

THE LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING IN BUDDHISM

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BUDDHISM CALLS ITSELF a career (*yāna*), a progress through life, and what it teaches is designed to fulfil this purpose: to lead man out of his unregenerate state of naive common-sense to enlightenment or reality knowledge. In more familiar terms this means that a complete change of attitude is aimed at, which it is certainly not too incorrect to define more precisely as a shift from a discursive thought situation to an intuitive cognitive situation. The means by which this change is brought about are meditational concentrative processes. Already in the earliest strata of Buddhism intuitive knowledge and meditational practices leading to it have been emphasized. However, in course of time, the methods have become more and more elaborate and refined and it is therefore from the Mahāyānic phase of Buddhism that a much clearer picture of both the methods and their attendant phenomena may be obtained. Here I shall not deal with the methods, in the first place, but with the salient features that mark the transition from one situation to the other and I shall try to give as precise statements as are possible, which is all the more necessary because the presentation of Eastern philosophical problems for the most part thrives on the ambiguity of terms due to the complete absence of semantic studies in this particular field.

Buddhist texts, as a rule, make a distinction between the "assumed" meaning (*draṇḍon*, Skt. *neyārtha*) and the "real" meaning (*ñes.don*, Skt. *nītārtha*) of the teachings,¹ a distinction which roughly corresponds to the various degrees of the student's intellectual acumen. This distinction as such has nothing to do with the spiritual development aimed at, but it is evident from the general trend of Buddhism that the "real" meaning can be understood only when the student's intuition has been developed to a certain extent and depth. It is this fact that has been emphasized in those texts which are concerned with the actual living of the Buddhist tenets—the Buddhist Yoga texts.²

¹ See Abhidharmakośavyākhyā, pp. 174; 704. Ma-dhyamakavṛtti, p. 43.

² In the following analysis I have made use of the

Starting with a quotation from the Tibetan scholar and saint Mi.la.ras.pa, which in concise terms outlines the salient features of the various levels of understanding, Padma.dkar.po declares:³

Venerable Mi.la said that

"In whatever way the outer world may appear
It is error⁴ when one does not intuitively understand it;

For those who intuitively understand it it appears
as the Dharmakāya.

The consummatory stage on which one does not
experience any appearance

Is said to be pure like the cloudless sky."⁵

There are three situations: the situation of non-intuition (*ma.rtog.pa.skabs*), the situation where intuition begins to function (*rtog.pa.sar.bai.skabs*), and the consummatory situation (*mtshar.thug.pa.skabs*). These situations are also to be known as the status of a man of ordinary common-sense, the status of a Bodhisattva, and the status of a Buddha.

In the first situation there may be an assertion as to

following texts. In the course of the article they will be referred to by their abbreviations given in parentheses:

- (a) Phyag.rgya.chen.poi.maṅ.nag.gi.bśad.sbyar.rgyal.bai.gan.mdzod (Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod)
- (b) Phyag.chen.gyi.zin.bris
- (c) Rnal.hbyor.bzii.ñes.pa.rab.tu.dbye.ba.phyag.rgya.chen.poi.bśad.pa.thams.cad.kyi.bla.ma (Phyag.chen.bla.ma)
- (d) Phyag.rgya.chen.po.rnal.hbyor.bzii.bśad.pa.ñes.don.lta.bai.mig (Phyag.chen.rnal.hbyor.mig)
- (e) Rnal.hbyor.bzii.bśad.pa.don.dam.mdzub.tshugs.su.bstan.pa (Rnal.hbyor.mdzub.tshugs)
- (f) Phyag.rgya.chen.po.lña.ltan.gyi.khrid.dmigs.yid.kyi.sñe.ma (Phyag.chen.sñe.ma)
- (g) Bsre.hphoi.lam.skor.gyi.thog.mar.lam.dbye.bsdu (Bsre.hphoi.lam.skor)

³ Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 21b sq.

⁴ *ḥkhrul.pa*, Skt. *bhrama*, *bhrānti*, offers great difficulties for a proper translation. It essentially means a deviation from Reality, hence "error" includes everything in the perceptual field which we should call a veridical and a delusive situation. Even our veridical situation is likened to the perception of a white shell as yellow by a man affected by jaundice, and the curing of the disease is the awakening to Reality. See for instance Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 62a.

⁵ Comparisons with the immaculate sky abound in Yoga texts.

freedom from duality (*gnis.med*, Skt. *advaya*)⁶ or coincidence (*zun.hjug*, Skt. *yuganaddha*),⁷ but intellectually there remains the world of appearance in a dual way or the differentiation into opposites, because the world of appearance in a dual way has not been given up. Since, following the dictates of the intellect, the persons in this situation hold to reciprocally exclusive assertions⁸ such as that error remains error, non-error, non-error, relative truth relative truth, and ultimate truth ultimate truth, they busy themselves with the "assumed" meaning of things. People of low intelligence (i.e., people who do not venture into the realm of critical philosophy) feel compelled to call this (assumed meaning) the Truth.

As to the second situation it has been stated that "when the conception of the world of appearance in its dual way has subsided there is intuition of non-duality." Due to this (intuition) all interpretative concepts (*rnam.rtog*, Skt. *vikalpa*) rise as the Dharmakāya, all emotions (and the destructive conflict into which they ordinarily lead man, *non.mon*s, Skt. *kleśa*) as ambrosia, and all error as intuitive knowledge (*ye.ses*, Skt. *jñāna*),⁹ and since it is no longer possible to make divisions or differentiations into opposites it is due to this basic feature that then the two truths (i.e., relative truth and ultimate truth) have become indivisible (*dbyer.med*), or

⁶ There is a marked distinction between the *advaya* of the Buddhists and the *advaita* of the Vedantins. *advaya* refers to knowledge which is free from the duality of the extremes, while *advaita* is knowledge of a difference-less Brahman. The term *advaya* often implies the futility of engaging in a knowledge governed by the duality of extremes. On this distinction between *advaya* and *advaita* see T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, p. 217.

