

THE IMPORTANCE OF HINAYANA AND MAHAYANA

Volume 1. Hinayana. Den tidlige indiske buddhisme

Volume 2. Mahayana. Den senere indiske buddhisme

CHRISTIAN LINDTNER, 1998 Copenhagen, Spektrum/Forum Publishers Vol. 1:228 pp., ISBN 87 7763 170 6; Vol. 2:256 pp., ISBN 87 7763 174 9

Two volumes of translations (from Pali, Tibetan, Chinese and Sanskrit) of central Hinayana and Mahayana sutras by Christian Lindtner give scholarly and reliable texts and provide an overview of the central issues in Buddhism as seen by some of the most distinctive Buddhist saints and philosophers themselves.

Introduction

All revealed religions, such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Jainism, share (in contradistinction to Hinduism, Greek, Roman and Chinese religions) the mutual fate of being divided into two main schools (and a number of lesser sects), viz. Sunni and Shia, Protestantism and Catholicism, Hinayana and Mahayana, Svetambara and Digambara.

Amongst these religions, however, Jainism and Buddhism may be characterised as psychological philosophies because the practice of yoga and meditation tend to give the practitioners the "same" insight as the founder of the school once had. This tendency furthers an innate peaceful and tolerant attitude contrasting with the more dogmatic attitude of faith-systems such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism in which the believers put their trust in the insight the founder of the faith once had. A more general difference appears to be that whereas Avalokitesvara, Siva or Ambika, like Zeus, Apollo and Artemis, instinctively (or sometimes consciously) were intuited as really being human artefacts designed to symbolise the ineffable substratum beneath all manifestations, Jahveh, God and Allah were regarded as being literally identical with this unmanifested substratum, i.e. in the latter three cases the personifications were absolute.

Yoga and meditation are empirical methods, in so far as their results are subject to verification and falsification. This is common to all schools of yoga and meditation, whether Jainist, Buddhist or Hinduist. This similarity with science has often been noted; of course, the difference consists in the fact that whereas science is completely cumulative and communicable the science of yoga and meditation lives and dies with the individual practising it, though the methods are part of a tradition and partly subject to diachronic refinement.

The practice of yoga and meditation are inspired and furthered by the Buddhist sutras, and Christian Lindtner, who has made extensive investigations into the authenticity of the texts of Nagarjuna, has succeeded in establishing dependable and readable versions of central Hinayana and Mahayana texts--not necessarily giving perhaps always the most obvious choices, but nevertheless always texts displaying distinctive and cardinal points.

Both the Mahayana (in the following abbreviated as M) and the Hinayana (abbreviated H) volumes have two important aspects. The first is purely historical and as such of interest to the history of religion, psychology and science. The second is existentialistic and has importance for our own ethical, aesthetical and psychological health. These primary texts give the essence of Buddhism, as experienced by Buddhists themselves, and emphasise the issues which are crucial for the level at which one chooses to live one's life. The urgency of the message of how to transcend suffering/ignorance is throughout unmistakable. Buddhist sutras are not mainly concerned with analysis, logic and semantic problems, and neither are they concerned with phenomenology as speculation. These texts contain rather a category of physiologically determined and innate experiences delineated in an allegorical and sometimes poetic language as there is no other kind of language available.

Beyond the basic historical level--such as the unravelling of dates, authorship and influences, the definitions of terms within each tradition and the change over time in these definitions--lies the inherent difficulty of coming close to the spirit of the age and of the author. The methodology can be studied as a science, but the art hardly so. Presumably it requires an affinity, a kind of sahrdaya outlook while still retaining a critical distance where that is required. Both these qualities are present in these volumes.

The Hinayana volume contains, e.g. Catusparisatsutra, Aggannasutta, Suttanipata, Catuhsataka and Visistastava, and the Mahayana volume Upalipariprcchasutra, Samadhirajasutra, Trimsika, Alambanapariksa and Madhyamakahrdaya; each chapter is provided with an introduction.

