

Week 3

St John & the Cross

of God is ignoble,¹⁰ and has much to do with their love of self and their own inclinations, as has been explained above, God desires to lead them farther. He seeks to bring them out of that ignoble kind of love to a higher degree of love for Him, to free them from the ignoble exercises of sense and meditation (wherewith, as we have said, they go seeking God so unworthily and in so many ways that are unbefitting), and to lead them to a kind of spiritual exercise wherein they can commune with Him more abundantly and are freed more completely from imperfections. For they have now had practice for some time in the way of virtue and have persevered in meditation and prayer, whereby, through the sweetness and pleasure that they have found therein, they have lost their love of the things of the world and have gained some degree of spiritual strength in God; this has enabled them to some extent to refrain from creature desires, so that for God's sake they are now able to suffer a light burden and a little aridity without turning back to a time¹¹ which they found more pleasant. When they are going about these spiritual exercises with the greatest delight and pleasure, and when they believe that the sun of Divine favour is shining most brightly upon them, God turns all this light of theirs into darkness, and shuts against them the door and the source of the sweet spiritual water which they were tasting in God whensoever and for as long as they desired. (For, as they were weak and tender, there was no door closed to them, as Saint John says in the Apocalypse, iii, 8). And thus He leaves them so completely in the dark that they know not whither to go with their sensible imagination and meditation; for they cannot¹² advance a step in meditation, as they were wont to do aforetime, their inward senses being submerged in this night, and left with such dryness that not only do they experience no pleasure and consolation in the spiritual things and good exercises wherein they were wont to find their delights and pleasures, but instead, on the contrary, they find insipidity and

¹⁰ [*Lit.*, 'low'; the same word recurs below and is similarly translated.]

¹¹ [*Lit.*, 'to the better time'.]

¹² M, e.p.: 'for they know not how to.'

bitterness in the said things. For, as I have said, God now sees that they have grown a little, and are becoming strong enough to lay aside their swaddling clothes and be taken from the gentle breast; so He sets them down from His arms and teaches them to¹³ walk on their own feet; which they feel to be very strange, for everything seems to be going wrong with them.

4. To recollected persons this commonly happens sooner after their beginnings than to others, inasmuch as they are freer from occasions of backsliding, and their desires turn more quickly from the things of the world, which is necessary if they are to begin to enter this blessed¹⁴ night of sense. Ordinarily no great time passes after their beginnings before they begin to enter this night of sense; and the great majority of them do in fact enter it, for they will generally be seen to fall into these aridities.

5. With regard to this way of purification of the senses, since it is so common, we might here adduce a great number of quotations from Divine Scripture, where many passages relating to it are continually found, particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets. However, I do not wish to spend time upon these, for he who knows not how to look for them there will find the common experience of this purification to be sufficient.¹⁵

CHAPTER IX

Of the signs by which it will be known that the spiritual person is walking along the way of this night and purification of sense.

BUT since these aridities might frequently proceed, not from the night and purification of the sensual desires aforementioned,

¹³ M, e.p.: 'and shows them how to.'

¹⁴ E.p. has 'happy' for 'blessed.'

¹⁵ C, e.p. omit this entire sentence, substituting: 'And, to avoid prolixity, we omit them, albeit we shall adduce certain of them later.'

but from sins and imperfections, or from weakness and lukewarmness, or from some bad humour or indisposition of the body, I shall here set down certain signs by which it may be known if such aridity proceeds from the aforementioned purgation, or if it arises from any of the aforementioned sins. For the making of this distinction I find that there are three principal signs.

2. The first is whether, when a soul finds no pleasure or consolation in the things of God, it also fails to find it in any thing created; for, as God sets the soul in this dark night to the end that He may quench and purge its sensual desire, He allows it not to find attraction or sweetness in anything whatsoever. In such a case it may be considered very probable¹ that this aridity and insipidity proceed not from recently committed sins or imperfections. For, if this were so, the soul would feel in its nature some inclination or desire to taste other things than those of God; since, whenever the desire is allowed indulgence in any imperfection, it immediately feels inclined thereto, whether little or much, in proportion to the pleasure and the love that it has put into it. Since, however, this lack of enjoyment in things above or below might proceed from some indisposition or melancholy humour, which oftentimes makes it impossible for the soul to take pleasure in anything, it becomes necessary to apply the second sign and condition.

3. The second sign whereby a man may believe himself to be experiencing the said purgation² is that the memory is ordinarily centred upon God, with painful care and solicitude, thinking that it is not serving God, but is backsliding, because it finds itself without sweetness in the things of God. And in such a case it is evident that this lack of sweetness and this aridity come not from weakness and lukewarmness; for it is the nature of lukewarmness not to care greatly or to have any inward solicitude for the things of God. There is thus a great difference between aridity and lukewarmness, for lukewarmness consists in great weakness and remissness in the will and in the spirit, without solicitude as to serving God;

¹ [Lit., 'And in this it is known very probably.'] E.p. omits 'very.'
² E.p.: 'The second sign and condition of this purgation.'

whereas purgative aridity is ordinarily accompanied by solicitude, with care and grief as I say, because the soul is not serving God. And, although this may sometimes be increased by melancholy or some other humour (as it frequently is), it fails not for that reason to produce a purgative effect upon the desire, since the desire is deprived of all pleasure,³ and has its care centred upon God alone. For, when mere humour is the cause, it spends itself in displeasure and ruin of the physical nature, and there are none of those desires to serve God which belong to purgative aridity. When the cause is aridity, it is true that the sensual part of the soul has fallen low, and is weak and feeble in its actions, by reason of the little pleasure which it finds in them; but the spirit, on the other hand, is ready and strong.

4. For the cause of this aridity is that God transfers to the spirit the good things and the strength of the senses, which, since the soul's natural strength and senses are incapable of using them, remain barren, dry and empty. For the sensual part of a man has no capacity for that which is pure spirit, and thus, when it is the spirit that receives the pleasure, the flesh is left without savour and is too weak to perform any action. But the spirit, which all the time is being fed, goes forward in strength, and with more alertness and solicitude than before, in its anxiety not to fail God; and if it is not immediately conscious of spiritual sweetness and delight, but only of aridity and lack of sweetness, the reason for this is the strangeness of the exchange; for its palate has been accustomed to those other sensual pleasures upon which its eyes are still fixed, and, since the spiritual palate is not made ready or purged for such subtle pleasure, until it finds itself becoming prepared for it by means of this arid and dark night, it cannot experience spiritual pleasure and good, but only aridity and lack of sweetness, since it misses the pleasure which aforetime it enjoyed so readily.

5. These souls whom God is beginning to lead through these solitary places of the wilderness are like to the children of Israel, to whom in the wilderness God began to give food

³ A, B: 'since it is completely purged as to [its] pleasure.'

from Heaven, containing within itself all sweetness, and, as is there said,⁴ it turned to the savour which each one of them desired. But withal the children of Israel felt the lack of the pleasures and delights of the flesh and the onions which they had eaten aforetime in Egypt, the more so because their palate was accustomed to these and took delight in them, rather than in the delicate sweetness of the angelic manna; and they wept and sighed for the fleshpots even in the midst of the food of Heaven.⁵ To such depths does the vileness of our desires descend that it makes us to long for our own wretched food⁶ and to be nauseated by the indescribable⁷ blessings of Heaven.

