



The Five Spiritual Faculties

The practice of the Buddha's teaching is most commonly depicted by the image of a journey, the eight factors of the Noble Eightfold Path constituting the royal roadway along which the disciple must travel. The Buddhist scriptures, however, illustrate the quest for liberation in a variety of other ways, each of which throws a different spotlight on the nature of the practice. Although the alternative formulations inevitably draw upon the same basic set of mental factors as those that enter into the eightfold path, they structure these factors around a different "root metaphor"—an image which evokes its own particular range of associations and highlights different aspects of the endeavour to reach the cessation of suffering. One of the groups of factors given special prominence in the Suttas, included by the Buddha among the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment, is the five spiritual faculties: the faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

The term *indriya*, faculties, applied to this group as a whole is derived from the name of the ancient Vedic god Indra, ruler of the devas, and the term accordingly suggests the divine-like quality of control and domination. The five faculties are so designated because they exercise control in their own specific compartments of the spiritual life. As the god Indra vanquished the demons and attained supremacy among the gods, so each of the five faculties is called upon to subdue a particular mental disability and to marshal the corresponding potency of mind towards the breakthrough to final enlightenment. The notion of "faculty" is partly akin to the ancient Greek conception of the virtues. Like the virtues, the faculties are active powers which coordinate and canalise our natural energies, directing them towards the achievement of an inward harmony and balance essential to our true happiness and peace. Since the faculties are to serve as agents of inward control, this implies that apart from their restraining influence our nature is not under our own control. Left to itself, without the guidance of a superior source of instruction, the mind is a prey to forces that swell up from within itself, dark forces which hold us in subjection and prevent us from attaining our own highest welfare and genuine good. These forces are the defilements (*kilesa*). As long as we live and act under their dominion, we are not our own masters but passive pawns, driven by our blind desires into courses of conduct that promise fulfilment but in the end lead only to misery and bondage. True freedom necessarily involves the attainment of inner autonomy, the strength to withstand the pushes and pulls of our appetites, and this is accomplished precisely by the development of the five spiritual faculties.

The qualities that exercise the function of faculties are of humble origin, appearing initially in mundane roles in the course of our everyday lives. In these humble guises they manifest as trustful confidence in higher values, as vigorous effort towards the good, as attentive awareness, as focused concentration, and as intelligent understanding. The Buddha's teaching does not implant these dispositions into the mind from scratch, but harnesses those pre-existent capacities of our nature towards a supramundane goal—towards the realisation of the Unconditioned—thereby conferring upon them a transcendental significance. By assigning them a task that reveals their immense potential, and by guiding them along a track that can bring that potential to fulfilment, the Dhamma transforms these commonplace mental factors into spiritual faculties, mighty instruments in the quest for liberation that can fathom the profoundest laws of existence and unlock the doors to the Deathless.

In the practice of the Dhamma each of these faculties has simultaneously to perform its own specific function and to harmonise with the other faculties to establish the balance needed for clear comprehension. The five come to fullest maturity in the contemplative development of insight, the direct road to awakening. In this process the faculty of faith provides the element of inspiration and aspiration which steers the mind away from the quagmire of doubt and settles it with serene trust in the Triple Gem as the supreme basis of deliverance. The faculty of energy kindles the fire of sustained endeavour that burns up obstructions and brings to maturity the factors that ripen in awakening. The faculty of mindfulness contributes clear awareness, the antidote to carelessness and the prerequisite of penetration. The faculty of concentration holds the beam of attention steadily focused on the rise and fall of bodily and mental events, calm and composed. And the faculty of wisdom, which the Buddha calls the crowning virtue among all the requisites of enlightenment, drives away the darkness of ignorance and lights up the true characteristics of phenomena.

Just as much as the five faculties, considered individually, each perform their own unique tasks in their respective domains, as a group they accomplish the collective task of establishing inner balance and harmony. To achieve this balanced striving, the faculties are divided into two pairs in each of which each member must counter the undesirable tendency inherent in the other, thus enabling it to actualise its fullest potential. The faculties of faith and wisdom form one pair, aimed at balancing the capacities for devotion and comprehension; the faculties of energy and concentration form a second pair, aimed at balancing the capacities for active exertion and calm recollection. Above the complementary pairs stands the faculty of mindfulness, which protects the mind from extremes and ensures that the members of each pair hold one another in a mutually restraining, mutually enriching tension.