In the following I shall concentrate on a couple of points raised by the texts and the translation before discussing some of the key issues regarding the influence of Buddhism, the general importance of Buddhist thought on the absence of an ego and a self, and the nature of consciousness vis-a-vis mental phenomena. My translations are from the Danish text.

Translation

In letting Buddhism speak for itself Lindtner has concentrated on the major (and perennial) issues. The tricky balance of making such a translation acceptable to both Buddhists, historians specialising in religion as well as to (that illusive creature) the general reader is accomplished in so far as this is possible given the esoteric and abrupt style of the texts. Crucial words are added in brackets to facilitate the reading, and in fact to make it comprehensible though the typical condensed sutra style, which presupposes that the reader is thoroughly familiar with the subject, does not easily lend itself to a readable and precise translation.

However, explanations in the form of footnotes, would, in spite of being obstacles to a fair fluid reading, enhance the conceptualisation of some of the analogies as well as the succinctness of some of the metaphors. "No one, not even a cakravaka, can stand up to Mahadeva, who is half a woman ..." (H, Visistastava 7, p. 200). Here, one might have

expected a note explaining the specific ethology of brahminy ducks, i.e. especially the classical Indian emphasis on bonding behaviour which is not easily observable, and perhaps also a note about Ardhanarisvara. And acintyata "inconceivability" (M, Upalipariprcchasutra 49, p. 38.) is better than "incomprehensibility", as defining "the state of being outside the scope of imagination" (Dictionary of Sanskrit 1.III, A.M. Ghatage, Poona 1978). "Even if I have taught the true way towards the primal goal, dhyana, vimoksa and samadhi, then, (really speaking), there is no such 'thing' as the cessation (of anxiety); such 'things' are caused by (artificial) categorization" (M, Upali. 64, p. 41). Here Lindtner has added "artificial", and all categorisation is probably counterproductive to a clear unified view of reality.

Lindtner defines samadhi as a state of clarity in which all usual thought-processes has ceased. But then he continues with a further definition: "trance" (M, p. 46), which I, in spite of OED b "a state of mental abstraction from external things, absorption, exaltation, rapture, ecstasy", e.g. quoting Bacon: "His ... conversation towards God is full of passion, of zeal, and of traunssis" (i.e. extasis), find problematic because sunyata, as occurring in the state of samadhi, is not a real mental phenomenon. Mental phenomena are thought-processes, i.e. comprising all that which arises in the relative mutually interdependent dualistic world; whereas sunyata is trans-mental; mental activity is suksma, subtle; sunyata is not this and not that, neither, both and everything simultaneously with being nothing. There are good reasons for distinguishing between consciousness as such, the Tathagata as such, and the dharmakaya on one hand and consciousness of something on the other; consciousness of something becomes a mental phenomenon, a correlate of citta proper; sunyata seems to be neither mental nor emotional nor physical (psychosomatic) nor even a phenomenon or a multitude of phenomena--only a superposed potentiality. This distinction is apparently already present in kamas tad agre sam avertatadhi manaso retah prathamam yad asit. "In the beginning Desire took hold of it (the non-existent Universe)--that was the first seed of thinking/mind" (Rgveda X. 129.4).

A good question would be to ask if sunyata might be likened allegorically to infinity/eternity. Infinity/eternity transcends thought. Even if it is possible to operate mathematically with such "concepts" any mental understanding of them is impossible. Even very large numbers, such as 10^{80} , the number of protons in the visible universe, or 10^{110} , the number of molecular vibrations (in picoseconds) in the universe since the Big Bang, are in one category while infinity or eternity remains something quite different, i. e. absolutely inconceivable mentally, acintya. This seems to be a fairly good analogy suggesting the difference between the phenomenal relative and mutually dependent universe of citta--and sunyata.

Words like anu and anuka are translated by "atom", (M, p. 95) and it is certainly a good solution as long as one keeps in mind the fundamental difference between the Indian concepts of matter at a minute scale (and of course this also applies to Demokritus' (Greek text cannot be converted in ASCII text)) and real particle physics, quantum mechanics and quantum fields. Key terms of this kind are better left untranslated, as Lindtner indeed does often (or if not the term is given in a parenthesis) e.g. samadhi for

which there is no proper word in Germanic languages; likewise *arya* is certainly better than "noble"; *arya* is so specifically Indian as to be untranslatable by a single word.