⁷ The literal meaning of this term is 'bound together, forming a pair.' However, Padma.dkar.po, Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 102b, referring to the definition of this term given in Pañcākrama V, makes it clear that the "pairness" is a unity and not comparable with the unity two horns form on the head of a bull. An example from chemistry will serve to clear the Buddhist conception of this term. Silver-chloride is not understood by the investigation of either silver or chloride, so *yuganaddha* is not understood by investigating the one or the other of its components.

⁸ In a wider sense this definition refers to what we call the Laws of Thought.

⁹ These combinations are often mentioned. For instance, Phyag.chen.gyi.zin.bris, fol. 7a; Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, foll. 21b; 81a; 95b; Rnal.hbyor.mdzud.tshugs, fol. 11a; Bsre.hphoi.lam.skor, foll. 64a; 69b; 74b; etc. There is a marked distinction between *jñāna* (Tib. *ye.ses*) and *prajñā* (Tib. *ses.rab*) which is often overlooked. The former is an intuitive mystic knowledge, while the latter is analytical. T. R. V. Murti in his *Central Philosophy of Buddhism* constantly translates *prajñā* by Intuition. This is against all evidence. *prajñā* is 'discrimination, analytical knowledge' (*dharmañām pravicaaya*), but its mode is different whether it operates in an intuitive attitude or an ordinary common-sense attitude when *prajñā* is called *matī*. See Abhidharmakośa II 24 and Vyākhyā.

(what is the same,) that the beneficial expedients (*thabs*, Skt. *upāya*) and the analytical appreciative understanding of things (*ses.rab*, Skt. *prajñā*) have become indivisible—and many other statements to the same effect—so that there is only one truth, viz., the ultimately real truth. Furthermore, rGyal.dbañ.rje expresses this idea in the following verse:

"As soon as the nature of the interpretative concepts is known,

Whatever rises has the ring of the Dharmakāya."

And the Great Saraha says:

"When intuition has come to function everything is this;

Nobody will get anything but this."¹⁰

This is the "real" meaning.

In the third case it may suffice to quote what rGyal.bai.dbañ.po has said about the statements made by the intellect of the human beings as regards the Buddha-viewpoint:

"To measure the sky with a yardstick,

To cut up the all-pervading into little bits:

Though there is no sense in doing so, many people do so."

While here three levels of understanding have been pointed out¹¹ nothing has been said about their inner relation. Further, while from purely logical considerations it would be sufficient to have only the distinction between the 'assumed' and the 'real' meanings of the teaching, the introduction of a third level, the 'consummatory situation' (*mtshar.thug*, Skt. *niṣṭhāgata*), is obviously necessitated by practical considerations. In all developmental processes man is but too easily inclined to lose sight of the actual goal and, if not actually falling away from it, at least to remain stuck half-ways. Therefore the ideal or goal has to be re-introduced as an additional level to the already existing two levels.

The actual process of spiritual development and maturation, however, begins when the individual feels necessitated to change his outlook. It is at this moment that again three different cognitive situations can be distinguished. These three situations are: first to think about the goal, then to apprehend it and thereby to be in a more intimate contact with it, and finally to have a clear view and knowledge of it in a purely non-conceptual manner. With the attainment of the last mentioned situation the foundation (*gzi*) has been laid from whence it is possible to walk the path (*lam*) to the

¹⁰ Dohakośa 18.

¹¹ These three levels are levels in their own right and not stages within one level. They must not be confused with the three stages assumed by the Mīmāṃsakas.

goal (*hbras.bu*), for knowledge is according to the Buddhist conception given to man that he may act. It has further to be noted that the three situations mentioned are distinct levels and not phases within one situation. In other words, the levels of understanding represent distinct attitudes which have an equally distinct bearing on action. The emphasis is thus on the *How* and not on the *What*, and it is precisely this feature that distinguishes Buddhism from the other Indian systems which, to judge from the available best material, were mainly concerned with ontological questions.

About the distinctive features of the various levels Padma.dkar.po declares:¹²

At the beginner's stage there is only discursiveness (*go.ba.tsam*); at the stage of interested practice (*mos.pa.spyod.pa*, Skt. *adhimuktīcaryā* (*bhūmi*)) there is the apprehension (*myoñ.ba*) of reality in a general way; (at the final stage there is) pure intuition (*rtogs.pa*). Since through it there is no chance that doubts will not be destroyed, it is the attainment (*grub*) of what is called the dispelling of doubts from within¹³ independent of syntactically formulated sentences.¹⁴

Of these three stages a fuller account has been given by Dvags.po.lha.rje¹⁵ and since his words have an immediate bearing on the topic under discussion they may be given here:

The beginner's level is the period for the Path of the Acquisition (of the necessary prerequisites for spiritual development) (*tshogs.lam*, Skt. *sambhāramārga*), because one is about to bring to maturity the as yet immature stream representing one's existence. The level of interested practice is the period for the Path of Practical Application (*sbyor.lam*, Skt. *prayogamārga*), because one is only interested in the meaning of *sūnyatā*. At this time miserliness and other vices which are opposed

to the practice of the perfections, emotional conflicts which can be got rid of by seeing them, as well as all the postulates which veil the knowable as to its real nature have been bent head-down so that they cannot rise again. The Bodhisattvas' levels extend from the first level called "The Joyous One" to the tenth level called "The Dharma Cloud." So also it is said in the *Daśa-bhūmikasūtra*:

"O sons of the Victorious One, these are the ten levels of a Bodhisattva: the Bodhisattva's level called 'The Joyous One,' and . . ."¹⁶

Here, the first level "The Joyous One" is the occasion for the Path of Seeing Reality (*mtshoñ.lam*, Skt. *darśanamārga*) to come into existence, it is the intuition of *sūnyatā* as a reality.

