

Entering the Path of Enlightenment



The *Bodhicaryāvatāra*
of the Buddhist poet Śāntideva

TRANSLATION WITH GUIDE BY

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of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, which intends the destruction of every philosophical school as a means of relating to the supreme wisdom all that the writer has said up to this point. Comparison may be made with the *Lotus Sūtra* in an interesting passage which removes Prajñā from the list of the Six Pāramitās, asserting that the merit achieved by the practice of the first five perfections (*dāna, śīla, kṣānti, vīrya, dhyaṇa*) for eight hundred thousand myriads of *koṭis* of aeons does not equal a thousandth part of the merit achieved by a single thought or belief in the exposition of the Dharma which is the Sūtra itself, "perfect wisdom being excepted."² The simple reason why perfect wisdom is excepted is because it encompasses all else. The way to this wisdom, it is important to note, is "by means of one's desire for the extinction of sorrow": The progress is from sorrow through virtue, motivated by proper use of desire, the cause of sorrow and virtue, to perfect wisdom which extinguishes both sorrow, virtue, and their cause. Arrival at this stage is Buddhahood: the Buddhas are *mahā-prajñā*.³

I Description of Satya

Speaking from the point of view of relativity, the object of Prajñā is Satya, which is both truth and reality. From a higher point of view, Prajñā is identical with reality, since it is, as Dignāga (or Dinnāga) says, "nondual knowledge, and that is the Tathāgata." Śāntideva does not use the expression "nondual knowledge" or actually attempt a comparable definition, but the result is the same in that the illusion of the knowledgeable self is annihilated in Enlightenment. He does, however, distinguish between two truths, *Paramārtha Satya* and *Saṃvṛti Satya*, in the manner generally characteristic of the Mādhyamika school. It is a distinction especially to be noted in the various *Prajñā-pāramitā* texts and in Nāgārjuna, although not limited to these; it is foreshadowed (against a background of even earlier speculation) in the Upaniṣadic duality asserted to exist between absolute and phenomenal

IV The Perfection of Wisdom

The greatest of perfections is the Perfection of Wisdom, Prajñā-pāramitā. Prajñā, in the Mahāyāna, is whatever understanding of anything is left after conceptual knowledge has been discarded. Any picture which we may form in the imagination is by definition false. Any analogy is relative. Any idea, theory, or description falls short of the intuitive experience. It can only be said to be Emptiness—and even this one might question, since Emptiness is an idea. Or it can be said to be Silence, as in the myth of the famous flower that the Buddha held without explanation and without sign before his disciples, and which was understood only by Mahākāśyapa. But Silence is an idea. Zero is an idea. Truth is an idea. Understanding is an idea. Even the term "intuitive experience" is a concept of the rational mind. The matter—which is no matter—cannot be discussed, and the reams of Mahāyāna manuscripts are worthless straw, or at best, only skillful means. Some such sentiment as this is fundamental to a consideration of Śāntideva's treatment of Prajñā-pāramitā.

Every single Pāramitā, "this multitude of Pāramitās are all for the sake of Prajñā." That is the teaching of the Muni. "Hence by means of one's desire for the extinction of sorrow, let Prajñā arise."¹ In this manner begins the ninth chapter

reality. Svetaketu breaks the seed of the banyan tree and the parts of parts of the seed to find the essence within; Yājñavalkya discovers the really real in the ether in the heart; and the writer of the *Maitri-upaniṣad* comes even closer to the concept with his distinction between two forms of Brahman—the formed unreal (*asatyam*) and the formless real (*satyam*).⁵ Similar distinction is found in the Pali texts in a general differentiation between the world of ignorance and the bliss of Nirvāna: Indeed, all Buddhist systems and perhaps any system which postulates a unitary base for the experience of multiplicity—whether one or the other is true or false, or both true, or both false—must present some version of the two truths. It is, however, the Mādhyamika system which worked out the doctrine in its most systematic Buddhist form.

Samvṛti Satya is the knowledge of everyday life, the knowledge which is derived from empirical experience by ordinary means of understanding. It is conditioned by human limitation; its subject matter is phenomenal; yet it is still truth in the sense that its truth is hidden. "It is understood that truth is of two kinds, *sanvṛti* and *paramārtha*. True reality is beyond the range of understanding; so understanding is called *sanvṛti*."⁶ In a sense, the truth which is covered, veiled, and hidden, is relative truth as opposed to transcendental, because it pertains to the world of causation; but it is nonetheless as real as transcendental truth. It is always *tattva*—that which is really real: there could be nothing else, and in the last analysis it is not really veiled. Otherwise the ultimate identification of Saṃsāra and Nirvāna—basic to the school, could not be maintained.

Paramārtha Satya is the truth which is beyond conceptual knowledge—the most remote and the most excellent, the highest and the most complete aspect of truth. Since it is an ultimate, it cannot be graded according to degrees of understanding; it is the full truth which is known only in the perfection of Prajñā.

The Yogī is the man who realizes that there exist these two truths and so he does not take the world of conventional

perception for granted. In this he differs decisively from the ordinary, vulgar, or natural man; and even among those who are yogīs there are further divisions based upon differences of mental power (*dhī*), but the yogīs are all united in their basic goal, the perfection of Prajñā.⁷ The Yogī may know only Samvṛti Satya, which is divisible—there being many stages on the road to Enlightenment, but he knows that Paramārtha Satya exists. He touches the fringe of the veil.

Further division of Samvṛti Satya, and a form most convenient for dialectical purposes, relates to skillful means, *upāya*, which in some Mahāyāna texts is itself a Pāramitā. "For the sake of his appearance in the world things were taught by the Lord to be momentarily real. It is not because of *sanvṛti* if this is contradicted."⁸ On the contrary, it is because of Paramārtha Satya that the momentariness of things is contradicted, and the yogīs are not to be blamed. Likewise, the Buddha is not to be blamed for the utilization of *upāya*, and thus a way is found for the reconciliation of conflicting texts—a point on which many Mahāyāna writers are indebted to the Lotus Sutra. The topic is further discussed (with overtones of Upanisadic imagery) in the *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, quoting a sūtra called *Pitṛputrasamāgama*:

This much must be understood: to wit, the covering and the essence, the kernel and the husk. And that by the Blessed One has been fully seen, fully spoken, made clear, as being void. Therefore he is called all-knowing. As concerns the covering, the Tathāgata has seen this as being human experience; but the essence is inexpressible, not to be perceived or discerned, unexplained, unrevealed, . . . not active, . . . not gain and not no gain, not pleasure and not pain, not glory or its lack, not form and not no form. . . . There by the Conqueror, for the sake of the world, the covering was explained for people's good, that the world might produce faith towards Sugata for happiness.⁹

In terms of the Mādhyamika outlook, the vital importance of dual truth could not be more obvious. "Those that are unaware of the distinction between these two truths," writes

Nāgārjuna, "are incapable of grasping the deep significance of the teaching of the Buddha."¹⁰

Such a position is fairly elementary in the history of religions, a common enough distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric, which from the point of view of the claimant to hidden knowledge, is inevitable—here, actually an act of charity leading to Enlightenment; but from the standpoint of the unenlightened outsider in the preparatory stage, it raises troublesome questions of intellectual honesty. The least that can be said is that abuse is possible, and yet this, too, must be qualified, because from the vantage point of Paramārtha Satya the entire realm of Saṃvṛti is the abuse of truth. Abuse is as inescapable as Original Sin.

The villain is *māyā*, that familiar word which recurs so consistently and so prominently across centuries of Indian thought. It is not primarily or conspicuously a Buddhist term, but Śāntideva has no objection to it, and apparently he feels that as a common catchword for "illusion, deception, trickery, that which is constructed or fabricated," it does not imply any association with opponents of the no-self doctrine that is Buddhism. On the contrary, even the Jina is Māyā. He, too, is an illusion, and if this is so, how can one cling to the hiddenness of hidden truth? To put it all in a nutshell—Satya is Satya: Saṃvṛti Satya is still Satya, but there is no Saṃvṛti and there is no Paramārtha—only the mistake of thinking so. The mistake is Māyā.

