

A lineage, a map, a living legacy

Notes from a talk by Satyalila about Sangharakshita's Complete Works, April 2017

It took me a while to find my way into what I wanted to say on this auspicious occasion of us celebrating the appearance of three important volumes of Sangharakshita's Complete Works. This evening is a part of us celebrating the first 50 years of the Triratna Buddhist Community and it's great that we also have a Ratnasambhava puja later, as part of that celebration. Ratnasambhava is the head of the 'jewel family' and he's associated with the Buddha's qualities of creativity, abundance and generosity.

Eventually I realised that I just needed a much bigger, more 'abundant' approach to this talk. I needed to 'zoom out' a long way, to get a big enough perspective to begin to say what I really want to say about the Complete Works. And why I've decided to devote a significant bit of my life to helping ensure they are as accessible and useable as possible.

So I'm going to talk about time and about space – and at the end there be some stuff about more practical matters!

Anniversary & Lineage (Time)

So. We're celebrating 50 years of the Triratna Buddhist Community. How *young* we are! I say this not just because I'm someone who turned 50 the year before last ;-). I'm also saying with an awareness of what a long time it takes to establish a new tradition, a new lineage. And that's what we are. A new lineage. There's never been a Buddhist lineage quite like us before. I've just been working on the exhibition for Adhithana to celebrate this anniversary and we've themed it around the 'six distinctive emphases'¹ of the Triratna Buddhist Community.

We've got a lot in common with the rest of the Buddhist world and we've also got a number of very distinctive 'emphases' which make us quite different – we're an ecumenical Buddhist movement, which means we draw inspiration from *whichever* strand of the Buddhist tradition helps us to deepen our Going for Refuge; we have one ordination regardless of gender – and there's no 'lay/monastic split'; we emphasise the importance of the arts, of friendship and of working together in teams as a spiritual practice. Above all, we recognise the absolute centrality of Going for Refuge. I can't go into these emphases more now, but you'll find stuff about them online or have a read of the exhibition when you're next at Adhithana – hopefully for our Big Sangha Retreat at the end of May!

Establishing a new lineage together

And we – *together* – are *in the process of* establishing a new Buddhist lineage. We're putting down Buddhist roots into the 'soil' of western culture in a way that's never been done before. (Remember Nandavajra's lovely image of the oak trees from our celebration of 50 years of Triratna a few days ago?) And establishing a new lineage takes a long time. Around 1100 CE, ie almost a thousand years ago, Tilopa began a new Buddhist lineage that became the Kagyu tradition. One of his most famous disciples was Milarepa, but it was his disciple Gampopa who really established the Kagyu lineage 'on the map'.

1 For more on the 'six distinctive emphases' see the exhibition catalogue, available from <http://www.lulu.com/shop/satyalila-jen-brown/triratna50-catalogue/paperback/product-23292577.html?ppn=1>

And what fascinates me about that is that Gampopa wasn't even *born* when Tilopa died. Gampopa was born 10 years *after* Tilopa's death. I'm saying this because it's made me aware that the person who most 'gets' – and effectively hands on - what Bhante's been trying to communicate to us in the last 50 years *may not yet even be born!* It maybe someone who comes to the movement after many of us have shuffled off. We have a responsibility to the practitioners of the future in our lineage.

Getting to know Sangharakshita and his thought

We're not just practising in an existing Buddhist tradition – we're co-creating a new one. And part of that is getting to know Sangharakshita and the vision and teachings on which our movement is based. (And to be 'testing these teachings, as a goldsmith tests gold, in the fires of our own experience.) Part of this is understanding how the Complete Works point to something *beyond* Bhante, to the Dharma that inspired him, not to him as an individual. Dhivan and I have decided to offer some study sessions in the autumn to explore the complete works and create the opportunity to 'encounter' Sangharakshita through these writings.

Laying the Foundations

We're in an important time when we're kind-of still 'laying the foundations of this new(ish) movement – it did occur to me that the volumes of these Complete Works are kind-of 'brick like!' ;-). When Vidyadevi, one of the editors, gave a talk on the Complete Works at Adhithana on Saturday she talked about the famous 'Mappa mundi' in Hereford Cathedral – a very early map of the world, which has Jerusalem at the centre and all sorts of lands and strange beasts ranged around it. She likened us gathering Sangarakshita's Complete Works to compiling a kind of 'Trirata Mappa Mundi' which has the centrality of Going for Refuge at the Centre and whole different realms and ways of approaching that central 'principle' ranged around. It is map that is unique to us.