6. But, as I say, when these aridities proceed from the way of the purgation of sensual desire, although at first the spirit feels no sweetness, for the reasons that we have just given, it feels that it is deriving strength and energy to act from the substance which this inward food gives it, the which food is the beginning of a contemplation that is dark and arid to the senses; which contemplation is secret and hidden from the very person that experiences it; and ordinarily, together with the aridity and emptiness which it causes in the senses, it gives the soul an inclination and desire to be alone and in quietness, without being able to think of any particular thing or having the desire to do so. If those souls to whom this comes to pass knew how to be quiet at this time, and troubled not about performing any kind of action, whether inward or outward, neither had any anxiety about doing anything,⁸ then they would delicately experience this inward refreshment in that ease and freedom from care. So delicate is this refreshment that ordinarily, if a man have desire or care⁹ to experience it, he experiences it not; for, as I say, it does its work

⁴ E.p. abbreviates: 'God began to give such delicious food from Heaven that, as is there said.'

⁵ Numbers xi, 5-6.

⁶ [Lit., 'makes us to desire our miseries.']

⁷ [Lit., 'incommunicable.'] E.p. has 'incommutable.'

⁸ E.p. reads: '... [outward], which they strive with their labour and their reasoning to perform, and had no anxiety to do anything save to allow themselves to be led by God, to receive and to listen with loving interior attentiveness, then ...' etc.

⁹ E.p.: 'if a man have superadded and particular desire and care.'

when the soul is most at ease and freest from care; it is like the air which, if one would close one's hand upon it, escapes.

7. In this sense we may understand that which the Spouse said to the Bride in the Songs, namely: 'Withdraw thine eyes from me, for they make me to soar aloft.'¹⁰ For in such a way does God bring the soul into this state, and by so different a path does He lead it that, if it desires to work with its faculties,¹¹ it hinders the work which God is doing in it rather than aids it; whereas aforetime it was quite the contrary. The reason is that, in this state of contemplation, which the soul enters when it forsakes meditation for the state of the proficient, it is God Who is now working in the soul; He binds¹² its interior faculties, and allows it not to cling to the understanding, nor to have delight in the will, nor to reason with the memory. For anything that the soul can do of its own accord at this time serves only, as we have said, to hinder inward peace and the work which God is accomplishing in the spirit by means of that aridity of sense. And this peace, being spiritual and delicate, performs a work which is quiet and delicate, solitary, productive of peace and satisfaction,¹³ and far removed from all those earlier pleasures, which were very palpable and sensual. This is the peace which, says David, God speaks in the soul to the end that He may make it spiritual.¹⁴ And this leads us to the third point.

8. The third sign whereby this purgation of sense may be recognized is that the soul can no longer meditate or reflect in the imaginative sphere of sense as it was wont,¹⁵ however much it may of itself endeavour to do so. For God now begins to communicate Himself to it; no longer through sense, as He did aforetime, by means of reflections which joined and

¹⁰ Canticles vi, 4 [A.V., vi, 5].

¹¹ E.p.: 'that, if it will work of itself and by its own ability.'

¹² Nearly all authorities read thus. M, e.p., however, have: 'He seems to bind,' and V: 'He veils.'

¹³ [Lit., 'satisfactory and pacific.'] E.p. omits: 'solitary, productive of ... solicitude.' H has 'solicitous' for 'solitary.' C omits 'solitary.' All other authorities read as in the text.

¹⁴ Psalm lxxxiv, 9 [A.V., lxxxv, 8].

¹⁵ E.p. is slightly explicit: '... or reflect, making use of the imaginative sphere of sense, that it may move it as it was wont.'

sundered its knowledge, but by pure spirit, into which consecutive reflections enter not; but He communicates Himself to it by an act of simple contemplation, to which neither the exterior nor the interior senses of the lower part of the soul can attain. From this time forward, therefore, imagination and fancy can find no support in any meditation,¹⁶ and can gain no foothold by means thereof.

9. With regard to this third sign, it is to be understood that this embarrassment and dissatisfaction of the faculties proceed not from indisposition, for, when this is the case, and the indisposition, which never lasts for long,¹⁷ comes to an end, the soul is able once again, by taking some trouble about the matter, to do what it did before, and the faculties find their wonted support. But in the purgation of the desire this is not so: when once the soul begins to enter therein, its inability to reflect with the faculties grows ever greater. For, although it is true that at first, and with some persons, the process is not as continuous¹⁸ as this, so that occasionally they fail to abandon their pleasures and reflections¹⁹ of sense (for perchance²⁰ by reason of their weakness it was not fitting to wean them from these immediately), yet this inability grows within them more and more and brings the workings of sense to an end, if indeed they are to make progress, for those who walk not in the way of contemplation act very differently. For this night of aridities is not usually continuous in their senses. At times they have these aridities; at others they have them not. At times they cannot meditate; at others they can. For God sets them in this night only to prove them and to humble them, and to reform their desires, so that they go not nurturing in themselves a sinful²¹ gluttony in spiritual things. He sets them not there in order to lead them in the way of the spirit, which is this contemplation; for not all those who walk

¹⁶ E.p.: 'cannot find support or make a beginning with any meditation.'

¹⁷ [The stress here is evidently on the transience of the distempers, whether they be moral or physical.]

¹⁸ Bz.: 'as continent.'

¹⁹ E.p.: 'and alleviation.'

²⁰ E.p. omits 'perchance.'

²¹ E.p. omits: 'a sinful.'

of set purpose in the way of the spirit are brought by God to contemplation, nor even the half of them²²—why, He best knows. And this is why He never completely weans the senses of such persons from the breasts of meditations and reflections, but only for short periods and at certain seasons, as we have said.

CHAPTER X

Of the way in which these souls are to conduct themselves in this dark night.

DURING the time, then, of the aridities of this night of sense (wherein God effects the change of which we have spoken above, drawing forth the soul from the life of sense into that of the spirit—that is, from meditation to contemplation—wherein it no longer has any power to work or to reason with its faculties concerning the things of God, as has been said), spiritual persons suffer great trials, by reason not so much of the aridities which they suffer, as of the fear which they have of being lost on the road, thinking that all spiritual blessing is over for them and that God has abandoned them since they find no help or pleasure in good things.¹ Then they grow weary, and endeavour (as they have been accustomed to do) to concentrate their faculties with some degree of pleasure upon some object of meditation, thinking that, when they are not doing this and yet are conscious of making an effort, they are doing nothing. This effort they make not without great inward repugnance and unwillingness on the part of their soul, which was taking pleasure in being in that quietness and ease, instead of working with its faculties.² So they have abandoned the one pursuit,³ yet draw no profit from the

²² E.p. reads 'to perfect contemplation' and omits 'nor even the half of them.'

¹ H: 'no help whatever in good things.'

² E.p. omits: 'instead . . . faculties.'

³ [Lit., 'spoiling themselves in the one.'] E.p. has: 'turning aside in [i.e., from] the one.'