Though a shared set of distinct experiences were common to the authors of these sutras individuality asserted itself in multiple ways and prolonged arguments. Thus the Yogacara supposed that as the world of "atoms" neither could be regarded as constituting a closed entity without parts nor as a multiplicity of things with different parts, the world ipso facto had to be unreal as it could not, in this way at least, be proven to exist on its own. And as there was no object "outside" there could not be a subject "inside" either. But more significant for the unreality of the external world of things was it that the only "thing" that was real and independent was consciousness itself. Here apparent analogies and logic combined with speculation seem to lead into a verbal *cul de sac*; exactly what the experience of *sunyata* was supposed to be a panacea against. The *Madhyamaka* on the other hand saw the world as being empty through and through. However, Nagarjuna was perceptive, proving that the only thing one might do with and in language was to show the absurdity and inherent self-contradictions of any point of view; i.e. language could not/cannot prove/disprove *sunyata*, its existence and/or its non-existence.

Lindtner has previously edited and translated the text of Bhavya's important *Madhyamakahrdaya* from Sanskrit and Tibetan; here chapters 1-5 and 8-9 are translated. The *svatantra* viewpoint is interesting as a partial reconciliation between the Yogacara and the *Madhyamaka* view by positing two truths, a higher and a lower, in each sphere, and identifying the higher truth in the relative sphere with the lower in the absolute sphere. The *Madhyamakahrdaya* is also written in the usual compact sutra style and many passages are obscure requiring substitution of the words which are implied. Lindtner has struck a fine balance between precision and readability, but many sentences would seem to require further elucidation, e.g. "Furthermore (relatively speaking) ('soul') may, conceptually, denominate 'consciousness', but it would be wrong (to see the 'soul' as absolute)" (M, *Madhyamakahrdaya* III.98, p. 139). Here the added "absolute" is necessary to make any sense of the passage. This is apparently again an attempt to distinguish absolute consciousness from consciousness suffusing mental aspects. And likewise "Here words do no longer apply; this (*tattva*) is never the object of thought. There is also no longer intentionality (*samkalpa*); the silence of insight (*jnana*) is born" (M, *Madhyamakahrdaya* III.283, p. 165). Lindtner translates *samkalpa* by "will to life", which gives the notion as long as one remembers that it is the conscious desire to accomplish this or that which has been superseded. However, the authors of all these texts did not seem to take their own advice too seriously for they certainly kept up a steady stream of sutras; but perhaps there were then, as now, ten times as many *pratvekabuddhas* who kept silence.

"It is without any mark, it does not show itself; it is without concepts, without words. For he who sees, without seeing, it is the sight of him who only is known through *buddhi*" (M, *Madhyamakahrdaya* III.246, p. 160). *Buddhi* is here translated by "reason", however, among the numerous shades of meaning of *buddhi* such as "intelligence, discernment" and "understanding"--"meditative perception" might have suggested the intention better.

Lindtner sees Buddhism as embodying a kind of humanism grounded in dharma and reason (M, p. 12); but both must fundamentally be grounded in the experience of sunyata. Dharma means "duty", and dharma is ascertained through mana (p. 17). But one might argue that dharma is duty only in so far as one has recognised that which is one's duty and thus becomes unable to do anything else; there seems to exist an underlying presupposition of fate; one discovers that one has a fate to fulfil and then one becomes incapable of not fulfilling it; i.e. duty is here not something which one consciously decides that one ought to do, something externally imposed; it is instead something which springs up spontaneously and leaves one with no choice, i.e. one wants above all else to do precisely that.