Born of humble origins in everyday functions of the mind, through the Dhamma the five faculties acquire a transcendent destiny. When they are developed and regularly cultivated, says the Master, “they lead to the Deathless, are bound for the Deathless, culminate in the Deathless.”

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Publications

Recent Releases

Tranquillity & Insight: An Introduction to the Oldest Form of Buddhist Meditation. Amadeo Solé-Leris. This widely acclaimed book explains the methods of Buddhist meditation in a concise yet complete account according to the oldest Buddhist tradition, that based on the Pali Canon. While providing all the information necessary to proper understanding, the stress is on the need for practice and personal commitment. "An excellent reference book ... Will appeal to beginners and non-beginners alike" (Buddhist Studies Review).

Softback: 176 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$8.50; SL Rs. 180. Order No. BP S 10S

The Heart of Buddhist Meditation. Nyanaponika Thera. A modern Buddhist classic translated into seven languages, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* has been an important bridge in the spiritual encounter of East and West. With the combined powers of deep personal insight and clear exposition, the author conveys the essential principles making up the Buddha's way of mindfulness. "A work of unique importance ... written with great depth, extraordinary knowledge, deep humanity" (Erich Fromm).

(Not for sale in U.S.A. In the U.S.A. order from Samuel Weisers Inc., P.O. Box 612, York Beach, ME 03910, or from bookshops stocking books on Asian religions.)

Softback: 224 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$9.50; SL Rs. 200. Order No. BP 509S

Middle Land. Middle Way: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Buddha's India. Ven. S. Dhammika. This is the first comprehensive guidebook for the modern Buddhist wishing to undertake a pilgrimage to the places in India made sacred by the Buddha's presence. The author begins with an inspiring account of the significance and history of pilgrimage in Buddhism. Then sixteen places are covered, the Buddha's association with each place, their later history, and a detailed description of the monuments found there. With maps and colour photos, an essential companion for pilgrim and general traveller.

Softback: 208 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
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In This Very Life: The Liberation Teaching of the Buddha. Sayadaw U Pandita. This book by one of the outstanding teachers in the tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw contains teachings given during an intensive retreat. It starts with basic instructions on sitting and walking meditation, and goes on to describe in detail the stages of practice, including recognising and dealing with problems that arise as insight deepens. Drawing on 40 years of teaching experience, the author's instructions are simple and concrete, ideal for the beginner and advanced meditator alike.

(For sale in Asia only. Elsewhere order from Wisdom Publications, 361 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02115, U.S.A. or from bookshops stocking books on Asian religions.)

Softback: 298 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$9.50; SL Rs. 300. Order No. BP 5085

The Discourse on Right View: The Sammaditthi Sutta and Its Commentary. Translated from the Pali by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli; edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Ven. Sariputta Thera explains all the essential principles of the Dhamma.

Softback : 88 pages 124 mm x 182 mm
U.S. \$3.95; SL Rs. 75. Order No. WH 377/379

Back in Print

The Life of the Buddha according to the Pali Canon. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. Composed entirely from texts of the Pali Canon, this volume portrays an image of the Buddha that is vivid, warm and moving. The ancient texts are rendered with lucidity and dignity as befits the beauty of the original. This handsome new BPS edition makes an excellent gift for friends and family.

Softback: 400 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$16.00; SL Rs. 350. Order No. BP 101 S

The Discourse on the Root of Existence: The Mūlapariyāya Sutta and its Commentaries. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. Since ancient times the "Discourse on the Root" has been considered one of the most profound and important texts in the Pali Canon, distinguished by its concision and penetrating depth. The present work contains an English translation of the sutta together with its commentaries; a long introduction explores the implications of the sutta for philosophy and psychology.

Softback: 96 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
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Coming Soon

A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma. Bhikkhu Bodhi, General Editor. The Abhidhamma is the Buddhist analysis of mind and mental processes, a wide-ranging systemisation of the Buddha's teaching that combines philosophy, psychology and ethics into a unique and remarkable synthesis. For 800 years a little treatise called the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha (Manual of Abhidhamma)* has served as the key to open this treasure-store of Buddhist wisdom. The present volume offers an exact translation of the Manual along with the Pali text, and a detailed, section-by-section explanatory guide by the Burmese Abhidhamma authority U Rewata Dhamma and Bhikkhu Bodhi, designed to lead the modern reader through the complexities of this ancient philosophical psychology. A long introduction explains the basic principles of the Abhidhamma, while the book specially features 48 charts and tables which represent the subject in a visually accessible format. Available by April 1993; all advance orders will be recorded and filled as soon as possible.