As is evident from these passages, the beginner's level is distinctly a thought situation and discursive in character. It chiefly consists of judgments about reality or, what is the same due to what at first sight appears as mentalism in Buddhism,¹⁷ about the status of mind. I use the term "chiefly" here, because I do not want to deny that there may be something intuitive in the thought situation. Obviously this is meant also by the statement that *rtogs* which essentially is pure intuition, is synonymous with all kinds of understanding such as discursiveness and apprehension,¹⁸ although the thought situation is defined more precisely as "To understand the status of mind by hearing and thinking about it."¹⁹ What happens in a discursive situation is that reality is split up and various meanings and evaluations are assigned to the parts. Thus Padma.dkar.po declares:²⁰

The *Mahāmudrā* (or Reality) which itself is devoid of contraries is split up by the intellect which (for ever) falls into contraries, and through this splitting up reality makes its appearance as pure being (*gśis*) and

¹² Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 42a sq.

¹³ A fuller definition has been given in *Rnal.lhbyor.mdzud.tshugs*, fol. 7b: "The dispelling of doubts from within is said so, because on account of having directly intuited the natural and real disposition (*gnas.lugs*) of all entities the discursive understanding of reality in a general way and all doubts have subsided in their own place."

¹⁴ This latter part of the quotation refers to the nature of *kalpanā* or a cognition the content of which is capable of being associated with verbal expressions (*abhilāpa-saṃsargayogyapratibhāsapratitiḥ kalpanā*). Valid, however, is only perception free from *kalpanā* (*kalpanāpo-dham pratyakṣaṃ*). See *Nyāyabindu*, ch. I.

¹⁵ Dam.chos.yid.bžin.gyi.nor.bu.thar.pa.rin.po.chei.rgyan.žes.bya.ba.theg.pa.chen.poi.lam.rim.gyi.bśad.pa, fol. 108a. See on this work my article *Dvags.po.lha.rje's "Ornament of Liberation," JAOS*, vol. 75, pp. 90 sqq.

¹⁶ *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, p. 5.

¹⁷ I follow here the distinction C. D. Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, p. 654, makes between Idealism and Mentalism. The Buddhists were Idealists in holding that the highest and most sublime, Buddhahood, becomes manifested in greater and greater intensity in course of the individual's spiritual development. However, in holding that there is only mind (*cittamātra*) or even mindness (*cittatā*, Tib. *sems.nid*) they were mentalists. Further, while materiality was for them at best delusive, mentality was emergent. This characterizes the aspect of Buddhist thought to which the Yoga texts mentioned in note 2 belong. There have been other schools of Buddhism which one would have to characterize in a different way. But this is outside the scope of the present analysis.

¹⁸ *Phyag.chen.gyi.zin.bris*, fol. 7a.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod*, fol. 32b sq.

pure creativity (*gdañs*).²⁷ (This splitting up) is exactly like what happens in the case of any person whosoever who (just is, but) is looked at by the observer either as a friend or as an enemy. With respect to its pure being (*gśis*) it is posited as unchanging great bliss (*hgyur.ba.med.pai.bde.ba.chen.po*) and with respect to its pure creativity (*gdañs*) it is posited as the *sūnyatā* endowed with all excellent occurments (*rnam.pai.mchog.thams.cad.dañ.laṅ.pa.stoṅ.pa.ñid*). The former is ultimately real (*don.dam*, Skt. *paramārtha*) and the latter is relatively real (*kun.rdzob*, Skt. *sāmvrta*).

I shall give an analysis of the technical terms later when I have mentioned the other factors involved in perception. Here it may be pointed out only that "ultimately real" is a provisional ultimately real, the "real" ultimately real itself being inaccessible to any attempt of verbalization or conceptualization. This Padma.dkakr.po points out in the following words:²²

Ultimately real is a conventional or provisional ultimately real, inasmuch as the object of discrimination which views every angle of it is (still) predicable as being "unoriginated," "void" (*sūnyatā*), "devoid of contraries" and so on. But the consummatory ultimately real means that even the Buddhas cannot point out that this is it, because not allowing itself to be investigated by the four alternative views on a subject, void, non-void, both together affirmed, and both together denied, to take the Ultimate (*gśis*) as some thing (*gañ.du.gzuṅ.yaṅ*) would not be beyond the error under which the ordinary perceiving subject operates.