CHAPTER V

Sets down the first line and begins to explain how this dark contemplation is not only night for the soul but is also grief and torment.¹

This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural and spiritual, and which is called by contemplatives infused contemplation, or mystical theology. Herein God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in perfection of love, without its doing anything, or understanding of what manner is this infused contemplation.² Inasmuch as it is the loving wisdom of God, God produces striking effects³ in the soul, for, by purging and illumining it, He prepares it for the union of love with God. Wherefore the same loving wisdom that purges⁴ the blessed spirits and enlightens them is that which here purges the soul and illumines it.

2. But the question arises: Why is the Divine light (which, as we say, illumines and purges the soul from its ignorances) here called by the soul a dark night? To this the answer is that for two reasons⁵ this Divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul, but is likewise affliction and torment. The first is because of the height of Divine Wisdom, which transcends the talent of the soul, and in this way is darkness to it; the second, because of its vileness and impurity, in which respect it is painful and afflictive to it, and is also dark.

3. In order to prove the first point, we must here assume a certain doctrine of the philosopher, which says that, the clearer and more manifest are Divine things in themselves, the darker and more hidden are they to the soul naturally; just

¹ So e.p. The Codices have no title.

² E.p.: 'without its doing any more than wait lovingly upon God, hear Him and receive His light, without understanding of what manner is this infused contemplation.'

³ E.p.: '... of God, it produces special effects.'

⁴ A, B, M: 'Wherefore the same wisdom, as a thing that purges.'

⁵ So A, B, Bz. The other authorities have: 'for two things.'

as, the clearer is the light, the more it blinds and darkens the pupil of the owl, and, the more directly we look at the sun, the greater is the darkness which it causes in our visual faculty, overcoming and overwhelming it through its own weakness. In the same way, when this Divine light of contemplation assails the soul which is not yet wholly enlightened, it causes spiritual darkness in it; for not only does it overcome it, but likewise it overwhelms it and darkens the act of its natural intelligence. For this reason Saint Dionysius and other mystical theologians call this infused contemplation a ray of darkness—that is to say, for the soul that is not enlightened and purged—for the natural strength of the intellect is transcended and overwhelmed by its great supernatural light. Wherefore David likewise said: That near to God and round about Him are darkness and cloud,⁶ not that this is so in fact, but that it is so to our weak understanding, which is blinded and darkened by so vast a light, to which it cannot attain.⁷ For this cause the same David then explained himself, saying: 'Through the great splendour of His presence passed clouds⁸—that is, between God and our understanding. And it is for this cause that, when God sends it out from Himself to the soul that is not yet transformed, this illumining ray⁹ of His secret wisdom causes¹⁰ thick darkness in the understanding.'

4. And it is clear that this dark contemplation is in these its beginnings painful likewise to the soul; for, as this Divine infused contemplation has many excellences that are extremely good, and the soul that receives them, not being purged, has many miseries that are likewise extremely bad,¹¹ hence it follows that, as two contraries cannot coexist in one subject—the soul—it must of necessity have pain and suffering, since it is the subject wherein these two contraries war against each other, working the one against the other, by

⁶ Psalm xcvi, 2 [A.V., xcvi, 2].

⁷ [Lit., 'not attaining.'] B, Bz.: 'not attaining to it.' E.p.: 'not attaining to so great a height.'

⁸ Psalm xvii, 13 [A.V., xviii, 12].

⁹ H has 'kingdom' for 'ray' [reino for rayo], an evident error.

¹⁰ So e.p. The other authorities [and P. Silverio] read: 'produces.'

¹¹ E.p. omits: 'that . . . bad.'

reason of the purgation of the imperfections of the soul which comes to pass through this contemplation. This we shall prove inductively in the manner following.

5. In the first place, because the light and wisdom of this contemplation is most bright and pure, and the soul which it assails is dark and impure, it follows that the soul suffers great pain when it receives it in itself, just as, when¹² the eyes are dimmed by humours, and become impure and weak, the assault made upon them by a bright light causes them pain. And when the soul suffers the direct assault of this Divine light, its pain, which results from its impurity, is immense; because, when this pure light assails the soul, in order to expel its impurity, the soul feels itself to be so impure and miserable that it believes God to be against it, and thinks that it has set itself up against God. This causes it sore grief and pain, because it now believes that God has cast it away: this was one of the greatest trials which Job felt when God sent him this experience, and he said: 'Why hast Thou set me contrary to Thee, so that I am grievous and burdensome to myself?'¹³ For, by means of this pure light,¹⁴ the soul now sees its impurity clearly (although darkly), and knows clearly that it is unworthy of God or of any creature. And what gives it most pain is that it thinks that it will never be worthy¹⁵ and that its good things are all over for it. This is caused by the profound immersion of its spirit in the knowledge and realization of its evils and miseries; for this Divine and dark light now reveals them all to the eye, that it may see clearly how in its own strength it can never have aught else. In this sense we may understand that passage from David, which says: 'For iniquity Thou hast corrected man and hast made his soul to be undone and consumed: he wastes away as the spider.'¹⁶

6. The second way in which the soul suffers pain is by ¹² E.p.: 'it follows that to receive it afflicts the soul greatly, even as when,' etc.

¹³ Job vii, 20.

¹⁴ Thus the Codices, except A, B, P, which read: 'this clear light.' E.p. has: 'this clear and pure light.'

¹⁵ E.p.: 'is the fear that it will never be worthy.'

¹⁶ Psalm xxxviii, 12 [A.V., xxxix, 11].

reason of its weakness, natural, moral and spiritual; for, when this Divine contemplation assails the soul with a certain force, in order to strengthen it and subdue it, it suffers such pain in its weakness that it nearly swoons away. This is especially so at certain times when it is assailed with somewhat greater force; for sense and spirit, as if beneath some immense and dark load, are in such great pain and agony that the soul would find advantage and relief in death. This had been experienced by the prophet Job, when he said: 'I desire not that He should have intercourse with me in great strength, lest He oppress me with the weight of His greatness.'¹⁷

7. Beneath the power of this oppression and weight the soul feels itself so far from being favoured that it thinks, and correctly so, that even that wherein it was wont to find some help has vanished with everything else, and that there is none who has pity upon it. To this effect Job says likewise: 'Have pity upon me, have pity upon me,¹⁸ at least ye my friends, because the hand of the Lord has touched me.'¹⁹ A thing of great wonder and pity is it that the soul's weakness and impurity should now be so great that, though the hand of God is of itself so light and gentle, the soul should now feel it to be so heavy and so contrary,²⁰ though it neither weighs it down nor rests upon it, but only touches it, and that mercifully, since He does this in order to grant the soul favours and not to chastise it.

CHAPTER VI

Of other kinds of pain that the soul suffers in this night.¹

THE third kind of suffering and pain that the soul endures in this state results from the fact that two other extremes meet here in one, namely, the Divine and the human. The Divine is this purgative contemplation, and the human is the

¹⁷ Job xxiii, 6.

¹⁸ Some Codices do not repeat this phrase.

¹⁹ Job xix, 21.

²⁰ [There is a reference here to Job vii, 20: cf. § 5, above.]

