

## Anthroposophy and Buddhism ~ A Dialogue

Bangkok, February 2 and 3, 2002



by Ha Vinh Tho

Some twenty participants came together for a two days dialogue in Baanrak Waldorf Kindergarten (Bangkok, Thailand) to explore together the possibility of creating a local research group in the field of Buddhism and Anthroposophy, as part of an international research network on this theme.

Each day began with Buddhist chanting and a silent meditation followed by Eurythmy exercises.

On the first day, I gave an introduction to clarify the background of this initiative and to suggest possible objectives for the meeting.

### Background

The Goetheanum (Dornach, Switzerland), center of the General Anthroposophical Society, offered two important international conventions in 1995 and 2000 with over 1000 participants each, to explore the major world religions in the light of Anthroposophy. During the summer conference 2000, I was asked to give a lecture and a workshop on Buddhism, and in this context, my wife Lisi and I had a meeting with the executive committee of the Anthroposophical Society. During this meeting, the members of the executive committee, and especially the late general secretary Manfred Schmidt-Brabant, emphasized the importance of a serious research in the field of Buddhism and Anthroposophy. My wife and I were encouraged to take up the initiative to gather interested people and to build up a research work in this field.

Our first attempt to follow up this suggestion was made in Hue, Vietnam in March 2001 where a group of 11 participants gathered in order to share their questions and experiences on this theme (see Newsletter No. 1).

After some unsuccessful attempts to organize other international meetings, we decided to try and create study and research groups on a local level, that could

gradually evolve into an international network aiming to organize at the appropriate time a larger conference on this specific theme.

According to my perception, there are two different approaches connected with this issue:

- Asian people coming from a Buddhist background who are studying Anthroposophy, and who are often time also active in Waldorf education or other practical fields directly connected with Spiritual Science.
- Westerners, both European and American Anthroposophists, interested in and connected with Buddhism for various reasons.

Both groups do not have necessarily exactly the same questions and concerns, although I believe that ultimately, a dialogue between the two can prove to be very fruitful.



*This issue contains reports from the following meetings:*

- *Bangkok, February 2002*
- *Switzerland, Mai 2002*
- *Copake, USA, July 2002*



*Some of the participants at the meeting in Baanrak Waldorf Kindergarten in Bangkok*

### **Anthroposophy within the framework of European culture**

To understand the development of Anthroposophy, it seems relevant to consider the evolution of consciousness and more specifically the emergence of the “consciousness soul” within the European culture since the Renaissance. On one hand, the best achievements of the Modern Age are directly connected with this evolution but, on the other hand, many of the problems we are facing in our time are the shadow side of it.

A problematic aspect of this evolution is connected with “the Newtonian-Cartesian synthesis”<sup>\*</sup> that gave birth to a worldview and a science that conceptualized reality as a machine rather than a living organism. As a consequence of the machine metaphor applied both to nature and to the human being, the earth became a dead entity to be controlled and manipulated, and culture suffered a loss of deeper human values and spirituality.

The efforts of Rudolf Steiner to offer a new spirituality meeting the needs of our time is directly connected with this specific development of modern western culture, and finds its sources in it: a new approach to Christianity; rediscovering the German spiritual heritage: Goethe, Novalis, Grimm, Schiller, Fichte and many others. Obviously, it is not right to limit Anthroposophy to these aspects, but they have, no doubt, played an important part in its development.

### **Anthroposophy in Asia**

A specific tendency of western culture is, generally speaking, to consider itself as being universal. In this way, colonialism aimed to bring “Civilization” to more or less barbarian natives, the same is true for Christian missionaries who spread the only True Faith. In more recent times, after the failure of Marxism (an other western system), the prophets of market economy and consumerism are showing the only way to happiness and well being to the rest of the world. Being aware of this situation, one can only be very cautious when bringing yet another western worldview to Asia.

Yet, at the same time, there are new possibilities of

intercultural dialogue in mutual respect that can lead to a deeper and wider understanding. The present world situation shows clearly how important such a dialogue is, if we want to live in peace.

So the question that we need to address is what can be the contribution of Anthroposophy as a method of spiritual investigation within the context of Asian and more specifically Buddhist culture?

It seems to me important that we see clearly that the aim can not be to «export» yet another form of European culture to Asia, but that we try to see in what way Spiritual Science can help to deepen the understanding of the local wisdom, and bring about a rejuvenation of traditions that have sometimes lost their deeper spiritual meaning.

Of course, it is also necessary to take into consideration the fact that some challenges and questions that mankind is facing are not any more connected with a specific country or culture, but are of global nature. Therefore, there are, no doubt, also aspects that are common to both East and West.

### **Research themes**

During our meeting, three main themes emerged as areas of research, and smaller groups made first steps to define more precisely how research questions could be formulated within these very broad fields:

1. Education: ethical dimension of education from Buddhist and Anthroposophical points of views
2. Selfdevelopment and inner path: Buddhist and Anthroposophical approaches
3. Social questions and community building: Three-foldness in Buddhism and Anthroposophy.

A participant from each group gave a concise yet very profound introduction in these various themes, followed by two working sessions in sub groups. At the end of the meeting, each group reported in a plenum discussion about the outcome of their dialogue. It was, needless to say, a first step on a long journey, but the shared feeling among the participants was that it had been an intense and fruitful meeting, that could be the starting point of a more regular research work.



<sup>\*</sup> Edmund O’Sullivan: *Transformative learning. Educational vision for the 21st Century.* Zed Books, London, New York, 1999.

## My relationship to Buddhism and Anthroposophy



Thanb Cherry  
preparing the flowers  
for the Buddha  
(see page 1)

I was born and brought up as a Buddhist in Vietnam for the first 17 years of my life. My parents, grandparents and many generations of great grandparents were Buddhists. I went to temples, prayed, learnt meditative practices for many years without really understanding what it was all about.

At 18, I went to study in Australia and decided out of freedom to stay there. I put aside my Vietnamese roots, my inherited religion, and became Australian. In England where I went to live many years later, I met Anthroposophy, Waldorf education and the work of Rudolf Steiner through working at a Camphill establishment. Then I came back to Australia and became a teacher at a Steiner school.

The more I studied anthroposophy the more I became aware of the different spiritual streams weaving through the history of human evolution. Inevitably, I was drawn to learn more about Vietnam, Asia and Buddhism alongside with Christianity and the rest of the world. Now, over 30 years since leaving Vietnam, I can say with conviction that I am a Buddhist and a Christian at the same time. Anthroposophy as a spiritual science has helped me to understand what it is to be a Buddhist and why I'm one at last.

And again, out of freedom, I have come back to Vietnam (for part of the time each year) to take up what I consider one of my life tasks and to involve myself again in Buddhism. *Thanb Cherry* 🙏

## Self development and meditation in Buddhism and Anthroposophy

Our discussion group on self-development and meditation in Buddhism and Anthroposophy started with forming three questions:

1. Why should we improve or develop ourselves?
2. What is meditation? What are the different methods of meditation? What do we experience in meditation?
3. How can we find our life direction? How can we develop the will to follow it?

\* \* \*

Self-development is a spiritual process leading to changes, transformation and purification in oneself. It is part of the goal in most spiritual disciplines including education. The four noble truths and the eight-fold path as taught by Buddha have pointed the way to humanity for the past two thousand years until now.

Anthroposophy also offers new ways of working with these teachings, culminating in seven steps of self-development, from physical well being, spiritual hygiene and meditation, through artistic work, study, spiritual research to social interaction and community-minded actions.



by Chong Weera  
and Thanb Cherry

### Why self-development?

To understand oneself better and become capable of answering questions arising in oneself;  
to be able to relieve one's own suffering and gain success through self knowledge;  
to become independent and not cause others pains and suffering on one's behalf;  
to develop more capacities to help others;  
to become wiser, more loving and selfless;  
to be wholly human and alive by continuing to grow spiritually and unfold all human capacities;  
to be able to radiate goodness, happiness and positive energy.

### Why are some people not interested in self-development?

When we are not conscious and do not ask questions; when the influences of materialistic societies are too strong. This could result in having purely materialistic concepts of selfdevelopment, i.e. self development purely in a physical sense; out of laziness, a lack of will; out of fear – fear of changes, fear of the unknown; because of social pressures and expectations – to have material success above all; when we do not experience enough suffering, or are not sensitive enough to suffering.

Buddha saw suffering, asked himself questions and wanted to understand it. Then he searched for ways to release it. He found that meditation helped in the understanding and releasing of suffering.

In Thai society, there's now more awareness about the quality of life. More magazine articles deal with the health of mind as well as body instead of just physical health as in the past.

### **Meditation**

We agreed that there are a variety of meditation methods, each has a specific aim. Even though Buddhism teaches meditation widely, some Buddhist friends only seriously practise meditation when they meet Anthroposophy. The process of meditation is for them a spiritual scientific discipline. Others look back to their Buddhist religious practices, especially meditation, when they discover Anthroposophy. There is overlapping areas over meditative practices, exercises, prayers and meditation itself.

### **Why meditation?**

- To be able to concentrate more deeply;
- to be in the present; to feel peace;
- to still our mind and feelings;
- to be able to see the whole picture, see things more clearly, have insights;
- to have objective truths revealed to us;
- to be able to communicate and work with the spiritual world and spiritual beings;
- to develop better capacity and skills to meditate.

In education the practice of meditation about children is a necessity for teachers. It helps us understand the child more deeply in an objective way and therefore can guide us in how to help and take care of him/her.

### **How do we feel when we do meditate regularly?**

Even after a short time of practice, we can already feel peaceful and centered and more effective and clear in



*Lunch in traditional Thai style*

our thinking. If done over a long period of time, it may lead to not only peace but also light and the capacity to receive higher spiritual knowledge. Meditation requires effort and will.

### **Life direction or destiny**

Each one of us has his/her own life direction or path. Our paths may meet and we may travel together for a while then diverge. We may be fortunate to find our destiny but if we don't follow it we will suffer inwardly.

### **To find our destiny we need**

Plenty of effort and strong will. A meditative process: observation, rational thinking, exploring possibilities, being open-minded and non-judgemental. And how to have the courage to take up our destiny and follow it through? This needs above all WILL. How can we develop this strong will?

We ran out of time so we could not explore this question further. It was a wonderful meeting and working together. We thank you all for your companionship and community spirit. 🙏



## Research Questions based on the ethical dimension of education

### The ethical dimension of education from Buddhism and Anthroposophy

1. How can I observe the “I” in teacher and children in Buddhist culture and develop my own “I”?
2. Is the core of Buddhist teaching interpreted by teachers and applied in class?
3. How can we revitalize inherited rituals and create new rituals that help us live fully in modern life and appropriate to our consciousness nowadays?
4. Out of our understanding of spiritual geography, how can we transfer season rituals into teaching practice?
5. To bring rituals into education how can teachers think out of their feeling and perform their roles for children?
6. Out of Buddhist understanding, are there any guiding words for each developmental levels of children?
7. How do we perceive “elemental beings” from Anthroposophical and Buddhist points of view? In which ways do we work with them in education?