This statement is in full accord with the assertion that the Ultimate or pure being (*gśis*) is in the truly ultimate sense beyond even truth, while the pure creativity (*gdañs*) which is inseparable from pure being and forming with it a unity and not a mere aggregate as such like anything that admits of being expressed in concepts or words, is relative, but in this relative nature it is thoroughly true,²³ the error not lying in our perception of reality but in our beliefs about reality. For just as the ultimately real may be distinguished into a provisional ultimately real and a real ultimately real, so also the relatively real is really relatively

real and erroneously relatively real; and it is from the really real that, as has been pointed out above, the two truths are said to be indivisible. This then explains the metaphysical position of Buddhism, which contends that all judgments involve us in the thought of one all-embracing system of reality of which each true judgment declares a part of it. Certainly a conch, to use a frequently employed item, is not an attribute of reality, but its existence is bound up with the existence of the whole universe. It is real in its being (*gśis*) and in its being a conch (*gdañs*), but it is not real in the sense that the sensum by which the particular object manifests itself is directly determined by the physical object or guarantees the existence of a physical object.²⁴

Without going further into the description of a discursive thought situation it is obvious that a totally different situation is given if instead of hearing or thinking or reasoning about a thing we actually apprehend and experience it. Here the various factors of the particular situation are not merely co-existent and may be selected for inspection, but are related in a perfectly unique manner to form the perfectly unique kind of a whole which we call the "experience of so-and-so." In order to experience a thing it is necessary to concentrate upon and to pay closest attention to it.²⁵ Now what happens when we are looking at something with interest and attention is that our awareness of the sensum in this particular situation loses its external reference by insensible degrees and approaches pure sensation. The favorite simile to describe what happens is the sky. Because of its nature of being a vast expanse of blue and of possessing the least disturbing qualities which are likely to divert the attention of the observer, in giving closest attention to it, every chance is given that the perception of it melts into pure sensation, an event which Saraha aptly describes in his verse:

By repeatedly looking at the state of the sky which
is pure from the very beginning
Seeing (the sky as an external object) melts away,²⁶

²¹ The term *gdañs* is sometimes written *mdaṅs* and *dvaṅs*. Its connotation is that of light, *gśis* is pure being and always true, *gdañs* is relatively true in so far as it refers to pure perception, always false is the belief about the item perceived. See also Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 62a.

²² Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 46a.

²³ Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 35b; Bsre.hphoi.lam.skor, fol. 78b.

²⁴ Cp. Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 62a.

²⁵ Nine stages are distinguished in concentration. See Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra XIV 14 and commentary. A fuller explanation is found in Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, foll. 89a-90b sq.

²⁶ Dohakoṣa 36. The usefulness of the sky in achieving pure sensation has been taught by Mi.la.ras.pa, as may be gleaned from the quotations in Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, foll. 72a; 91a.

and which his commentator, gÑis.med.avadhūti, explains in the following manner:

The real nature of mind, when no conditions for its becoming obscured arise, is known by looking at it first as the perceptive activity against the background of the apperceptive mass of the flux of mnemonic persistents; by looking at it again it is known as being unoriginated; and by once again looking at it it is known as inaccessible to reasoning.²⁷

On the other hand, in this vast expanse of blue clouds come and go in an unceasing and ever changing manner, out of it they appear and back into it they fade, but the sky persists, and in this way the sky also serves as a simile for the wondrous unity of pure unchanging being and continuous creativity. As Padma.dkar-po points out:²⁸

Since there is nothing more vast (*ston.pa*, Skt. *śūnya*) than the sky it is used as a simile: just as one can easily know that the sky is spotless when the conditions for its becoming overcast disappear, similarly one can know the nature of the incessant creativity going on (*gdans*). Further, the multitude (in which the creativity manifests itself) is made by the intellect. On the side of the created items there is difference among each other; in reality, however, all the differences are something single: just like gold remaining in itself one single substance and the same though it may have been turned into a variety of ornaments. But when the gold is left by itself and not continuously worked into ornaments, though it may be turned into a variety of them, it is at peace with itself, just like muddy water which by itself becomes clear when it is not disturbed.

"Like water, gold, and the sky,

It is spoken of as pure because of its purity."²⁹

The first simile explains how the incessant (creativity) appears in a manifold of forms; the second simile explains how even at the time when a manifold of forms has appeared pure being remains unchanged; and the third simile points out how pure being left in its originality becomes the result.

What is given in an experience may on subsequent reflection be looked at from various angles, either as the situation in which the particular experience could happen or as the experience itself. The former is known as "tranquillity" (*ñi.gnas*, Skt. *śamatha*), obviously called so because through and after the concentrative and attentive processes a certain harmony and peacefulness is obtained. The experience itself is designated by the technical

term *rtse.gcig* (Skt. *ekāgratā*) which I propose to translate by "a unique kind of whole." "Tranquillity" and "unique kind of whole" are therefore synonymous³⁰ and have the same qualifying attributes. Thus,

"tranquillity has the essence of feeling, transparency, and absence of interpretative concepts (*bde.gsal.mi.rtog.pa*)"³¹

and

"at the time of there being a unique kind of whole the view that only mind exists is firmly established. There is absence of interpretative concepts as subject and object, there is knowledge as awareness and transparency, and there is its essence feeling. Thus feeling, transparency, and the absence of interpretative concepts (*bde.gsal.mi.rtog.pa*) abide in the unique kind of whole (*rtse.gcig*)."³²

The term "absence of interpretative concepts" (*mi.rtog.pa*) is intimately connected with what was referred to as the view that only mind exists. This view is the rejection of the common-sense belief in physical objects as ontological items corresponding to the epistemological object of a particular perceptual situation. It further declares that the notion of a physical object is a category and defined by postulates (*rnam.par.rtog.pa*, Skt. *vikalpa*) which are as innate principles of interpretation superimposed on and applied to what is given in pure sensation. The view that there is only mind takes into account the subjective part in cognition—and the unique contribution of Buddhism to Indian philosophy is the discovery of the subjective, hence its role is comparable to the one Kant played in Western philosophies with this distinction that the Buddhists did not consider the so called a priori categories to be absolutely necessary. Therefore, however important the subjective is it is not ultimate and so the view of there being only mind is but provisional and an intermediate stage in the whole of the developmental process.³³

But not only is "physical object" an interpretative concept, so also is the idea of a "self," and both are said to be absent in the experience called "a unique kind of whole." This total absence of all interpretative concepts is borne out by direct experience. The following considerations may

²⁷ Do . ha . mdzod . kyi . sniñ . po . don . gyi . glui . hḡrel . ba (Dohākoṣaḥḡdaya-arthaḡitīkā), fol. 75b (bsTan . hḡgyur, section rgyud, vol. ñi, Derge edition).

