

VOLUME TWO

THE PROFOUND TREASURY
OF THE OCEAN OF DHARMA

The Bodhisattva Path of
Wisdom and Compassion

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Because of the nature of shunyata experience, and the occasional glimpse in your mind of nothing being existent, you may think nothing great or small really matters very much. It is all a kind of backslapping joke: ha-ha, yuk, yuk, yuk. Nothing matters, so let it go. All is shunyata, so who cares? Since everything is empty, you may think you can murder, you can meditate, you can perform your art, you can do all kinds of things.

You may think that you can do whatever you want, that as long as you are meditative, everything is going to be fine. But there is something very tricky about that approach. In meditation, we are not particularly seeking enlightenment or tranquillity—we are trying to get over our deception.

Some people view meditation as the simple experience of tranquillity. They may regard going to the movies every evening as their meditation, or watching television, grooming their horse, feeding their dog, or taking a long walk in the woods. They may even regard hunting as their meditation. Other people claim that they do not have to sit because they have always “understood.” I do not trust such people.

Dwelling on emptiness in that way is a misinterpretation called the poison of shunyata. You have to work with that antidote, but not dwell on it. However, thinking that the point is *not* to dwell on it could also be problematic. In fact, the idea of this slogan is that antidotes of any kind are not regarded as appropriate.

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Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence.

According to Buddhist psychology, there are eight types of consciousness. This slogan is about transcending the first seven consciousnesses and resting in the eighth, or alaya consciousness. The first six consciousnesses are connected with sensory perception, or the meeting of a sense organ, a sense object, and a corresponding sense consciousness. The six sense consciousnesses are sight, smell, hearing, touch, taste, and mind consciousness, which is the basic coordinating factor governing the other five. The mind consciousness uses those particular instruments to perceive mental objects, or thoughts. Beyond all that is the intention of doing so, which is the seventh consciousness, or nuisance mind. The seventh consciousness puts energy into all those perceptions and brings the whole thing together. It has a quality of fascination or inquisitiveness. Going further, beyond

all that, you find a level of experience known as the alaya consciousness. There is a resting place, which could be called primitive shamatha.

Resting in alaya means that you do not follow your discursive thoughts, but you try to treat yourself well. Basically, you do not follow fixed logic, discursive thoughts, or conceptual ideas of any kind. Generally when you look out at someone or something, you tend to check back on yourself, but you could look further, beyond yourself. When you do so, you are brought back to that resting place, where the orders and information are coming from.

Starting from basic alaya, you develop alaya consciousness, which makes distinctions. You begin to create a separation between this and that, who and whom, what and what. That is the notion of consciousness, or self-consciousness. You begin to distinguish who is on your side and who is on their side, so to speak. But basic alaya does not have any bias. That is why it is called natural virtue. It is neutral, neither male nor female; therefore, it is not on either side, and there is no question of courting.

Basic wakefulness, or sugatagarbha, is beyond alaya. It is pre-alaya, but at the same time encompasses alaya. Alaya has basic goodness, but sugatagarbha has greater goodness—it is wakefulness itself. From that point of view, even basic alaya could be said to be a consciousness of some kind. Although it is not an official category of consciousness, it is a kind of awareness, and maybe even a form of samsaric mind. Sugatagarbha is beyond that. It is indestructible; it is the ancestor or parent of alaya.

We could describe the process of perception with the analogy of a film projector. First you have the screen, the phenomenal world. Then you project yourself onto that phenomenal world. You have the film—the fickleness of mind, which constantly changes frames—so you have a moving object projected onto the screen by the machinery of the projector. There are lots of teeth to catch the film, and mechanisms to make sure that the projection is continuous. This is precisely the same situation as the sense organs: you look and you listen, and as you listen, you look. You connect things together, although they are shifting completely every moment by means of time.

Behind the whole setup is a bulb, which projects everything onto the screen. That bulb is the cause of the whole thing. Resting in the nature of alaya is like resting in the nature of that bulb. Alaya is brilliant and shining; it does not give in to the fickleness of the rest of the machine.