Reported by the Education Group



## Engaged Buddhism and Anthroposophy

### Progress Report on Research Questions ‘Engaged Buddhism and Anthroposophy’

Overview of ongoing action-research of Hans van Willenswaard and Wallapa Kuntiranont in Thailand

Subjects and Questions as formulated in May 2001 (Newsletter Issue 1)

#### Actions undertaken by May 2002

##### 1. Education

*What can be the role of Waldorf Education within the broader context of ‘Alternative Education’, and Education Reform in Thailand and Asia?*

- Urgent need in Thailand: a good book for parents and teachers offering a contextual explanation of Waldorf Education in practical terms. **‘Natural Childhood. A practical guide to the first seven years’** edited by John Thomson can fulfill this important need. It has been translated in 10 languages but not yet in Thai. ‘Garden of Fruition’, our small-scale company that started in March 2001, acquired the copyrights and formed a translating, editing, proofreading and technical executive team. We started actively raising funds to make it a feasible venture, given the challenge that the book should be made available widely at an affordable price.

- Virtually without funding the third International Gathering on “Alternative Education” was organised in Moo Ban Dek Childrens’ Village near Kanchanaburi, November to December 2001. Participants from Cambodia, Burma, Laos (among them many Buddhist

monks), Indonesia, India, Japan, Thailand as well as from Europe and USA worked together in plenaries and a variety of workshops on ‘Alternative Education ~ its role in transforming society’. Andres Pappee, Perceval Foundation, Switzerland, introduced the Camphill approach to ‘special education’ and Ramu Manivannan, India, presented the project for street-children “Buddha Smiles”. The gathering concluded in the beautiful Thai traditional house of Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, with a dialogue between Vandana Shiva (India) and Sulak Sivaraksa (Thailand). Reports in book form will be published in English and Thai by ‘Garden of Fruition’.

- Yoshi Nagata from the National Institute of Education Research (NIER), Japan, organised a follow-up seminar to the “Alternative Education” gathering in Japan.

*How can Anthroposophy and its concept of ‘Spiritual Science’ contribute towards transformation of universities and lifelong learning in Asia?*

- The intended partnership with the International Development Studies programme at Chulalongkorn University (IDS) materialised in the current year in various ways. The jointly organised Symposium on ‘Holistic Education and the Sciences’ (see below) was a landmark and in subsequent preparatory meetings the aims and objectives of the IDS were further explored. In the Netherlands we spoke with *Michaela Hordijk* in order to explore cooperation with Amsterdam University. Michaela will be in the Philippines this summer to work with Nicanor Perlas. Also progress was made in establishing co-operation with the ISS (Institute of Social Studies) in The Hague and other persons and organisations in Europe. Our partner in the ISS is Tahndam Truong, whose sister supports Thich Tue Tam, the Buddhist monk and Tai-chi teacher we visited in Hue. She helps to extend the herb gardens for the clinic. The Development Studies programme will cater Asian participants in the first place while dialogue with ‘Europe’ is eminent. Sander Tideman (who gave a lecture on Buddhist Eco-



by Wallapa and Hans

nomics during the second Ariyavinaya meeting – see below) asked us to join the ‘Inner Asia Centre for Sustainable Development’, linking Central Asian universities from e.g. Mongolia, Bhutan, China with intended expansion to South East Asia. Sander is also the co-organiser of the ‘Spirit in Business’ conferences.

- Parallel to academic co-operation a network of “Alternative Universities” is emerging. Hans accompanied Sulak Sivaraksa, well known engaged Buddhist teacher and activist, to India where he held an inaugural speech at ‘Bija Vidyapeeth’, the new College for Sustainable Living near Dehra Dun. This College was founded by Vandana Shiva and Satish Kumar and it is a sister project of Schumacher College in Devon, U.K., Alok Ulfat of Nanhi Dunya childrens’ movement, Dehra Dun, later conducted a drama workshop in the new college.

- In March 2002 Hans and Wallapa visited Emerson College, Forest Row, East Sussex in U.K. We met with John and Marie-Claire Thomson and with Wu Bei, the first student from China (Beijing). The strong presence of many Asian students struck us and our short stay inspired us to propose an ‘East–West, North–South’ (title to be decided) meeting in Summer 2004 in Emerson College.

- “If science is not holistic, it is no science.” This strong statement of Vandana Shiva at the Symposium ‘Holistic Education and the Sciences’ (following the Alternative Education gathering) opened an exciting dialogue on paradigms in science among scientists and students at Chulalongkorn University. A small group of students opt for more social responsibility of this eldest university of Thailand, established by King Rama V (Chulalongkorn) 84 years ago in order to introduce western science and western administration in the independent country. Thailand kept its independence but was colonized intellectually, according to social critic Sulak Sivaraksa. A diversity of scientists e.g. prof. Surichai Wung’ waeo (initiator of the IDS programme at ‘Chula’) and prof. Atsu

Yoshida (Women’s University, Osaka, Japan) as well as NGO representatives acted as resource persons in workshop discussions. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (author of ‘Development Theory’), Illinois University, concluded his workshop report with the recommendation to experiment with re-linking Buddhist temples and universities in a contemporary perspective.

- A Buddhist approach to Education (including child education, adult education, scientific education and research) was also discussed during the 3rd Ariyavinaya meeting in Ashram Wongsanit near Bangkok in February 2002. ‘Ariyavinaya’ or the Noble Discipline refers to the need for reflection on civil ethics and monastic disciplines from a universal perspective. One of the initiatives emerging from this meeting is a ‘Biography workshop for Educators’ in October 2002 to be conducted by Ha Vinh Tho in the Ashram.



## 2. Agriculture

*What are similarities and differences between the practice of EM (Effective Micro-organisms) as part of Natural Farming and the application of Bio-dynamic preparations (and especially the ‘starter’ as developed by Ehrenfried Pfeiffer)*

- A series of workshops was initiated with a group of farmers (men and women) of the “Assembly of the Poor”. This non-violent protest movement was induced by protests against the Pak Moon dam near the border with Laos, the point where Moon river merges with the Mae Kong. Some of the farmers apply ‘EM’, a practice they learned from the Santi Ashoka group, a dissident group within Theravada Buddhism. They are strictly vegetarian and trade in food and health products based on ‘EM’.

- An article on the Pak Moon movement written by Wallapa and Hans has been published in COMPAS magazine, a project of ETC Leusden, the Netherlands.

- COMPAS kindly facilitated a connection with Dr. Margarita Correa (Auroville, India) whom Hans could meet in Bangkok on her way back from an extensive international conference on ‘EM’ and Kyusei Nature farming in New Zealand. Margarita informed me about experiments with both Bio-dynamics and ‘EM’ at her farm. The interactions deserve much closer investigation in order to understand both the micro-physical and spiritual principles behind organic farming connected with Buddhism and Anthroposophy. Auroville provides an interesting platform for such research which could be replicated in Europe e.g. by the Louis Bolk Institute in the Netherlands.

- The planned workshop on Goethean Science could not yet been realised as Hans van Florenstein Mulder from New Zealand was unable, due to family circumstances, to attend the Symposium on ‘Holistic Education and the Sciences’. Jan Diek van Mansvelt, chairman of the Bio-dynamic Society in the Netherlands, offered to replace Hans Mulder but time was too short. It is certainly a challenging subject to be explored with a small group, in Ashram Wongsanit and other locations.



## 3. Business

*How can we arrange and manage participation of village-producers in our company ‘Garden of Fruition’?*

- In March 2001 we started our small-scale independent enterprise. The three business area’s of ‘Garden of Fruition’ are:

1. ‘Fair trade’ in village products (handwoven cotton fabric, naturally dyed);
2. Publishing books and media productions;
3. Training, conferences, events, advice and consultancy.

- With support of the Canada Fund and the Embassy of New Zealand we could start a training programme with women weavers in the Pak Moon area and in Sakorn Nakorn district. Also we established co-operation with a weavers network in Nan, in the extreme

North of the country. The groups all produce handwoven and natural dyed cotton products according to local traditions. The training supports skills improvement, contemporary product development and self-organisation.

- In a broader perspective we support the strengthening of the local micro credit and savings systems among the farmers and we encourage experiments with organic farming (rice and cotton). The farmers started with a small-scale rice mill for independent rice processing.

- Our initial company investment amounts to 5 million Baht (about 125.000 Euro) and this capital is owned by 16 shareholders from both NGO's and the business community (including Ban Raak Kindergarten and friends of Social Venture Network Asia). Sulak Sivaraksa is the President of the shareholders group and Wallapa Kuntiranont is Managing Director. In a second investment round, probably again for 5 million Baht, we hope to raise also capital which especially is meant to materialise the intended producers participation in our company. In August 2002 we will present a longer term business plan that justifies a second call for investment.

*How can our experimental company play a role in developing small-scale economic exchanges and cooperation in S.E. Asia, Asia and worldwide?*

- One of our pioneering shareholders is the Bridge Fund (7,5 %) and its aim is to support Tibetan small- and medium scale enterprises (in a variety of Asian countries including China). We started selling Tibetan products in Suksit Siam bookshop, old Bangkok, which is since recently under our cooperative management. We hope to contribute to realising alternative small- and medium scale enterprises cooperation in Asia.

- Saturday, 20th April 2002, we commemorated the 35th anniversary of Suksit Siam bookshop by looking back to the past – when the bookshop was a leading activist think tank – and by anticipating the future. A challenging remark by one of the panellists, a former

assistant of Sulak Sivaraksa who founded Suksit Siam together with his wife, pointed at the need for more cooperation among independent progressive small- and medium scale publishers and book-distributors in Thailand. Media-control is penetrating Thailand's fragile democracy. Media-control also implies that no criticism towards Buddhist institutions will be allowed.

- We started regular meetings to explore common 'Green Campaigning' in Thailand. Among the participants are GreenNet, Lemon Farm (the biggest organic shops' chain), PLAN publishers, Green Choice, Accreditation Centre Thailand (ACT), Baanrak Kindergarten, 'Greenpeace', the Ministry of Public Health; 'Garden of Fruition' fulfills an initiating role.

- Since Social Venture Network (SVN) Asia – Thailand was established by Thai business people through Sulak Sivaraksa; with the help of Josh Mailman, the American co-founder of SVN, and a small group of Dutch business persons it evolved into a prominent business network. It organises monthly activities and annual conferences. The initial contacts were facilitated through Bart-Jan Krouwel, now working with RABO-Bank and one of the co-founders of Triodos Bank in the Netherlands. 'Garden of Fruition' played an active role in all SVN meetings and especially in the historic visit of the business delegation to the village-activists at the Pak Moon dam. The protest movement evolved into the widespread "Assembly of the Poor". In 2003 we hope to organise the first truly 'Asian' Social Venture Network conference with major participation from a variety of Asian countries.

- The first book our new company published was the translation into Thai of "Visionary Business" by Mark Allen (USA). Other books on 'alternative business' will follow and we will be happy to receive recommendations for good books and business trainers.



#### 4. Threefolding

*How can the spiritual reality of "Threefoldness" be recognized, understood and practiced both from the perspective of Anthroposophy and Socially Engaged Buddhism?*

- In one of the workshops during the 2nd meeting of the 'Buddhism – Anthroposophy' Dialogue, 26–27 January 2002 at Baanrak Kindergarten, Bangkok, we exchanged experiences and ideas on the importance of community spirit. Several possible parallels between "threefolding" in Buddhism and in Anthroposophy were explored. Both in the realm of psychology and sociology some striking similarities were discovered, without trying to put reality into boxes too much. The 'Triple Gem' or 'Three Jewels' in Buddhism is one of the most basic ordering principles: Buddhists take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Could one say that the Buddha represents the realisation of Freedom; that the Dhamma is the principle of Law; and the Sangha the principle of Community?