"How is there any merit whatsoever—regarding true reality, even concerning the Jina, who is equated to Māyā? If a being is equated to Māyā, how much less is it to be born? or to have died?"¹¹ This key verse, so rich in its implications, is, in many ways, a little summation of the whole text. The same verbal root used in *māyā* (the root *mā*), "to build," is here in *upamā*, "comparison, resemblance"; or as a suffix, "that which is equal to, or similar, or like." We could say that the Jina is like *māyā*, or that he resembles *māyā*; or that the Jina is the support of *māyā*! Each statement is equally true, and

each would be excused as charitable *upāya*. In any case, there is no merit, in any real or ultimate sense, in clinging to him or to anything else. Yet at the same time, being born or being dead is not less lacking in importance or interest or even fact. We could say about any being, including the Jina: How is he born? How has he died? and the variant translation is possible: How much less is it to be born? How much less is it to have died? Śāntideva is here answering Hinayānistic objections to the cult of the Buddha, and he is defending its efficacy: Its ultimate validity is denied, to be sure, but only if one denies the validity of life and of death as well. When Māyā engulfs truth, all statements are equivocal. When the Jina is a sham, what, then, are you and I? The answer is: no more, no less; and this answer refers both to the negativism of the Buddhist attitude and, at the same time, to a promise of inexpressible richness. The Hinayāna objection to the cult of the Jina is based upon the false view of the totality of causes (*pratyaya-sāmagrī*) asserted in various forms in the Pali Scriptures. The Little Vehicle confuses causation which does not exist and which is not useful, with device (*upāya*) which does not exist but which is useful. Māyā conceals to just that extent that a totality of causes is empirically accepted. Actually, there is no continuity of elements (*saṃ-tāna-mātra*): no continuity and no elements.¹²

II The Ethical Problem

Śāntideva himself raises the principal objection to this type of thinking, and it is not the cult of the Buddha, although it is related to this Hinayānistic difficulty, but the question, what happens to ethical standards? If everything is Māyā, if there is no thought (*citta*), if all is illusion, where then is the crime in murder or in any evil action? If the victim is Māyā, what is destroyed? Śāntideva's answer is simple enough: Because of Māyā, the psychic apparatus, the Citta, is in turmoil, and good and evil have arisen. When

thought is tranquil, it is indeed true that whatever-is (the Buddha-nature, the non-self, the Enlightenment) is beyond good and evil—not in any crude sense of license based upon alleged superiority of master over victim, but beyond the occasions and the problems of good and evil. Ethical standards are as irrelevant as standards of physical well-being, but only from the standpoint of the achievement of the total Perfection of Wisdom. On this plane of multiform causation, the realm of Saṃsāra, it still behooves one to behave himself for two good reasons: first, because the Buddha taught *karuṇā*, altruistic compassion for all beings; and second, because of the increase of merit which (although not to be sought) must occur in the preliminary stages which lead to release.

On the plane of Saṃvṛti Satya, the Mādhyamika poet will not allow us to escape from morality. "From what single cause is the power of everything derived? If one is in transmigration release comes by means of *paramārtha* and by means of *saṃvṛti*."¹³ Everything is both without cause, with regard to Paramārtha Satya, and at the same time the result of many causes, with regard to Saṃvṛti Satya: Thus, release, or more strictly, "having been extinguished," *niṛvṛta*, comes via the overlapping paths of dual truth. Emptiness, the goal, is also the means; compassion is likewise a means. Emptiness includes compassion, compassion partakes of Emptiness: which is to say, Paramārtha Satya and Saṃvṛti Satya both are avenues of release.

The point is neatly expressed in the *Śikṣā-samuccaya*: "As it is said in the *Vaiśaḍhikā*: 'When a Bodhisattva gives a gift without believing in anything, it is not easy to set a limit to the mass of his merit.'"¹⁴ In this impressive statement, the Bodhisattva is described as *apratistha*—not abiding, being without foundation, not permanently fixed: it is the technical expression used to describe the particular type of Nirvāna from which the Buddha may return to the earth for the sake of creatures, although he himself is completely free from involvement, i.e., "*nirvāna qui n'est pas l'arrêt*."¹⁵ When such

a one acts from the platform of Emptiness, from the womb of compassion, believing neither that he exists, that the object of his action exists, nor that his action exists, there is indeed no facile measurement to be fixed to the *skandha*, the heap, the aggregate, the quantity, the trunk (as the trunk of a tree), which is his tremendous merit.

Thus the doctrine of the Double Truth upholds morality and at the same time destroys the basic Hinayāna objection to the Mahāvāna stress upon the helpfulness of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. On the plane of Saṃvṛti Satya, the glorious Buddhas are made manifest in their appropriate Buddha-fields; the Bodhisattvas roam selflessly throughout the six realms of being, amassing merit without self-seeking, and lavishly expending this inexhaustible treasury of merit upon gods, *asuras*, men, animals, *pretas*, and the dwellers in hell. The prayer of petition becomes possible; and it is the substance of the tenth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Whether or not Śāntideva did write this tenth chapter has been questioned, but it is a question of little practical importance; in any case, its philosophical foundations are firmly laid right here. On the plane of Paramārtha Satya it is true, of course, that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do not exist any more than they do not not exist, but neither do we! So much for the fundamental objections of the Little Vehicle.

III The Metaphysical Problem

After having brushed aside the ethical problem involved in the doctrine of the Two Truths, especially as raised by the Hinayāna, Śāntideva proceeds to the metaphysical problem involved in that doctrine. It is a problem particularly important to the second of his leading sectarian rivals, the Viñānavāda. His primary counterattack in this field is upon the Viñānavādin acceptance of pure thought, in some form or another, as an Ultimate.

Nirvāna, to Viñānavāda adherents, is undefiled consciousness (*viśuddha-vijñāna*), and the followers of this school deri-

sively labeled the Mādhyamika as the doctrine of nihilism, or "cutting-off," *ucchedavācā*.¹⁶ Exactly what form of consciousness, or thought, was held to be an Ultimate is a somewhat thorny problem, and perhaps the definition differed to some slight extent within the school. According to Dr. D. T. Suzuki, the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, and the *Mahāvāna-śraddhotpāda-śāstra* join in asserting the ultimate reality of *Cittamātratā* (the matrix of thought), and they teach that all Citta derives from this matrix and that the phenomenal world is an objectification of Citta; whereas the true Vijñānavāda of Asanga and Vasubandhu teach an ultimate *Vijñānamātratā* (the matrix of the conscious) which is undefiled consciousness without object, and that the world is only "idea" which is unrelated to "reality"—a difference between idealistic realism and pure idealism.¹⁷ Śāntideva, in any case, avoids the distinction entirely and attacks the whole school by asserting the identity of Citta and Māyā. Following his example, we may apply to the Vijñānavāda in general E. J. Thomas' comment on the *Laṅkāvatāra*: "The *Laṅkāvatāra* evidently belonged to a Mahāyāna school which existed alongside of the Prajñā-pāramitā movement. It accepted the doctrine of the Void, the career of the Bodhisattva, and the unreality of things perceived by the senses. But while the school of Nāgārjuna started from the standpoint of logic, and showed the impossibility of making any statement free from contradictions, the *Laṅkāvatāra* started from a psychological standpoint, and found a positive basis in experience."¹⁸ It is exactly this to which Śāntideva objects: "When even thought is Māyā, then what is seen? and by whom? For it was taught by the Lord of the Earth that thought does not behold thought."¹⁹

In his treatment of the Vijñānavāda, Śāntideva demonstrates particularly well the aptness of Murti's description of the Mādhyamika, "a system which is all dialectic," which, having no content, must receive its orientation from the criticism of other schools. The argument runs thus: If there is only thought, what can it think about? If there is something

to think about, then what is its cause? Every seeming cause is related to other seeming causes and no ultimate foundation is known. The blade of the sword does not cut itself: the mind (*manas*) does not behold the mind.²⁰ And there is nothing else to behold. This dialectic is, in effect, an application of Nāgārjuna's argument regarding the relativity of all causation as applied by Candrakīrti to the Vijñānavāda. The *Mādhyamika-Kārikās* begin with the destruction of the Abhidharma doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*), the gist of which is that the relation between cause and effect cannot be considered in such a way that they are identical, that they are different, that they are both identical and different, or that they are neither identical nor different. "An object as separate from its cause is not perceptible, and the cause of the object as separate from the object cannot be perceived. If the cause of the object is separate from the object itself, then you assert that the object is causeless. But to assert the existence of the cause of an object is not reasonable, for an object without a cause does not exist."²¹ There is no object minus cause; there is no cause minus object: Yet there is no cause without object; there is no object without cause. We know objects only through their relatedness, never in themselves: nothing is real which cannot be imagined to be identical with its cause or different from it.²² Thus cause and object are both destroyed, because lost forever in paradox.