The Influence of Buddhism

The reaction of Buddhists against the Brahmins was focused on their very privileged position as priests, their infallible faith in the Veda as the ultimate authority regarding all possible questions; their complete dependence on rituals, often bloody sacrifices, as a means of control and as a road to salvation, and in their faith in a divine Creator (H, p. 63). So Buddhism emphasised strongly that it was only through one's own acts that one might obtain liberation; rituals and births as privileged Brahmins did not help (H, p. 64). This notion of equality and merit was revolutionary as was the lofty and beautiful concept of ahimsa, non-violence vis-a-vis all living beings. For example, in the letter to Kaniska "Keep to the truth and tell me if it is right or wrong that a king kills or will let kill (innocent animals such as) birds, deer and cattle?" (H, Maharajakaniskalekha 66, p. 219). And "To an even greater extent than toward human beings You ought to show compassion toward animals, for they are plagued by suffering to an even greater extent" (H, Maharajakaniskalekha 78, p. 220). Urging Kaniska to be compassionate is truly reasonable, but it is remarkable that the sage seems to have disregarded the capacity of non-human animals also to live in the present and enjoy it when his opportunities for direct observation must have been unique, at least compared to the catastrophic conditions of to-day. But this distinct sense of loving kindness, empathy, karuna, and non-violence, ahimsa, seem to be the first conceptualisation of an altruistic ideal which has not yet been bettered (as Milarepa said "The experience of emptiness engenders compassion").

Lindtner indicates also the historical influence of Buddhism both in India and abroad. Thus the Bhagavadgita should be full of hidden polemics directed against Buddhism (H, p. 195). The reform movement of Buddhism initiated a Hinduistic counter movement. One of its most important sources is the Gita. Krsna defends the caste system by means of karma and dharma. No society can survive following the doctrine of ahimsa and be utterly pacifistic; such an attitude is cowardly and dishonourable. Duty and fate, dharma, are closely connected to caste. The Bhagavadgita in fact also seems to absorb Buddhism by using such terms as brahmanirvana (H, p. 196); and Indian Buddhism finally became absorbed completely by Hinduism as Buddha became accepted as a Bhagavat Gestalt (H, p. 197).

The question of the influence of Buddhism on Christianity is thorny and controversial though Indian presence and influence in the Graeco-Roman world are comparatively well documented. Prajna, a central feminine deity, Wisdom personified as a mother-saviour, had an early influence on Gnosticism (H, p. 61). And there are distinct parallel developments between Hinduism/Jainism, Hinduism/Buddhism and the Old Testament/New Testament (H, p. 11). Furthermore, Bhagavatism, a kind of hypostasis, i.e. Buddha as Siddhartha as well as the Buddha, could be regarded as a parallel movement to Christianity or even as a partial presupposition. Lindtner assumes that the Catusparisatsutra, which was used by Buddhist missionaries, could have had an indirect influence on the Gospels (H, p. 13). Thus the concept of Bhagavatism may have influenced The New Testament regarding the notion that Jesus had a double nature, being both human and divine, both mortal and immortal, with two bodies, a physical and a spiritual one; this seems, as Lindtner points out, decidedly Indian, primarily manifested in the Gestalt of the Bhagavat of which Krasna also is a good example (H, p. 61), another is Mahavira. Bhagavatism is an attempt to give an allegorical illustration of the fact that Buddha and Krsna (and hence possibly Jesus) while still human in flesh and blood, also simultaneously were divine in the sense of being aware of sunyata or God the Father as the androcentric Hebrew tradition tried to explain it. This two-fold nature seems, according to Lindtner, to originate in the Vedic notion of brahma as the unmanifested impersonal principle and Brahma as the manifested and personal principle (H, p. 62). Behind both lies the physiological notion of the two realms, sunyata and the relative manifested world of citta.

Various sporadic statements suggest the presence of Indians and Indian thought in the Hellenistic world. Strabo writes that an Indian delegation visited Athens during the reign of Augustus and that one of the delegates, Zarmanochegas, burnt himself in publico. The first part of the word "Zarmanochegas" could be a rendering of gramana, a Buddhist "monk" or "mendicant" (H, p. 63). Kalyana and Zarmanochegas might indeed have inspired the Christian martyrs. So Lindtner assumes that this indicates the presence of Indian missionary activity and this in turn enhances the likelihood of Hinayana influence on the Gospels. The population of Athens at the time of Augustus would have been baffled by the sight of someone willingly committing suicide in such an atrocious manner, and it is probable that Zarmanochegas could have made a considerable impression because such an act appeared utterly incomprehensible to Greek mentality (rationalising about the reason for sati the Greeks supposed that it was a way of preventing wives from poisoning their husbands).