- Community building – in Buddhist terms: the role of the Sangha – was also one of the prominent subjects during the 3rd Ariyavinaya meeting at Ashram Wongsanit, near Bangkok (see under Education). Ha Vinh Tho who represented Vietnamese teacher Thich Nhat Hanh during the meeting emphasized the importance his teacher adheres to the nature of 'community' in any action we undertake. In a narrow sense the Sangha only refers to the order of monks and nuns, but Thich Nhat Hanh made a much broader understanding of Sangha one of the corner stones of his teachings. Some Buddhist streams like Theravada Buddhism (dominant in most of S.E. Asia and Sri Lanka) tend to mummify under strict interpretation of the Dhamma and the rules and regulations of the vinaya, the discipline, as literary preserved in the scriptures. The narrow understanding of both Sangha and Dhamma risk to obscure a genuine understanding of the liberation as realised by the Buddha. A genuine understanding of the Sangha-nature of events prevents liberation to be

conceived as something individual only. The Enlightenment of the Buddha in solitude is the window to liberation from Suffering in a holistic perspective. Enlightenment embraces the transformation of the whole.

- A new start was made with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) just before the Ariyavinaya meeting in Ashram Wongsanit. INEB has been an important pressure group for gender equanimity in Buddhism, and against political suppression of Buddhist and non-Buddhist spiritual communities. INEB is associated with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (USA) and other groups promoting engaged buddhism (with a small b) worldwide. INEB is a potential platform for dialogue on the process of understanding and practicing “Threefoldness” from a multi-cultural perspective.

- In order to work out these insights and experiences, a publication could be prepared triggering more dialogue and in-depth study.



## 5. Culture, Politics

*Can Anthroposophy (and Threefoldness) contribute to the discourse on a newly formulated “Third Way” as a problem-solving socio-cultural*

*concept in the Age of Globalization?*

- Immediately after the Ariyavinaya meeting in Ashram Wongsanit, an international conference ‘Peacemaking and International Insecurity in the 21st Century’ took place at the campus of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) near Bangkok. Especially after the 11 September disaster people are aware of the fragile security situation in the world. At one hand there is a deep feeling of un-ease caused by “structural violence” of anonymous character and widespread poverty, at the other hand actual violent conflicts, often with an ethnic component, seem to grow; conflict of this nature is very hard to overcome. Discussions about establishing a non-violent Peace Force (an initiative that emerged from the 1999 Hague Peace Conference) were very lively and placed in the perspective of the upcoming 50-years commemoration of the Bandung conference of 1955 in Indonesia. This Bandung conference was the start of the so-called ‘non-aligned movement’ and a possible Bandung II conference may offer a platform for a re-newed quest for a healing, global “Third Way”-policy.

- The meeting in AIT was preceded in August 2001 by a small-scale exploratory meeting at Gandhi Ashram in Bali, Indonesia, hosted by Mrs. Gedong Bagoes

Oka. Not only the ‘Engaged Buddhism and Anthroposophy’ dialogue could contribute to the constitution of a new, genuine “Third Way”, also Ghandian Hindu’s, Quakers, Sufi’s and other groups practicing ‘engaged spirituality’ can join hands for a process towards a Culture of Peace.



## 6. Finances, organization

*How to finance research and how to organize our research group?*

- It will be clear to the patient reader that this report only gives a very shallow overview of a series of activities, without much reflection or synthesis. The question is whether we intend or not that the dialogue between Buddhism and Anthroposophy goes into research with a certain degree of depth and order.

If research should be the core activity of this exchange of experiences and open dialogue, it will require organizational and financial conditions.

In our case a period of reflection, free from daily work, should be facilitated leading to a publication. This need may comply to a small group of pioneers active in this very important dialogue process. 

## Another Meeting in Bangkok



*The executive committee of INEB, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists.*

INEB brings together Buddhists, both lay and monastic practitioners who are socially engaged and try to apply Buddhist wisdom, compassion and skillful means to meet the social, political, economic and cultural challenges of our time.

This picture was taken during the general assembly of INEB in Thailand in February 2002.

# A Space of Sharing

Meeting in Switzerland from Mai 31 to June 2, 2002



by Lisi Ha Vinb

The contours of the big wooden cross that has once been hanging here maybe for a few hundred years, where still visible on

the white wall between the two big windows of the old Cartusian monastery, La Part Dieu. The cross was overlooking the meditation room, even though it was not physically there anymore. This gave the room space, air and dignity.

Under the cross, on a small table, was a beautiful flower arrangement of wild springtime flowers. I had picked the flowers while waiting for Tho until his classes in Perceval where over and we could come here to La Part Dieu, to start our retreat on Buddhism and Anthroposophy in the early days of June.

It has been quite some time I did not have so much fun picking flowers! We have been house parents in Perceval, Camphill-community for over ten years and at that time picking flowers and making bouquets was part of my work. But now it is a few years we live again "private", we travel a lot, work a lot, so it is really not that often anymore that I take the time to make big bouquets. But this one was beautiful! Wild roses, violet

irises and all sorts of lovely, flowery spring messengers.

We were a group of 13 people coming together and share our questions, concerns, reflections on the theme of B&A on this weekend in Pentecost time.

For me it was a pleasure to welcome our friends in this beautiful Cartusian monastery of the 13th century. Tho and me have already organized retreats here, but for most of the friends on this meeting, this extraordinary place was new and I am sure a wonderful discovery.

For over 500 hundred years monks have prayed, meditated and worked here and even though it is not a monastery anymore, the atmosphere is wonderfully kept alive by the association and the family who owns this estate. It is only rented to people who want to do some kind of retreat work here, meditation, art or study.

The Cartusian order was a silent order. The monks only spoke at very rare occasions. So for us it was also evident that this meeting should not become a big discussion "about" ideas or opinions, but rather a meeting in the spirit of sharing experiences and inner investigations, of sharing out of active silence.

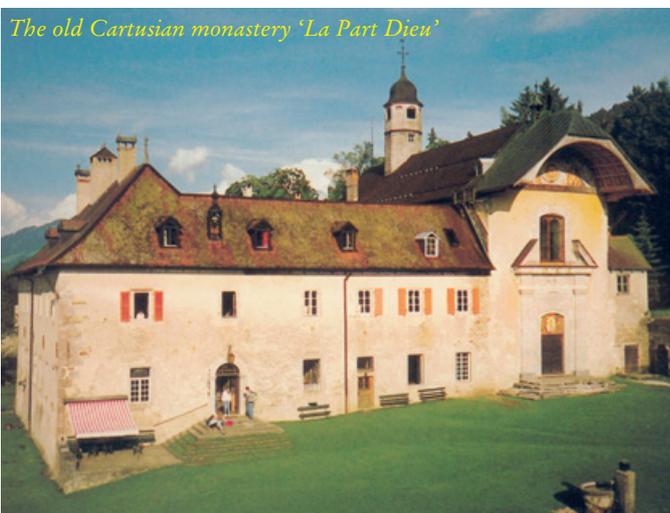
Our schedule was that of a retreat as we have practiced it in Buddhist contexts. Early morning bell wake up at 5h 30, silent or

guided meditation, silent breakfast, introduction talk, walking meditation outside in the lovely park, partly silent meals, and in the afternoon sharing of experience, relaxation and again partly silent evening meal with evening meditation and noble silence until after next days breakfast. This was also intended this way so that our friends who did not have very much experience of a Buddhist practice and of a retreat setting could become familiar with these practices.



All this with the most lovely springtime sunshine! Wonderful sunsets and delightful sunrises, stars at night and turquoise blue sky in the day!

So what are the important thoughts that I would like to share after this meeting? Maybe you already guess that it was mainly the





From left to right: Ulrike Mackay, Paul Mackay, Denis Pascal Donnet, Anne Michel, Urs Schumacher, Ha Vinh Tho, Françoise Moncade, Michaela Spaar, Heide Byrde, Martine Serrano, Joachim Grebert, Benjawan Gularb, Lisi Ha Vinh

open, honest and inquiring atmosphere, the open space like the contours of the cross on the white wall that I carry back as an after-image in me after this weekend.

The silence made it possible for some very tender but intimate and deep thoughts to arise. Comparisons, theological or philosophical disputes were not at all on our minds, but rather like a common painting, or like making music together, everyone tried with honesty to bring his color, his tone, his inner experience, to the questions about these two apparent different spiritual streams.

Different streams out of historical, cultural, geographical contexts. Buddhism being so old, with such a rich and long experience. Anthroposophy so young, fresh and with still a somewhat naive creativity.

Yet dialogue always is possible! Yet dialogue always is enriching! Without dialogue between differences, life would disappear!

I had the wonderful opportunity to speak about the aspect of wisdom in the Buddhist tradition, in dialogue with Paul Mackay who spoke about the Anthroposophical path of knowledge on the same morning.

At first I was impressed and had the feeling of not “knowing” enough about this vast theme. But there are a few things I do “know”

and these I was happy to share.

I spoke out of my own experience about the reality of suffering. Suffering is part of the world, part of the evolution of all mankind. This brought me to look at myself and at the world around me in a very concrete way. It brought me to the questions of what are the roots and what is the role of suffering. Through that I came to the realization of a state beyond suffering that is available at any moment!



Looking out of the window in La Part Dieu during our talk, I could see the morning sun through the blooming cherry tree! What Joy!

The path that leads to the state beyond suffering is the path we were talking about, each one of us through his own biography, his experience of life, his study and practice.

My gesture was the gesture coming from within me, from a

very personal concrete observation reaching towards something universal. You could say from contraction to expansion.

There was a poem that led my thoughts. I had written it for the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh:

*A tear from the ocean of suffering  
fell into my hand.  
Looking deeply into this tear,  
I found a precious jewel.  
Looking deeply into this jewel,  
I found an open heart.  
Looking deeply into this heart,  
I found a path.  
Walking this path,  
I found the Ocean embracing it all.*

Paul Mackay started his contribution with the picture of Pentecost. He was far in the spiritual dimension with its colorful wisdom. This large and vast encompassing knowledge that Anthroposophy can bring to us like a fresco where the brush of the painter is the Thought itself. From this expansion of the thinking he slowly brought us to the reality of our own evolution, of our own path.

It was one could say from expansion to contraction. Following his thoughts was a truly creative experience!

At one point Urs Schumacher mentioned that Buddhism was a spiritual science. The Buddhists do not call it a Religion. People usually say: we practice Buddhism. It is rather described as a Philosophy, a very concrete observation and practice of processes of the mind. There are no revelations from “another” world somewhere, only a deeper understanding of the Reality as it is. For Thich Nhat Hanh making one step on the ground of the earth is truly a miracle as it can open the understanding of the whole universe in a very concrete way. Through Mindfulness the historical moment, the present moment, can bring us to the realization of the Ultimate.

But then there is at one point a change of attitude that makes that Buddhism is also a religion with its beliefs, rituals, traditions and also superstitions like many other religions

When Urs mentioned this, I

wondered if one could not say the same in a way of Anthroposophy. It is a spiritual science with its rigorous scientific research and observation. But then there is also a whole aspect that is coming out of a "revelation" or if you wish "thought" but not anymore available to the practitioner without the help of belief. We sometimes have to remind ourselves that Thinking is not enough to make it a Reality.

Another aspect of our investigations was simply the aspect of Meeting! What joy to come together and share our deepest questions with



friends that are willing to explore without a preconditioned mind!

Thank you to each participant! Thank you Joachim and Tho for your introductions and guided meditations. Thank you all for your openness and wisdom.

A wonderful Peacock was dancing for us in the courtyard of the monastery. The fox of the forest has eaten his lady, so he was charming the chicken and us with his colorful fan. Maybe he was actually marking his territory trying to chase us away!

