

The Manure of Experience and the Field of Bodhi

HOW TO GIVE BIRTH to bodhi, the awakened state of mind? There is always great uncertainty when you don't know how to begin and you seem to be perpetually caught up in the stream of life. A constant pressure of thoughts, of wandering thoughts and confusion and all kinds of desires, continually arises. If you speak in terms of the man in the street, he doesn't seem to have a chance, because he is never really able to look inward; unless perhaps he reads some book on the subject and has the desire to enter into a disciplined way of life, and even then there seems to be no chance, no way to begin. People tend to make a very sharp distinction between spiritual life and everyday life. They will label a man as "worldly" or "spiritual," and they generally make a hard-and-fast division between the two. So if one speaks about meditation, awareness, and understanding, then the ordinary person, who has never heard of such things, obviously would not have a clue and he probably would not even be sufficiently interested to listen properly. And because of this division he finds it almost impossible to take the next step and he can never really communicate with himself or with others in this particular way. The teachings, the instructions, the mystical writings, may all be very profound, but somehow he is never able to penetrate through to them, so he comes to a kind of dead end. Either a man is "spiritually inclined" or else he is a "worldly person," and there seems to be no way to bridge this gap. I think this is one of the great hindrances to the birth of bodhi. It also happens that people who have started on the path have

doubts and want to give it up. They may be happier if they gave it up and just ren-

So there is something not quite flowing from one thing to another, and this is what prevents the birth of bodhi. Therefore we have to study this something, to find some clue for the man in the street, something which he can understand and which will still be part of his life. Of course, there is a mysterious thing which could suddenly change the situation, possible, by saying only a few words, to the great teachers like Christ or Buddha were able. They had always to find the right approach to the situation. If one examines the character of the blockage, the difficulties, then one can see why it is because one is trying to untie a knot which takes ages and ages to unravel this entanglement. One has to approach from another angle and to understand the character of that person, who may be compared to a ladder, as an anchor, as a vehicle, so that it could give birth to bodhi. It is all very wonderful for the awakened person and that he is continuous with the Buddha and his teachings are concerned with everything—and to talk of the sangha, the community which can influence things. But one could never even think of taking refuge alone. One has to find the right approach. And one has within himself a specific character. He has intelligence and no personality at all, but each has a particular quality. It may be a great kind of quality, but one has just to take that particular quality as a fault or blockage, for that is the blockage, seed, or rather the full potentiality for giving birth, impregnated by bodhi. As one particular scripture pervades all beings there is no such person as a candidate."

This scripture was composed after the death of the Buddha. In the world of gods and men

doubts and want to give it up. They may perhaps think that they would be happier if they gave it up and just remained agnostics.

So there is something not quite flowing, there is a failure to relate one thing to another, and this is what prevents us from giving birth to bodhi. Therefore we have to study this problem. We have to provide some clue for the man in the street, some way of finding out, some concept that he can understand and which will still be related to his life and will still be part of his life. Of course, there is no magic word or miraculous thing which could suddenly change his mind. One wishes it were possible, by saying only a few words, to enlighten someone, but even great teachers like Christ or Buddha were unable to perform such a miracle. They had always to find the right opportunity and create the right situation. If one examines the character of the person and one studies the blockage, the difficulties, then one simply goes further and further, because one is trying to untie a knot which is already there, and it would take ages and ages to unravel this entanglement and confusion. So one has to approach from another angle and start off by just accepting the character of that person, who may be completely worldly-minded, and then choose one particular aspect of his activity or mentality and use it as a ladder, as an anchor, as a vehicle, so that even the man in the street could give birth to bodhi. It is all very well to say that Buddha was an awakened person and that he is continuously living as far as the essence of the Buddha and his teachings are concerned—the universal law permeates everything—and to talk of the sangha, the highest and most open community which can influence things. But still the majority of people could never even think of taking refuge along those lines. So somehow one has to find the right approach. And one always finds that a person has within himself a specific character. He may be regarded as having no intelligence and no personality at all, but each person in fact has his own particular quality. It may be a great kind of violence, or great laziness, but one has just to take that particular quality and not regard it necessarily as a fault or blockage, for that is the bodhi which is in him; it is the seed, or rather the full potentiality for giving birth—he is already impregnated by bodhi. As one particular scripture says, "Since buddha nature pervades all beings there is no such thing as an unsuitable candidate."