Hardback: 432 pages 140 mm x 214 mm
U.S. \$20.00; SL Rs. 450. Order No. BP 304H

Preview for 1993

During the coming year three new and valuable works will be rolling their way into the Wheel Series: *The Edicts of Asoka*, in a rendition by Ven. S. Dhammika; *Reading the Mind*, a selection of talks on meditation by the remarkable Thai woman teacher Acharn Kor Khao-suan-luang; and *The Buddha's Examination of Sense Pleasures*, a compilation of suttas translated and introduced by Bhikkhu Bodhi. For release as independent book publications, we currently have in preparation *The Questions of King Milinda*, an abridgement of a great Buddhist classic, and *King Asoka and Buddhism*, a collection of studies by leading scholars of Indian and Buddhist history. Within the next few months we also hope to complete the *Pali-English Glossary of Buddhist Technical Terms*, long delayed owing to technical and technological problems. We also expect soon reprints of Ven. Mahathera Ñāṇārāma's *Seven Stages of Purification & the Insight Knowledges* and Bhikkhu Bodhi's *Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views*.

We appreciate very much receiving your comments on our publications, so please feel welcome to write to us.

Book Reviews

The First Buddhist Women. Susan Murcott. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991. 232 pp. PB \$15.00.

The First Buddhist Women merits due attention because of the contemporary significance of the subject with which it deals. The book offers a translation of the Therīgāthā, the verses of the ancient Buddhist nuns, together with the author's own commentary on them. Murcott has included 61 of the 73 poems from the Pali text, rearranging them under topics such as Wanderers and Disciples, Wise Women and Teachers, Mothers, Wives, Old Women, etc. At a time when feminism waxes strong in the West and has begun to stir up interest in the East as well, it is natural that an inquiry is initiated into the nature of feminine spirituality, and in such a situation the Therīgāthā is bound to become a focal source of study and reflection.

The author's choice of title is prudent as it attracts the attention of those interested in women's studies much better than the PTS's "Elders' Verses II," which gives almost no indication of the contents. As a translation, the book has its merits but also serious limitations. The writer's intention to bring out a translation in contemporary English for the general reader rather than the scholar is commendable and her treatment of the verses is clear and accessible. But there are a great number of places where her translation is misleading, inaccurate or wrong. Only a few instances can be mentioned here.

The expression *sabbe kāmā samacchinnā ye dibbā ye ca mānūsā* is translated "I have ended the hunger of gods and humans" (p. 53), though it means: the desire for all pleasures both divine and human has been eradicated. *Lūnakesī pankadharā* is translated "I cut my hair and wore the dust" (p. 46), though the rendering misses the point that what is referred to are two austere Jain practices of plucking out the hair and keeping the teeth unclean. She renders the term *uddhamsotā* as "entered the stream" (p. 64), which she explains as stream-entry, when the term actually means "gone upstream" and refers in this context to a non-returner. There are many such instances throughout the book where simple consultation of the Pali Commentary, or the accurate prose translation by K.R. Norman with its extensive annotations, would have prevented misunderstanding. Her commentary to the verses is also of an uneven quality. While she provides us with many interesting points of historical information on women in ancient India and on the background to the verses, she is also prone to fall into factual error and ill-considered judgements. Thus she assumes that the precepts which a *sikkhamānā*—a probationer to bhikkhuni status—has to observe (pp. 43, 197) are identical with the five precepts of a layperson (with the addition of the abstinence from food after midday), and thus concludes that a *sikkhamānā* does not have to reject the company of men (p. 43). In fact the third precept of a *sikkhamānā* is changed from the layperson's abstinence from unlawful sex to the rule of strict celibacy. A Western feminist point of view has coloured the author's comments on Ven. Moggallāna's rebuff to Vimalā's overtures (pp. 123–26).