Thank you too wonderful Peacock! Does a Peacock have a Buddha nature?

What do you think?



## The Swiss Meeting in 'La Part Dieu'



by Michaela Spaar

In a former Carthusian monastery surrounded by a lovely environment, 13 participants from the French and German

part of Switzerland met for a weekend-retreat. The aim of this retreat was to get a taste of buddhist meditation practice following the methods of Thich Nhat Hanh. After the dinner we gathered in the ancient chapter hall. Ha Vinh Tho gave a short introduction about the conditions of buddhist meditation and the correct sitting positions. We finished this day with an evening meditation. From the beginning of this hour of meditation to next mornings breakfast we practiced 'noble silence'.

The second day began with one hour of meditation, only interrupted by a short walking meditation. After breakfast Tho gave a talk about buddhist meditation, the way how the 'Christian buddhism' by Thich Nhat Hanh uncovers the forces of the heart. In Buddhism meditation isn't an isolated practice. It is part of the three columns wisdom, ethic and meditation. All three elements belong together and strenghten each other. Joachim Grebert spoke about the anthroposophical meditation path, his

personal path. He gave us the image of Pentecost, when the disciples of Christ gathered. They developed forces of devotion through the grief and sorrow they felt after having lost Christ. Their hearts became transformed, through inner work they obtained understanding. They learnt to understand the others, and through understanding they achieved healing forces.

After a walking meditation we separated in two study groups in the wonderful monastery garden: one group about the motivation for meditation and the difficulties how to liberate us from the fullness of thoughts during the meditation; the other group about the relation between teacher and student and the role for the inner path.

After lunch we made a relaxation exercise followed by an intensive exchange about 'How can we create conditions that something new can appear in our mind? How can we develop the Anthroposophical Society to a community in which people are really accepted with their individual questions and problems?' One suggestion was: It would be helpful today to have a meditative engagement with the possibility of a lay brotherhood (people on different places in the world would have a commitment and work meditatively together).

Following these thoughts we had an interesting discussion about the question of the 'I': How can we

develop the forces of the 'I', not confounding with the ego. If we really want a dialogue with Buddhism and prevent misunderstandings we have to do this in a phenomenical way and not by only describing and comparing notions.

The third day again started with an hour of meditation. Later, Lisi gave a contribution about the reality of suffering that we share with all living beings. If we can help to relieve sorrow we can grow. It was very touching for all of us how Lisi brought this theme in a poetic form.

Then Paul Mackay spoke how the forces of belief (Glaubenskräfte) that Christ's disciples had, were later on replaced by the forces of knowledge (Erkenntniskräfte). With the new forces of the intellect we recognize that we ourselves can decide about our thinking. We have the possibility of freedom, but we also have to learn how to manage it.

Finally all participants expressed their personal impressions, ideas and wishes about the weekend. The short but intensive retreat gave a foretaste how buddhist retreats in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh can be practiced. According to Tho we need some experiences with special meditative moments to understand other spiritual streams. That's why he organized this retreat. Great thanks to Tho and Lisi for organizing this fruitful weekend!



## Anthroposophy and Buddhism: Some Reflections from the Conference

by Douglas M. Sloan

As one who has long been intrigued by Rudolf Steiner's many indications of the importance of the Buddha in human spiritual life, and by his call for Anthroposophy to develop a careful synthesis of Buddhism and Christianity, I was excited to learn that there was to be a conference near my home on the topic, "Anthroposophy and Buddhism", and that it was to be led by two people who are themselves deeply committed Anthroposophists and Buddhists. I was delighted then to be invited and able to attend. The conference, led with deep knowledge and sensibility by Ha Vinh Tho and Lisi Ha Vinh, exceeded all my expectations. It was held at the home of Gregor and Jeanne Simon-MacDonald in the lush countryside of Columbia County, New York. Gregor's and Jeannes' hospitality, the setting they provided, and the careful planning and organization of the conference by Sara Ciborski all provided a wonderful support for our meetings together. Moreover, the 17 participants, from this country, Europe, and Asia, brought along with their keen interest in the topic a diversity of experience and knowledge that made for rich and always rewarding explorations together.

In the short space I have here, I want to underscore very briefly three thoughts that emerged for me from the conference. I will then close also with a question for further reflection. These comments are not intended to summarize the conference, not even to mention many other things I found of importance in it. Furthermore, other participants might well – indeed, probably would – want to stress other points as of equal or more importance.

First, we began the conference by hearing something essential of the life-stories of the others present, and of the main concerns they brought to the topic out of their own experience. In the course of the conference it became increasingly apparent that these life-stories represented something much more than a nice, introductory exercise to get us going. Rather, it became evident that a dialogue on subjects that purport to have genuine consequences for how we understand and live our lives – as both Buddhism and Anthroposophy do – has to flow integrally from the life experiences of those engaged. Genuine dialogue on life-critical, life-changing issues has to be grounded in

the life stories of those doing the dialoguing. This is not to say that ideas, even very abstract ideas, are secondary or unimportant. It does suggest, however, that the consequences of the ideas for lived experience must become apparent. Otherwise they become what the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once called "inert ideas". Lived experience, however, may be purely inward at times, more outward in manifest action at other times, and more one or the other for different types of people most of the time. By the same token, what seem to be empty abstractions for one person may be full of life, vitality, and excitement for another; conversely, what seems outwardly to some to be mere action without thought may actually proceed from deep sources of the soul. If the encounter of different positions is to be the occasion for creative insight and new discoveries, rather than for misunderstanding and conflict, or simply a blind clash of inert ideas (abstraction and intellectualizing in the pejorative sense), then the crossing point must again and again be the life-stories of those engaged. This was established at the outset of the conference, and its importance became evermore evident as our meetings proceeded.

Second, it also became evident that a genuine dialogue between outlooks and experiences as complex as those of both Anthroposophy and Buddhism must respect and reflect that complexity. Humility emerges as a prime virtue in such a dialogue. Oversimplifications, conventional assumptions, and first impressions may, granted, often be unavoidable starting points – they may trigger, for instance, important questions needing attention – but if they are to be fruitful, they must be held tentatively and invite correction, qualification, and complications. Buddhism is not a

*Blessing the meal during the conference*





*Tokistuyu Tsukirona with Lisi Ha Vinh*

monolithic entity, and, I hazard to submit, neither is Anthroposophy. Both, furthermore, have a history, or, better, histories, which means that both have to be understood contextually, that is, taking into account the changing places, circumstances, and persons in relation to which Buddhism and Anthroposophy have found expression over time. Complicating matters further is the fact that Anthroposophy and Buddhism have their origins and development in radically different cultural and linguistic contexts. The opportunities for fundamental error and misunderstanding in the encounter between them are, therefore, myriad. Words chosen for translation may fail entirely to convey the meaning of the original language. Western expressions such as “emptiness”, “suchness”, “self”, “non-self”, and others have been notoriously disputed as to whether they adequately convey the meaning in the original. The same word may also be used for concepts and experience whose content and substance have themselves changed over time. Such seemingly obvious considerations often go unattended with the result being heated arguments between parties who are in reality simply speaking past one another.

Does this mean that we have to become experts in all that we are to explore in dialogue? That would be more than daunting. After all, scholars can devote a lifetime becoming experts in one form of Buddhism during one short historical period, and then, often, only have their expertise challenged by the next generation of experts. No, we must and can begin wherever we are, holding fast to the truth as we see it from our perspective – and sometimes it is the “non-expert” who is able to ask the most penetrating and difficult questions – but at the same time being open also to the corrections and enlargement of our views which continuing dialogue may bring. So the seemingly contradictory ability to stand fast and simultaneously to remain flexible, open, and capable of change is fundamental to fruitful dialogue. The polarities of deepening with openness, of firmness with flexibility, of concentration with mindfulness, are central requirements of both the Buddhist and Anthroposophic paths, and one would hope, therefore, central to any dialogue between them. Another way to put it is that genuine dialogue requires as much of the Eight-Fold Path as we can muster.

My third set of comments has to do with the way the conference brought out clearly to me how both Buddhism and Anthroposophy share two concerns that are central to their whole endeavors: the suffering of the world (which includes for both the suffering of ourselves, of all humanity, of all other sentient beings, and of the earth herself) and the inner soul-spiritual development necessary rightly to engage that suffering. Perhaps this is so obvious that it need not be said. Yet, since it is the case, the fact of this common, dual concern would seem in itself to mandate an on-going dialogue between the two paths. Here the obligation to initiate and sustain the dialogue seems to me to fall more heavily on the Anthroposophical side given that 1) Rudolf Steiner drew many relationships between the two, not least his own description of a Christian-Bodhisattva approach to suffering, and 2) he directly challenged Anthroposophists to develop those relationships further, of course carefully, not haphazardly or unheeded of possible points of irreconcilable conflict. A concrete example of how the two might come together, and one of the high points of the conference, was Tho’s presentation of his current research into the ways in which a socially-engaged Buddhist understanding of the Eight-Fold Path and Rudolf Steiner’s conception of the Three-Fold Social Order might complement and support one another in meeting major social ills and problems of our time.

I end these comments with my question for further thought and dialogue. To what extent has the adoption of Buddhism in the West been affected, and especially adversely affected, by certain characteristics of the evolution of consciousness in our time? For purposes of asking this question I assume, without attempting to ground it, Rudolf Steiner’s description of the emergence of the consciousness soul, beginning at least in the West early in the 15th century. Positively, the consciousness soul holds the potential for new forms of human freedom and the development of new faculties of soul-spiritual cognition; negatively, however, absent the development of its positive potential, the consciousness soul confronts us with the fact of having lost the capacity to experience as knowable reality the non-sensory dimensions of the world. This means the loss of the capacity to experience as knowable such non-sensory realities as values, meaning, purpose, quality, and others. This negative side of the consciousness soul needs to be taken seriously because it seems to be the dominant form of consciousness for increasing numbers of westerners.

Where the capacity for genuine knowledge of the non-sensory is lacking, several different responses are possible: 1) a sense-bound, materialistic naturalism which denies the existence of the non-sensory outright and maintains that we can only have knowledge of the physical sense world and abstractions from that world; 2) a dogmatic fundamentalism which asserts certain values and realities, not on the basis of genuine knowledge, but arbitrarily on the basis of personal or social preference – and this dogmatic fundamentalism is on the rise not only in every religion without exception, but there are also now widespread political,

economic, and scientific fundamentalisms; 3) social action movements which can be effective in alleviating suffering so long as they draw upon existing deposits of older ethical traditions but that become confused, ineffectual, and themselves increasingly dogmatic when they encounter new situations requiring real knowledge of the non-sensory (as in the many questions now seething, for examples, around the issues of abortion, assisted death, genetic engineering, cloning, and so forth. Without genuine knowledge of the non-sensory dimensions of life and of the human being, these kinds of questions can only be settled by arbitrary – i.e., fundamentalistic – value assertions and power struggles); and, finally, 4) an inner-directed, contemplative, meditative response which may produce some real peace and tranquility, both among individuals and, perhaps even, radiating out from them, among larger social groups. But this last response tends to leave the knowledge question untouched, and that means it is left in the hands of the first group, of those who claim a monopoly on knowledge in our time, the knowledge of a scientific, mechanistic naturalism that is rapidly taking our world apart.