²⁸ Bsre . hḡphoi . lam . skor, fol. 81b.

²⁹ According to the Bñi . chos . ñal . gdams, fol. 3a this has Nāropa as its author.

³⁰ Rnal . hḡbyor . mdzub . tshugs, foll. 6b-7a.

³¹ Ibid., fol. 2a-b.

³² Phyag . chen . rnal . hḡbyor . mig, fol. 11b.

³³ Lankāvatārasūtra X 256 sq. Quoted in Phyag . chen . gan . mdzod, fol. 36b.

assist in understanding what is meant by the Buddhist statement. In a perceptual situation which is indicated by the phrase "I see the sky" there is an objective constituent which is an outstanding sensum in a wider sense-field and which has a certain external reference beyond itself by virtue of which I speak of the sky, all this being related to me in an asymmetrical two-term relation. Now, as can easily be verified by anyone who takes the time to concentrate and to contemplate, it is a fact that to the same degree as the sensum loses its external reference which, speaking more precisely, is the non-inferential belief about the perceived content as being a three-dimensional object in space and time, also the notion of the perceiving self fades away. In other words, the approach to pure sensation is a progressive absorption and, indeed, the attainment of the unique kind of whole (*rtse.gcig*) is called "absorption in which feeling and the Void have become the predominant feature."³⁴ This absorption in which the notion of a physical object and of a self equally fade away is therefore not an identification of the subject with the object or of the object with the subject. For identification and the judgment of identity is a purely intellectual process moving in postulates and can at best give only knowledge "about" but not direct knowledge. Since in the "unique kind of whole" all judgments and beliefs are absent, all that one can say about it is that it is a mode of knowing (*śes.pa*) which is non-postulational, immediate, "intuitive."

So far only the objective side of a perceptual situation has been taken care of. There is also a subjective constituent. This is a mass of feeling which, as the quotations have shown, does not vary at all in quality "unchanging great bliss," *hgyur.ba.med.pai.bde.ba.chen.po*). It is with this mass of feeling that the apprehension of the sensum enters into a specific relation which cannot be analyzed any further and which is technically known as "coincidence" (*zuñ.hjug*, Skt. *yuganaddha*).

That this mass of feeling is called "unchanging" has its ground in the fact that in pure sensation the apprehension of the sensum fails to excite traces which can cause specific modifications in the mass of feeling, which is the case when in ordinary perception a sensum of a specific kind is apprehended. For in this case certain traces left by

previous experiences are excited and, in turn, arouse certain emotions that effect a modification in the mass of feeling as to pleasantness, unpleasantness or indifference, all of them being feeling judgments. In pure sensation, however, or, in the wider sense of the word, in pure perception there are no judgments of any kind.

The "Void" (*ston.pa*, Skt. *śūnya(tā)*) which together with the unchanging great bliss (*bde.ba.chen.po*, Skt. *mahāsukha*) in the experience called a unique kind of whole forms an indivisible unity (*zuñ.hjug*, Skt. *yuganaddha*) is the "Śūnyatā endowed with all excellent occurrents."³⁵ Although the literal meaning of the word Śūnyatā is "void" and is used to point out the fact that it is impossible to speak in connection with it of either a physical or a mental substance, it would be erroneous to suppose that this term therefore refers to a vacuum. On the contrary, its constant epithet, besides that of "being endowed with all excellent occurrents," is "continuous," "imperishable" (*hagag.pa.med*). This latter epithet is always used with the term which I translated by "pure creativity" (*gdans*) and which has the connotation of lustre. This term "pure creativity," to be sure, does not denote something like a creation out of nothing, but is a pure descriptive term for what is going on in a certain experience and hence it is not a concept by postulation. This is clearly pointed out in the following quotation:³⁶

Creativity (*gdans*) which is incessant (*hagag.pa.med*) is the capability of becoming everything (*thams.cad.du.ruñ*). Therefore it is said to be the foundation (or motive or cause, *gzi*, Skt. *hetu*) of the manifold (of appearance). Further, since it only becomes a manifold when the conditions for its so becoming are present, from the intellect's point of view it is said to possess all occurrents (*rnam.pa.kun.lan*).

The conditions are the residues of former experiences, in the narrower sense of the word, the belief we have about what we perceive, and these conditions do not obtain in pure sensation or pure perception to which the term 'the Śūnyatā endowed with all excellent occurrents' refers. This positive character of Śūnyatā is also insisted upon in the following passage:³⁷

The Śūnyatā with all excellent occurrents is not just the absence of the determination by a physical object or

³⁴ *Phyag.chen.rnal.hbyor.mig*, fol. 6b.

³⁵ *Phyag.chen.sñe.ma*, fol. 5a.