Lindtner further argues that several of the notions of the Gospels are best understood as Judaised Buddhism, especially as pertaining to the notions of suffering, salvation, karma, resurrection and sacrifice (H, p. 64). The problem is whether both Buddhism and Christianity independently reveal common human trends and aspects of behaviour or whether Buddhist ideas floated around in the Hellenistic world. Alexandria was also then close to Palestine and as the Graeco-Roman world, including Palestine, of, say, 50-300 AD, was susceptible to Christianity, as history shows, then it would appear likely that the same susceptibility could have favoured comparable if not closely identical ideas in the period from 50 BC to 50 AD.

And yet the human condition, between a birth and a death, a condition we share with all life, animals as well as plants and bacteria, is diachronically and synchronically unchanged. There are no arguments supporting even a small change in physiology at least within the timespan of recorded religions, so it is conceivable that the same idea may have struck two people independently. However, it is odd that the wheel, for example, was never invented in America; the idea seems so obvious; but it is perhaps only obvious once it is seen and to the individual who gets the idea, cf. Newton's apple or Kekule's snake (the closed benzene ring). Once something new is perceived it becomes self-evident.

Separating the scant historical data from the physiological sub-stratum is a delicate process, especially as about 90% of all cultures have more or less institutionalised procedures for reaching at least altered states of consciousness if not states comparable to samadhi, though a close reading of all the relevant texts might give definite clues.

The Limits of Language

In Buddhism there is no assumption of the existence of a "soul", atma, or any divine principle, brahma as in Vedanta and no God, Isvara, as in Mimamsa--there is only emptiness, sunyata, the Plenum Void, that which is empty and full simultaneously without being neither. Expressed as this it becomes a paradox, an illogical statement, yet (this) "... as reality cannot be the object of logic, one cannot understand it by means of inference". (M, Madhyamakahrdaya V. 104, p. 202). The only answer is that language is simply not geared to deal with this, as language cuts, divides, fragmentises and categorises, dealing only with one thing at a time. The inadequacy of language to grasp a reality, which is ineffable, is continuously emphasised.

The Illusions of atma and ahamkara

One of the main and fundamental realisations of Buddhist philosophy and religion was that there strictly speaking was no ground for positing such an entity as an ego or a "self". The concept of a self, of an identity, seems best explained physiologically as originating in the sensation of body boundaries. Any paramecium would have to have a sense of that to survive as that would relate it as an organism to the environment and determine the two prime impulses of attraction and repulsion. Vertebrates would naturally have a much more subtle sense of body-self with far more moments of experience.

Yet the innate fragility of human concepts of self is clearly demonstrated during sensory deprivation in tanks with warm water as the sensation of body boundary vanishes and one attempts to find alternative definitions; the ambiguous and deceptive nature of the self emerges when the notions of self/other, inside/outside vanishes. Sensory deprivation and meditation both minimise the amount of proprioceptive stimuli that may reach the brain. This accentuates new orientations and a search for meaning beyond the ordinary (laukika) level.