What happens when Buddhism encounters this negative side of the consciousness soul? Despite the oft-cited suspicion by Gautama Buddha of useless metaphysical speculation, all Buddhism – unless I am totally mistaken, always a possibility – all Buddhism has seemed to recognize the fundamental reality of the qualitative and non-sensory as, at least partially but importantly, knowable reality. I do not know whether the development of the consciousness soul among Easterners has been quite so radical on the negative side as in the West – whether some vital capacity to perceive and cognize the reality of the non-sensory still remains for them intact and alive. They themselves will have to tell us. But if this is the case, one cannot help wondering if Buddhist leaders from Asia may not face a handicap in understanding what may often be happening in the growing adoption of Buddhism by Westerners.

Is it possible that they may assume one thing is happening because of the nature of their own cognitive capacities when in reality something quite different is taking place in those who lack those capacities, and who do not see in meditation a path for developing those capacities? While the Buddhist leaders from the East may see people following a meditative path that leads to genuine knowledge of non-sensory reality, however that knowledge may be formulated, many of the Western converts appear to be following a meditative path primarily for its therapeutic benefits—peace, calm, tranquility. Not infrequently one hears Westerners, who claim to have become Buddhists, contend that theirs is a path that is solely for the purpose of greater mindfulness and awakesness and involves no metaphysical (read, non-sensory) dimensions whatsoever. The therapeutic benefits are not to be belittled, as they are a necessary prerequisite to all higher knowledge. But if it is assumed that therapy is primary, as the untransformed negative side of the consciousness soul must assume perforce, then, from

my own understanding at least, we have a distorted and denatured form of Buddhism. And more important, we give the world over to a narrow, mechanistic, materialistic conception of knowledge that is extremely powerful and is rapidly destroying both life and meaning in the world, while we sit in peace and tranquility. Without constant vigilance no social movement can easily escape being sucked into the voracious, therapeutic maw of American culture. And on this score Buddhism may be more vulnerable than some others because it does produce peace and tranquility.

All of this is by way of saying that perhaps a critically important point of future dialogue between Buddhists and Anthroposophists would focus on the question of transforming our ways of knowing, which means transforming the now dominant negative side of the consciousness soul. This is the central concern of Anthroposophy – to develop a science of qualities and consciousness, a science of spirit, a task yet to be realized. And at the same time there seem to be forms and aspects of Buddhism that can rightly also be called consciousness sciences of long standing. Mutual collaboration on this crucial issue would seem to offer much promise. Anthroposophists need the Buddhists to show what they bring to this all-important issue from their long experience of meditative practices. And perhaps Anthroposophists have an essential contribution in light of the fact that Anthroposophy was forged in the midst of the worst of the negative side of the consciousness soul with the express purpose of confronting and transforming it in order that the positive potential might emerge. As the negative side and its influence become evermore world-wide, this transformation of knowing is a task that, world-wide, we humans can no longer afford to ignore.

The conference was wonderful. I hope there will be others, and that regular ways of working together in the meantime can be developed. My thanks again to Tho and Lisi, Jeanne and Gregor,  and Sara.



*Watching deers in the park*

# In the Palm of the Buddha

by Toki

It was only two and a half days of sharing. It was only one beautiful house sharing. We did not know where we all came from and where we all were going. Yet we were there together, honestly and sincerely.

The sky was blue with white clouds floating, with the wind smoothly running, dancing with the leaves. The grass was green, the birds were singing, the air was a gift embracing it all with heat, chill and all in between. I was looking at the wonderful face of the sky. I simply loose words.

Everything was so present: nature, people, every single word we say, every single gesture and action we take. They are all highly respected and appreciated, no matter how I feel and what I believe. Even when the sky was busy flying from one object to the another object. It loved staying on the shade of the lamp, while we were busy talking. Each breath was my presence, just to be here and it is seamless.

I have no way to convey what the retreat was like. But I listened to what I said.

In the beginning of the biography sharing I said:  
“I do not know why I am here.”

In the end of the impression sharing, I said:  
“I do not know anything.  
Buddha knows everything.  
Buddha speaks to me.”

After the conference:  
“All answer is clear.  
The answer questions the answer.  
The question answers the question.  
We are in the palm of Buddha.”

Tokistuyu Tsukirona



## A poem ~ dedicated to who ever reads it

*Beat of the heart, every single breath,  
Just one finger moves.  
Opening eyes, closing eyes  
Physical harmonization meets harmonization of mind.  
A stream, just a stream running from  
Heart, breath, fingers and eyes.  
Running takes a form of staying.  
Staying in the breath,  
Completely in each breath  
Each breath embraces beginning and ending.  
One thing called nothing  
I am nothing.*

*Nothingness gives birth to a myriad of things.  
They bring I together to be I.  
I fall into pieces to be I  
One, all, all, one  
Nothing helps, nothing against  
Anything helps, anything against  
Just being as it is.*

*Something always behind anything  
Another something always behind something  
It penetrates behind, behind, behind ...  
Plants growing, sun, earth and air.  
Earth living plants, insects, animals and humans.  
Widening, deepening any direction.  
Interwoven to be endless piles of cloth of soul.*

*One rain drop from heaven  
Creates a ripple in the pond.  
A ripple expands touching  
A big stone and a small stone  
A lotus flower is awake or asleep  
Then reaching the end  
One little dragon fly on the lotus flower  
Walking up from a dream  
Flying from one to another.*

*The little wind being created by  
The little wing of the dragon fly.  
Dance, dance, twisting, curving, graciously, elegantly.*

*Softly touching the little flower  
Bowing, bowing in humble manner*

*The flower drops a seed like a tear  
Sleeping with earth  
Glowing with sun  
Living with air*

*The tree is singing with wind,  
Harmony and harmony  
The fruits are laughing  
Having insects inside.*

*An insect is taking a step out.  
Flying in the air  
Little space is gently embraced.*

*A flower is modesty waiting  
An insect is hugging it warmly.*

*The moment comes  
The little is absorbed into the big life  
Then it drops to create a ripple in the pond.*

Tokistuyu Tsukirona



## A&B Retreat in Copake: Some Afterthoughts

In my room I have a little shrine or altar. On it is a statue in pure sandalwood of the Maitreya Buddha, standing. Also three smaller images in brass of the Buddha meditating in the lotus position. Above is a Russian icon of the archangel Michael and below Leonardo's head of Christ. These images are a picture of my inner life. They represent a conviction that beyond the "isms" and the organised religions, beyond the separate philosophies and world views, beyond the differences of practice, there is a common ground which represents the ultimate spiritual state of the human being, albeit, for most of us, very far in the future.

For this reason I am keenly interested in the work which has begun two years ago as a research into the questions which arise when Buddhism and Anthroposophy interact or come into dialogue. Though unable to attend the first meetings in Asia and Europe, I was grateful to attend the recent retreat in July of this year which took place in Copake, New York.

The retreat brought together a group of about 17 individuals from broadly diverse backgrounds most of whom had not met one another before. Consequently almost a half of our time was given over to entering one another's biographies insofar as they related to the



by Penelope Roberts

encounter with either Buddhism or Anthroposophy, or both. This was fascinating because it was real, not theoretical. A Japanese monk who comes to Camphill and finds the devotion of daily life and spirituality of Rudolf Steiner's teaching to be in harmony with the mantra that accompanies his every waking minute. The Waldorf teacher who plunges into phenomenology as door to the spirit, pictured in the Buddha's gesture of touching the earth with his finger. In Eurythmy, the conscious incarnation of gesture and movement. The work of the House of Peace to serve refugees of war and to insist on the message of peace as the greatest imperative of our time. Each person has life experience which became question in a completely unique way.

Because we were so many and because the time was limited there was, unfortunately not any time to work on each other's questions. This, in a sense, left one dissatisfied, incomplete, even frustrated. Perhaps an entire week or a month would have been just as incomplete. In the incompleteness lies the seed of future potential and the fructifying of the seeds of our questions, laid into one another's souls and spirits.

An important aspect of our time was actually meditation time together, every morning. This time of profound quiet was serenely powerful. Here was no sense of incompleteness, but the wholeness of being within the spirit.

I look forward to further work together with this or other groups.



## An extremely positive event

First I would like to thank Sara, Jeanne and Gregor for the wonderful organization and hospitality of this meeting.

For me this meeting in Copake was the third around the theme of Buddhism and Anthroposophy, as I had already participated in the meetings in Vietnam and Switzerland.

Of course each meeting had a different quality and brought different insights, questions and opened new fields of research.

But for me coming to America this summer on this occasion, could not be separated from the recent events of September 11 and from the recent or still ongoing war this country is or was involved in.

Since my arrival in the US, two weeks before our coming together in Copake, I was very much impressed how the recent events were still very much present and yet were almost "sublimated" (like in a theatre play). On some occasions I could feel it was better not to mention the 11th of September tragedy, or rather one had to be very careful how to mention it. Depending in which social context one was it could be



by Lisi Ha Vinh

received quite differently. On one hand it impressed me how "life must go on". Especially in New York while walking around the financial district, in this dynamic and optimistic atmosphere, one could say: "the show must go on". On the other hand sometimes I was afraid of a certain denial or should I rather say fear of looking deeply into the underlying serious questions that this tragedy has brought up.

For those of you who have read the "Clash of Civilization" by Samuel Huntington, who in some ways has had a great influence through his work on the current views, you can feel the danger of simplifying cultural differences and cultivating a simplistic worldview that separates and classifies human communities, religious beliefs into opposite entities, into adversaries. So for me to have a modest, but true dialogue of different religious streams, was an extremely positive event.

What I felt very inspiring during our meeting, was a truly "scientific" approach, as not to have the answers ready, but to look together at the questions in an open, not immediately defined way. Sometimes this might have seemed stumbling or may not seem concrete enough, but I think that this really is the quality of a true meeting and of research.



*Ha Vinh Tho, John and Carrie Schuchardt*

We approached the theme through our personal life experiences and the questions that arose from there. We also had some introductory contributions to each session, that were of very high quality and I would like here to thank Michael, Gregor, Carrie and Tho for their wonderful and deep contributions. These introductions also had this attitude of research, no finished answers, but pointing in directions, opening space for questioning, for a true research.

In this I feel this dialogue quite unique. Being accustomed with “pure” “Buddhist” or “Anthroposophical” meetings, where one is more rooted in clear directions and opinions and one can sometimes have the answers ready before the questions, this a bit hesitating rethinking of one's convictions is very inspiring and creative. At one point one participant said: “I realize that I know nothing.” – What a challenging moment!

In this contexts I personally can also feel that I can share all the different aspects of my inner and outer life

freely. Along with the questioning that is always present in the wonder of understanding of Karma.

At one point one participant said jokingly: ”This meeting is like my ‘coming out’. To be able to share my Buddhist practice and research with you who all study Anthroposophy is quite unique” In this context there is no aspect of our inner quest that has to be left outside the door. Isn't a true spiritual path, a path of Inclusion? Inclusion of the complexity of one's own destiny, inclusion of the Other. Isn't Love and Understanding a path of Inclusion?

I would like to thank everyone for her or his wonderful sharing. Also thank you Jeanne for the sharing of your research in eurythmie that was very inspiring for me.

I am looking forward for the next coming together, where I hope we can go a step further into this open dialogue. 



*A walk with a talk ...*

## The Threefold Social Order and the Eightfold Path



*by Ha Vinh Tho*

### **Introduction**

In this article, I summarize some of the points that were presented during the Buddhism and Anthroposophy Dialogue in Copake.