This scripture was composed after the death of Buddha, after the Parinirvana. In the world of gods and men everyone began to doubt

whether the teachings of Buddha would remain, because it seemed that now the wonderful teacher was gone and all that remained was a group of mendicant monks, and they did not seem to do very much, or they were not able to do so. So one of the disciples was lamenting and saying that now the world of samsara will go on and on, with its waves of passion, desire, hatred, and delusion; we will never have the chance to hear the Buddha's teaching and instructions, we are again plunged into darkness. So what shall we do? And as he lamented the answers came to his mind, that Buddha had never died, that his teaching is always present, and that the birth and death of Buddha is merely a concept, an idea. In fact, no one is excluded and all beings—anyone who possesses consciousness, anyone who possesses mind or the unconscious mind—all are candidates for bodhisattvahood, anyone can become an awakened person.

In this sense there is no such thing as a "secret doctrine" or a teaching which is only for the few. As far as the teaching is concerned it is always open; so open in fact, so ordinary and so simple, that it is contained within the character of that particular person. He may be habitually drunk or habitually violent, but that character is his potentiality. And in order to help give birth to bodhi, one must first of all respect that person's character and open one's heart to that violence in him. Then one must go into him fully and respect him so that the energetic, the dynamic aspect of violence can be made to serve as the energy aspect of the spiritual life. In this way the first step is taken and the first link is made. Probably the person feels very bad, that he is doing something wrong, or that something is not quite right. He may feel that he has big difficulties, that he has a problem which he wants to solve. But he cannot solve it, and probably in his search for a solution he merely substitutes other activities for the ones he has renounced. Therefore it is through simple, direct, and ordinary things in the person's mind and behavior that he arrives at the realization of the awakened state of mind.

Of course one cannot apply this in a general way. It is no use generalizing or trying to explain philosophical concepts to a man in his state. One has to study that particular moment of the person, that very moment of nowness. And there is always a kind of spark, a kind of gap. His character is not just one thing. There is active behavior, then passive, then active, continuously changing, and the first moment producing and giving birth to the next moment. So there is always a gap between these

two periods, and one has to take that one has to begin with some form of the samsara, the world of confusion, one can enter a state of mind, or nirvana. For samsara is the vehicle for nirvana. Therefore one should not think that samsara is good. It is a wonderful thing, it is something that begins to realize this, though at first he does not know what is good in it, but somehow, if he goes through it, he at least begins to feel good; and he is not just a "sinner" but that there is something good in it, exactly the same thing when one practices meditation. One begins to detect his own weaknesses. It may be a wandering mind or planning for one's future, or something like that. It may come, and it is as though one were sitting in meditation over rather than to practice meditation. One is aware of certain things, and this is very valuable. It is an opportunity.

It is often mentioned in the scriptures that if one has concepts, one cannot even start. So start with concepts, up theory. And then you use up the theory and get wisdom, to intuitive knowledge, and that is reality. So to start with, one should allow concepts. And if one wants to help a person, for example, in doing it: One is that you want to help him in a different way, you would like to mold him according to your way, like him to follow your way. That is still concepts. Compassion with an object, compassion finally with you as well—and that is not quite true compassion. Other people may be a very good one, but that is an approach of wanting to save the world as a whole. There has to be more than that, the first one has to start by respecting concepts. Though actually in Buddhist teachings, concepts are a hindrance. But being a hindrance does not mean anything. It is a hindrance and it is also a help. Therefore one must pay special attention to concepts.