It is probable that when Nāgārjuna wrote (perhaps c. 150 A.D.), the Vijñānavāda did not exist as a separate school, yet the blunt instrument to be applied for its destruction lay ready and waiting for the hand of Candrakīrti (early seventh century A.D.). Without an object, reasoned Candrakīrti, what can thought (Citta) know? No thought is known which is not caused by an object, no object can be known without thought. If thought claims to know thought—to be self-known (*svasamvitti*), division is made between knower and known, between cause and object. "Even the sharpest sword cannot cut itself; the fingertips cannot be touched by the

same fingertips. Citta does not know itself."²³ This is the argument repeated by Śāntideva, and, in addition, since the Viñānavāda especially compared the self-luminous Citta to a lamp which shines in darkness, he may very well have had in the background of his learning this more ancient statement from the Pali Canon, one of the many wherein the Buddha declared the unreality of the *skandhas*: "Depending on the oil and the wick does the light of the lamp burn; it is neither in the one nor in the other, nor anything in itself; phenomena are, likewise, nothing in themselves. All things are unreal; they are deceptions; *Nibbāna* is the only truth."²⁴

Likewise, one's "self" (the false unity dependent upon the combined *skandhas*) is not self-conscious without objectification. The Viñānavādin thesis that "the self is like a lamp which illuminates" cannot be maintained.²⁵ The flame of the lamp causes light in darkness or it does not cause light. If the lamp is not in darkness there is nothing to illuminate, so it does not cause light. If the lamp is in darkness it still does not cause light, because darkness cannot make itself light and still be darkness. Light is light and cannot make itself dark: dark is dark and cannot make itself light.²⁶ If, on the phenomenal plane, one sees that a lamp illuminates, this is affirmed by knowledge, or by consciousness of an object to be illuminated, but to say that intelligence (*buddhi*) illuminates, is meaningless in that it is affirmed by nothing, i.e., it has no cause or object. "That it is illuminated or not illuminated, as long as it is seen by no one whatsoever, is as uselessly affirmed as the charm of a barren woman's daughter." Candrakīrti had said that every single thing is as "devoid of its own-being" as "the daughter of a barren virgin carved in stone."²⁷ In each case the simile is most apt in terms of the Mādhyamika theory that phenomena are governed universally by a law of causality which is pure illusion; it is especially apt in Śāntideva's application, because in his problem even seeming causality is removed. The statement that the mind is or is not as a blazing lamp is in itself of no significance. If no one has knowledge of it, how can it be

said to be? Why should it be affirmed at all? Yet it is noteworthy that the very point which is denied by Śāntideva is capable of interpretation as *Tathatā* (Such-ness) in the *Mahāvāyānsraddhotpāda-śāstra* of Asvaghosa,²⁸ and in Ch'an it becomes the very key to reality. One finds it hard to imagine Śāntideva repeating the exhortation of Ma-tsu, a pupil of Bodhidharma: "O monks, when you each believe that you yourself are the Buddha, your mind is no other than the Buddha-mind. The object of Bodhidharma who came from Southern India to this Middle Kingdom was to personally transmit and propagate the supreme law of One Mind by which we are all to be awakened to the truth."²⁹ The supreme law of the One Mind, the blazing lamp of the Citta, would seem to be the distant truth to be discovered by those who would follow Hui-neng's cryptic advice, so characteristic of Ch'an: "Reflect in yourself and recognize your own face as it was before the world."³⁰ In any case, one's own face before creation, if it is only the blazing lamp of the Citta, would seem to Śāntideva to have as much and as little reality as anything else on the phenomenal plane. If Samsāra and Nirvāna are identical, the Citta too, like anything else, is in a sense the *Tathāgata*; but on the other hand, like everything else in the realm of Sainyiti Satya, it cannot be unique in an absolute sense, although at the same time, it cannot be said to be not unique, since at any instant it is completely transitory in so far as it is made manifest in the realm of lesser truth. In a word, Citta is phenomenal, it is passing, it is relative, and all of its aspects and functions are deceptive. There is no self-knowledge without reference to anterior perception: There is no consciousness and there is no memory which is not part of an immemorial and deceptive mesh of interrelatedness. "If there is no act of self-knowledge [because the Citta cannot behold the Citta], how is consciousness (*viñāna*) remembered? Memory (*smṛiti*) is from association with an exterior perception (*ambhūti*), as the poison is to the rat."³¹

It is assumed in this standard illustration that the poison

will take effect only as thunder sounds. In this same way, memory is derived from perception which precedes the act of memory, and hence it is only another frail shred of the deceptive mesh of interrelatedness. *Smṛti* (memory) has no independent reality, and it cannot be considered in any ultimate sense as a factor or force to be utilized in proving the existence of the self in any form—even in the Vijñānavādin version of luminous consciousness.

The logician Dignāga (c. 450 A.D.), a pupil of Vasubandhu and a leading member of the Vijñānavādin school, in his *Pramāṇa-samuccaya* ("Compendium relating to Valid Knowledge"), had attacked two of the four basic criteria of proof used by the classical Nyāya system (*pratyakṣa*, sense perception; *anumāna*, inference; *upamāna*, analogy; and *śabda*, Scriptural authority) and had accepted only two, viz., *pratyakṣa* and *upamāna*. Śāntideva, following Nāgārjuna, accepts no criteria of valid knowledge at all. The evidence of the senses he explicitly denies, and he takes pains to show their rather obvious contradictions:³² likewise, here in accord with Dignāga's position, he denies the validity of inference as a means to the attainment of positive truth; but for negative truth, or the denial of that which is false, inference appears to be quite satisfactory. Such, in effect, is the sense of the argument that nothing can be demonstrated "by observing its association with proximate causes." We can use a magical ointment to find a jar, but the jar is not really connected with the ointment, and something else would be needed to find the ointment, and something else to find the something else, etc., etc. If a connection is asserted to exist between jar and ointment, etc., then sense evidence is not denied, but this hypothesis leaves us nowhere, at least nowhere worth being: We are still in a position of sorrow.³³ Nāgārjuna had said as much in his total denial of all criteria of valid knowledge. One bit of evidence depends upon another bit of evidence and that upon another bit of evidence, and another, and another: the fallacy of *regressus ad infinitum*. It is noteworthy

that in opposing Akṣapāda Gautama, the great authority of the Nyāya, Nāgārjuna used the same illustration of the lamp and the darkness which is used by Śāntideva against the Vijñānavāda: The lamp cannot illuminate itself, because light presupposes darkness; why, he asks, if it could illuminate itself without coming into contact with darkness, could it not, without effort, remove all darkness?³⁴

The nonsympathetic observer might feel that there is, at the least, an element of irresponsible sophistry in a position which uses the tools of logic for the destruction of those very tools: the Mādhyamika here, as elsewhere, is strictly *reductio ad absurdum*—in a phrase very well put by Murti, a spiritual *ju-jitsu* which utilizes the opponent's power for the opponent's destruction.³⁵ No goal is advanced: The goal is the devastation of every thesis. Yet one wonders if a weakness in the position is not, perhaps, to be found in this matter of inference; and in the use of inference to destroy inference: Some sort of explanation would seem to be in order. Regardless of inconsistency, however, Śāntideva's method is that which clearly is stated by Candrakīrti: "The adversary, accused to think that the eye sees, is refuted by his own proof—even by inference."³⁶ The only possible justification could be the arguments cited in favor of *upāya*.