Many attempts have been made in the recent past to discuss in various ways Buddhism in relation to western psychology. But the effort to bring about a dialogue between Buddhism and a sociological approach is far less developed. The ancient Wisdom of the various Buddhist Traditions have helped countless beings on their path towards Awakening or, more humbly, towards a deep, meaningful and all together better life. But can this ancient Wisdom, revealed long before the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and all the other major events that have formed the present world, still meet the global challenges of our time?

Is the understanding of society in the light of the threefold-social order as developed by Rudolf Steiner compatible with the movement of socially engaged Buddhism?

And above all, can the dialogue between Buddhism and Anthroposophy help us to find the healing forces needed both for the individual and society? These are some of the questions that this paper tries to address in a tentative way.

It is to be understood as the sharing of a work in progress, and in no way as final results of a completed research.

### **The three foundations of modern civilization**

#### *The cultural realm*

The consciousness soul era begun, according to Rudolf Steiner, in the time of the Renaissance. On one hand, it has been an important and necessary step in the evolution of consciousness on the path towards emancipation and individual freedom but, on the other

hand, mankind had to pay a very high price for this progress.

One of the most important changes that took place at that time was the loss of the thinking process as a spiritual experience. Until then, although the ancient clairvoyance had gradually disappeared, the cognitive act of thinking was still experienced, at least by the most profound scholars such as Thomas of Aquinas or Alanus ab Insulis, as a direct inspiration from the spiritual world.

With the beginning of the Modern Times, this capability disappeared, and this loss gave rise to a tremendous, although mostly unconscious sense of lack. The very foundation of human existence and human consciousness had been swept away.

Cartesius in the realm of philosophy and Newton in the realm of natural sciences are characteristic representatives of the new consciousness that was born at that time.

The spiritual Cosmos that could be understood through divine inspiration was gradually vanishing to give way to a machine like material world that could be understood and dominated by mathematical laws, unrelated to any ethical dimensions.

My assumption is that in order to understand the Modern Times, from the Renaissance up to the present, we need to take into consideration this tremendous sense of lack that is at the very basis of the existential experience of mankind. I will argue that it is the driving force that can be seen as the effort to compensate the loss of spiritual grounding by material security.

### *The nation state*

The second realm that is a direct consequence of the loss of a spiritual ground of modern civilization is the coming about of the nation state. This political form is the outcome of two complementary aspects of evolution.

In ancient time, the Pharaoh or the Emperor was the highest Initiate, and thus the mediator between the spiritual world and the earthly realm. Therefore, his power was bestowed from above, and his authority had a religious and moral basis. But gradually, the spiritual foundation of political power disappeared and a state apparatus had to be developed to enforce its authority. Although wars have been part of the history of mankind from the earliest age on, the creation of the nation-state is connected in a very special way with military expansion and colonialism.

The “Raison d’Etat” abolishes usual moral values and allows the rulers to put themselves above ordinary behavior. Reading the news everyday gives one many fold examples of this situation.

The second aspect of the development of the nation-state is connected with the loss of traditional solidarity and of a spiritually grounded sense of community. Therefore, the state creates an anonymous bureaucracy that replaces the security and stability that was granted in the past by interpersonal relationships.

Here again, the loss of a spiritual ground creates a vacuum and has to be replaced by exterior structures in which the human being tends to lose its central place.

The system becomes more important than the person does.

As in modern astronomy, the earth is just an anonymous little planet lost in a gigantic material universe; similarly, the individual is but an anonymous pawn in the great state machinery. But precisely for this reason, he can behave in any way he wants, and only earthly laws and justice sets a boundary to his egotism.

### *Corporate capitalism*

The third aspect is the realm of economy. Here again, the loss of the spiritual ground is the very foundation of corporate capitalism. In the Middle Ages, money was still regarded as manifestation of a spiritual force, hence the role of the Templar Knights in medieval finance.

With the Renaissance, the modern banking system began in relationship with the Great Discoveries and the expansion of the European Powers.

Later, corporate capitalism developed with the industrial revolution, and a philosopher like Herbert Spencer (who was a nephew of Darwin), was sponsored by Rockefeller and Carnegie to lecture on the social implications of Darwin’s theory of the “survival of the fittest”, giving thereby a “scientific legitimization”, to cut throat competition and ruthless social brutality of early capitalism.

Today, we witness the commodification of always-wider areas of human life. Where in the past, the market was mostly concerned with the exchange of goods, more and more, the economy colonizes all aspects of human existence.

The commodification of culture, where creativity, art, traditions and even religion are mostly considered as cultural products and treated as such on the global marketplace is one powerful example.

In a similar way, many activities that used to belong to the intimate and personal sphere, based on trust, solidarity and mutual responsibility; for instance taking care of young children, of the elderly, of the sick, or having someone to confide in... have become paid for services performed by professionals.

All this also suggests the fundamental sense of lack described earlier, and consumerism can be seen as an attempt to fill in the spiritual vacuum by consuming in a compulsive way objects, experiences, relationships and people, always hoping that the next will bring about the desired fulfillment.

### **The Eightfold path**

After having described some of the pathological symptoms of modern society, let us consider in how the spiritual path can show us a way out of the problems we have touched upon.

Anthroposophy and Buddhism both share the notion of the Eightfold Path, although, in the Buddhist Tradition, it holds a more central place.

I would like to present three fundamental aspects of this Path that can, in my view, offer the ground for



the development of healing forces both for the individual and for society in relationship with the phenomenon described earlier on. The Eightfold Path is composed of the following steps: *Right View* (Samyag Drishti), *Right Thinking*, sometimes also translated as Right Intention (Samyag Samkalpa), *Right Speech* (Samyag Vac), *Right Action* (Samyag Karmanta), *Right Livelihood* (Samyag Ajiva), *Right Effort* (Samyag Pradhana), *Right Mindfulness* (Samyag Smriti) and *Right Concentration* (Samyag Samadhi).

Traditionally, the eight steps of the paths are divided in three main chapters, and I will also follow this sequence that seems pertinent to our theme.

### *Prajna: Wisdom*

The two first steps of the eightfold path: Right View (Samyag Drishti) and Right Thinking (Samyag Samkalpa), are generally considered to form the first aspect of the Path, namely Prajna: Wisdom.

In the “Discourse on the Right View”<sup>1</sup> the Venerable Shariputra offers an explanation of what should be considered as Right View: “Friends, when a noble disciple understand the unwholesome and the roots of the unwholesome, then that disciple has the right view, a view that is upright... The roots of the unwholesome are greed, hatred and delusion.”

Greed, hatred and delusion are the three poisons of the mind in the Buddhist Tradition. They can also characterize in a very appropriate way the three negative aspects of the three realms of the social organism:

- Delusion as the poison of the cultural realm
- Hatred (violence) as the poison of the political realm
- Greed as the poison of the economic realm.

### **Overcoming delusion: healing the cultural sphere**

We have tried to show earlier in this article, how the loss of the spiritual dimension of cognition is the very basis of the confusion and delusion that can be experienced worldwide in so many fields.

The “machine metaphor” applied both to the cosmos and to the human being has progressively destroyed the experience of the spiritual interconnectedness of all beings. Contemporary ecologists have used the notion of “web of life” or “circle of life” to describe the fundamental oneness of all life. In the Mahayana Scripture “Avatamsaka Sutra”, we find the image of Indra’s Net as a description of the universal interdependence: each knot of the net is a jewel, and in each jewel, all other jewels are reflected. In each jewel, we see an image of the Buddha and, at the same time, all Buddhas from the ten directions are present in this image. This is an imagination of the all-pervading presence of the spirit in all and everything.

Thich Nhat Hanh has created the notion of “Interbeing” to describe the fact that everything exists in interdependence with all other elements of the cosmos. A flower is a flower, but without the earth, the rain, the sunshine, the air, the compost, the gardener

and so on, the flower could not exist. So the flower “inter-is” with the entire universe. If this is true for a simple flower, it is easy to understand that it is also true for each one of us, and to an even greater extend.

The Scientific/technological project, on the other hand, views the material world as an object that is to be mastered and dominated. This project is directly linked to the hopeless effort to reach an absolute knowledge that would equate with a total mastery over the world.

From a Buddhist perspective, Prajna is not aimed at gaining an absolute control over the material world, but at seeing reality as it is, and allowing our mind to flow freely with the ever changing stream of life.

The awareness of our interconnectedness with all life also implies a sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity. Knowledge and ethics can not be separated. Progress and development gain a totally different meaning when we consider them in this light. Creating material conditions favorable for the spiritual development of mankind is certainly a major task, but it is a very different matter from compulsively longing for always more production and consumption.

Wisdom, from this point of view, is the capability to restore the spiritual dimension of the cognitive experience, allowing us thereby to unite with the spiritual world that is the common ground of all beings. Ultimately, Wisdom and Love are two aspects of the same fundamental experience of the true nature of reality.

### *Sila: ethics, discipline, precepts*

The three next steps of the Eightfold Path: Right Speech (Samyag Vac), Right Action (Samyag Karmanta) and Right Livelihood (Samyag Ajiva) are connected with the practice of an ethical way of life.

If we become aware that wisdom can not be separated from ethics, the next necessary step is to find guidelines on how our way of speaking, acting and living can be in harmony with the spiritual laws of the universe.

The five lay precepts offered by the Buddha in many Sutras<sup>2</sup> are a powerful tool to help find a healthy orientation if applied in everyday life.

The movement of socially engaged Buddhism has tried to explore in what way, these traditional precepts, beyond personal guidelines, can also show ways towards a healthy society.

### **Overcoming hatred, fear and violence: the healing of the political sphere**



We have discussed the fact that the nation-state is the very fundament of war, mass destruction and violence. But the seeds of these manifestations lie in the human consciousness and in human behavior. Therefore it is in the individual that the healing has to begin. The first “mindfulness training” is offered here as an example of guide-lines that have both individual and social outcome, if put in practice in a consequent way.

“Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating compassion and

learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, in my way of life.”

To live according to this training, it is not enough to refrain from killing, but we are encouraged to learn ways to protect all forms of life. The first step towards this goal is to cultivate compassion.

To look with the eyes of the Buddha means to look at all beings with the eyes of compassion. When we look in this way, we understand the others very deeply, and we perceive what they truly need, and how we can help them.

Violence and fear are intimately related, both arise when mutual comprehension fails. The other is not perceived in his true being any more, but merely as a manifestation of evil, as a threat that has to be eliminated at any cost.

Violence is always caused by the inability to understand each other. Violence is a form of communication, but it is a very unskillful form of communication. Killing is the ultimate lack of communication.

It is the paradox of our time that we have developed the most sophisticated communication technology, but that the simple communication from heart to heart, from person to person seems more difficult than ever.

We can send our thoughts and words all over the world and to thousands of people in just an instant, but what do we have to say, and whom are we saying it to? Are we able to listen deeply and speak lovingly to the person that is next to us right now?

We are encouraged not to support any act of killing in the world, but also in our thinking and in our way of life.

In a resolution adopted in 1999, the General Assembly of the UN stated the following:<sup>3</sup> Recalling the Charter of the United Nations, which states that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”.

This is a very profound and important statement, but there are no indication given on how the mind can be transformed in such a way that peace can be present in a practical way.

It would seem that both the Buddhist tradition and Anthroposophy have a fundamental contribution to offer in this field, as the transformation of anger, fear, violence and other unwholesome energies of the mind is the very object of its practice.

To put it in Anthroposophical terms, the purification of the astral body is the first step towards higher knowledge, and this is the very foundation of a healthy social order.

This leads to the next chapter of the eightfold path devoted to meditation.