This central doctrine or insight, that the personality as such was a fiction, was expressed allegorically in many different ways. The stream of consciousness looks like a river if seen from afar, but under closer scrutiny the stream is seen to consist of water molecules rushing along in between each other towards the sea. So is each single experience, what Whitehead called a "moment of experience", a brief single flash, but because the duration of such flashes (each one lasts from about 10-100 or 200 milliseconds, and according to some definitions it is also the duration of a ksana) and because of the vast number of them, consciousness appears to be one unbroken whole. "That which one calls a person's 'life' is nothing but a moment of consciousness ..." (H, Catuhsataka 10, p. 181). The notion of individuality is further stabilised by memory processes. A forest is a conglomeration, an agglutination (dravya) for it consists of parts, of individual trees, so the denotation is an abstract entity fashioned for the sake of convenience. "A forest cannot be regarded as a unity; it consists of flame-of-the-forest trees and other (trees)" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya III.37 p. 130). And "Fundamentally it is not right/logical to say that an individual (namarupa) goes through samsara. It is because the (individual is) an agglutination of things ..." (moments of experience) (M, Madhyamakahrdaya III.89, p. 137). And "When one says that someone is burning something in a fire then it is really the fire which is burning, not the charcoal burner who is burning. In the same way (is it) when one knows something by means of one's understanding. It is the cognition which is cognizing, not the 'soul'" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya VIII.46, p. 209). The Madhyarnakahrdaya and the Upalipariprcchasutra emphasise the illusion of a permanent ego again and again. The term 'ego' or 'egohood' ahamkara, has a wide spectrum of connotations and definitions, however, the central denotation suggests that it constitutes all past ontological experiences, i.e. memories, and these memories, conscious as well as unconscious, constitute the image one has of oneself, one's definition of oneself, one's boundaries and one's character. Basically this consists of patterns of superposed experiences, determined by character (i.e. genes) and circumstances (i.e. time and space). Like a forest can be seen to be an abstract entity consisting of a finite number of individual trees, so the "personality" of an individual may be seen to be an abstract entity loosely covering the accumulated sum of past experiences. This does not deny individuality as genetic profile alone precludes duplication; and added to this comes the further individualisation determined by space and time. But there is no "I" which experiences; there is an experience, not even an experience which experiences, but in fact an experience process, an experiencing consisting of a vast number of separate experiences appearing as in a flow, an unbroken unity, like a film in which the single images remain (usually) unperceived--only the flow comes to exist.

The term atma (literally 'breath') or soul is a considerably more Protean beast definitionally. It is not used or defined in Freudian or cognitive psychology, let alone in neuropsychology. In Vedantic terminology it is the spark of brahmd which animates the individual, that which makes the individual come alive. Buddhism denies the existence of atma. "Fundamentally there is then no ('soul', etc.), which becomes attached or liberated. By meditating on past time and future time, the same is seen to be true of thought" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya III.99, p. 139); and "There is nothing which in any way is created or fostered by this (Dharmakaya). There is no (soul) which abides therein, and no (soul)

which is dissolved therein" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya 111.288, p. 166). So presumably 'soul' is also seen as constituted by a flow of separate experience-units.

Buddhist philosophy is pragmatic and existentialistic in so far as it was meant to serve as an instrument with which to point towards the goal of sunyata and nirvana, and thereby decrease suffering and increase understanding, calmness and happiness. The sutras merely functioned as means towards that end. They were meant to be transcended, to be rendered superfluous once the goal of personal insight had been attained. As the questions of the meaning of life, suffering, happiness (sukhaduhkha) and death were central, Buddhist philosophy appears to have more in common with the Continental tradition than with the purely Anglo-American tradition which limits itself to language and language-related problems seeing in a refinement of such analytical tools a solution to most, if not all, problems of philosophical interest. Again and again it is stated that speculations are a waste of time. As in Upali. 53 (M, p. 39): "Those who speculate about the emptiness of the dharmas, they are fools who have gone astray", and in 54: "All confusion (prapanca) is caused by thought-speculations. One has to realize that the dharmas are inconceivable."

The Nature of Consciousness and Mental Activity

Pure/objectless consciousness is clearly differentiated from thought. "Devoid of concepts, without reflections, without marks and denominations, not dualistic, not non-dualistic, quiet, empty of the movements of thought" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya 1.2, p. 118). The phenomenological philosophers tried to reach a state of fundamental truth using introspection, but by using language as a means they could not transcend language and remained therefore unaware of the nature of sunyata. In this connection it is worth while remembering that Kant did not deny the existence of the potential state of objectless consciousness but he thought that it was beyond human ability to experience it.