In any case, it is not the *pramāṇas* which are the principal victims of Śāntideva's criticism of the Vijñānavāda, but the concept of the Citta itself, the psychic apparatus which is the source of logical thinking, and which is supposed by the Vijñānavādins to be self-evident. In various forms he repeats his basic argument that Citta is only Māyā. If there is no object of thought, there is no thought. If one says that the thing that is not Māyā is thought, then thought is made to be nonexistent. If that which is seen is Māyā, then so is the one who sees, for the one who sees (or, for that matter the one who thinks) is made to be dependent upon the non-existent. When causes are cut off, there is no more Māyā, no more Saṃvṛti. "As soon as there is no moving to and fro, by

what means is *Māyā* perceived?"³⁷ In this way, Enlightenment is discovered to rest far beyond the illusionary power possessed by *Citta*, and what is called logical thought is superseded by *Prajñā*.

IV The Mādhyamika Answer: Śūnyatā

Although thought is illusionary and deceptive, and it is nothing but a fabrication without intrinsic meaning or character, the problem of passion remains. To be inflamed with passion, in the broad and inclusive sense of the word, *kleśā*, is, of course, the source of all sorrow; and to think that one is inflamed is not only as bad as being inflamed, but it is actually the same. This is the theory demonstrated in a little summary of the Mādhyamika position which seems to divide—perhaps deliberately?—the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. Verses 31 through 35 are particularly rewarding; for they summarize the positive affirmations of the preceding section, which included the basic objections leveled against the Hinayāna and the Viñānavāda, and they lead into assorted and less basic arguments in the defense of the Mādhyamika position. At this point the Viñānavāda view is disposed of, and we hear no more about it; but much more remains to be said about the Hinayāna and about other Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools. Śāntideva takes the classic illustration of the *Māyā*-woman, the epitome of desire and illusion, as pivotal to his argument.

"But [it is argued] if it is understood that thought is only the likeness of *Māyā*, how is passion turned aside? Even as she is created, the magician falls in love with the *Māyā*-woman. Indeed, the impression of passion (*saṃkleśā-vāsanā*)—still to be understood by the magician—has not been worn out. In that moment of beholding her, his impression of *Śūnyā* (*śūnyā-vāsanā*) is weak."³⁸ Such is the problem, and such is the answer.

The *Māyā*-woman, the woman of illusion, is a familiar figure in Sanskrit literature, who usually is created of pas-

which destroy all of the many unfortunates who possess her. A variation of the story, given in a manner which makes altruistic changes that are most revealing of the true spirit of the Mahāyāna, is quoted in the *Śikṣā-samuccaya* from a sūtra called the *Tathāgata-guhyā* ("The Secret Tathāgata"), to demonstrate the point that when a Bodhisattva is "penetrated by the Law Body," or the Essence Body (the *Dharmakāya*), just hearing him or touching him or touching anything created by him works to one's advantage. The Bodhisattva, *Vaidyārāja* ("King of Medicine"),³⁹ the master of all elements of healing, created the shape of a lovely woman's body, and all men who loved her were cured instantly of every infirmity: a phenomenon which one may note to be an extremely practical type of religion. "Just so . . . when the Bodhisattva has the Law-Body, all beings—women, men, boys, girls—distressed by passions, faults, delusion, who touch his body, no sooner do they touch it than all their passions are calmed and they feel that the distress has left their bodies; that is, by the purity that comes from this Bodhisattva's former devotion. For this reason the person must be purified."⁴⁰ In Śāntideva's verses the conception of the *Māyā*-woman passes from an ethical to a metaphysical plane, and she becomes an equivocal figure to be taken as symbolic of the whole phenomenal world. The magician (actually, the maker, or the doer: *kartr*) becomes any person or any living thing. The essential question: Why does such a one fall in love with his own fabrication? The answer: Because even as she is created, the magician's impression (*vāsanā*) of passion (actually, total passion, *saṃkleśā*) is not worn out; it is not cast off or destroyed; it is not yet understood. And in the same moment, his impression of Emptiness (*śūnyā-vāsanā*) is weak and it is feeble. One might easily draw the moral that, this being so, the *Māyā*-woman is only the same old poison-girl—the beautiful illusion who still is venomous and deadly. And the moral is quite true: Yet the very same *Māyā*-woman, if she were understood as total Emptiness, would be no less beautiful, but, far from being the harmful instigator of pas-

sion, would become an insight leading to tranquility and to the uttermost truth.

It is said in the Tibetan legend that when Śāntideva chanted the thirty-fifth verse of the chapter on Prajñāpāramitā, which follows the contrast made between the impression of passion and the impression of Emptiness, he levitated and disappeared. However, his words continued to be heard by his followers and they were able to write down the ending of the book. Such incidents of transfiguration and ascension could not be more appropriate. As so many other legends, if it did not happen, then it ought to have happened; in this case, it is a vivid parable illustrating the nature of illusion versus ultimate Truth.

In time even the impression (*vāsanā*) of existence, much less the impression of merit or the impression of passion, must fade as mere shadows before the brilliant rays of Enlightenment. Even the impression of Emptiness must eventually be renounced. "By holding to the impression of *śūrya*, it is realized that the impression of existence is nothing at all; and, afterwards, by repetition even this is discarded."⁴¹ The repetition or "study" is the Bodhisattva's path: the *Bodhisattva-caryā*. It reveals the Emptiness of being, and the Emptiness of nonbeing is virtually self-evident.

"When an existence is not accepted of which it may be said that it does not exist, then nonexistence is without foundation: How can it stand before the mind?"⁴² It is to be noted that *bhāva* (existence) and *abhāva* (nonexistence) here represent being and nonbeing in their most final and essential meaning on the phenomenal plane. They might well be defined as the ground and potentiality of *Samvṛti*, and as such, they are joined in *Māyā*. To realize this, there are, in effect, three stages of progress:

- (1) the realization that there is no *bhāva*, that existence has no unconditioned support (*āśraya*), that all causes are caused, that the phenomenal universe is a sort of glittering quicksand of possibility without any trace of solid foundation; and
- (2) the realization that there is no *abhāva*, that nonbeing

is a contradiction in terms, that no-thing is only nothingness, which is to say, that there is no Emptiness; and

(3) Prajñā, intuitive awareness of the middle ground between being and nonbeing: That-which-is-never-to-be-given-to-definition. "When neither existence nor nonexistence again is presented to the mind, then, through lack of any other possibility, that which is without support becomes tranquil."⁴³

That-which-is-without-support (*nirālambā*), according to the commentator Prajñākaramati, is the *buddhi*. (That-which-is-never-to-be-given-to-definition was never disturbed in the first place.) The "thus-making" factor (*buddhi*) is pacified, and there are no more problems. Indeed, the only problem is why the Hīnayānists and others find difficulties in this doctrine: or, perhaps, more fundamentally, why there are any problems to be explained at all?

V The Body of the Buddha

Reverting to the question of the cult of the Buddha (in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Chapter IX, verses 36 through 40), the lasting effects of the Buddha's presence among men, even after he had disappeared, the results of his impression (*vāsanā*), are compared to the power of the wishing stone which grants all of the desires of the one who possesses it, and the wishing tree which serves the same purpose in the Paradise of Indra. The Buddha's Body (*Jina-bimba*) is compared also to the pillar of healing that is ascribed by folklore to the snake charmer; it is said that long after a snake charmer has left a village, the pillar which he may create in that village will retain a certain potency that can cure the effects of poison. So also is the Jina-pillar (*Jina-stambha*) which the Bodhisattva leaves behind on the way to Enlightenment; it remains when the Bodhisattva is extinguished and it does all things that remain to be done. In this way, it may be observed, the Bodhisattva does have his cake even as he eats it, for at one and the same time he is off to Nirvāna and still accomplishing all which demands his attention in the

phenomenal realms of sorrow. Of course, this is only as it should be, since it is the result of his discipline, his training, his conversion (all of which is conveyed by *vinaya*), and his vow (*pranidhāna*): It is the accomplishment of which conformity to the Way of Enlightenment is the means.

Since this is the case, adoration (*pūjā*) can and should be made to Buddhas and to Bodhisattvas, even if they are beings without thought. Citta, after all, is on the Māyā side of relative reality, it belongs to the realm of Saṃvṛti Satya; whereas the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas belong to the realm of Paramārtha Satya. Obviously, they are without thought, for by definition they have been freed from any form of conditionality. It is because of this freedom from limitation that their power in the phenomenal world is without plausible estimate of its extent and value.