It is said, I think in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, that one should throw away their rubbish and buy manure from others.

two periods, and one has to take that as the starting point. Probably one has to begin with some form of theory, because without respecting samsara, the world of confusion, one cannot possibly discover the awakened state of mind, or nirvana. For samsara is the entrance, samsara is the vehicle for nirvana. Therefore one should say that the violent character is good. It is a wonderful thing, it is something positive. And then he begins to realize this, though at first he may be perplexed and wonder what is good in it, but somehow, if he gets beyond the fascination part of it, he at least begins to feel good; and he begins to realize that he is not just a "sinner" but that there is something very positive in him. It is exactly the same thing when one practices meditation. A person may begin to detect his own weaknesses. It may be in a mild form, as a wandering mind or planning for one's future, but certain things begin to come, and it is as though one were sitting specially to think these things over rather than to practice meditation. Through this one discovers certain things, and this is very valuable, it provides a wonderful opportunity.

It is often mentioned in the scriptures that without theories, without concepts, one cannot even start. So start with concepts and then build up theory. And then you use up the theory and it gradually gives way to wisdom, to intuitive knowledge, and that knowledge finally links with reality. So to start with, one should allow and not react against things. And if one wants to help a person, for example, there are two ways of doing it: One is that you want to help him because you want him to be different, you would like to mold him according to your idea, you would like him to follow your way. That is still compassion with ego, compassion with an object, compassion finally with results which will benefit you as well—and that is not quite true compassion. This plan to help other people may be a very good one, but nevertheless the emotional approach of wanting to save the world and bring peace is not quite enough; there has to be more than that, there has to be more depth. So first one has to start by respecting concepts and then build from there. Though actually in Buddhist teachings, concepts are generally regarded as a hindrance. But being a hindrance does not mean that it prevents anything. It is a hindrance and it is also the vehicle—it is everything. Therefore one must pay special attention to concepts.

It is said, I think in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, that unskilled farmers throw away their rubbish and buy manure from other farmers, but those who

are skilled go on collecting their own rubbish, in spite of the bad smell and the unclean work, and when it is ready to be used they spread it on their land, and out of this they grow their crops. That is the skilled way. In exactly the same way, the Buddha says, those who are unskilled will divide clean from unclean and will try to throw away samsara and search for nirvana, but those who are skilled bodhisattvas will not throw away desire and the passions and so on, but will first gather them together. That is to say, one should first recognize and acknowledge them, and study them and bring them to realization. So the skilled bodhisattva will acknowledge and accept all these negative things. And this time he really knows that he has all these terrible things in him, and although it is very difficult and unhygienic, as it were, to work on, that is the only way to start. And then he will scatter them on the field of bodhi. Having studied all these concepts and negative things, when the time is right he does not keep them anymore, but scatters them and uses them as manure. So out of these unclean things comes the birth of the seed which is realization. This is how one has to give birth. And the very idea that concepts are bad, or such and such a thing is bad, divides the whole thing, with the result that you are not left with anything at all to deal with. And in that case you either have to be completely perfect, or else battle through all these things and try and knock them all out. But when you have this hostile attitude and try to suppress things, then each time you knock one thing out another springs up in its place, and when you attack that one, another one comes up from somewhere else. There is this continual trick of the ego, so that when you try to disentangle one part of the knot, you pull on the string and only make it tighter somewhere else, so you are continually trapped in it. Therefore the thing is not to battle any more, not to try and sort out the bad things and only achieve good, but respect them and acknowledge them. So theory and concepts are very good, like wonderful manure. Through thousands and thousands of lives we have been collecting so much rubbish that now we have a wonderful wealth of this manure. It has everything in it, so it would be just the right thing to use, and it would be such a shame to throw it away. Because if you do throw it away, then all your previous life until today, maybe twenty, thirty, or forty years, will have been wasted. Not only that, but lives and lives and lives will have been wasted, so one would have a feeling of failure. All that struggle and all that collecting would have been wasted, and you would have to start all over again from the beginning. There-

fore, there would be a great feeling of defeat more a defeat than anything having been the continual pattern. One may have been all sorts of things may have happened. good things. They are rather undesirable things. There are good things and bad things, but things disguised as bad and bad things.

