

## The Buddhist Path

Buddhists have devised various methods for seeing the divine brilliance and achieving supreme joy. Depending on the sect and/or scripture, different emphases have been placed on exactly which way best achieves the goal. The *Maharatnatuka Sutra* emphasizes "good works." A story is told of some disciples who wanted to know, "why does this great, auspicious light appear in the world? ...What is this light, which causes us to be overwhelmed by great joy and to be pure in mind?" The response from certain "Buddhas" (individuals who had already attained enlightenment) was that "this light is cultivated through such good roots as kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity...."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, one devotee wrote that he had

*...a light called The Clouds of Pure Illumination;  
It arises from the innumerable good roots  
I have accumulated. In the past, when I saw sentient beings  
Afflicted with many kinds of disease,  
I gave them medicines out of pity  
To restore their health,  
And thereby I attained that light.*<sup>35</sup>

Other parts of the same *sutra* emphasize the need to detach oneself from craving, a central theme in Buddhism:

*One who realizes the emptiness of the eye  
Can eradicate desires forever;  
Free of desire,  
He can emanate various lights.*<sup>36</sup>

One can also attempt to extinguish other negative impulses:

*I vow to acquire the immeasurable light  
Of a Tathagata, illuminating  
All Buddha-lands in the ten directions;  
I vow to eradicate All desire, hatred, and  
ignorance  
And to eliminate the miserable  
realms of the world...*

*I shall acquire the limitless,  
superb, awesome light  
Which can outshine the brilliance  
Of suns, moons, gods, pearls,  
Or any other source of light.*<sup>37</sup>

Other texts emphasize the need to think, as opposed to act, correctly. The *Shurangama Sutra* says that

*In response to a thought,  
defiling objects vanish,  
Becoming pure and wonderful  
Perfect brightness...*

*If there is residual defilement,  
one must still study.  
When the brightness is still ultimate,  
That is the Tathagata (Buddha)...<sup>38</sup>*

The *Flower Ornament Scripture* also emphasizes the role of knowledge in achieving the ultimate goal, but adds that there is a Divine as well as a human element in the attainment of that end:

*The Buddha cultivated many practices  
over ocean of eons  
In order to extinguish the ignorance  
and confusion of the world.  
Therefore his purity is the most radiant light:  
This is the realization  
of the mind of Light Power.<sup>39</sup>*

*Just as when those born blind don't see the sun  
It is not because there is no sun  
appearing in the world --  
All those who have eyes can clearly see it,  
Each doing their work  
according to their occupations,  
So it is with the lights of the Great Being --  
Those who have wisdom all can see,  
While ordinary folk with false beliefs  
and low understanding  
Cannot perceive these lights at all...*

*So it is with the Great Being's lights:  
Those of deep knowledge are all illumined,  
While the ignorant, with false beliefs  
and poor understanding  
Are not able to see these lights at all.<sup>40</sup>*

The *Book of the Dead* emphasizes the role of meditation, prayer, and a teacher-guide -- preferably a *guru* -- to help dying people attain the blissful, Clear Light. "It is best," says the Tibetan text, "if the *guru* from whom the deceased person received guiding instructions can be had." This *guru* will "set thee face to face before with the Clear Light..."<sup>41</sup> The book advises us to "pray to the Five Orders" of those who have passed into Happiness (or who have attained *Nirvana*). By "thus praying, one recognizes one's own inner light."<sup>42</sup> We are advised to meditate properly before we die. Those who do "will recognize the Clear Light at the moment of death," and will not need to have the book read to them.<sup>43</sup> In order to prevent rebirth in another womb, we are told to "meditate, without any thought-forming, upon the clear, vacuous Clear Light."<sup>44</sup> This will allow us to break the otherwise never-ending cycle of birth, death, rebirth, and consequent pain and suffering. This will allow the aspirant to achieve the highest goal:

*...Along the bright light-path of undistracted  
listening, reflection, and meditation,  
May the Gurus of the inspired line lead us...  
May we be placed in the state of perfect  
Buddhahood.<sup>45</sup>*

Like Hinduism, Buddhism encourages its followers to attain a certain state of being, one in which the distinctions between God and man become obscured. In Buddhism, however, this goes by different names: Nirvana, the Void, Emptiness, Nothingness, Buddhahood, even the Buddha himself. Each of these names are often associated with feelings of supreme bliss, and radiating a pure, brilliant light. In each case, we can also see that this encounter has left the impression in the authors' minds that this is the ultimate object and meaning of life.

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