¹ So e.p. The other authorities have no title.

are too weak to have the fortitude and bear the trials of perfection.⁸ They resemble those who are softly nurtured and who run fretfully away from everything that is hard, and take offence at the Cross, wherein consist the delights of the spirit. The more spiritual a thing is, the more irksome they find it, for, as they seek to go about spiritual matters with complete freedom and according to the inclination of their will, it causes them great sorrow and repugnance to enter upon the narrow way, which, says Christ, is the way of life.⁹

5. Let it suffice here to have described these imperfections, among the many to be found in the lives of those that are in this first state of beginners, so that it may be seen how greatly they need God to set them in the state of proficients. This He does by bringing them into the dark night whereof we now speak; wherein He weans them from the breasts of these sweetnesses and pleasures, gives them pure aridities and inward darkness, takes from them all these irrelevances¹⁰ and puerilities, and by very different means causes them to win the virtues. For, however assiduously the beginner practises the mortification in himself of all these actions and passions of his, he can never completely succeed—very far from it—until God shall work it in him passively by means of the purgation of the said night. Of this I would fain speak in some way that may be profitable; may God, then, be pleased to give me His Divine light, because this is very needful in a night that is so dark and a matter that is so difficult¹¹ to describe and to expound.

The line, then, is:

In a dark night.

⁸ [Lit., 'they are very weak for the fortitude and trial of perfection.']

⁹ St. Matthew vii, 14.

¹⁰ M, P, e.p.: 'all these imperfections.'

¹¹ E.p. and a number of MSS. omit all that follows the word 'difficult.'

CHAPTER VIII

Wherein is expounded the first line of the first stanza, and a beginning is made of the explanation of this dark night.¹

This night, which, as we say, is contemplation, produces in spiritual persons two kinds of darkness or purgation, corresponding to the two parts of man's nature—namely, the sensual and the spiritual. And thus the one night or purgation will be sensual, wherein the soul is purged according to sense, which is subdued to the spirit; and the other is a night or purgation which is spiritual, wherein the soul is purged and stripped² according to the spirit, and subdued and made ready for the union of love with God. The night of sense is common and comes to many: these are the beginners; and of this night³ we shall speak first. The night of the spirit is the portion of very few, and these are they that are already practised and proficient, of whom we shall treat hereafter.

2. The first purgation or night is bitter and terrible to sense, as we shall now show.⁴ The second bears no comparison with it, for it is horrible and awful⁵ to the spirit, as we shall show⁶ presently. Since the night of sense is first in order and comes first, we shall first of all⁷ say something about it briefly, since more is written of it, as of a thing that is more common; and we shall pass on to treat more fully of the spiritual night, since very little has been said of this, either in speech⁸ or in writing, and very little⁹ is known of it, even by experience.

3. Since, then, the conduct of these beginners upon the way

¹ The title is taken from e.p. The Codices have no title.

² E.p.: 'wherein a soul is purged or stripped.'

³ E.p.: 'of whom.'

⁴ [Lit., 'say.']

⁵ E.p.: 'for it is very awful.'

⁶ [Lit., 'say.']

⁷ E.p. omits: 'first of all.'

⁸ [Plática: the word is frequently used in Spanish to denote an informal sermon or address.]

⁹ This 'very little' [which in the original comes in the emphatic final position] is omitted in e.p.

sufficiently like the Buddha of tradition to remain a Buddhist Buddha is a debatable point; it is perhaps never finally answerable given the many adaptations of Buddhism and the endless disagreements about what is and is not Buddhist. What is clear is that such a humanized Buddha loses the magical aura and superhuman characteristics that many Buddhists throughout history have regarded as central to Buddha's nature.

A similar contemporary approach would be to psychologize the extraordinary accounts of the greatness of Buddha as myths which contain deep truths about human aspirations for perfection, wisdom, compassion and benignly employed power. Many of the aspects of traditional accounts of Buddha that seem difficult to accept literally might appeal to one's imaginative faculty and move one towards ideals of understanding, kindness and compassion. These regulative ideals may remain distant and unrealized; nevertheless, they are inspiring for fallible, morally and cognitively imperfectible human beings. Teachings about the empty, conceptually constructed nature of Buddhas might be exploited in a self-conscious contemporary adaptation to support the view that Buddhas are actually just powerful metaphors for our own most exalted desires and values, while also acknowledging that Buddhas were not usually psychologized in this way by traditional forms of Buddhism.

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David Burt, (Routledge: Abingdon, 2017)

5 The varieties of emptiness

(extract)

Week 3

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is a central teaching in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Indian Mahāyāna scriptures known as the *Pratyāśāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) *sūtras* have the teaching of emptiness as their primary focus. The recurrent theme of these texts is that all phenomena are empty like a magical illusion and perfect wisdom or understanding (*prajñā*) fully comprehends emptiness. We will see that this claim was in part a reaction to mainstream, non-Mahāyāna Indian Buddhist philosophy which had asserted that some phenomena are not empty, namely, the momentary and atomic events (*dharmas*) that are the fundamental constituents of everything. The concept of emptiness gets reiterated and reinterpreted in other Mahāyāna scriptures and the vast commentarial tradition which produced the Mahāyāna philosophical schools of Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, as well as teachings about Buddha nature.

Emptiness is of such importance that Buddhist philosophy of religion must give it considerable attention. However, this is not a simple task because the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of emptiness has numerous meanings. Many Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophers use the term 'emptiness' but often in divergent ways. Moreover, contemporary scholars of Buddhism often disagree about the interpretation of emptiness, in both fundamental and quite nuanced ways. This is fuelled in part by the hermeneutical challenges that Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophical works pose; different texts or portions of texts can suggest different readings and often the same passage can support more than one interpretation. There is also an understandable wish to relate teachings about emptiness to current philosophical trends and debates. When done without sensitivity to the original intellectual, linguistic and social context of Mahāyāna Buddhism, this comparative thinking can lead to dubious readings. For instance, Andrew Tuck (1990) has shown how the interpretation of Nāgārjuna's Mahāyāna philosophy of emptiness has often depended on the philosophical fashions of the time; when Kantianism was in favour, emptiness was construed in Kantian terms, when deconstruction is dominant, then Nāgārjuna's philosophy gets interpreted as a forerunner of those of Wittgenstein and Derrida.

However, given the ambiguities and divergent views often present in the source material, even careful commentators reach different conclusions about the philosophical implications of emptiness. This rich diversity of possible meanings

provides an opportunity for vigorous debate about the relative philosophical merits of the variety of interpretations. This chapter will identify some prominent meanings of emptiness in Mahāyāna Buddhism and highlight some important interpretive disputes and philosophical problems. It will not be a comprehensive treatment of this complex topic, but will investigate some aspects of the emptiness concept (or concepts) that are crucial for the development of a Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy of religion. While this chapter will refer to important texts and thinkers from India and beyond, the emphasis will be on an exploration of the various philosophical possibilities associated with the emptiness concept without neglecting textual, philological analysis and the cultural and historical context in which the emptiness teachings arose.

Mādhyamika: Emptiness as absence of intrinsic existence

Perhaps the best-known teachings about emptiness come from the Mādhyamika school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, with Nāgārjuna (second century) regarded as the foundational figure and many subsequent Mādhyamika philosophers in India and beyond.