³⁶ *Bsre.hphoi.lam.skor*, fol. 64b.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. 60b.

by processes in it of the sensum by which a certain physical object manifests itself as found out by a critical analysis of the situation.³⁸ For while this is found by critical analysis to be non-existent, this *śūnyatā* appears in direct perception.³⁹

These quotations together with the statement that at this stage there is, from a philosophical point of view, only mind (*sems.tsam*, Skt. *citta-mātra*) allows us to give an interpretation of the Buddhist technical terms in Western terminology. Since materiality is not a differentiating attribute and is at best delusive and what exists so far is only mind, noises, colors, fragrances and so on are literally mental events and as such are non-objective and non-referential. But since this *śūnyatā* is said to be "capable of becoming everything," it implies what C. D. Broad calls "epistemologically objectifiable" or "capable of corresponding to the epistemological object of some referential situation"⁴⁰ and "psychologically objectifiable" or "capable of being an objective constituent of some objective mental situation."⁴¹ This is the case when a non-objective mental event (*rnam.pa*) becomes the objective constituent of a mental situation whenever it is sensed or used in perception. This is obviously intended by Padma.kdar.po's statement that "Cognition (*rig.pa*) is an inner cognition devoid of interpretative concepts and this is the *śūnyatā* endowed with all occurrents."⁴²

It is on this basis of an incessant creativity (*gdañs, ston.pa.ñid*) capable of becoming everything and its existentially given fact (*gśis*) which only to the analytical investigation appears as something different that the experience termed a unique kind of whole (*rtse.gcig*) is described as the bridging of the gap between the stationary (*gnas.pa*) and the fleeting (*hgyu.ba*) whereby the stationary obviously refers to the existentially given (*gśis*) and the fleeting to the incessant creativity (*gdañs*) with its immense richness of items (*rnam.pa*) experienced in pure sensation and pure

perception. Thus the explanation of the unique kind of whole runs as follows:⁴³

At that time one knows the nature of the fleeting in the stationary and in the fleeting one holds the place of the stationary. Therefore it is called the bridging of the gap between the stationary and the fleeting and this is the understanding of the nature of the unique kind of whole.

Although it would be an oversimplification to say that the experience of this unique kind of whole is merely pure sensation and pure feeling, yet these items are characteristic of it. But what is more, they form the irremissible situation out of which the particularly Buddhist viewpoint and its philosophical premisses emerge. This is the mode of knowing and understanding the things one apprehends before they are modified by our beliefs about them and before they are conceptualized and thereby become dead figures of our mental calculus. This mode of knowing I shall call "pure intuition" (*rtogs*) and distinguish it from pure sensation and pure perception which I understand to refer to the "sensuous" factor in knowledge. And just as pure sensation and pure feeling form an indivisible whole so also pure sensation and what is involved in it forms an indivisible whole with pure intuition, as may be seen from the following quotation:⁴⁴

Where the feeling, the transparency, and the absence of interpretative concepts of the situation known as indeterminate tranquillity and the intuition operating in an ampler vision coincide (*suñ.hjug*, Skt. *yuganaddha*), the object is intuited as being in itself *śūnyatā* and the mind is experienced as light in itself.⁴⁵

However one word of caution has to added. "Pure intuition," as it is understood in the Buddhist texts and as I use this term, has nothing to do with the Bergsonian concept of intuition which is at best "empathy" and in connecting Bergson's intuition with empathy I am still rather charitable.⁴⁶ "Pure intuition" in the Buddhist sense

³⁸ This passage contains a reference to *Diñnāga's* *Ālambanaparīkṣā* where this problem has been dealt with in a more detailed manner.

³⁹ *mñon.sum*, Skt. *pratyakṣa*. *Bsre.hphoi.lam skor*, fol. 72a. *pratyakṣa* must be free from *kalpanā*. See above note 14.

⁴⁰ C. D. Broad, *The Mind and its Place in Nature*, p. 306.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁴² *Phyag.chen.gan.bdzod*, fol. 31a.

⁴³ *Phyag.chen.gyi.zin.bris*, fol. 4b; *Rnal.hbyor.mdzub.tshugs*, fol. 1.

⁴⁴ *Rnal.hbyor.mdzub.tshugs*, fol. 4b.

⁴⁵ The translation of the term *yul.can* (Skt. *viśayin*) by 'mind' is only tentative. Literally the term means 'owner of the object.'

⁴⁶ As the critique by Jacques Maritain, Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism, makes abundantly clear, Bergson's concept of intuition is a very muddled concept, "composed of quite diverse elements artificially gathered together" (p. 109).

of the word is a function which gives knowledge which is at once penetrating and a gateway to a wider and richer world. Within the total of the developmental process it has a definite place inasmuch as it begins to function when all possibilities of conceptualization and verbalization have subsided⁴⁷ and when thereby the Path of Seeing Reality (*mthoñ.lam*, Skt. *darśanamārga*) has been made accessible.⁴⁸

The realm into which one enters with the acquisition of the wider vision (*lhag.mthoñ*, Skt. *vipaśyanā*) and which, functionally speaking, is pure intuition, is the domain of the mystic. Yet this mystic knowledge is by no means speculative or is marked by a lack of a specified criterion of verification. Actually the mystic knowledge is fundamentally empirical and realistic, taking into account the ineffability of the immediately given. Hence it must be experienced in order to be known and any description or definition is but a guidepost. The most remarkable feature which distinguishes this experience of vision from the antecedent experience of unity with its absorption in an ineffable feeling of bliss is the character of luminosity (*gsal*) and the suddenness in which all doubts and uncertainties are resolved. Therefore also the mystic intuitive vision is for all practical purposes the unique means to find a way out of a hopelessly entangled and blocked situation, and thus again the wider vision is beside being a function also a specific attitude which informs all other functions. This certainty of pure intuition, the positive character of the newly found attitude in which freedom and impasse are no longer antagonistic, has been most clearly hinted at by Padma. dkar. po: ⁴⁹

All conceptualizations and verbalizations such as origination and annihilation and so on as well as the categories of subject and object have subsided in their own place. Whatever rises is taken in its real nature and whatever has come to be born is intuited as being unborn. The fact that the object to be seen and the subject seeing the object are ultimately pure and forbid every formulation by concept or by speech (*spros.pa.med*, Skt. *niṣprapañca*) does not mean to be faced with a vacuum (*chad.pai.stoñ.pa*); it is seeing the very nature of primordial knowledge (*tha.mal.gyi.śes.pa*). By in-

tuitively understanding (*rtogs.pas*) that error (*hkhruḥ.pa*, Skt. *bhrānti*, *bhrama*) has no foundation and no root the gap between error and freedom (*grol*, Skt. *mukti*) is bridged. The fact that doubts have been dispelled from within means that the experience which forbids of any formulation by either concepts or speech (*spros.bral*, Skt. *niṣprapañca*) is born within one's self.