Moggallāna only spoke of the real nature of the human body and such realistic understanding is absolutely essential for the attainment of the ultimate goal of Nibbāna. Her accusation of cruelty and defensiveness against the great disciple hardly makes sense in relation to a man who had extinguished all defilements. Her speculation that Vimalā may have accepted Moggallāna's rejection because of her own self-hatred is hardly plausible: it is clear she did so because the elder's comments made her realise the repulsiveness of the body and the hollowness of sense pleasures.

Referring to the cultivation of universal love (*mettā*), Murcott says that there is "an ironical philosophical underpinning". "Through his cultivated power and insight the monk will cut off future rebirths and thereby transcend the woman's power to give birth" (p. 78). This is a meaningless statement which makes no sense at all. As *mettā* is defined in terms of a mother's love for her only child, the writer is confused as to how a renunciant who is expected to

cultivate such love towards all beings can cut off rebirth altogether. On the same page she says that under the Buddhist system a woman was considered to belong to an intermediate plane between animals and men. This is sheer imagination on Murcott's part and she fails to identify a source for such a claim.

The book is replete with misconceptions and misinterpretations of such nature, but they all cannot be discussed in a review. While the title will appeal to readers interested in Buddhist women's studies, he or she is well advised to exercise critical judgement against knowledge of Buddhism gained from more reliable sources in arriving at conclusions through this writer's interpretations.

—Lily de Silva

Burma: The Next Killing Fields? Alan Clements. Foreword by the Dalai Lama. Odonian Press, P.O. Box 7776, Berkeley CA 94707. 96 pp. PB \$5 (+ \$2 shipping per order if ordered from the publisher)

Burma is one of the last great citadels of Theravada Buddhism, the seat from which the current revival of insight meditation has spread across the world. However, this nation of a gentle and devout Buddhist population has been ruled for decades by an autocratic military regime which has brutally suppressed the Burmese people's yearnings for the most basic human rights. Alan Clements, the author of the above book, is an American who lived in Burma for seven years, most as a Buddhist monk. Since the installation of the SLORC—the new military junta—in 1988, Clements made three trips back to Burma, two secretly. He spoke with hundreds of Burmese, from ordinary citizens to freedom fighters in the jungle. In this simply written and emotionally gripping book, he tells the inside story of the Burmese people's sufferings and aspirations, warning of the dangers that lie ahead if the rest of the world watches with indifference.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Notes and News

Ven. Nyanaponika Scholarship Fund. We are happy to report that our earlier article on our plans to establish a "Ven. Nyanaponika Scholarship Fund" in honour of our distinguished Patron (issue No. 20) had the effect of attracting additional contributions which greatly bolstered the fixed deposit from which the scholarship will be generated. The amount collected totalled Rs. 247,421, which is more than sufficient to present a qualified candidate with a full fellowship for the purpose of the award: postgraduate research into the philosophy or literature of Theravada Buddhism. At the time this issue goes to press, all proposals concerning the fellowship have been discussed with the responsible officials at the University of Peradeniya, through which the fellowship will be granted. We are only awaiting formal approval by the University Senate, after which the fellowship will become operative.

A Dhamma Book in Braille. Earlier this year the BPS sponsored the publication of a Braille edition of Ven. Piyadassi's Damsak booklet *Budurajmutn Wahanse Saha Bududahama* ("Lord Buddha and His Teaching") for the benefit of blind readers in Sri Lanka. The book was prepared for the BPS as a two-part set by the Ratmalana School for the Deaf and Blind; 100 sets were produced. On June 8th 1992 the BPS initiated the distribution of the book at a special function held at the Senkadagala School for the Deaf and Blind in Dodanwala, Kandy. The function was attended by government officials, teachers, parents and schoolchildren. The books were accepted on behalf of the school by the Government Agent, M.B. Warsakoon. Since then the BPS has distributed sets to other schools for the blind throughout Sri Lanka. About twenty sets

remain in stock. These will be given on request as dhama dāna, on a first-come first-serve basis, to any blind reader of Sinhala in Braille within Sri Lanka. If you are interested in receiving a copy for a blind person, write to us addressing your letter to the Honorary Secretary.