When Mādhyamika philosophers assert that all things are empty they mean that all things are the result of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*); they lack, or are empty of, autonomous existence because they are reliant on causes to bring them into and sustain their existence. The manifold entities that make up the world are related to one another in complex patterns of interdependence. Nāgārjuna famously declares that emptiness (*śūnyatā*), dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and the middle way (*madhyamā pratipad*) are synonyms (*Vigrahavyāvartanī*, 70). In other words, emptiness means that all things lack, or are empty of, autonomous existence because they depend on other entities as their causes and sustainers. No thing is an island unto itself. This is an ontological middle way between complete non-existence, the extreme of nihilism, and independent and permanent existence, the extreme of eternalism.

However, the Mādhyamika concept of emptiness entails more than an assertion of interconnectedness; in addition, it means that all phenomena are empty in the sense that they lack existence independent of the conceptualizing activity of the mind. Here Mādhyamika philosophy is closely related to the teaching in the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures that all entities are empty like a dream or a magical illusion. Dependent origination in the Mādhyamika context entails that all entities are mental constructions. Nāgārjuna equates emptiness, dependent origination and the middle way with what he calls dependent designation (*prajñaptirupādāya*) (*Mādhyamakakārikā* xxiv, 18). One plausible reading of this statement is that, according to Nāgārjuna, entities are one and all designations or concepts that exist in dependence on our cognitive processes of discrimination and individuation. The ontological middle way for Nāgārjuna is that things exist, but nothing exists more than conventionally.

This Mādhyamika claim should be understood in the context of Abhidharma Buddhism which distinguishes between fundamental or primary existence

(*dravyasa*) and conceptual existence (*prajñaptisa*). This distinction corresponds to that between ultimate truths (*paramārthasatya*) and conventional truths (*saṃvṛtisatya*). Entities such as mountains and tables have conceptual existence and are conventional truths because they can be analysed into their component parts. Their existence is the result of conceptual synthesis on the basis of their constituents. Entities have fundamental existence and are ultimate truths if they cannot be further analysed into parts. Abhidharma philosophy refers to these partless components of all mental and material things as the conditioned *dharmas*, each of which is said to have its own defining characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*) and intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*).

There are some complex areas of disagreement between early Buddhist philosophers about the nature of these *dharmas*. For example, the Sarvāstivādins maintained that the *dharmas* have a persisting existence which explains phenomena such as memory of past mental events, karmic effectiveness of past actions, and the ability to be objects of cognition when anticipating the future (Cox 1995: 134–46). Other mainstream Buddhist schools, such as the Sautrāntikas and Theravāda, considered these *dharmas* to be radically impermanent and causally produced by preceding *dharmas* in a chain of dependent origination. Even so, the strictly momentary *dharmas* are ultimate truths and have intrinsic existence because they are the basic components into which all other things can be analysed. Their existence is not the result of conceptual reification (Cox 1995: 145–6; Williams, Tribe and Wynne 2012: 83–92).

Mādhyamikas contend that this two-tier Abhidharma ontology does not go far enough. All things are empty of intrinsic existence. Even the *dharmas* have conceptual existence and are conventional truths. This again is in accord with the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures, which repeatedly assert that all *dharmas* are empty of intrinsic existence. Mādhyamikas present a host of detailed arguments intended to refute the intrinsic existence of all things. But the key Mādhyamika contention is that *dharmas* would have to be independent and permanent in order to have their own, autonomous defining characteristics; however, nothing has that type of existence. All things dependently originate and dependently originating existence entails conceptual existence; entities are reifications on the basis of their manifold causes. These causes are themselves always reifications on the basis of their own multiple causes. There is just conceptual construction without exception. There are no ultimately true entities that function as an ontological bedrock on which conceptual construction takes place.

This means that, for Mādhyamikas, the ultimate truth is that there are no ultimate truths. This apparent paradox arguably can be resolved by identifying two senses in which Mādhyamika philosophy uses the term ‘ultimate truth’. Ultimate truth₁ refers to the way things really are. Ultimate truths₂ is used in the plural to refer to entities that have intrinsic existence. The Mādhyamika claim is that the ultimate truth₁ is that there are no ultimate truths₂. There is an important ambiguity in the Sanskrit term ‘*satya*’, it can be understood epistemologically as ‘truth’ but it can equally be construed ontologically as ‘reality’. So, emptiness means that the ultimate truth is that there are no ultimate realities.

Mādhyaṃikas are insistent that emptiness has genuinely universal scope; emptiness is itself empty. This is often interpreted to mean that emptiness is not an independently existing absolute reality like *Brahman* in Advaita Vedānta, for example. On the contrary, emptiness is itself a characteristic of the entities of which it is the emptiness – it is the emptiness of the tree, the emptiness of the chair and so forth. Emptiness is itself dependently originated. Without entities there would be no emptiness. The emptiness of emptiness arguably does not mean that emptiness is not ultimately true, but it does entail that emptiness is not an ultimate truth₂. The ultimate truth₁ is that all things, including emptiness itself, are empty of intrinsic existence. Put another way, emptiness is the ultimate truth that nothing, including emptiness itself is ultimately real. This is the true nature of things.

So, Mādhyaṃika texts declare that all entities are simply conventions (*samvṛti*, *sāṃvṛta*) and that the whole world is name-only (*nāmamātra*). They also claim that all things are the result of conceptualisation (*vikalpa*) and imagination (*kalpanā*, *parikalpa*) (*Yuktiśaṣṭikārikā*, 37; *Lokāṭīśṭava*, 19; *Acintyaśṭava*, 6, 35, 36). Furthermore, these sources often compare all entities to illusions, dreams and mirages. All things are, in a manner akin to fantasy objects, dependent on cognitive processes for their existence (*Ratnāvalī* 110–13. Trans. Hopkins 1975: 33–4). This is presumably why Nāgārjuna says that dependently originating entities do not really originate (*Yuktiśaṣṭikārikā*, 48). In other words, the whole world of dependently originating entities is simply like a phantasm or a mental creation. Thus the *Mādhyaṃakakārikā* and later Mādhyaṃika texts seek to demonstrate the merely conventional existence of phenomena such as causality, motion, the senses the agent and actions, and the five aggregates. In Tibetan Mādhyaṃika, things are said to have no “existence from their own side” (*rang ngos nas grub pa*) and no “existence from the side of the basis of designation” (*gdags gzhi’i ngos nas grub pa*). Entities are declared to be mere imputations of thought (*rtog pas biags isam*) and to have a conceptual existence (*btags yod pa*) (Hopkins 1996: 35–41).

In an apparent denial of the earlier Buddhist belief in an unconditioned reality beyond time and space, Nāgārjuna declares nirvāṇa to be identical with *samsāra*, that is, the conditioned world of conventionally existing things (*Mādhyaṃakakārikā* xxv, 19–20), and that nirvāṇa is simply the correct understanding of existence (*bhava*), that is, as lacking intrinsic existence (*Yuktiśaṣṭikārikā*, 6). The early Buddhist ontology of the conditioned and the unconditioned is here replaced apparently with an ontology that denies this duality.