"How can there be fruits when *pūjā* is made to a being without thought? Because it is taught that the one who stands and the one who is extinguished are equal."⁴⁴ The fruits of merit, although not to be measured, are always present, whether in the realm of the hidden (*saṃvṛti*) or in the realm of the really real (*tattva*).⁴⁵ It could not be otherwise if the reality of Saṃvṛti Satya and of Paramārtha Satya are identical, and if there is no essential difference between Nirvāna and Saṃsāra.

The *Sikṣā-samuccaya* attempts another restatement of this difficult doctrine: "On this topic, it is described in the *Piṅgulasamāgama* how all phenomena are without substance, but it is not denied that they are connected with the fruit of action; that they have no properties of their own, but it is not denied that they are connected with the world of appearance."⁴⁶ "All phenomena are without substance . . .": That is to say, all dharmas (*sarva-dharma*)—all momentary entities of seeming existence; the flashes of momentariness, the endless stream of illusion—are without substance. They have as a basis or foundation (*āśraya*) for existence only the nonexistence of the self: the non-self (*nirātman*), which is

not much of a basis for either existing or not existing. Yet it is asserted that they exist, "not having denied the bond between *karma* and its fruit." There is of course no such bond, no connection between action and the fruit of action; and all dharmas are *nīṣvabhāvātā*, they have no being of their own. Hence it is a mistake, based upon the mistake of not realizing that all dharmas are empty, that one assumes dharmas to constitute the visible world.

In the background of this teaching, as it relates to the Body of the Buddha, there is to be discovered a dual nature with regard to the Buddha's person, which corresponds to the respective realms of the Two Truths. Traditionally, the *Nirmāṇa-kāya* is the assumed or magical body of history: The *Dharma-kāya*, although in some sense still a person, is virtually the essential nature of the ultimate truth. The Commentary quotes the *Vairocana-sūtra*: "A Buddha is to be seen (known) from the Law; for the Lords have the Law-body; and the nature of the Law cannot be understood, nor can it be made to be understood."⁴⁷ The traditional Triple Body (*Trikāya*) of the Buddha is not clearly stated in Śāntideva, although perhaps it is assumed: The intermediate body, the *Sambhoga-kāya* does not seem to be an issue with anyone; it belongs to the language of devotion rather than of philosophy. Actually, the Body of the Buddha (*Jina-bimba*), when literally translated, is virtually the resplendent Body of Enjoyment: The *Jina-bimba* is the "image of the Conqueror"; *bimba* is a disk, as of the sun or the moon, or a mirror; or it is a shadow, a picture, or a type.⁴⁸ And we are reminded of the wonders of Buddhist art; of the rays radiating from the halo of the Buddha, or from the Buddha's total person; of the Bodhisattva rising triumphantly out of the night as the full moon from behind the hills.

The same problem that the relativity of causation creates for the succession of cause and effect is inherent in the respect to be given to the Buddhist Scriptures. They too, even more than the *Jina-bimba*, belong to the world which lies

in tumult and turmoil on this side of Emptiness, and in their teaching of *Sūnyatā* they are, in a sense, denying their own validity. At least it may be said that they deny their own validity as any type of ultimate bearer of truth. Like the Bodhisattva, like the "Good Friend," like the practices of discipline and of *pūjā*, they point the way; but one is not to consider them as the way. They too are a kind of "impression": They are a sort of momentum which follows the initial action of the Enlightened Being. The Buddha speaks, and long after his extinction, his words echo in the hearts of men.

In continuance of his critique of the *Hīnayāna*, *Sāntideva* poses several objections to his own views—questions with which he doubtless contended many times in the course of lectures and debates. It is not difficult to imagine the eager student at *Nālandā* listening to the doctrine of *Sūnyatā*, and then throwing up to his teacher the objection—as if the idea were quite original to himself—that the Four Noble Truths are taught as the way to release in the very same Scriptures which the lecturer defends. If this is so, what good is the teaching of the Void? Because, answers *Sāntideva*, shifting the ground of argument and quoting the Scripture as its own self-vindicating authority—because "following the Scripture, there is no Enlightenment except by this path."⁴⁹ He does not bother to quote any of the Scriptures which he has in mind, although *Prajñākaramati* identifies them with the corpus of the *Prajñā-pāramitā*, because the real issue is not to find a proof text out of the thousands which could be produced; the issue is the authenticity of the *Mahāyāna* Scriptures in general.

That the *Mahāyāna* Scriptures are unproven is the objection, and *Sāntideva* throws the objection back into the teeth of his questioner. "How is your own Scripture proven?" The answer: It is proven by consensus. There is no argument: Both *Hīnayānist* and *Mahāyānist* agree on the validity of *Hīnayāna* Scriptures; and whatever the causes of their acceptance (their origination in the spoken discourse of the Buddha, the unbroken line of transmission, their suscep-

tibility to pragmatic proof, etc.) these causes should be applied to the *Mahāyāna* Scriptures as well. There can be no appeal to any authority outside the Buddhist community, for in that case, the followers of the Vedas and of heretical scriptures of all types could find many supporters and abundant examples of both oral and written tradition. Likewise, the argument cannot be used that *Mahāyāna* Scriptures are invalid because there is contradictory disputation within the fellowship of *Mahāyāna* believers. There is no escaping such disputation; it is within the *Hīnayāna* itself, and it is to be found among all groups. What is important is not contention or disagreement; what is important is the truth of the sūtras in question.

The commentator *Prajñākaramati* and the *Sikṣā-samuccaya* both quote a passage from the *Adhyāśayasamcodana-sūtra* ("Sūtra of the Urging to Determination") to indicate the criteria by which any religious pronouncement may be judged:⁵⁰

"Moreover, O Maitreya, by four causes the word of the Buddhas may be recognized. What four? (1) O Maitreya, it refers to truth, not to untruth; (2) to the Law, not the not-Law; (3) it lessens sin, not increases it; (4) it shows the advantages of *Nirvāṇa*, not indicates those of continued rebirth. . . . When someone, O Maitreya, utters or shall utter a word endowed with these four qualities, the believing young men and women will produce the idea of Buddha, of Master; they will hear this Law as he preaches. Why? Anything, Maitreya, that is well said, is a word of Buddha."

Such tolerance leaves the door open to the investigation of innumerable sources, without discrimination or prejudice concerning the question of authorship, and it shows at once both the pragmatic emphasis of Buddhism and the lack of interest in historical fact which is a general characteristic of Indian religions. For his part, *Sāntideva* takes a respectful and, at the same time, a comparatively restrained attitude towards the Scriptures. He bases (or claims to base) all of his teaching upon the previous writings of Buddhist authori-

ties, and yet he does not go to the extremes of *sūtra* veneration which are not uncommon on more popular levels of thought and practice.

The discussion about the Scriptures, with its initial reference to the Four Noble Truths, provides Śāntideva with yet another opportunity for an excursus into the doctrine of Śūnyatā. It also provides us with an interesting problem (shirked by the commentary) as to the exact degree of validity that the Four Noble Truths can have to a follower of the Middle Path school. The original question which was set up to allow for insertion of the remarks about the Scriptures leads us into the usual deep water. "But if [it is argued] release is by the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, what good is the teaching of *śūnyatā*? Because, following the Scripture, there is no Enlightenment except by this path."⁵¹ As is well known, the Noble Truths are the truths of sorrow, of the origin of sorrow, of the extinction of sorrow, and of the course of conduct which leads to the extinction of sorrow. It cannot be assumed on the basis of the succeeding verses in which the merit of the Scriptures is extolled, that Śāntideva would agree to a bold statement that they are inadequate *per se*; but since he does say that there is no Enlightenment except by the teaching of Śūnyatā, we must assume perforce that he considers the Four Noble Truths to be susceptible of an interpretation which is consonant with the doctrine of Emptiness. The crux of the issue would appear to lie in the verse which is a virtual affirmation of identity between the enlightened disciple and the state of Enlightenment: "The root of religion is the life of the *bhīkṣu*; and for the thought which depends upon props, Nirvāna is as difficult as the life of the *bhīkṣu* is difficult."⁵² In other words, in order to be a true *bhīkṣu*, a true follower of the Four Noble Truths, it is necessary to understand Śūnyatā, the understanding of which, in this school, is the equivalent of the true Nirvāna. For the *bhīkṣu* whose thought, or psychic apparatus (*citta*), relies upon any support, there is no understanding of Śūnyatā,

the unsupported—and hence no Nirvāna, and hence no true discipleship.