Similarly as the experience of the unique kind of whole was termed an absorption in which the feeling of bliss and the richness of *Sūnyatā* form an indivisible unity, so the experience of pure intuition or mystic vision is called an "absorption in which luminosity and *Sūnyatā* (*gsal.stoñ*) are the outstanding feature."⁵⁰ The intimate relation between the state of tranquility (*ži.gnas*, Skt. *śamatha*) or the unique kind of whole (*rtse.gcig*, Skt. *ekāgratā*) and the ampler vision (*lhag.mthoñ*, Skt. *vipaśyanā*) or pure intuition with its ineffability (*spros.bral*, Skt. *niṣprapañca*), which I have pointed out above, is again displayed in the following discussion referring to the nature of the primordial knowledge (*tha.mal.gyi.śes.pa*) mentioned in the preceding quotation. This knowledge is pointed at in the following way: ⁵¹

Although it is permissible to speak of it as the co-nateness (*than.cig.skyes.pa*, Skt. *sahaja*) of the object as the *sūnyatā* and the mind (lit. the owner of the objects) as luminosity in itself (*rañ.bžim.hod.gsal*), in the actual experience it is a free-rising perception (*thol.skyes.kyi.rig*) of uninterrupted understanding in luminous knowledge. Not understanding this free-rising knowledge there is Samsāra, understanding it there is Nirvāṇa. But this knowledge itself does not belong to any side whatsoever. It is the coincidence (*suñ.hjug*, Skt. *yuganaddha*) of great bliss as the essence (*no.bo = gsis*) and the *sūnyatā* endowed with all excellent occurrences as the owner of the objects.

More aptly than this highly technical terminology, the description of the process by which this experience of luminosity and of richness is brought about, is able to convey something of this mystic vision and emotionally moving sustenance. Two stages are to be distinguished, the developmental stage (*bskyed.rim*, Skt. *utpannakrama*) and the consummate stage (*rdzogs.rim*, Skt. *sampannakrama*). The former begins when the object of contemplation is perceived in what approximates pure sensation and, devoid of all interpretative concepts and beliefs about its ontological nature, is viewed and felt as something divine in its own right. The character of light is not something

⁴⁷ Phyag.chen.rnal.hbyor.mig, fol. 7a; Phyag.chen.gyi.zin.bris, fol. 7a.

⁴⁸ Phyag.chen.bla.ma, fol. 2a; Phyag.chen.rnal.hbyor.mig, fol. 7b.

⁴⁹ Phyag.chen.rnal.hbyor.mig, fol. 4b; Rnal.hbyor.mdzub.tshugs, fol. 1.

⁵⁰ Phyag.chen.rnal.hbyor.mig, fol. 6b.

⁵¹ Rnal.hbyor.mdzub.tshugs, fol. 8b.

attributed to it but something inherent in it. It is as if the object begins to glow from within and stands out sharply, with luminosity rather than clarity; where everything seen is felt, felt much more strongly than in any normal state of consciousness; and where the solidity of the outer world is lost and the belief in its absolute reality gives way to a mere vision of a phantom-like tableau (*sgyu.ma.lta.bu*, Skt. *māyopama*).⁵² This is what Maitripa asserts with respect to this developmental stage:⁵³

Since there is only conditioned existence
There is nothing real in it. *Śūnyatā*, however,
Though it is luminous and a divine occurrent,
Is the very nature of no nature.
In whatever way it may appear
It is the nature of *śūnyatā*.

And that this *Śūnyatā* is not just a concept or idea one has reached by intellectually analyzing, moving in dichotomies, is pointed out by Mañju-ḡoṣa (*hjam.pai.dbyaṅs*):⁵⁴

The *śūnyatā* arrived at by an intellectual analysis
of the psycho-physical constituents of man
Is like sea-weed and has no solidity;
But the *śūnyatā* with all excellent occurrents
Is not like this.

Seeing and feeling the object as divine in its own right is very often a stage beyond which many people, mystics and non-mystics, do not pass. In Buddhism, however, the consummate stage is still more necessary, since only with its realization a solid foundation for one's life has been built. This transition from one stage to the other and the consummatory experience of an all-pervasive luminosity Padma.dkar.po describes in the following words:⁵⁵

At the time when one attends to the development of tranquillity (*ṣi.gnas*) one pays closest attention to the object of one's contemplation which has been made a deity and the divine appearance then becomes more and more radiant. At that time the whole tableau (*dkyil*.

⁵² It must be observed that the Buddhists speak of the likeness with a phantasma but do not assert that the world or so is a phantasma.

⁵³ Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 36a. The translation is according to the Tibetan version which has the correct reading against the quotation of this verse in Advaya-vajrasamgraha, p. 51.

⁵⁴ Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 36a. Only the first two lines are quoted in this text. I have given the two missing lines according to the oral explanation I got from my Lama friend Bstan.lhizin-rgyal.mtshan.