Mādhyaṃika philosophy also rejects the two-tiered ontology of conditioned things that lies at the heart of the Abhidharma project by denying that any dependently originating entities have substantial existence (*dravyasar*). All conditioned things, and that is everything, are merely conventional, and there are no entities that are ontologically foundational in the sense that they have more than conceptual existence. Each and every thing is simply a convenient designation for a concatenation of causes. For Mādhyaṃikas, there is simply conceptual construction all the way down and no entity escapes this analysis.

Is there a substratum?

The precise ontological significance of this claim, however, is not entirely clear. It might mean that there is a flow of events that is not dependent on our perceptual and cognitive functions, but that this is pure process, not yet divided into identifiable, discrete things with nameable qualities. There is an unconstructed indeterminate, changing substratum but no unconstructed, identifiable things. Independently of the mind, there are no distinct, discrete objects with describable qualities; named entities are a result of conceptual and linguistic superimposition that carves up a spatio-temporal stream of relentless change which is otherwise unspecifiable. One might doubt the intelligibility of the notion of change without things that are changing; despite this problem, the Mādhyaṃikas are arguably claiming that the partition of the world – into things, their properties and relationships – is a function of conceptual and linguistic reification, rather than existing independently of the human mind. All talk of discrete things is merely a practical convenience that is misleading if they are taken to be ultimately real.

The phenomenon of vagueness can be used to support the view that there are no discrete entities. The boundaries between things are ill defined, especially when one examines them at the atomic level, with constant shifting of particles and no clarity about whether particular particles belong to one thing or another. This vagueness is a powerful argument against common sense realism, which naively assumes the existence of well defined entities; it can also be used to support the Mādhyaṃika claim that the division of the world into distinct things is a result of conceptual construction rather than a feature of the way the world exists independently of our interpretations (Goodman 2009: 93–5). We determine the boundaries between things on the basis of our own biases and interests.

According to Jay L. Garfield (2002: 61), Nāgārjuna’s assertion that all things are conventional means that “Nature presents no joints at which to be carved”, and thus there are no natural things that exist as distinct portions of nature prior to the carving done by our conceptualizing minds. Even so, ‘nature’ exists prior to conceptual construction. Mādhyaṃikas would presumably accept – as Buddhists committed to process ontology – that ‘nature’ prior to our conceptualising activity is a process of changing but unspecifiable events rather than static. Thus, some Mādhyaṃikas might accept pure change as a substratum, which is not yet divided into discrete things prior to conceptual construction and naming. Of course, ontological realists will object that nature does have joints which are mind-independent – be they *dharma*s, atoms, quanta and so on – and are features of the world as it actually is, prior to conceptualization, despite this Mādhyaṃika claim to the contrary.

But the Mādhyaṃika ontology may be even more radical and controversial; it might mean that all entities are simply conventions, and that is all there is. There is no substratum whatsoever for conceptual construction; there is not even an undifferentiated process as the basis for the fabrication of entities. Not only are there no joints in the undifferentiated process of nature, in addition, the undifferentiated process is itself just the product of conceptual construction.

existence and non-existence do not apply to it, for it does not have a describable ontological status akin to existing things such as stones, trees and mountains (King 1991: 34). This appeal to the inconceivable character of Buddha nature indicates one way in which *gzhan stong* and other advocates of a 'higher emptiness' beyond the mere absence of intrinsic existence might respond to their critics' accusations of absolutism. This claim, made by some Buddhists, that reality strictly transcends language will be considered in more detail in the next chapter. It is an approach that seems to imply that we really do not know what we are talking about when we use concepts to comprehend Buddha nature and that it is strictly a matter for experiential encounter rather than philosophical discussion.

Emptiness and liberation

This chapter has explained that the concept of emptiness in Mahāyāna Buddhism is contested and open to a variety of readings. Emptiness can be construed in a range of ways which are of interest to the philosopher of religion; indeed, the interpretive uncertainties and diversity of ideas make emptiness extremely intellectually engaging.

Despite the diversity of Mahāyāna notions of emptiness, most readings are united in recognizing that emptiness has, as a central part of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, a soteriological purpose. Understanding emptiness is thought to remove the psychological impediments to awakening. Emptiness is likened to a medicine because it cures the mind of the causes of suffering, namely, the mental ailments of craving and ignorance. While emptiness might seem abstract, it is a concept which is intended to have an existential impact.

Emptiness needs to be understood in the context of Buddhist praxis; insight into emptiness is typically part of a broader Buddhist discipline of ethical training, meditation and so forth. Philosophical reflection on emptiness is not intended to be simply an intellectual and theoretical exercise; it is also meant to induce a profound change in one's psychological dispositions and motivations. However, the various interpretations of emptiness that are possible indicate that Mahāyāna Buddhists are not united in their understanding of emptiness, the knowledge of which is meant to produce such profound transformative effects.

6 Language and reality

The nature of religious language is one of the main issues addressed by philosophy of religion. Philosophers of religion with a theistic orientation explore the extent to which God's nature can be expressed by words. This is evident, for instance, in Christian discussions about the scope and limitations of 'God talk', and whether positive descriptions of the divine nature are possible (cataphatic theology) or whether only the *via negativa* is appropriate in attempting to describe the deity (apophatic theology) (Louth 2012). This debate is not confined to Western traditions; we find a broadly similar discussion in Vedānta philosophy, for example, with Śaṅkara propounding that brahman, the absolute reality, is ultimately without qualities and thus indescribable except by means of statements of what it is not, whereas Rāmānuja declares that *Brahman*, whom he identifies with the god Viṣṇu, most definitely has superlative divine qualities which can be described positively (King 1999: 224–5).

It may seem that Buddhism would have little to contribute to this discussion. We have already seen (chapter 4) that Buddhists commonly reject the existence of a creator God and so would not have anything to say about the capacity of language to express God's qualities. Even so, there is some room for comparison here. We have also seen in chapter 4 that, although Buddha is usually not thought of as God, he is considered to be an extraordinary being with many superlative qualities such as wisdom and compassion which he is believed to possess to the maximum degree. Buddhist sources often delight in describing these qualities, indicating that words have some power to express the Buddha's nature. However, there are also indications of the indescribable nature of Buddhahood; indeed, Buddhist texts sometimes refer to the Buddha as so extraordinary that he is inconceivable and others state that the categories of 'existence' and 'non-existence' are not applicable to a Buddha in his post-mortem state, possibly indicating the radically ineffable nature of such an awakened being (*Majjhima Nikāya* i, 483).

Moreover, we have seen that a common claim in Buddhism, especially in Mahāyāna traditions, is that Buddha is ultimately identified with reality itself and that the way things really are is the Buddha's *dharmakāya* (reality body). And there is a persistent thread in Buddhist thought that reality is in some sense beyond the capacity of words to apprehend. Yet this claim sits alongside numerous Buddhist descriptions of the true nature of things. Can reality be expressed by

WISDOM AND COMPASSION

(Week 5)

Modern descriptions of the Mahāyāna sūtras, a huge collection of texts that began to be composed in India around the beginning of the Common Era, often focus on two topics: the wisdom of emptiness (śūnyatā) and the compassion of the bodhisattva. Such descriptions are in some ways misleading. The Mahāyāna sūtras are a heterogeneous collection, dealing with myriad doctrines and practices, and the wisdom and compassion of the bodhisattva are set forth in the literature of the non-Mahāyāna schools of Indian Buddhism as well. However, wisdom and compassion are indeed common themes in many of the most famous Mahāyāna sūtras, including the sūtra quoted here.