### ***Samadhi: concentration, meditation***

Right Effort (Samyag Pradhana), Right Mindfulness (Samyag Smriti) and Right Concentration (Samyag Samadhi) represent the third element of the Noble Eightfold Path.

These three sequences are not to be understood in a chronological way. All three aspects are simultaneously present, supporting each other, and creating the necessary harmony and balance on the Way.

Right Effort, also sometimes called Right Diligence represents a transition from the Sila (discipline) dimension of the Path to the meditative aspect.

Mindfulness and Concentration describe two fundamental attitudes of the meditative mind.

Mindfulness is a vast, spacious, open awareness that perceives what is present in us and around us. It is a global, all embracing consciousness, totally alert in the Here and the Now.

Concentration is a very focused awareness, where subject and object become totally united in completely collected attention.

Mindfulness and concentration are like the outbreath and the inbreath of the meditative consciousness, and the balance of the two leads to Understanding and Insight, thus closing the circle and bringing us back to the starting point: Prajna or Wisdom.

## **Meditation and the healing of the economy**



His Holiness the Dalai Lama often begins his teachings by reminding us that all beings have in common their striving for happiness and their desire to escape suffering, but that the problem lies in the ability to find skillful means to do so in an intelligent way.

Consumerism is definitively an effort to reach happiness; the question is simply to see if it is a skillful and efficient way to reach this goal.

From a planetary, social and individual point of view, corporate capitalism and consumerism, far from bringing the fulfillment of their promises, are the cause of great suffering and devastation.

On a planetary level, it is the main cause of the ecological disaster that the earth is facing, and the very survival of our planet is at stake.

On a social level, it is the very root of the social injustice of a planet, where the affluent North represents 20% of the world population, but consumes 80% of its resources.

On a personal level, consumerism, following a pattern of addiction, creates more craving, more dissatisfaction, bringing only brief and momentarily relieve that is soon replaced by greater dissatisfaction and the compulsive need to consume the next object, service, or cultural good. The increasing speed of obsolescence of all material and immaterial products is making this process all the more visible in recent times.

Meditation, on the other hand, offers an experience of inner fulfillment dependent on nothing but the mind

1 *Sammaditthi Sutta*, Majjhima Nikaya 9.

2 *Upasaka Sutra*, Madhyama Agama 128.

3 *Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly 53/243*. Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

itself. It stands in diametrical opposition to consumerism that always promises happiness in the future, dependent on this new product, or that new exciting experience. Meditation does not strive toward anything outside of the immediate authenticity of the present moment that contains the fullness of limitless reality: "Suchness", the original nature of the mind in Buddhist terms.

In Anthroposophical terms, it is the direct experience of the spiritual world through the power of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition.

The peace, stability, strength and insight that can only be found through the direct experience of the spiritual ground of our being is also the ultimate and maybe the only medicine to cure the insatiable greed of consumerism.

## Conclusion

The challenges that we are facing in the beginning of the 21st century are of global nature, they encompass the planet, many cultures and civilizations, and all continents.

It is my deep conviction, that the time has come where all those who are trying to work towards peace, social justice and for the spiritual development of mankind need to join hands, and overcome misunderstandings and prejudices in order to find new ways of striving together.

The Buddhism and Anthroposophy Dialogue can be understood as a modest contribution  towards this goal.

## Dialogue continues in the United States



by Sara Ciborski

The fourth meeting in the international Buddhism and Anthroposophy dialogue took place from July 20–23, 2002 in the United States. We were hosted by Jeanne and Gregor Simon-MacDonald in their lovely home in Copake, New York, in what is referred to by

local people as the Berkshire-Taconic region (comprising Columbia County, New York and Berkshire County, Massachusetts).

As most readers of this newsletter know, the intention of the dialogue is to bring together, in different regions of the world, small working groups of people with an earnest connection to both streams. For obvious practical reasons participants tend to come from the locale of each meeting. (The initial meeting in Vietnam was an exception, drawing participants from nearly every continent.)

Our meeting in July followed this pattern: of 17 participants, 10 of us were from the immediate surrounding area, including four from nearby Camphill Village. The inspired guidance of Tho and Lisi, who have helped organize and have attended all four dialogue meetings, provided us with continuity and linkage to the overall initiative.

While my own personal expectations for the content of this meeting were not met, our experience together—the meeting had the form and intimacy of a retreat—blessed me with at least one valuable insight into the connection between Buddhism and Anthroposophy. I didn't learn what I hoped to learn, but I woke up to something else.

The content that I missed was of two kinds. First, I had assumed that most people would have thought through in advance their specific personal relationship with Buddhism and would come prepared to articulate with some concreteness how a Buddhist meditation practice or an aspect of Buddhist teaching has affected

their spiritual practice or outlook on life. Instead, the personal sharing was largely of a general biographical nature. (I should say that the five prepared presentations, including eurythmy by Jeanne, were excellent.)

The other content that I missed was discussion of one area of concern that is especially important to me: how meditation is taught to beginners. As a group we chose not to take up this question (and several others as well) because of our limited time together. I am happy to say that eight of us from the local area will be meeting together in October to explore concerns that the July meeting could not address.

What I did learn in July was altogether unexpected, an awakening to something that I already knew but hadn't sufficiently appreciated. The real connection between Buddhism and Anthroposophy lies in our fundamental motivation as individuals – our determination, if you will – to understand and to serve a suffering world.

No one came to the meeting primarily in order to build an intellectual bridge between the two streams or to develop a synthetic spiritual practice, although those are valuable, challenging goals. Rather, each person who chose to come, did so out of deepest longing to find through our meeting of each other new strength and insight for good work in the world. I am very grateful to have shared this inspirational time with these people.

Several people wanted to attend but could not, and others have expressed a wish to be kept informed about future meetings. I now have a small database of about three dozen people in the U.S. interested in the Buddhism and Anthroposophy dialogue. Over the winter people interested in a second U.S. meeting, perhaps next summer, should let me know.

Sara Ciborski, Gt. Barrington, MA,  
413-528-4387, sarac@berkshire.net



## Buddha and Christ: Revering them as beings ~ realizing them as faculties

by Gregor Simon-MacDonald, Copake NY

This brief presentation is partly personal – “thinking aloud” almost, about questions concerning our approaches to the Christ and the Buddha. It also touches on bigger questions concerning Anthroposophy and Buddhism, and how for me they speak together at times. I was glad to hear Tho’s suggestion that our theme is not so much the “big picture” of these two spiritual traditions or paths and how they work in the world, but rather how each of us engages in our own conversation with them both. So these notes are extracts of a conversation in progress, like a mosaic with many pieces missing.

First of all: three images, moments from my own biography. As a young teenager, I attended a church which was centered on conversion. The sermons were about the need for each of us to turn our life over to Christ. There were powerful pressures (not all unhealthy!) to admit our own ‘fallen’ state, and, in an act of trust and repentance, to hand over our lives. I did “convert” in this way. But, every few years during this impressionable period, I’d feel that I hadn’t converted properly, and that I should do it again – but, this time, I’d be one hundred percent sincere, of course! ... Later, I gradually lost trust in institutional religion. For over twenty years now, I have been working with Anthroposophy. In the last few years, my wife and I have also been working with Zen Buddhism, particularly with zazen, sitting meditation.

The second image comes from my first retreat at a Zen monastery. I was dismayed to find what looked like an altar with a statue of the Buddha in the meditation hall, and to hear the advice to bow to this statue as we entered. I thought I’d freed myself from the formalities of organized religion, and yet, in pursuing Zen, I seemed to have slammed right into them again! So it was a great relief, and quite arresting, to hear the suggestion: *when you bow to the statue, imagine that you are bowing to acknowledge the Buddha-nature within yourself and within others.* This was something I knew I needed to do: to develop a stronger relationship with that healthy spiritual core hidden within myself – within all of us.

The third image arises from a moment in that same meditation hall a few months later. We were in the middle of an intensive retreat, during one of many periods of zazen, with rock-like stillness and silence in the meditation hall. With absolutely no warning, with passionate intensity, the senior monk suddenly shrieked out: “WAKE UP!” Though such behavior is a familiar part of the Zen tradition, it was still a shock. It wasn’t directed at anyone in particular and fortunately, I hadn’t actually fallen asleep at that point! But her call still had a lasting impact. It was a summons to rise from that habitual lethargy, that self-excusing small-mindedness: a call to wake up to the fullest reality around me, to what matters most, and to engage in practice with my whole being.

These images are related to two distinct gestures in

our spiritual life, which seem importantly different, but which belong together. These gestures express different perspectives within Anthroposophy, and Buddhism, particularly Zen Buddhism. I’ll talk about them first in general terms, and then later more personally. I’m not implying that either of these ‘paths’ tends to stress one of these gestures more than the other, but the gestures may help in describing a ‘dialogue’ between the two paths.

The first gesture is the one of turning ourselves towards a ‘higher power’. Many familiar examples come to mind: the type of ‘conversion’ which I described earlier; or the sense of powerlessness and subsequent turning for strength to a higher source, expressed in the Twelve Step program; or the gesture voiced in the phrase “Not I, but Christ in me”, which does not necessarily arise from a sense of being weak or fallen, but can be simply a recognition of a higher level of being. There is a clear language for this gesture in Japanese Shin Buddhism, which contrasts ‘self-power’ and ‘other-power’. ‘Self-power’ (loosely speaking) is the activity of the everyday ego-identity, which is a necessary, but in the end misguided activity on the path to enlightenment. We have to turn ourselves towards ‘other power’: that is the true source. In whatever language we describe this gesture, we recognize a transcendent level of being, which in some sense is beyond us. In order to reach this level we have to make a fundamental change in our relationship to ourselves. There is a spiritual boundary we have to cross, a threshold, into a territory (or towards a Being) of a radically different order.

The second gesture does not look towards a transcendent ‘other power’. It focuses on deeper spiritual capacities hidden (or ‘dormant’) within each human being. It says that our deepest responsibility is to realize such spiritual capacities within oneself. It is an arduous path to come to these capacities, but they are our foundation in reality and the source of spiritual vitality, and we do not have to look beyond ourselves in order to be spiritually whole. (Perhaps you sense how different this gesture is from the belief in ‘original sin’ and the need for conversion I described earlier.)

An example of this attitude is the Zen conviction that talk about transcendent beings easily becomes a distraction; that the all-encompassing work in spiritual life concerns attention, though without attachment, to the here-and-now: continually to deepen the activity of being mindful: “chop sticks; carry water”. The wonderfully provocative phrase used in Zen, “Kill the Buddha!”, also points to this gesture of ridding ourselves of attachment to some savior-figure, or to some icon of transcendence. The work is to be what we already are.

Another example of this gesture comes in some words of Steiner (which, as so often is his way, he seems to contradict elsewhere!): “... human beings will be their own guides through the gift of the now-independent ego. And each individual must discover the ‘I AM’, the God, within himself...” (Gospel of John, 1.5, GA 103). The focus is the divine gift within. I don’t think that Steiner and Zen are necessarily

“saying the same thing”, but there is an important common thread. There is a summons to the individual, and a challenge to our relationship to ourselves, which is different from the first gesture.

Now you may say: “aren’t these two gestures similar in practice? They just use different languages!” That may be partly true, but I think that it’s helpful to see these two gestures as different, both in historical terms and on the psychological level. So let’s briefly explore some historical perspectives in the development of Buddhism and Christianity. This may throw light on some apparent tensions between Anthroposophy and Buddhism. (These themes careful reflection; there’s a risk of lifeless abstraction or irreverence in the type of overview which follows. I hope for humility and inward listening in speaking about these realities.) Traditional Buddhism, with its theme of liberation from the cycle of re-birth, has often been characterized by Westerners as other-worldly. Christianity, by contrast, with its central image of the incarnation of the Christ, is presented as being engaged in this world.