I've recently begun working as the person compiling the indexes for the complete works – I worked on one of the present 3 volumes. And I've realised that what fascinates me is coming to understand the 'architecture' of Bhante's thought. How his ideas and teachings fit together to form a vast overarching vision - not unlike a vast 'cathedral of thought', in a way. Or – to return to the metaphor from Saturday – like a great net or canopy of jewels, twinkling to guide us.

We need the 'whole map' or the whole 'construction' of the teachings because we'll each walk a particular route through them, or occupy a particular part of the 'cathedral'. What works for one as a method doesn't work for all – that's why we have a panoply of possibilities in our movement. The important thing is that they all have the 'taste of freedom', that they lead us away from craving, aversion and ignorance towards contentment, love and freedom.

Multi-Dimensional Mandala

Each of teachings in the Complete works was given *in response* to a particular set of circumstances – at a particular time and in a particular place. There's no 'one size fits all' method of practising the Dharma, tho' there are over-arching principles. And it's important that we learn to distinguish between the principles (the 'doctrines', one might say) and the

practices (or 'methods'). In her talk on Saturday, Vidyadevi pointed out the difference between what she called 'general teachings' and 'pith instructions'. We need both. We need the whole range of teachings to choose from, but we also need an experienced guide, a spiritual friend or teacher, who can help us work out what's needed when. It's like having a chest full of potent medicines and needing a skilled prescriber to help us choose the right one.

The Complete Works will give us a 360 degree perspective on the Dharma offering different ways in

- for introverts
- for extroverts
- for the rational part of ourselves
- for the non-rational part of ourselves

There are teachings that appeal more to

- thinking – eg study
- imagination – eg the arts
- feelings – meditation and friendship
- activism/social engagement

We need to ensure that none of these important strands gets lost. At different times different emphases and approaches are more 'fashionable' or just more suited to the prevailing conditions. But we must take care not to lose the one's that don't appeal to us at the mo, as 10, 15, 20 years down the line, they might be *just* what we need! When the movement started, the first of Bhante's books that was published was 'The Essence of Zen' – this was in response to the great surge of interest in Zen Buddhism in the late 1960s. But if that was all we were left with from Bhante's books, we'd be really impoverished.

Practicalities

So what about the practicalities? Well. The Complete works came about partly because when Amalavajra asked Bhante what he'd like for his 90th birthday he said 'to see all my books in print'. So Amalavajra set to and raised over £100,000 to make the project happen. Now it's thoroughly planned we know that there are going to be 27 volumes and that it's going to take 7 years to prepare and publish them all. And also to undertake the translation of some of them for use in other languages.

They're arranged into six 'baskets'. This is 'our version' of the 'three baskets' or Tripitaka of the Pali Canon. We have:

Foundation Teachings (6 volumes)
India (4 volumes)
The West (3 volumes)
Commentaries (6 volumes)

Memoirs (5 volumes)
Poems and Stories (2 volumes)
Concordance and Appendices (1 volume)

Four volumes will be published each year and substantial work is being done to improve the quality of the books with

- prefaces to contextualise the teachings
- many more footnotes to trace Bhante's teachings back to their original sources
- new indexes, to make it easier to navigate and find what you want
- new material eg Milarepa, India talks, Other lectures not published before
- a complete concordance to act as a 'gazeteer' to the whole 'map' of the teachings.

Like books in the 18th and 19th century, these complete works need subscribers to support their production as the funds raised are a start, but they don't cover the entire costs. There are three options for books:

- hardback
- paperback
- e-books

The importance of actual physical books isn't to be underestimated. E-books are handy, but formats change quite rapidly and, I've found, they can be more ephemeral than we realise. Bhante was very clear about wanting his actual, physical library to be safely housed for use by future generations. In the same way, actual physical copies of the books are important.

So I'd like to ask you to consider becoming a supporter of this part of the foundations of our lineage by taking out a subscription.

If you do this, you'll immediately receive the 3 newest volumes:

The Rainbow Road – the first instalment of Bhante's memoirs....

The 'Three Jewels II' – actually a good one to have first!....

Mahayana Myths and Stories – WLS/SoGL/ VKN (with a fine index!) - not just about the sutras, but how to look at A sutra – a 'how to approach it' manual, in a way

The **cost** of subscribing to the Complete Works could be as little as £3.25/month or £39/year if you'd simply like an e-book. But for £11.58/month – less than the price of a glossy magazine or a latte-a-week, you could have both a hardback and an e-book subscription. There are options between these two for hardback and paper-back only, or paper-back plus e-book...

in 2018 there will be the new edition of Bhante's masterwork 'The Survey of Buddhism' along with two completely new books which will give us all 12 of his seminars exploring the Songs of Milarepa – a delightful (and often amusing) account of the teacher/disciple relationship between Milarepa and his hapless disciple Rechungpa....