That bulb has no concern with the screen or how the image is coming through. Resting in alaya is the actual practice of ultimate bodhichitta. It is what happens during sitting practice. Ultimate bodhichitta is the realization that phenomena cannot be regarded as solid, but at the same time, phenomena have a self-luminous quality. So alaya refers to experience, not simply to the structural, mechanical process of projection.

In the analogy of the film projector, the bulb can be taken out and put into a flashlight. If you have a flashlight with a beam of light coming out of it, you have to hold it properly in order to use the light. The flashlight is like relative bodhichitta; holding it properly and making it work for you is absolute bodhichitta. You need absolute bodhichitta so that the light will shine everywhere, wherever you need it. Resting your mind in alaya produces absolute bodhichitta constantly.

By resting your mind in the alaya consciousness, in clear and nondiscriminating mind, you are trying to free yourself from sevenfold mind, or the first seven consciousnesses. But before you can transcend sevenfold mind, you have to work with the bulb. Instead of monkeying with the projector, you could just take the bulb out of your projector, screw it into your regular old-fashioned lamp, and look at it. So there is just the bare minimum of you and your mind, very simply. That is the self-liberating alaya. That good old bulb is the real thing. You have your light or you don't—you switch off or you switch on.

Even in ordinary situations, if you actually trace back to find out where everything comes from, you will find a primitive resting level. You could rest in that quality of basic existence, or alaya. However, you should not cultivate alaya as an end in itself, which would be dangerous, but you should use it as a stepping-stone. In this case, we are talking about alaya as a clear mind—as simplicity, clarity, and nondiscursive thought—as alaya consciousness. We have to be very clear on this. We are not trying to grasp the buddha nature immediately, but we are trying to work on our basic premises. For the first time, we are learning to slow down.

Alaya is described in the text as naturally good, as basic goodness. That quality of basic goodness applies to personal wholesomeness as well as to dedication to others. It is like saying you are a good person who can take care of your family and friends. Basic goodness is related to both alaya and bodhichitta. However, bodhichitta is more active and illuminating, while alaya is a resting quality with no grudge against anything, just satisfaction.

With the third slogan, “Examine the nature of unborn awareness,” you look at your mind and trace back where your perceptions are coming from. With the fifth slogan, “Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence,” instead of getting caught up in your visual and auditory perceptions, you come back home. You return to “home sweet home,” which is your alaya. The alaya is where everything began, so you are returning to central headquarters. You see that all your activities—sight, smell, sound, and everything else that happens—are a production of that home ground. Having recognized that, you come back to where they began to manifest, and you rest in the needlessness of those productions. Alaya is a starting point and a returning point. It is internalizing. Resting in the nature of alaya takes for granted that you trust yourself already. It assumes that you don’t have to run away from yourself all the time in order to get something from outside. You can just come home and relax.

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In postmeditation, be a child of illusion.

Becoming a child of illusion means that you continue in postmeditation what you have experienced in your sitting practice. During postmeditation, you take the bulb out of your projector. You might not have the screen or the film at this point, but you still carry a flashlight. You transfer the bulb into your flashlight, and you carry it with you all the time.

Illusion does not mean haziness, confusion, or mirage. You realize that after you finish sitting practice, you do not have to solidify phenomena, but you can continue your practice. If things become heavy and solid, you can flash mindfulness and awareness into them. In that way, you begin to see that everything is workable. Your attitude is that the phenomenal world is not evil—that “they” are not going to attack you, or destroy you, or kill you. Everything is workable and soothing. You swim along in your phenomenal world. You can’t just float; you have to use your limbs and swim with the basic stroke of mindfulness-awareness. So you are swimming constantly in postmeditation—and during meditation, you just sit and realize the nature of your alaya very simply.

In the postmeditation experience, you sense that everything you perceive is a creation of your own preconceptions. If you cut through that and interject awareness, you begin to see that the games going on are not big games, but simply illusory games. It requires a lot of mindful-