As sunyata and simultaneous realisation of the emptiness of the phenomenal world are indescribable it is only possible to point towards them, to use allegorical statements: "As a man who is looking at a mass of foam carried away by a river, if he looks closer he sees that there is nothing--remember, just like this, is everything we know", and "When the rain pours down bubbles arise one by one. Bubbles are created and bubbles burst and do no longer exist, remember, just like this is everything we know" (M, Samadhirajasutra 5 and 6, p. 50). These poetic images should make the listener become less attached to the world of the senses. So the central experience of life, between a birth and a death was "Impossible to imagine, impossible to realize (i.e. beforehand), unfathomable and devoid of characteristics, indescribable, only experiencable spontaneously, without beginning, without end, full of peace"(M, Madhyamakahrdaya I. 1, p. 118).

An acute perception differentiating between the sense organs and the conceptualising faculty of the mind is stated in Madhyamakahrdaya III.45 (M, p. 131), "In an absolute sense the eye (as an organ of sense) cannot perceive form; it (the eye) has not the faculty of cognizing". This is introspection at its best.

The illusionary maya-like aspect of the phenomenal world is stated continually: "Of course such things (as attachment and liberation) are possible, but only in so far as all things are separate, dependent on and causing specific phenomena. Hence they are without self-existence, like illusions and dreams" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya 1.87, p. 137). And "It is by discovering the emptiness of self-being and by the cessation of the thought about it, that one, by a yoga which attains nothing, obtains the indestructible nature of the indestructible" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya 3.115, p. 141). The indescribable nature of the underlying void is also succinctly suggested in the following statement: "For it is not even possible to establish a reason (buddhi) devoid of concepts, because there is no object of cognition to be cognized, and this is recognized by those who know reality as the incomparable reality (tattva)" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya III.266, p. 163). The "nature" of consciousness without an object is suggested in various ways, for example, "When cognition no longer has any external support it becomes pure cognition--when there no longer is any object to be cognized then there is no (subject) which can cognize" (M, Trimsika 28, p. 99); and "Ultimately nirvana cannot be defined--neither as being nor as absence of being" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya III. 109, p. 140). "When one perceives that which is empty then there is absolutely nothing which exists. When one understands by this that one does not understand, then it is conceptually speaking perception of emptiness" (M, Satyadvayavatara 6, p. 244). The origin of the paradoxical nature of Zen is seen in the following: "(Relatively speaking) it is common knowledge that thoughts and mental phenomena have a mental and cognitive nature. (Absolutely speaking) yogis have no reasons and no example. They have simply no point of view" (M, Madhyamakahrdaya IV.72, p. 187), i.e. "Beyond the menhirs of desire premeditated".

In the introduction to the Salistambasutra Lindtner points out that the schism between Madhyamaka and Yogacara (partly) lies in the concept of vijnanabija, "the seed of consciousness". The difficult question is to decide whether consciousness is empty or whether it is emptiness per se; is it something in itself or is it only something in relation to something else? and is, as the Yogacara says, everything only consciousness while reality may be the object of perception/realisation or is realisation objectless and indescribable? However, the Madhyamaka says that it may be suggested; in a similar way Abhinavagupta and Anandavardhana said that the poetic element as a rasa could not be expressed or stated but only implied. This should answer Udayana's question about whether sunyata was something or nothing by silently pointing to it.

Several key terms would need to be defined as exactly as possible, e.g. Vasubandhu's alayavijnana (which appears to have much in common with atma), is, as the "home" or "ground/abode of consciousness", said to produce the vasanas (mental patterns and dispositions) which form traces and tendencies which generate actions producing habits which reinforce and/or form character which then in turn becomes the cause of future reincarnations beginning with alayavijnana.

Neuropsychologically each stage in the development of the sensory and cognitive system would add more sophisticated notions to the sense of "self". Following the presumably primordial "sense of self" produced by any purely cytoskeletal structure, the pros-, mes- and rhombencephalon and the development of each of these in the various phyla would

generate more extensive notions of self-awareness and vastly increase the width and the depth of the stream of consciousness, i.e. the multitudes of moments of experience.