Ven. Piyadassi Returns to Sri Lanka. At the end of September Ven. Piyadassi Nayaka Thera, Editor of our Sinhala series Damsak, returned to Sri Lanka after completing his 13th global Dhamma mission. His tour, which took him nearly a year, brought him to some 15 countries. In Seoul the Korean Sangha, in appreciation of the Ven. Piyadassi's services for the Dhamma, conferred on him the coveted title "Tripitakacharya," Master of the Buddhist Scriptures. Ven. Piyadassi remarked on his return that "thanks to the BPS almost everybody around the world seems to know something about the Buddha's teachings." The thera's latest book, *The Spectrum of Buddhism*, was recently acclaimed in the British Buddhist journal "The Middle Way." The reviewer commented: "This book is truly inspiring and heart-warming in its combination of great learning with practice ... (It) is highly recommended to all, for content as well as presentation."

A Letter from Ukraine. Earlier this year we sent a packet of books to a spiritual seeker from Ukraine, to share with a group of her friends also interested in the Dhamma. We thought her reply was itself deeply rewarding: "Words are totally inadequate to express our pleasure and joy upon receiving a package of books that you sent us. Each of the books you shared with us so generously is most, most precious for each of us, but all together they are really an invaluable treasure indeed. Each of the books is a real gem, most outstanding, we didn't even know about their existence. We will be most happy to study these wonderful materials, which are of enormous use for our spiritual development. We place our hands together and bow to you in sincere reverence and gratitude."

Guidelines to Sutta Study

Āditta-pariyāya Sutta, is the third discourse of the Buddha recorded in the Pali Canon's account of his early ministry. Originally spoken to a group of a thousand monks who had newly embraced the Dhamma after having been matted-hair fire ascetics, it delivers a message that rings down the centuries and still speaks to us even in our proud but confused technological society. To a world whose denizens lunge at each other's throats in a hot chase for pleasure, power and the acquisition of wealth, the sombre cadences of this ancient discourse resound like a fire alarm. Shrill and disturbing to be sure, they yet send us an urgent and benevolent warning intended to arouse us from our trifling concerns and stir us to find a place of genuine safety.

The entire theme of the Fire Sermon is announced in the short but electrifying sentence with which the Buddha opens his discourse: "All is burning." The rest of the sutta, which occupies only two pages in English translation, unfolds as an answer to three questions provoked by this startling declaration: (1) What is the "all" that is burning? (2) In what sense can all be said to be burning? (3) What are the consequences of seeing things as the Buddha recommends, i.e. as burning?

The dictum that all is burning is not an easy one to swallow. The very words are bound to arouse in us an immediate and instinctive resistance, if not outright rejection; for if these words were accepted with the seriousness they seem to demand, the entire scaffolding of values upon which our ordinary lives are strung would be thrown into question. From our everyday point of view we are inclined to think of life as a field of immense possibilities offering countless opportunities for enjoyment and discovery, opportunities to be exploited to the hilt. While friction, bumps and bruises abound, these, we think, are a small price to pay for the prizes life has to confer upon the zealous participants in its struggle. From such a perspective the idea that "all is burning" is likely to strike us as the rueful grumbling of a surly ascetic bemoaning his own incapacity for pleasure.

As a first approach to gaining some insight into the Buddha's words, let us proceed at a relatively coarse and manifest level. We need only scratch some of the surface glitter off our everyday world for his words to begin to ring true. Pick up a newspaper on any given day and scan the headlines: "Fierce fighting in Angolan capital," "Serbs step up offensive in Bosnia," "Attack by Muslim rebels in Kashmir," "36 die in Indian riots," "Monsoon kills 48 people," "Street battles in Jerusalem," "Chinese planes for Pakistan," etc. etc. Flip the page, and there's bank fraud, sex scandals, and heroin busts. When report upon report spins the mind with tales of international tension, ethnic conflict, environmental destruction, fatal diseases, crime and violence, can we deny that the world is really aflame? Are these calamities—whether wrought by individuals or by nations or by groups—anything but magnifications and externalisations of a malady lodged in the human heart, of a fever that burns in our veins?

As we sit at a comfortable distance from the scene of so much pointless misery, we should not let ourselves get too comfortable thinking that we ourselves are secure. For the Buddha traces the sparks from which such global conflagrations flare up right down into the depths of our own hearts. He does not merely say that fires erupt on random occasions and at scattered sites, or that only a few of us get burnt. He declares quite boldly that "all is burning" and, having done so, he sets out to back up his claim by showing that the "all" of which he speaks comprises our very being, extending down to the most elementary level of cognition.

(to be continued)

The Buddhist Publication Society

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

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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