It is entitled the Kāśyapa Chapter (Kāśyapaparivarta), and is found now in a large corpus of dozens of Mahāyāna sūtras, known as the 'Great Pile of Jewels' (Mahāratnakūṭa). The Kāśyapa Chapter (so named because the Buddha's interlocutor is his famous disciple Kāśyapa) is regarded by scholars as one of the earliest texts in this larger collection, dating from perhaps the first century CE.

The Kāśyapa Chapter is widely quoted in later Mahāyāna treatises, especially on the topics of the qualities of a bodhisattva and on the nature of emptiness. The qualities of bodhisattvas are outlined in groups of four, two of which appear in the opening passages below, where the false bodhisattva and true bodhisattva are compared. The bodhisattva described in the text is not the celestial saviour known from other sūtras, but is instead the ordinary disciple of the Buddha who has vowed to achieve buddhahood in order to liberate all beings from suffering (see Chapter 43). This vow is indeed quite extraordinary,

but in the Kāśyapa Chapter (and other Mahāyāna sūtras) it is presented as the path that all should seek to follow.

The bodhisattva is no longer the rare individual of each age who strives for the welfare of others, while others seek only the cessation of their own suffering. Instead, all who traverse the path to buddhahood must develop extraordinary compassion and extraordinary wisdom, yet there is an apparent contradiction between these two. Compassion leads to a dedication to provide assistance to other persons, yet wisdom brings the understanding that ultimately there are no persons because there is no self. The Kāśyapa Chapter acknowledges this, but proclaims the compatibility of compassion and wisdom, stating that everything is empty, yet actions are efficacious, 'He is firmly convinced of emptiness, yet he has faith in the law of the fruition of acts; he tolerantly accepts non-self, and yet has great compassion towards all beings.'

The next excerpt from the sūtra (sections 56–67) offers one of the more systematic discussions of emptiness in the Mahāyāna sūtras. In this oft-cited passage, the middle way between two extremes is described. In his first sermon, the Buddha had described a middle path between the extremes of self-indulgence and asceticism, both of which he had experienced prior to his enlightenment. Here, and in other Mahāyāna sūtras, especially those of the 'Perfection of Wisdom' (prajñāpāramitā) genre, the notion of the middle way between extremes is given a more philosophical sense, as an inexpressible reality between the extremes of permanence and impermanence, self and no-self. If that reality could be expressed, it might be called emptiness. But emptiness is not an ultimate reality, eternal and autonomous. Emptiness is itself empty, and those who reify emptiness and become attached to it commit a grave error. Emptiness is like a medicine that, having cured the illness, must not be clung to. Yet emptiness is not nothingness, it is not something to be feared. It is the natural state of things, and there is no more reason to fear it than there is to fear the empty space around us. The objects of our experience are falsely imagined to be more real than they in fact are; a false reality is projected on to the world by our ignorant minds, and then we respond to those

Buddhist scriptures (Penguin)

Ed David S. Lopez Jr.

projections with desire and hatred. The sūtra describes this as being similar to a painter who paints a picture of a demon and then faints in fear when he looks at his work.

The next excerpt describes the false and the true ascetic. It is noteworthy that, despite the language of emptiness, the sūtra does not in the least discount the proper conduct of monks, who should comport themselves properly and eschew fame. The best of ascetics, however, do this within the understanding of emptiness, knowing that even the Buddha, his teachings and the community of monks, as well as saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, are empty, and thus to be regarded without attachment.

The excerpts conclude with a description of the extraordinary benefits to be received by anyone who would uphold even one verse from this sūtra (called here Ratnakūṭa, 'Pile of Jewels'). Scholars speculate that many of the Mahāyāna sūtras had their own circle of devotees who regarded their text as the supreme teaching of the Buddha. It is common for these sūtras to conclude with a description of the benefits of devotion to the text (see Chapter 5), which here extend even to the moment of death.

'These four, Kāśyapa, are counterfeit *bodhisattvas*. Which four?

(1) The one who seeks for material profit and honours, not who seeks for the *dharma*; (2) the one who seeks for fame, renown and celebrity, not who seeks for good qualities; (3) the one who seeks for his own happiness, not who seeks for the removal of the suffering of beings; (4) the one who seeks for a group or company, not who seeks for solitude. These, Kāśyapa, are the four counterfeit *bodhisattvas*. (15)

'These four, Kāśyapa, are the genuine *bodhisattva* good qualities of any *bodhisattva*. Which four? (1) He is firmly convinced of emptiness, yet he has faith in the law of the fruition of acts; (2) he tolerantly accepts non-self, and yet has great compassion towards all beings; (3) his intention is already abiding in *nirvāṇa*, and yet his active application abides in *saṃsāra*; (4) he gives gifts in order to mature beings, and yet he has no expectation of any fruition of the act of giving for himself. These, Kāśyapa,

are the four qualities which are the genuine *bodhisattva* good qualities of any *bodhisattva*. (16)

...

'To uphold the idea of permanence – this, Kāśyapa, is one extreme. To uphold the idea of impermanence – this, Kāśyapa, is a second extreme. The middle between these two, permanence and impermanence, is immaterial, cannot be designated, does not appear, is non-informative, unsupported and placeless. This, Kāśyapa, is spoken of as the middle way, as true comprehensive examination of things. (56)

'To uphold the idea of self – this, Kāśyapa, is one extreme. To uphold the idea of non-self – this, Kāśyapa, is a second extreme. The middle between self and non-self ... is spoken of as the middle way, as true comprehensive examination of things. (57)

'To uphold the idea that the mind is real – this, Kāśyapa, is one extreme. To uphold the idea that the mind is unreal – this, Kāśyapa, is a second extreme. That in which, Kāśyapa, there is no mind, no volition, no mentation, no consciousness, this, Kāśyapa, is spoken of as the middle way. ... (58)

'To uphold the idea of existence – this, Kāśyapa, is one extreme. To uphold the idea of non-existence – this is a second extreme. ... (60)

'It is not, Kāśyapa, that emptiness leads to the annihilation of personhood; persons themselves are empty and emptiness itself is empty, absolutely empty, empty in the past, empty in the future, empty in the present. You must rely, Kāśyapa, on emptiness, not on the person. However, those, Kāśyapa, who rely on emptiness with an objectification of emptiness I speak of as lost and vanished from this teaching. The speculation on the existence of the person in which one's reliance has been placed, be it as great as Mount Sumeru, is indeed better than the speculation on emptiness into which the conceited have settled. Why?

Emptiness is the way out for those who engage in items of wrong speculation on the person, but by what means will they find a way out who hold to the speculations on emptiness? (64)

'It is just like this, Kāśyapa. Should some man be sick, and should a physician give medicine to him, and should that medicine, having evacuated all his diseases, not [itself] come to be cleared from his viscera, what do you think, Kāśyapa? Shall that sick man be freed of that sickness if that medicine, having evacuated all the diseases settled in his viscera, would not itself depart his viscera?'