In simpler language, just understanding the Four Noble Truths on a superficial mental level is not enough. The total self must be totally involved: The understanding must be existential. It is true (if we read Śāntideva correctly on this point) that if *trṣṇā* (craving or thirst) is controlled, as explained in the formula of the Four Noble Truths, then Enlightenment follows; but just saying it, or just knowing it, is not enough. It is obvious that we all know it, but we are still distressed by it. From craving (*trṣṇā*) comes grasping (*upādāna*), as explained by the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*pratitya-samutpāda*), and the control of grasping follows the control of craving. Very true, but how do we control craving if we have no realization of Sunyatā? It is true that the cause of craving (*trṣṇā*) is feeling (*vedanā*), as again explained in the *pratitya-samutpāda*, yet it is obvious that those who advocate the *pratitya-samutpāda* as a way of release are still victimized by feeling. "The thought which has an object must be attached to something or other."⁵³ That is to say, when the Citta believes in objects, grasping (*upādāna*), the ninth link in the *pratitya-samutpāda*, is connected to craving (*trṣṇā*), the eighth link, and this to feeling (*vedanā*), the seventh link, and so on and so on—and around and around the unbroken chain. We must break through the endless circle by realizing that the whole apparatus of enslavement is only Māyā.

"Without *śūnyatā* the imprisoned thought is reborn again, even after attainment of the stage of unconsciousness. Therefore one should cultivate *śūnyatā*."⁵⁴ Old age, disease, death, and misery are like four great mountains which reach from the earth to the sky, and which slowly converge upon mankind. They move in together from the four directions, tearing up the earth and grinding under their terrible weight all inanimate objects, all growing things, and every living creature. Soon all are trapped and crushed beneath them, and then

the cycle begins again. Even in unconsciousness (as achieved in one of the most advanced of the *samāpattis*, the *asamjñī-samāpatti*, which is second only to the complete extinction of all things)⁵⁵ there is no escape; and yet knowing the awful trap, and even realizing exactly how the trap operates, does little or no good. Only Emptiness can prevent the mountains from closing in: Śūnyatā is the obstacle, the rival, the enemy, the opposite of the dark hindrances of passion and of intellect.⁵⁶ Śūnyatā is the healing of both moral and intellectual faults. To find Śūnyatā is to find freedom from every limitation.

Some may argue that one who seeks Śūnyatā is held in Saṃsāra; and in consequence, because on the phenomenal plane Śūnyatā is made manifest as compassion, he remains unliberated from clinging and from fear “for the sake of the sorrowful”; and that one would only remain in such a terrible state because of confusion (*moha*). But this is a false objection, replies the poet laureate of the Bodhisattva, and it does not even touch upon Śūnyatā. The discussion of “impression” (*vāsanā*) has resolved the whole matter: The Bodhisattva acts in the realm of Sainvṛti Satya without passion and his action is a reflex of his goodness.⁵⁷ There is nothing to fear in the doctrine of Śūnyatā, either because it holds one to a sorrowful existence, which it does not, or because it is annihilation (a silly objection if there is no self to start with, and if, in addition, the state of Śūnyatā cannot be said to exist anymore than it can be said not to exist). Fear can arise only from something which causes sorrow. “Śūnyatā is the soothing of sorrow, so why should fear arise?”⁵⁸

We are reminded of a sort of metaphysical Epicurus, who found contentment in the thought that after death he could not suffer, because he would not be; although this Indian Epicurus, while anticipating neither being nor nonbeing, still strives for unconditionality. They are brothers at least as regards this one point, that there will be nothing to suffer; and from the platform of Emptiness, whether materialistic or transcendental, the point is well taken: “There may be

fear from any quarter whatever, if I really am anything at all; but if I am nothing whatever, whose fear will it be?”⁵⁹ So much for consolation.

VI Hymn To Selflessness

The latter portion of the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a kind of passionate philosophical hymn (which at the same time is a partial summary of the Mādhyamika position) dealing with the one great thought that—either materialistically or in any other fashion—the Ego is *not*. This assertion is used as the principal means of refuting non-Buddhist schools.

To the materialist Śāntideva gives short shrift, using ancient arguments which very likely belong to bedrock Buddhism. At the least they are found in all schools, excepting only that remote and unorthodox group which held to the existence of *puṅgala*, a true and abiding self. Of this short-lived and shadowy doctrine only traces remain in extant literature, and it is noteworthy that even its followers shied away from the term “*Ātman*” as if the conception of a soul were in some way abhorrent to them.⁶⁰ It cannot be denied that the non-existence of the *Ātman* is axiomatic to both the Great and the Little Vehicles.

Śāntideva’s version of the non-self argument is a somewhat hit-or-miss analysis of the parts of the body, and the parts of the parts of the body, to show that no self or permanent entity is anywhere to be found. One is not teeth nor hair nor nails nor bone. He is not blood nor mucus nor phlegm nor pus nor lymph. He is not marrow, fat, muscle, intestines, perspiration, nor anything that is within the body, nor anything that is outside of the body. He is likewise in no part of any part; and he shows that the body itself is a fabrication, since it is a thing made up of parts without entity of its own; and the parts themselves are mere fabrications, since they are only made up of more parts. There is no foot, only the parts of a foot. There is no limb, only the parts of a

limb. And even the parts do not exist; they are made up of atoms which are made up of empty space. Comparable arguments easily are found as a major theme running through all of the principal texts, not excluding those of the Pali Canon. Comparison is made in the *Sikṣā-samuccaya*, referring to the *Bhagavati-sūtra*, between the Bodhisattva and the butcher: The one cuts up a cow into so many pieces that there is nothing left; the other mentally dissects the human body, he analyzes its elements, and he finds nothing but the illusion of misery.⁶¹

The Sāṅkhya philosophy is given a little closer attention than that rendered to mere materialism; and the arguments for its destruction are a mixture of the type of analysis which has been applied to materialism, and the familiar Mādhyamika method of postulating the absurdity of each of the two contrary propositions which are said to include all of the possibilities inherent in a given experience. The attack upon the system begins at the vulnerable point of the six perceptions (*śaḍ-vijñānaṅi*),⁶² which in Sāṅkhya are the five *jñānendriya* (the faculties of sense) and the *manas* (the faculty of thought). This is the very crux of the system, since herein is the link between the tangible and the intangible. Śāntideva presumably does not have to bother with the *puruṣa* (the life monad who is eternally inactive, although colored by a false identification of itself and the action of primal matter), because his arguments against the *ātman* apply to the *puruṣa* as well. (The problem of the one and the many—whether there is one *ātman* or many *puruṣas*—obviously hangs upon an affirmation of the existence of soul in the first place.) It is the theory of *prakṛti* (primal matter) with which he must contend. Out of undifferentiated primal matter is supposed to evolve the *buddhi*, or *mahat*, the impersonal thought-and-emotion machine which lies beyond the differentiation of personality. Out of this comes the *ahamkāra*, the faculty of individuation which attributes the activities of evolving *prakṛti* to *puruṣa*, who is really (if he only knew it) eternally free from all of the tedious manifestations of matter.