⁵⁵ Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 36a-b.

ḡkhor, Skt. *maṇḡala*) which has been studied in its coarse form becomes as if it could be directly touched or directly seen. Due to this it is possible to discard the coarse appearance which possesses certain characteristics since these are accidental rather than essential. Although there is (at this instant) a profound and luminous vision, in reality it is a differentiated kind of tranquillity. Immediately thereafter, in the union with the consummate stage there is by the revelation of the symbolism of the divine form a self-finding and this profound and luminous experience in which there is only the appearance of phantoms after the belief in the concrete reality of the divine form has been given up is the (mystic experience of oneself being a) phantom-body (*sgyu.lus*). The more subtle it grows in its mere appearance it is resolved in the luminosity of the Sarva-*śūnyā*.⁵⁶

This lengthy discussion of the two closely related experiences, the unique kind of whole and the intuitive mystic vision, which would have been still more lengthy if space had permitted to go into the details of their ramifications and implications, serves a double purpose. First of all, it shows plainly that the meditative process is not auto-suggestion but a spontaneous phenomenon, a release of hitherto unknown, or, maybe it is more correct to say, of hitherto disregarded factors which are just as necessary for the fulness of life as the commonly acknowledged operations of mind and which one cannot come into contact with in any other way but by meditation. Secondly, the mystic vision gives a specific note to one's outlook in life which in the Buddhist conception must be based on knowledge by acquaintance and not on knowledge by description. It is with the attainment of pure intuition and the mystic vision with its certitude that the foundation of philosophy in the Buddhist sense of the word is laid. This intuitive character of Eastern systems of philosophy⁵⁷ is

⁵⁶ *Sarvaśūnyā* is a technical term referring to a particular kind of experience. It is the last and consummate experience, the preceding ones being called *śūnyā* corresponding to *rtse.gcig*, *mahāśūnyā* to *spros.bral*, *atiśūnyā* to *ro.gcig*, and *sarvaśūnyā* to (*b*)*sgom.med*. The last two kinds belong to the special (*mithun.moṅ.ma.yin.pa*) form of meditation which realizes the sameness of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa as to their emotional feeling tone and goes beyond an object-bound meditation. The four terms *śūnyā*, *mahāśūnyā*, etc. are also met with in Pañcakrama III 4.

⁵⁷ F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West*, pp. 315 etc., etc. is substantially correct in calling Eastern philosophies "intuitive," but he fails to note the differences that exist between the various systems. Except for this oversimplification his account of Eastern philosophies evinces a much better understanding than is

evident from the very words used for what we designate by philosophy, viz., "seeing, view" (*lta.ba*, Skt. *drṣṭi*, *darśana*). Philosophy which thus is the Seeing of Reality is not the culmination of one's abilities but the very beginning of the arduous task of achieving spiritual maturity. In this way philosophy in the Eastern sense of the word only serves to clear the way and, quite literally, to open the student's eyes. What he then sees has to be closely attended to *sgom.pa*, Skt. *bhāvanā*) and must be actually lived (*spyod.pa*, Skt. *caryā*).

Ever since its beginning Buddhism has insisted on avoiding the mutually contradictory extremes and on steering a middle course. Therefore also it calls its philosophy the "Middle View" (*dbu.mai.lta.ba*, Skt. *madhyamakadrṣṭi*). That this middle view is not discursive but is the mystic vision is clearly expressed in the following statement:⁵⁸

At the time of non-conceptualization and non-verbalization (*spros.bral*, Skt. *niṣprapañca*) the middle view (*dbu.mai.lta.ba*, Skt. *madhyamakadrṣṭi*) has found its fulfilment. Devoid of all such conceptualization as existence and non-existence, origination and annihilation, coming and going, eternalism and nihilism, monism and pluralism, doubts have been dispelled.

The "Middle View" is also the name of the most important school of Buddhism whose tenets have been rather baffling to most students who tried to approach them from the propositional method used in most philosophical systems. The

found in most works on these philosophies which as a rule twist them into some Western philosophy or other, be this Hume or Kant.

⁵⁸ Phyag.chen.rnal.lbyor.mig, fol. 11b.

middle view is given, as we have seen, when the Path of Seeing Reality has been realized. This has one important consequence. It makes the presentation of the essential points of Buddhist philosophy more than doubtful when their character of direct experience and of having been directly intuited instead of having been arrived at by the method of hypothesis and partial verification is not made clear. Padma.dkar.po even goes so far as to declare that any such presentation has nothing to do with Buddhist philosophy. His words are:⁵⁹

Since the Middle View is not realized before the Path of Seeing Reality has been attained, any other view before this stage falls under the opinion which a man of common-sense or a śrāvaka or a Vijñānavādin may hold, and it does not alter the fact even if he calls the tenets arrived at by hearing and thinking about The middle view. The views of most people who nowadays advocate certain doctrines I consider as views of enlightened common-sense only. Also in the śāstra it has been said:

The man of common-sense sees a concrete thing
And conceives it as the ultimately real.
Because he contends that it is not like a phantasma
There is dissension between the man of common-sense and the critical philosopher.⁶⁰

In conclusion then, there are three levels of understanding, but two of them are of major importance. First of all there is the level of common-sense in its naive and more enlightened form which gives knowledge by description. Then there is with the attainment of the Path of Seeing Reality the level of mystic insight and the first level of spirituality. It is from this level that after a prolonged practice the final level, Buddhahood or enlightenment, can be realized.

⁵⁹ Phyag.chen.gan.mdzod, fol. 54a.

⁶⁰ This verse is taken from Bodhicaryāvatāra IX 5.