Although it’s difficult to summarize Steiner’s references to Buddhism (because they can seem especially contradictory or at odds with other accounts of Buddhism), he generally seems to concur with this characterization. He says that historically, Buddhist practice tended to draw people into a spiritual dimension of great purity, restoring them to the world of pre-birth, and drawing them away from the earth. His depiction of Christianity is of a movement in the opposite direction. He talks of the Christ, the Cosmic Being of the Sun, gradually drawing down out of the cosmic dimension into closer union with the earth and humankind, culminating with the Mystery of Golgotha. He then characterizes the slow development of Christianity as a process of a deepening relationship between the resurrected Christ and both the individual human being and the earth. It is crucial to take in Steiner’s depiction of the great spiritual beings such as Buddha or Christ as beings who are in continuing evolution, and who do not remain unchanged at the stage of one particular revelation to humankind. Thus he contrasts the work of the Christ in his incarnation in Palestine, which took hold of the physical dimension and radiated out from there, with his work in the twentieth century and beyond, which is focused in etheric activity. Similarly, Steiner talks about the evolving life of the Christ in relation to the individual human. Whereas previously, spiritual transformation tended to require an initiation process in which the individual was taken ‘out of the body’ in order to be worked upon by higher beings, now transformation results from “the I AM, the God within”. The gift of the resurrection is that what were previously cosmic forces are now – at least in seed-form – within the deeper core of the individual. And the path towards the ‘other’, the transcendent, is not so much towards a Father-God or towards an initiate-teacher, but is more through our encounter with ‘the other’ in the world around us. Specifically, this can be in meeting ‘the other’ in a heightened perception of the being of another person, in serving the being of a group

working with dedication together, in heightened perception of nature, or of some other phenomena – or it can be in the enhanced experience of meaning in meditation. Thus, the whole direction of Christianity in Steiner’s understanding (and so the whole of Anthroposophy) is about the encounter with the deepest spiritual truth within the world around us, and about deepening engagement in the world around us. Of course, these processes depend absolutely on the work of spiritual beings who do not themselves incarnate onto the earth, but, by contrast with earlier times, it is now increasingly a matter of our own individual choice whether we collaborate with these beings or not.

Now, the thrust of Buddhism could seem very different. The world around us is not our focus. The world is not real, but is samsara, the construct of our conditioning, based on greed, fear and ignorance and the resulting illusion. Our work is to overcome this complex attachment to the world. At first this seems an opposite path to that of Anthroposophy. But I would like to sketch a way of looking at Buddhism, in which the contrast is less absolute. This again is based on the understanding that a being such as the Buddha is in continuing evolution. There are important characteristics in the forms of Buddhism which developed within the Mahayana tradition towards the period which Steiner calls the age of the Consciousness Soul. (I hesitate here, partly because I haven’t studied this subject enough, and partly because, as Westerner, I must be very cautious in using Western criteria in such study).

Firstly, the *Bodhisattva* ideal can be seen as an affirmation of human evolution in earthly incarnation.

Secondly, in the development of Zen, as we noted earlier, there is a strong emphasis on being present in the world, affirming the world as it is, and on not getting seduced by longings for some other world. Despite its partly monastic forms, Zen does not teach removing oneself from the world, but becoming more present within the world, in order to break through illusion. Buddha-nature is already within us, here and now.

Thirdly, in the most positive aspects of contemporary “engaged” Buddhism, and in certain changes arising as Buddhism meets the West, there is an intense emphasis on spiritual practice as a means of realizing “Buddha-nature” in the world, in the contortions, horrors and opportunities of secular society. We work to affirm the world “just as it is.” It would be misleading to describe these developments as a sign of an “incarnation spirituality” in Buddhism, but I hope these brief hints are sufficient to raise questions about whether Steiner’s early characterization of the limitations of Buddhism can be applied to newer currents within Buddhism. These hints may also give us clues as to why he talked with some insistence on the importance of the fact that Christianity and Buddhism will come together in the future.

What Steiner meant by this coming together is not so clear, but I want to describe one activity of the Buddha, which may be a key. Steiner understood that the Buddha in more recent times engaged himself with

particular cosmic forces which tend to work in a very assertive, one-track way, which readily leads to division or conflict. (He gave a name for these forces, which I'll come to soon.) These forces ray into many aspects of individual and communal human life, and also into the forms of our individual consciousness. They almost have a dualistic quality, a tendency to divide things into opposites: "you're either with me or against me"; "everything is either a or non-a." The Buddha has entered into these forces and begun to transform them. Steiner hints (his comments are particularly cryptic) that the Buddha now has a particular gift to offer. He can assist people embedded in materialistic culture (a culture which is deeply dualistic in consciousness) when they engage in certain meditative activities. Steiner seems to imply that the Buddha who, as Gautama in earlier times, pointed out the illusions of dualistic consciousness and instituted practices which lead away from earth-bound consciousness, now works in a new way. He acts specifically to support forms of meditation which enable the practitioner gradually to break through dualism while living fully engaged within the material world. Thus, a new gift from the Buddha seems to serve specific needs for the meditant living in the type of Western consciousness which now dominates the whole world. This new gift builds a bridge between a more 'other-worldly' spirituality and a 'this-world' spirituality. (I am speculating rather freely here on the meaning of brief remarks by Steiner on the work of the Buddha in the spiritual sphere of Mars. These remarks come in lectures with a problematic English translation: 'From Buddha to Christ' (GA 130). Readers may find Douglas Sloan's article in this report specially relevant to this broad context.

Despite the sweeping generalizations I've allowed myself, I hope that this historical sketch opens up a way of seeing certain very specific currents within Christianity and Buddhism in a more complementary light! But now, finally, let's return now to the two gestures with which I began: firstly: turning towards a being such as the Christ as transcendent or 'other': secondly: deepening within ourselves to uncover Buddha-nature or the 'Christ within'. I want to comment on pro's and con's of these two gestures on a personal level, related to my experience of Zen and Anthroposophy.

I see at least two particular strengths in each gesture. When we turn away from ourselves in reverence towards a Being such as the Christ or the Buddha, thinking of their monumental role in human evolution, we prize ourself free for a time from the powerful seduction of our own personality – that constant pre-occupation with our own well-being, and with ourself as the primary agent in our live. We have the opportunity to experience our own life, and human life in general, on a scale much closer to reality. Secondly, we may begin to work with understanding the whole of life, including the whole of the material world, as the expression of the activity of beings, as the expression of the inter-play between spiritual beings of many ranks and dimensions. This in turn begins to be a powerful anti-dote to materialistic consciousness with

its fixation on matter, matter divorced from the agency of beings, as the primary reality. On the other hand, when we say that the deepest reality in the cosmos is, in fact, within each of us, and when we work to 'realize' it, we get drawn out of the tendency to see ourselves and the world as hopelessly 'fallen' or flawed. We can be re-invigorated to recognize our own consciousness and our own circumstances as the stage for the transformative activity of the most profound spiritual processes: a profoundly affirmative recognition. Our sense of responsibility is deeply stirred. Another strength of this second gesture is its call to be 'existentially mature', whether we like it or not! So much is up to us; we are no longer children of a diving Mother or Father. We cannot expect to continually betray our own nature, and then to be rescued by a savior-figure; there will be consequences we will have to meet. If the first gesture tends to emphasize what theologians (including Steiner) call 'grace', the second gesture tends to alert us to karma. Of course, in reality, these two are wonderfully bound together – as are the two gestures, as each of us becomes whole!

In Anthroposophy, I experience both gestures. Steiner frequently describes the experience of 'powerlessness' in the face of human riddles or spiritual crises as a path towards "Not I, but Christ in me". On the other hand, the whole thrust of the epistemological work is towards the realization of profound spiritual resources within ourselves, resources which can be realized without employing a religious or 'transcendent' perspective. But I find that certain themes in Buddhist psychology and philosophy take me further than my work in Anthroposophy with the second gesture: the language and practice for the 'divine within' is more accessible to me. (Of course this is my personal 'take', particularly influenced by the practice of zazen.) On the other hand, I have to turn to Anthroposophy for direction in the 'divine without' – I mean in the specifics of certain areas of practical life. In relation to working with substances, (eg gardening, medicines) or therapies (eg music therapy or eurythmy), Anthroposophy has ways of talking about the inter-play between body, soul and spirit which are extraordinarily illuminating. Some Buddhist presentations, particularly in the west, sometimes fall back on loosely-poetic terms for this inter-play. To put it very loosely, these Buddhist languages are very rich for a personal relationship with nature or with music, for example, but they may not yield so much for a professional relationship as a gardener or therapist, for instance in diagnosing.

In closing: I don't think that a personal selection, a kind of spiritual 'mix and match' with Anthroposophy and Buddhism, is the best route to take, although I see myself doing this. We need a deeper understanding and a consistency of inner practise, which challenges personal preference and involves loyalty to a 'community of practice'. I should also add that I have left aside the fundamental question about 'loyalty' to a spiritual being – whether that is essential and what that means. I do not see Christ and Buddha as the same being, nor do I see them as entirely distinct...  May we learn to revere them and to realize them.

## Some ideas for future meetings

So how should we continue from here? We know that locally certain groups continue with the research, but we suggest two bigger meetings in 2003.

- The idea of *Bangkok or Vietnam* came about as some of us will be there anyway in *October/November 2003*.

- There would also be a possibility for Tho and me to organize a meeting in *Switzerland* on *September 19/20/21 2003*.

- An idea of a meeting in *2004 in England* was also mentioned.

Please give us your feedback on this.

Hopefully see you soon Lisi



### Prayer

War, famine, malicious thoughts and deeds –  
May even their name become unknown throughout all worlds.  
My beings have loving kindness,  
May goodness increase with the environment and inhabitants  
and an ocean of happiness and joy spread in all directions.

Henceforth, may I too, by solely striving in hearing, thinking and meditating  
On the complete path of the doctrine – the profound view of emptiness  
and the vast mind of bodhicitta –  
Quickly touch the ground of temporary and eternal happiness.

For the sake of beings as infinite as space,  
May I engage joyfully with faith and aspiration,  
Free from the laziness of discouragement and attachment to evil  
In the delightful deeds of the Buddha and the Victor's sons.

May all who see, hear, remember and have convinced in me  
Be subject to greatest joy and happiness and  
Even those who slander, punish blame or disparage me  
All have the fortune to enter the path to awakening.

In short, as long as space endures,  
As long as the suffering of wanderers exist,  
So may I too remain as the sole source  
Of help and happiness, directly and indirectly.

*Excerpts from an Ecumenical Prayer by His Holiness the 14. Dalai Lama*

### Contacts

*Initiators:* Lisi Ha Vinh: [lisiha@hotmail.com](mailto:lisiha@hotmail.com)  
Ha Vinh Tho: [vinhtho@hotmail.com](mailto:vinhtho@hotmail.com)

*Editor:* Michaela Spaar: [michaela.spaar@goetheanum.ch](mailto:michaela.spaar@goetheanum.ch)

*Layout:* Urs Schumacher: [urs.schumacher@goetheanum.ch](mailto:urs.schumacher@goetheanum.ch)

© 2002 by International Working Group 'Anthroposophy and Buddhism'