One must respect the flowing pattern of the early part of one's present life right up to the pattern in it. There is already a very strong current running through it, so instead of meeting in a valley. And this river is very good to join this current and use it. This does not mean collecting these things over and over again. If one is lacking in awareness and wisdom, he will have the idea of collecting manure. He could collect it, and by acknowledging it he would have realized it, and would understand that this manure is real.

There is a story in the teachings of the Buddha who both wanted to search for the truth and to be a master. The master said, "Do not abandon anything you have accepted, use it in the right way." "Well, this is wonderful. I can go on being a master, up hundreds of brothels and hundreds of bars, drinking places, which in India was regarded as a lower-caste person would do. He began to do this, and he thought this was what he was supposed to do, and his friend thought this was not quite right and by examining himself he came to the conclusion that he had material already and did not have to collect more. So, to do any particular practice of meditation, to use the already existing heap, he achieved enlightenment. At this stage of realization, a kind of satori. Then he and his friend talked together and compared their experiences. He was not at all awakened; he was still struggling with these things. In fact he had fallen into an even deeper state. He even started to examine himself. But each of them was right, so they both decided to go on.

fore, there would be a great feeling of disappointment, and it would be more a defeat than anything having been gained. So one has to respect the continual pattern. One may have broken away from the origin and all sorts of things may have happened. These may not be particularly good things. They are rather undesirable and negative. At this stage there are good things and bad things, but this collection contains good things disguised as bad and bad things disguised as good.

One must respect the flowing pattern of all one's past lives and the early part of one's present life right up to today. And there is a wonderful pattern in it. There is already a very strong current where many streams meet in a valley. And this river is very good and contains this powerful current running through it, so instead of trying to block it one should join this current and use it. This does not mean that one should go on collecting these things over and over again. Whoever does that would be lacking in awareness and wisdom, he would not have understood the idea of collecting manure. He could collect it together and acknowledge it, and by acknowledging it he would have reached a certain point and would understand that this manure is ready to be used.

There is a story in the teachings of tantra about two close friends who both wanted to search for the truth. They went to a master, and the master said, "Do not abandon anything, accept everything. And once having accepted, use it in the right way." And the first one thought, "Well, this is wonderful. I can go on being just the way I am." So he set up hundreds of brothels and hundreds of butcher shops and hundreds of drinking places, which in India was regarded as something that only a lower-caste person would do. He began to run all these big businesses, and he thought this was what he was supposed to do. But the other friend thought this was not quite right and he began to examine himself; and by examining himself he came to the conclusion that he had enough material already and did not have to collect any more. He did not have to do any particular practice of meditation, but by acknowledging the already existing heap, he achieved enlightenment, or at least a certain stage of realization, a kind of satori. Then one day they met each other and talked together and compared their experiences. The first one was not at all awakened; he was still struggling and collecting and doing all these things. In fact he had fallen into an even worse trap and had not even started to examine himself. But each of them was quite sure that he was right, so they both decided to go and consult the teacher. And

the teacher said "I am afraid your way is wrong" to the one who was running the businesses. And he was so disappointed that he drew his sword and murdered the teacher on the spot.

There are these two possible approaches, and there may perhaps be some confusion between the two. Nevertheless, if a person is skilled enough—not necessarily intelligent—but skilled enough and patient enough to sift through his rubbish and study it thoroughly, then he will be able to use it. So, coming back to the subject of concepts, which is a very important example, the idea behind this is to develop a positive outlook and to recognize your great wealth. And having recognized one's concepts and ideas, one must also, in a sense, cultivate them. One has a tendency to try and abandon them or throw them away. But one should cultivate them, not in the sense of reading more books and having more discussions and philosophical disputes—that would be the other way, the way of the friend who ran the businesses—but simply, since you already have enough wealth, just go through it. Just as a person who wants to buy something first has to check and see how much money he has. Or else it is like going back to your old diaries and studying them, and seeing your different stages of development, or going up to the attic and opening up all the old boxes to find the old dolls and toys that were given to you when you were three years old, and looking at them and examining them together with their associations. In this way you gain a complete understanding of what you are, and that is more important than continuously creating. The point of realization is not to try and understand only the awakened state and pretend not to understand the other side, because that becomes a way of cheating oneself. You see, you are your own best friend, your own closest friend, you are the best company for yourself. One knows one's own weaknesses and inconsistency, one knows how much wrong one has done, one knows it all in detail, so it doesn't help to try and pretend you don't know it, or to try not to think of that side and only think of the good side; that would mean that one was still storing one's rubbish. And if you store it like that you would not have enough manure to raise a crop from this wonderful field of bodhi. So you should go through and study even right back to your childhood, and of course if you have the great ability to go back to your previous lives, you should do so and try to understand them.