The Buddha acting through the *ahamkāra*, that is, under the guise of individuality, is manifest in its thinking aspect as *manas*, and in its feeling aspect as the five *jñānendriya* (the faculties of sense): *śabda*, sound; *sparsā*, touch; *rūpa*, form; *rasa*, flavor; and *gandha*, smell. There are, in addition, five faculties of action, and five subtle elements which correspond to the five sense experiences, and also five gross elements which make up the tangible world.⁶³ The consciousness of the six perceptions (the *manas* and the five *jñānendriya*) is the point at issue. If consciousness (*jñāna*, sense perception) depends upon the reception of sense experience (runs the argument), then sense experience must be constant. Sound, for example, must always exist and be perceived, for it is by and in terms of sound that consciousness is explained. Without an object of consciousness, consciousness is impossible, since it cannot be made manifest by that which is unconscious. This is essentially the same argument which earlier was used against the Vijñānavāda to prove the nonexistence of the Citta as a thought without object. Thus far, the only difference is the shift from the realm of ideation to the realm of sensual experience. The next step is to tear apart any sense of connection between the forms of sense perception. If form (*rūpa*) occasions sense perception, then why does it not hear?—a quibbling question in a way, but deadly serious to Śāntideva; and the answer is that *rūpa* and *śabda* are without relationship and that neither one can claim to be a principle of consciousness in and of itself. Form does not perceive sound, nor sound, form; and yet they are supposed to be self-existent conscious entities. It is like calling the same man father and son: In reality he is (according to Sāṅkhya) only the intertwining of the three *guṇas* (qualities or “threads”) which constitute *prakṛti*, and he is neither father nor son in any real sense. The one who perceives father and son is said to be like an actor—transient, fleeting—who comes and goes from out of the depths of primal matter. If so, says Śāntideva, what is its true nature? If it is mere *rūpa* it is not conscious; if it is conscious (*jñāna*) then there can be no dis-

inction between men, because they all are undifferentiated primal matter. In addition, turning to the Nyāya school (following the pattern of the argument regarding the lighted lamp and the darkness), we cannot have things both ways: Either the Ego (*aḥam*) is conscious or it is not. If it becomes conscious because of uniting with a factor or function of consciousness, then unconsciousness is lost; and if it becomes unconsciousness when this condition is not established, then consciousness is lost. Yet it is said to be immutable!⁶⁴

From the springboard of Sāṃkhya errors Śāntideva launches an attack against all forms of Ego doctrine and against all forms of perception, which is the principal support of the Ego. The twists and turns of the argument touch rapidly upon fallacy after fallacy which may lead one to the belief that he exists in any significant way. Careful organization of thought is not as apparent as the abundance of argumentation. We are lost, as it were, in a flood of sardonic denial.

Some will say that there must be a union of cause and effect—a joining of *karma* and its fruit (*phāla*). False: No connection is possible. Cause and effect are supported by entirely different collections of interrelated factors of causation. Because they appear at different moments of the time sequence, the effect cannot be united with the cause. "The one who acts" is not "the one who enjoys." There is no unity of that phenomenal series (*saṃtāna*) which makes up the illusion of life.⁶⁵

Some will say that if this is true, ethical standards are bypassed; they will say that such standards depend upon individual existence, that one cannot exhibit compassion to a being who does not exist. False: Compassion is purposefully bestowed because of the seemingly extant situation of delusion in which all share. The issue has been argued several times: The Bodhisattva acts out of compassion without believing in objects.⁶⁶

Some will say that the body is the self. False: It has just been shown that the body is no entity. It is only a conglomeration of parts, and the parts are conglomerations of

parts. Either the body is to be found in each part or it is not to be found in each part. If it is in each part, there must be as many bodies as there are parts. If it is not in each part, then it is nowhere. "The body does not exist, but because of delusion, there is a body-idea (*kāya-buddhi*) in its parts—because of a kind of fabrication (*saṃniveśa*), like imagining a man in a stump."⁶⁷ And the parts of the body are comparable fabrications which can be split and re-split until nothing is left but atoms.

Some will say (e.g., the Mīmāṃsākas and the Vaiśeṣikas) that the atoms are self-existent and eternal. False: They can each be split into six sections, the six cardinal points of the universe, and these six sections are only empty space without parts.

Some will cling to the delusion of form (*rūpa*, the first of the five *skandhas*), but this is like falling in love within a dream.

Some will cling to sensation (*vedanā*, the second of the five *skandhas*), but no principle of sensation, either pleasant or unpleasant, exists in and of itself. If it did so exist, the pleasant would be made manifest in conditions of sorrow, and the sorrowful would assert itself in the time of joy. Sensation is only a fiction to be dissolved in contemplation.

We might expect Śāntideva at this point to discuss perception (*saṃjñā*), the third of the five *skandhas*, and impulse (*saṃskāra*), but he jumps instead from an analysis of the five *skandhas* to *sparsa*, contact or impression, which is the immediate cause of sensation in the Chain of Causation (*pratītya-samutpāda*). It is to be assumed from the arguing away of form, sensation, and (after contact) mental phenomena (*viññāna* in the list of *skandhas*) that perception and impulse are destroyed by implication. The argument concerning contact would apply to them as well as to sensation. It is, in any case, a typical Mādhyamika assertion of no assertion: that there can be no contact between objects.

If there is an interval between objects—no contact; if there is not an interval, they are a unity—no contact. There

function between men, because they all are undifferentiated primal matter. In addition, turning to the Nyāya school (following the pattern of the argument regarding the lighted lamp and the darkness), we cannot have things both ways: Either the Ego (*aham*) is conscious or it is not. If it becomes conscious because of uniting with a factor or function of consciousness, then unconsciousness is lost; and if it becomes unconscious when this condition is not established, then unconsciousness is lost. Yet it is said to be immutable!⁶⁴

From the springboard of Sāṅkhya errors Śāntideva launches an attack against all forms of Ego doctrine and against all forms of perception, which is the principal support of the Ego. The twists and turns of the argument touch rapidly upon fallacy after fallacy which may lead one to the belief that he exists in any significant way. Careful organization of thought is not as apparent as the abundance of argumentation. We are lost, as it were, in a flood of sardonic denial.

Some will say that there must be a union of cause and effect—a joining of *karma* and its fruit (*phala*). False: No connection is possible. Cause and effect are supported by entirely different collections of interrelated factors of causation. Because they appear at different moments of the time sequence, the effect cannot be united with the cause. "The one who acts" is not "the one who enjoys." There is no unity of that phenomenal series (*sarvāṅga*) which makes up the illusion of life.⁶⁵

Some will say that if this is true, ethical standards are bypassed; they will say that such standards depend upon individual existence, that one cannot exhibit compassion to a being who does not exist. False: Compassion is purposefully bestowed because of the seemingly extant situation of delusion in which all share. The issue has been argued several times: The Bodhisattva acts out of compassion without believing in objects.⁶⁶

Some will say that the body is the self. False: It has just been shown that the body is no entity. It is only a conglomeration of parts, and the parts are conglomerations of

parts. Either the body is to be found in each part or it is not to be found in each part. If it is in each part, there must be as many bodies as there are parts. If it is not in each part, then it is nowhere. "The body does not exist, but because of delusion, there is a body-idea (*kāya-buddhi*) in its parts—because of a kind of fabrication (*saṃvīteṣa*), like imagining a man in a stump."⁶⁷ And the parts of the body are comparable fabrications which can be split and re-split until nothing is left but atoms.

Some will say (e.g., the Mīmāṃsākas and the Vaiśeṣikas) that the atoms are self-existent and eternal. False: They can each be split into six sections, the six cardinal points of the universe, and these six sections are only empty space without parts.

Some will cling to the delusion of form (*rūpa*, the first of the five *skandhas*), but this is like falling in love within a dream.

Some will cling to sensation (*vedanā*, the second of the five *skandhas*), but no principle of sensation, either pleasant or unpleasant, exists in and of itself. If it did so exist, the pleasant would be made manifest in conditions of sorrow, and the sorrowful would assert itself in the time of joy. Sensation is only a fiction to be dissolved in contemplation.

We might expect Śāntideva at this point to discuss perception (*saṃjñā*), the third of the five *skandhas*, and impulse (*saṃskāra*), but he jumps instead from an analysis of the five *skandhas* to *spṛṣā*, contact or impression, which is the immediate cause of sensation in the Chain of Causation (*pratītya-samutpāda*). It is to be assumed from the arguing away of form, sensation, and (after contact) mental phenomena (*viñāna* in the list of *skandhas*) that perception and impulse are destroyed by implication. The argument concerning contact would apply to them as well as to sensation. It is, in any case, a typical Mādhyamika assertion of no assertion: that there can be no contact between objects.

If there is an interval between objects—no contact; if there is not an interval, they are a unity—no contact. There

is nothing, anyway, that anything could touch, because consciousness (*vijñāna*) is without form—so no contact; and any aggregate (*samūhā*) cannot experience contact because none of its parts can touch and the aggregate not be a unity. Thus, contact cannot be the origin of sensation which leads, in such overly easy stages, to craving, grasping, becoming, birth, and multiform sorrow.