The alayavijnana is supposed to contain the primordial karmic energies (vasana) as seeds (bija). However, Vasubandhu seems to think that consciousness of 'self' (manovijnana) is developed first, and then consciousness about the environment, whereas the two spheres of awareness must evolve, phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically, simultaneously in a process of close interactions of mutually dependent activities. The definition of vasanas is vague as Sankara pointed out, they seem to lack characteristics though they have to be object-related phenomena containing specific and distinct "information", and there does not seem to be any concepts in alayavijnana which could suggest a genetic approach; it is rather a purely mental phenomenon. It could be that alayavijnana was thought to constitute the accumulated karmic patterns of the illusions of a "self" which were so persistent as to be able to transcend the dissolution of one organism and attach itself to another in the process of being created (at the moment when the spermatozoon penetrated the cell wall or when the mitosis began?).

A term which changes somewhat according to viewpoint is *praticvasamutpada* (the chain of dependent origination) and a more precise definition of its various shades of meaning and historical interpretations would facilitate its eventual correlation with physical and mental systems. The concept of *pratityasamutpada* is crucial in Buddhism. Basically it does not mean that some things depend on other things which are independent, but that all things are mutually dependent; hence Nagarjuna denies self-existence or original nature, *svabhava*, to all things--the world is empty fundamentally. This denial of a positive reality is quite unique, though the Jain holds that everything depends on everything else. However, the Nyaya-Vaisesika and the Mimamsaka hold that "atoms" and "selves" are real as they do not depend on anything else, the Samkhya holds that everything depends on Prakrti while the Advaita-Vedanta and the Bhedabhedavada hold that everything depends on brahma which does not depend on anything else; and the Yogacara would say that everything depended on consciousness alone which in turn depends on nothing else.

Nagarjuna's dialectics, which strongly presupposes interdependence, is an attempt by reason to delete all trust in the power of reason to solve existential philosophical problems and attain liberation; only the direct experience of *sunyata* can do that, but reason can perhaps show that it is meaningless to try to use reason/rationality as a stepwise path to *sunyata*; the only thing reason can do is to make one realise the inadequacy of reason and so become desperate enough to dare to take the final jump out into the unknown. This is achieving freedom from conceptuality/language (Krishnamurti called it "an empty small affair") by realising the limits of conceptuality and of words. But there is a vast gap between dialectics and the final insight, and this gap is at the heart of all Zen koans. This is the difficult part. So Nagarjuna (or Zen) does not envisage philosophy as a gradual progress of accumulation of knowledge, like, e.g. science; philosophy is instead a deeply personal and existentialistic question determining the quality of life. So the natural result is silence and a paradoxical attitude (which to-day, perhaps, is most clearly discernible in Zen Buddhism). But this paradox runs all through

these texts, yet it is most clearly expressed in the Madhyamaka view, e.g. extolling the ideal of the Bodhisattva yet simultaneously saying that there is no ideal and no Bodhisattva either.

The Relevance of Buddhist jnana

When the intricate and thorny questions of definitions, influences and authorship have been settled, there remains the intriguing attempt of correlating the processes of dhyana, yoga and pranayama, the various stages of samadhi as well as the precise consciousness content of such terms as alayavijnana and vasana, plus of course the fundamental states of sunyata and nirvana with the appropriate neurochemical activity in the cortex and the subcortical structures. Beside this there will be the far more fundamental and difficult so-called binding problem, i.e. why do some neurochemical/ electrical processes (neural and subneural) give rise to subjective qualia/experiences? Increasing evidence seem to suggest that the facile solution of comparing neurons to bits in on/off states and hence consciousness to a purely computational process fails. The somewhat more sophisticated solution of seeing consciousness as resulting from increasing complexity, i.e. as emerging from increasing hierarchies of interactions (where the combination or the sum of a and b somehow becomes more than a separated from b), suffers also from a kind of "dea/deus ex machina" syndrome, for exactly at which level does consciousness begin and how is it generated? Furthermore, both these epiphenomenalistic ad hoc hypotheses fail also to account for the evolutionary development of memory, intelligence and emotion. The radical solution of taking the bull by the horns would be to go along with the Buddhists and see consciousness and/or sunyata as fundamentally embedded in Nature at, or prior to, the level of space-time pre-geometry.

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By Niels Hammer, Sortedam Dossering 3.3th 2200 Copenhagen N Denmark

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