There is also a story about Brahma, who came one day to hear the

Buddha preach, and the Buddha asked, "When the first time began to look and check into the ego), and when he first looked into himself, he said, 'I'm Brahma, the Great Brahma, the Creator.' He asked, 'Why do you come and listen to me? I don't know.'" Buddha then said to him, "Now you are Brahma, with his wonderful ability to see into the past, and he couldn't bear it. He simply broke down. Then Buddha said, 'Well done, good.' You see, this was the first time that he had the ability to see into his distant past, and so on. This does not mean that a person has to be able to see it, but it is very important to check and go through it, nothing is unexplored. Having started from the view of the whole thing—like an aerial view of a landscape, all the trees and the road and the buildings—being anything that one pretends not to see.

One must also examine fear and expectation. One examines that; if one fears old age, one examines that; if one is uneasy about a certain ugliness in oneself, or about a certain weakness of any kind, one examines that. One also examines one's mental image of oneself, the image one has about it. It is very painful in the beginning, breaking down—when you first go through it, it is the only way to do it. Sometimes one touches on it, but one is almost too shy to look into it, but one goes through it. And by going into it one finally understands oneself, one gains a thorough knowledge of oneself. Now, we have explored the negative aspect of the ego, we have gained some idea of the positive side. We have just started the basic collection of material, we have to study it and see how to put it to use.

By now one has developed this positive outlook, one has a certain amount of understanding, and that is the theory. It is still theory, but you do not throw it away; you cultivate this kind of theory and you continue to work on it; intellectually only up to a certain point, then you are working on and on—and without having ref-

Buddha preach, and the Buddha asked, "Who are you?" And Brahma for the first time began to look and check into himself (Brahma personifying the ego), and when he first looked into himself he couldn't bear it. He said, "I'm Brahma, the Great Brahma, the Supreme Brahma." So Buddha asked, "Why do you come and listen to me?" And Brahma said, "I don't know." Buddha then said to him, "Now, look back into your past." So Brahma, with his wonderful ability to see his many past lives, looked; and he couldn't bear it. He simply broke down and wept in front of Buddha. Then Buddha said, "Well done, well done, Brahma! That is good." You see, this was the first time that Brahma had used his wonderful ability to see into his distant past, and so he finally saw things clearly. This does not mean that a person has to break down and feel bad about it, but it is very important to check and go through everything so that nothing is unexplored. Having started from there one gains a complete view of the whole thing—like an aerial view which takes in the whole landscape, all the trees and the road and everything—without there being anything that one pretends not to see.

One must also examine fear and expectation. If there is fear of death, one examines that; if one fears old age, one examines that. If one feels uneasy about a certain ugliness in oneself, or a certain disability or physical weakness of any kind, one examines them as well. And one should also examine one's mental image of oneself, and anything one may feel bad about. It is very painful in the beginning—as Brahma showed by breaking down—when you first go through it and see it. But this is the only way to do it. Sometimes one touches on a very painful spot where one is almost too shy to look into it, but somehow one still has to go through it. And by going into it one finally achieves a real command of oneself, one gains a thorough knowledge of oneself for the first time. Now, we have explored the negative aspects, and have also probably gained some idea of the positive side. We still have not attained anything, we have just started the basic collection of manure, and now we have to study it and see how to put it to use.