Some will say that mental phenomena constitute the essence of the self, but this, too, is false: The claim has been examined in the section dealing with the Vijñānavāda and found wanting. The mind, thought, consciousness, or whatever one may care to call the misleading mechanism of cognition, is contingent upon the false conception of causality. In the five senses (*indriya*), in form (*rūpa*), in the inside or the outside of the body, or anywhere else, thought is not to be found which is independent and self-existent.⁶⁸

The place of mental phenomena in this list of Ego-less fabrications of Māyā completes the *skandhas* (if this could be the arrangement which causes Śāntideva to organize his material in this fashion). He has passed from body as such, through the manifestations of the body, to the mind, and he has found no abiding or resting place. His next step is to destroy the illusion of *dharma*s, and we remember that this is the exact pattern of the *Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*, “The Sūtra of the Heart (or Secret) of the Perfection of Wisdom,” which is supposed to be a summary of the entire *Prajñā-pāramitā*:⁶⁹

Avalokita, The Holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of the Wisdom which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high. He beheld but five heaps, and He saw that in their own-being they were empty. Here, O Śāriputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form (*rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyatāva rūpaṃ*); emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness (*evam eva vedanā-samjñā-samskāra-vijñānaṃ*).

It is to this devastating insight that Śāntideva has taken us, and now he takes us one more step, following Nāgārjuna, in denying the existence of any *dharma*—the momentary false flash of phenomenal existence accepted by the Abhidharma schools and worked out in great detail by them to explain the world of appearances. In the *Mādhyamika*, *dharma*s are only *māyā*. It is true, as Keith observes (un-sympathetically): “If we accept the strict doctrine of Nāgārjuna, as interpreted by Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti, and accepted by Śāntideva, we must admit that the phenomenal world has not merely no existence in absolute truth, but has even no phenomenal existence, difficult as this conception is, and numerous as are the failures of its holders exactly to express it.”⁷⁰ Such, indeed, is also the effect of the view expressed in the next verse (following those quoted above) of the *Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya-sūtra*: “Here, O Śāriputra, all *dharma*s are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete.” In other words, no adjective applies to them. In the *Vajracchedikā* the question is asked if the Tathāgata has known any *dharma* as “the uttermost, right, and perfect enlightenment,” and the answer is that he has *not*. Of that which he has known and demonstrated (still called *dharma*), “it cannot be grasped, it cannot be talked about, it is neither a *dharma* nor a no-*dharma*.”⁷¹ Anything which has the nature of a *dharma* is conditioned, it depends upon supports, it has no ultimate existence of its own. In the last analysis, the only reason why the illusion of *dharma*s is accepted by anyone is because of the trust which unwisely is given to the testimony of the five senses and the mind. It has no unconditional vindication. “If knowledge is before that which is known, what is its original support? If knowledge is simultaneous with that which is known, what is its original support? Likewise, if it should be after that which is known, then from where can knowledge come? And so the arising of all *dharma*s is impossible.”⁷²

The Abhidharma schools never had satisfactorily explained

the arising of dharmas, or how, when once arisen, they could disappear, which had forced Nāgārjuna to conclude: "Origination, existence, and destruction are of the nature of *māyā*, dreams or fairy castle."⁷³ If this is so, then why, we wonder, are there any problems at all; and Śāntideva himself asks this question: Why, if there is nothing hidden, are there two truths? Which is the same as asking, How can beings be released if they are not first confined? The answer: The one who is released is only "the imagination of another's thought (*para-citta-vikalpa*)."⁷⁴ The hypothesis, the fiction, the imagination (*kalpanā*), and the thing which has been imagined (*kalpita*) are mutually dependent.⁷⁵ The question is really about which is primary: Is it the hiddenness, the creature of imagination, the appearance of the realm of Sainvṛti? Or is it the fiction that the hiddenness exists? Empirical existence is the "given," it is not the "that," and its "givenness" is not from itself, but from the corrupt and ignorant eye of the beholder. It is another way of saying that all dharmas are conditioned. To be a father requires a son, to be a son requires a father. To be a plant requires a seed, to be a seed requires a plant. Or as in the venerable Western riddle: Which did come first, the chicken or the egg? Furthermore, not only imagination (*kalpanā*) and the thing imagined (*kalpita*) are conditional and belong to the realm of Sainvṛti Satya, but the very means of knowing, that is, the criteria of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*), and anything known (*pramita*) are equally false. The thing that is examined (*vicārita*) is examined only in terms of what already has been examined; so discursive reasoning is as false as all dharmas are false, and its concepts have no foundation. Because they have no foundation (*nr-dāśraya*) they have never arisen, "and this is called Nirvāṇa." Thus there is no distinction between Nirvāṇa and Saṃsāra.⁷⁶ The Mādhyamika destroys both the dharmas of sense perception and the other dharmas which are so-called rational concepts: That they are so easily lumped together is further indication of the spirit

and the flavor of a system which is introverted beyond the limits of the mind, and which (excepting always the burning urge to serve with compassion) is not interested in the outside world at all.

There is, in addition, besides the nonexistence of dharmas, no ultimate cause for the arising of the illusion that they do exist. The materialists (Svabhāvavādins), holding that things exist without causation, by their own nature, are refuted by the casual observation that the sequence of seeming causation is *ad infinitum*. Similarly, no God can be alleged, as by the Nyāya, to be an ultimate cause, because the very concept of *īśvara*, a Lord, or *īśatā*, Lordliness, involves a multitude of contradictions.⁷⁷ If he is in the elements, he is not ultimate or unitary or even pure. If he is space, he is inactive. If he is *ātman*, all of the arguments which demonstrate the nonexistence of any *ātman* destroy him. If he is unknowable, then he cannot be called a creator, and indeed there is nothing for him to create. "If there is no beginning of causation, how can there be a beginning of effect?" And if he could create, why would he? If he acts without desire he must be dependent, because forced to act. If he acts because of desire, he must be dependent upon that desire. Likewise, he is dependent upon the totality of things; for if it is nonexistent, he has no scope for activity, and if it is complete, its completeness implies permanency and the Lord cannot cease from acting within it. So there is no eternal Lordliness. There is also no eternality to atoms, as argued by the Mīmāṃsākas, Vaiśeṣikas, etc., by reason of arguments already asserted. And, returning to the followers of Sāṅkhya, there is no primary matter (*pradhāna*, or *prakṛti*) which is the cause of creation. *Prakṛti* is defined as an equilibrium of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (corresponding, in part, to pleasure, pain, and error), but that is not a unity, since it is threefold by definition; and even each of these is threefold, since no *guṇa* is known to the unliberated soul in its pure form. Each contains an admixture of the other. Pleasure is supposed to

be derived from the admixture of *guṇas*, but it is not possible that a material thing is the cause of an insubstantial experience. Likewise, the Sāṃkhya system itself further denies the possibility of primary matter being considered as an ultimate cause because of its distinction between gross and subtle elements. (The five *tanmātras* are the subtle organs of sense; the five *sthūla bhūtāni* are the gross elements which correspond to them in the sense experience.) Either *prakṛti* is the one or it is the other if it is unchanging, and if it is unchanging it does not create; And if it does change, then it is as impermanent as pleasure is impermanent. Even if it did exist, nothing could arise from primary matter, because the effect is not contained in the cause. The seed is not the cotton tree; the cotton is not the garment. The vulgar world, including the Nyāya, the School of Logic, may take the appearance of things as a criterion of proof, but the appearance of things is nonexistent. "If the criterion of proof (*pramāṇa*) is not criterion of proof (*apramāṇa*), then what is understood (*pramīta*) is false. It follows, in fact, that the Emptiness (*sūnyatā*) of creatures does not arise."⁷⁸

It is in realization of the falseness of every intellectual attitude, including the classical positions which Śāntideva here has attempted to destroy, that the cutting knife of Prajñā may strike for the revealing of Sūnyatā—the Perfect Wisdom, Paramārtha Satya, the fulfillment of Bodhicitta. Only Wisdom is left for us. We are deprived of all else. There is no body. No parts. No form. No sensation. No contact. No thought. No dharmas. No unconditioned form of perception. No creator. No primary matter. No duality. No soul. No self.

All roads lead to Nowhere. Up is not,
And down is never. The Mahāsattva walks
Unmoving, and only flower petals fall.

PART TWO



Translation of the Bodhicaryāvatāra

by Śāntideva

