, in the context of our active everyday lives: "This mode of awareness works so well that the Buddha devotes many teachings to it. He said that mindfulness of the body leads to nirvana, to freedom, to the unconditioned" (p.139).

Insight Meditation is articulated in seven chapters, whose titles clearly signpost the development of Goldstein's presentation: 1. What is the Path?; 2. How to Practise; 3. Freeing the Mind; 4. Psychology and Dharma (where he makes the very important distinction—all too often blurred in the West—between psychology and meditation); 5. Selflessness; 6. Karma; and, in conclusion, 7. Practice in the World. He ends this last chapter with valuable comments on the high relevance of insight (*vipassanā*) and loving kindness (*mettā*) and that of others.

This is a helpful book, which speaks to the reader in a warm and caring tone, and can be well recommended to beginners and more particularly to practitioners who, while still in the early stages, can derive much benefit from Goldstein's lively yet gentle reminders. In concluding, however, I cannot refrain from raising two objections: one of substance, and one of grammar. As regards substance, I am somewhat disturbed by the pronouncement (which reappears, with minor variations, more than once) that "what we call mind is the naturally pure knowing faculty—invisible, clear, and lucid" (p.37). This, to me, sounds perilously close to the views of certain Mahayana schools concerning some kind of absolute "pure mind", (such as in the Dzogchen teaching of Tibetan Nyingma), or "Buddha nature" inherent in all beings: a view which reintroduces, in a thinly veiled form, the very notion of a universal ground of being or atman that the Buddha considered irrelevant and unprofitable. As to the grammar: Why do we find, on page after page of this otherwise well-written book, a construction where the plural personal pronoun "we" is followed by a hybrid, but clearly singular, reflexive "ourselves"? (E.g. "Because we usually do not observe phenomena closely, we satisfy ourselves with a surface impression," p. 1) Hopefully, this will be remedied in future editions.

—Amadeo Solé-Leris

Also received: *Transforming the Mind, Healing the World*. Joseph Goldstein. Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1994. 54 pp., \$3.95. The Wit Lectures at the Harvard University Divinity School, on how to live a spiritual life in today's world. Wise guidance, expressed clearly and succinctly, for this Age of Perplexity.

Guidelines to Sutta Study

Because the Buddha's path unfolds as a "gradual training with gradual progress," the transition from virtue to concentration does not occur suddenly but is bridged by a series of steps that help to internalise the process of mental purification initiated by the training in virtue. In the Kandaraka Sutta (MN 51), which we have been examining in the present set of sutta guidelines, we saw that the Buddha lays down three steps to facilitate the transition from the one stage to the next: (i) contentment with the basic requisites of life; (ii) restraint of the sense faculties; and (iii) the practice of mindfulness and full awareness.

In the next section of the sutta the Buddha gives direct instructions for the practice of concentration. These instructions, which will culminate in the attainment of the jhānas, begin with an injunction that recapitulates the "requisites" of concentration and prescribes the suitable type of place for practice:

Possessing this aggregate of noble virtue, and this noble restraint of the sense faculties, and possessing this noble mindfulness and full awareness, he resorts to a secluded resting place: the forest, the root of a tree, a mountain, a ravine, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, an open space, a heap of straw.

It should be noted that the Buddha here makes it plain that the practice leading to samādhi presupposes that one has been fulfilling the proper preliminaries of the path. Without these requisites—noble virtue, etc.—the effort to achieve right concentration is likely to go astray. For the practice of concentration in the Buddha's Teaching aims at purification of mind (*cittavisuddhi*), and unless earnest effort is made to achieve the preparatory purification of virtue, the attempt to arrive at the higher purification will lack the secure foundation required to ensure success.

The direct training in the higher mind, as explained in the Suttas, proceeds through confrontation with five unwholesome mental states that the Buddha has collected under the name "the five hindrances" (*pañca-nivāraṇa*): sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. The Sutta passage on the overcoming of the hindrances is standardised and recurs in identical words throughout the Canon:

Abandoning covetousness for the world, he abides with a mind free from covetousness; he purifies his mind from covetousness. Abandoning ill will and hatred, he abides with a mind free from ill will, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings; he purifies his mind from ill will and hatred. Abandoning sloth and torpor, he abides free from sloth and torpor, percipient of light, mindful and fully aware; he purifies his mind from sloth and torpor. Abandoning restlessness and remorse, he abides unagitated, with a mind inwardly peaceful; he purifies his mind from restlessness and remorse. Abandoning doubt, he abides having gone beyond doubt, unperplexed about wholesome states; he purifies his mind from doubt.

In this passage the Buddha does not expressly show the specific methods for overcoming each of the hindrances. This information has to be gathered from other suttas which devote more attention to the actual dynamics of mental cultivation; the Commentaries also supply useful details. A text that is particularly helpful for understanding how to conquer the hindrances is Bojjhaṅga Saṃyutta No. 51 (included section by section in Nyanaponika Thera, *The Five Mental Hindrances*, Wheel No. 26). In this sutta the Buddha explains the "nourishment" (*āhāra*) for each of the five hindrances, and its "denourishing" (*anāhāra*) or antidote. These can be indicated only briefly here:

- (i) In the case of sensual desire, unwise attention to sensually attractive objects is the nourishment; meditation on a foul object (*asubhanimitta*)—on the 32 parts of the body or on a decomposing corpse—is the antidote.
- (ii) The nourishment for ill will is giving unwise attention to irritating objects; meditation on loving kindness is the antidote.
- (iii) Giving unwise attention to listlessness, lassitude, and sluggishness is the nourishment of sloth and torpor; the arousing of energy is the antidote.
- (iv) Giving unwise attention to things that agitate the mind is the nourishment of restlessness and remorse; giving wise attention to an object that induces mental quietude is the antidote.
- (v) Giving unwise attention to things that cause doubt is the nourishment of doubt; giving wise attention to phenomena and examining their distinct qualities is the antidote.

In the Kandaraka Sutta the Buddha does not include the similes for the five hindrances and their abandonment. These similes can be found in other suttas (e.g. DN 2, MN 39). In that passage the Buddha compares sensual desire to being in debt, ill will to a disease, sloth and torpor to imprisonment, restlessness to slavery, and doubt to a dangerous wilderness. When the disciple abandons the five hindrances, “he considers himself as free from debt, as rid of illness, as emancipated from prison, as a free man, and as one who has arrived at a place of safety.”

(to be continued)

The Buddhist Publication Society

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Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

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