Kāśyapa said: 'No, Blessed One. The disease of that man would be more serious if that medicine, having evacuated all the diseases, was settled in all his viscera and would not depart.'

The Blessed One said: 'Just so, Kāśyapa, emptiness is the remedy for all items of wrong speculation, but then, Kāśyapa, one for whom emptiness itself becomes a wrong speculation I speak of as incurable. (65)

'It is just like this, Kāśyapa. Were a man frightened of empty space to howl beating his chest, and were he to say "Get rid of this empty space!" – what do you think, Kāśyapa? Is it possible to get rid of empty space?'

Kāśyapa said: 'No, Blessed One, it is not.'

The Blessed One said: 'Just so, Kāśyapa, I call those ascetics and brahmins who are fearful of emptiness "tremendously mentally confused". Why? Since they, Kāśyapa, live fully in emptiness and yet they are afraid of that very emptiness. (66)

'Suppose a painter were to himself create a terrifying image of a *yakṣa*, and frightened and scared by it falling face down were to lose consciousness. Just so, Kāśyapa, all foolish common people themselves create material form, sound, smell, flavour and tactile objects, and due to those they wander in *saṃsāra* and they do not understand those things as they truly are. (67)

...

'People use the term "ascetic", Kāśyapa. In how many ways, Kāśyapa, do they use the term "ascetic"? These ascetics, Kāśyapa, are of four types. Which are the four? Namely, (1) the one who is an ascetic by virtue of his figure, outward form, distinguishing marks and appearance; (2) the one who is an ascetic deceitful while guarding good behaviour; (3) the one who is an ascetic interested in fame, renown and celebrity; (4) and the one who is an ascetic engaged in real, correct practice. These, Kāśyapa, are the four ascetics. (121)

'Now, Kāśyapa, who is the one who is an ascetic by virtue of his figure, outward form, distinguishing marks and appearance? Here, Kāśyapa, there will be someone who possesses the figure, outward form, distinguishing marks and appearance of an ascetic. He is clothed in a monastic robe, with shaven head, grasping in his hand a fine begging bowl, yet his conduct is characterized by impure bodily acts, impure vocal acts and impure mental acts. He is unrestrained, unliberated, untamed, unpacified, unguarded, undisciplined, greedy, lazy, of wrong behaviour and he conducts himself in sinful ways. This, Kāśyapa, is called the one who is an ascetic by virtue of his figure, outward form, distinguishing marks and appearance. (122)

'Now, Kāśyapa, who is the ascetic who is deceitful while guarding good behaviour? Here, Kāśyapa, there will be some ascetic who is accomplished in acting well-behaved. He behaves circumspectly in all four modes of deportment, consumes coarse food and drink, is satisfied with the four saintly attitudes, does not mix with householders or renunciants, is one of little speech and few words. But those modes of deportment are feigned with deceit and boasting about his spiritual accomplishments; they are not for the sake of the purification of the mind, nor for calming, nor for tranquillity, nor for training. And he is one who holds to wrong speculations on objectification, and hearing that things are inconceivable because of emptiness he feels as if he has confronted an abyss. And he is displeased by monks who speak about emptiness. This, Kāśyapa, is called the ascetic who is deceitful while guarding good behaviour. (123)

'Now, Kāśyapa, who is the ascetic interested in fame, renown and celebrity? Here, Kāśyapa, some ascetic upholds the discipline, having calculated "How may others know me to be an upholder of the discipline?" He preserves what he has learned, having calculated "How may others know me to be very learned?" He lives in a wilderness, having calculated "How may others know me to be a wilderness dweller?" Calculatingly, he dwells with few desires, satisfied, apart. But he acts merely to deceive others, not for the sake of cultivating aversion to the world, not for the sake of destruction of lust, not for the sake of cessation, not for the sake of tranquillity, not for the sake of complete awakening, not for the sake of attaining the state of a true ascetic, not for the sake of attaining the state of a true *brahmaṇa*, not for the sake of *nirvāṇa*. This, Kāśyapa, is called the ascetic interested in fame, renown and celebrity. (124)

'Now, Kāśyapa, who is the ascetic engaged in real, correct practice? He is that monk, Kāśyapa, who is disinterested in his own body and even in his own life, not to mention in profit, reverence or fame. Hearing the teaching of emptiness, the signless and the wishless, he is delighted at heart. He has understood thusness and he lives a life of purity, being disinterested even in *nirvāṇa*, not to mention in the delights of the triple realm. He is disinterested even in wrong speculations on emptiness, not to mention in wrong speculations on a self, living being, life-force, human or person. He takes the teachings as his refuge. He seeks the inward liberation from defilements; he does not run around outwardly. He sees all things as intrinsically extremely pure, undefiled. And he is an island unto himself; he is without any other island. He does not see the *Tathāgata* even as the embodiment of the teachings, not to mention in a physical body. He is not attached to the teachings even as being free from lust, not to mention as being expressible within the scope of speech. And he does not imagine the monastic community of the saints even as unconditioned, not to mention as a gathering of assemblies. He does not exert himself for the removal of anything at all, nor for the cultivation, nor for the realization. He does not grow forth in *saṃsāra*, he does not delight in *nirvāṇa*. He does not

seek liberation, nor the bondage of this world. Knowing that all things are intrinsically in the state of *parinirvāṇa*, he does not circle in rebirth, nor does he enter *parinirvāṇa*. This, Kāśyapa, is called the ascetic engaged in real, correct practice.

'One should exert oneself towards attaining the state of a true ascetic through real, correct practice. One must not allow oneself to be injured by being called by the name ascetic. These, Kāśyapa, are the four ascetics.' (125)

...

Then again the reverend Mahākāśyapa said this to the Blessed One: 'It is wondrous, Blessed One, it is wondrous, Sugata, how beneficial this king of *sūtras* the *Mahāratnakūṭa* is to those gentle sons and gentle daughters who have just set out in the Mahāyāna. How much merit, Blessed One, will that gentle son or gentle daughter produce who would teach even a single verse from this king of *sūtras*, the *Ratnakūṭa*?' (157)

When thus asked, the Blessed One spoke as follows to the reverend Mahākāśyapa: 'That gentle son, Kāśyapa, or gentle daughter might smash into atomic dust particles world-realms as numerous as the sands of the River Ganges, and having smashed them might disperse just so many of them. And filling all of the world-realms, so many as those particles of dust, full of the seven jewels he might give them as a gift to the *tathāgatas*, *arhats*, perfect and complete buddhas. And for each one of those *tathāgatas* among the buddhas, blessed ones, as many as the sands of the River Ganges, he might make monasteries as many as the sands of the River Ganges. (158)

'And he might serve the community of innumerable auditors of each one of those *tathāgatas* among the buddhas, blessed ones, as many as the sands of the River Ganges, with all the requisites for happiness for aeons as many as the sands of the River Ganges. And in order to devoutly serve those buddhas, blessed ones, throughout his whole life with pleasing bodily acts, vocal acts and mental acts he might smash world-realms as numerous