By now one has developed this positive outlook and one has achieved a certain amount of understanding, and that is what is known as real theory. It is still theory, but you do not throw it overboard. In fact you cultivate this kind of theory and you continuously work on and on intellectually; intellectualizing only up to a certain point, of course, but still working on and on—and without having reference to books or talks or

discussions. It has to be a kind of contemplation and firsthand study. One's theory then begins to develop and takes on a shape of its own. And then you begin to discover not only the positive things you have done, but also the element of bodhi which is in you. You begin to realize that you have this great ability to create such a wonderful theory. At this stage, of course, a person often feels that he has reached a state of enlightenment, a state of satori, but this is a mistake. Naturally, at this first discovery, there is great excitement, great joy, bliss, but he still has to go on. So, having gone through these things, and having studied and explored them, one finds that one's theory does not stop, as ordinary theory does after reading books on philosophy—or scriptures, for that matter. But this theory continues. There is a continual investigation, a continual finding out. Sometimes of course this theory does stop. One reaches a certain point where one becomes too much fascinated by the whole thing; one searches with too much eagerness, and then one comes to a stop and can't go any further. That doesn't mean there is a breakdown or a blockage, it means one is trying too much with an idea, one is trying too much with the inquisitive mind. Then one has to channel it differently, without the eagerness and without the fascination, but going step by step—as it says in the scriptures: at an elephant's pace. You have to walk very slowly, unemotionally. But walk with dignity, step by step, like an elephant walking in the jungle.

So, your continual struggle may be a very slow one, but Milarepa says, "Hasten slowly and you will soon arrive." By this time theory is no longer theory. Well, it is also a kind of imagination. So many imaginary things come in. And this imagination may even be a kind of hallucination, but again, one does not abandon that. One does not regard it as a wrong track, as though one had to go back to the right one. In fact, one uses imagination. So theory brings imagination, which is the beginning of intuitive knowledge. One then discovers that one has a great imaginative energy, and so one goes on, gradually, step by step. In the next stage one goes beyond just imagination—and this is not hallucination at all. There is something in us which is more real than merely imagination, though it is still colored by imagination. It is somehow ornamented by this sort of imaginary outline, but at the same time there is something in it. It is like reading a children's book, for example; it is written for children and it is entirely imaginary, but there is something in it as well. Perhaps the writer simplifies his experience, or tries to be childlike, so

one finds something in it. And the same matter. And that imagination is not just fiction. If one looks back to theory, or if one took, it may seem a bit tiring or even boring. One hasn't wasted time at all.

You have scattered the manure very early in the time to sow the seed and wait for the preparation, and now one is ready to dig. It is already begun to develop. There are many things to ask and many things are still not certain. One doesn't really need to ask questions at all. One needs an external person to say that it is so, although that is not true. The question is like the first layer, like the soil. When you remove it the answer is there. This is the teaching of the philosopher of Buddhism, Asanga, describing the intuitive mind, if one studies true logic. The question and the opponent's attitude—are in us. So the answer, because the question contains the seed of going into it in depth; that is the true nature. One has reached a kind of feeling; the intuitive feeling. And with that feeling it is as though one is in a trance hall.

one finds something in it. And the same is true of any story, for that matter. And that imagination is not just hallucination, but real imagination. If one looks back to theory, or if one traces back to the first steps one took, it may seem a bit tiring or even unnecessary, but it isn't so. One hasn't wasted time at all.

You have scattered the manure very evenly over the field and now is the time to sow the seed and wait for the crop to grow. That is the first preparation, and now one is ready to discover. And that discovery has already begun to develop. There are many questions one would like to ask and many things are still not certain. But in fact at that stage one doesn't really need to ask questions at all, perhaps one simply needs an external person to say that it is so, although the answer is already in one. The question is like the first layer, like the skin of an onion, and when you remove it the answer is there. This is what the great logician and philosopher of Buddhism, Asanga, described as "the intuitive mind." In the intuitive mind, if one studies true logic, one finds that the answers—and the opponent's attitude—are in us. So we don't have to search for the answer, because the question contains the answer in it. It is a matter of going into it in depth; that is the true meaning of logic. At this stage one has reached a kind of feeling; the imagination becomes a kind of feeling. And with that feeling it is as though one has reached the entrance hall.