

The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong

Extracts from Sangharakshita Complete Works Volume 20

On memoir – as distinct from autobiography

I... realized that I was not, in fact, writing my autobiography at all, that is, not writing my auto-biography: I was writing my *memoirs*. In the words of the unrevised version of the first of the ten amputated chapters the work on which I was engaged was 'less a collection of facts than an evocation of memories, from the degree of whose distinctness the more delicately perceptive may gauge both the relative intensity of the experiences whose impressions they are and the nature and ultimate extent of the influence exerted by those experiences on the development of character and formation of opinion of the narrator.

from *The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong* p.477

Responding to Beauty

[In childhood, in Tooting:]

A few weeks after we had returned, sunburnt and happy, from one of the Shoreham holidays, we left the old house where I had spent all the eleven years of my life, and moved to a semi-detached council house on the Streatham side of Tooting.

The removal took place in early autumn. What afterwards became father's garden, complete with lawn, flower-beds, and vegetable plot, was then a wilderness. Large yellow-green leaves from the old fig tree behind the house carpeted the ground. Weeds grew shoulder high. Half-way down the garden, which was more than a hundred feet long, stood a line of ragged blackcurrant bushes, round which Joan and I were soon playing cowboys and Indians. At the far end, underneath the back fence, was a rhubarb bed. Along the fence on the left grew loganberries which had not been pruned for years. But best of all I remember the chrysanthemums, which grew red and yellow and bronze all over the garden. So many of them there were that all that autumn the air was filled with their acrid scent. Indeed, whether because I had never seen chrysanthemums growing in such profusion before, or because there is a subtle relation between scents and moods, or because they symbolized something I felt but could not express, those frost-bitten blossoms growing so rankly in the neglected garden were one of the major emotional experiences of my life.

from *The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong* p.34

[In Muvattupuzha, Kerala, c. 1947-8:]

For someone of my temperament, conditions at our ridgetop retreat were now ideal. When not actually meditating or studying, I was content simply to sit on the low veranda wall watching the way in which the rubbery green leaves of the plantain flapped and shivered in the seemingly motionless air, or listening to the rise and fall of the lilting, yodelling cry with which, throughout the day and night, a cultivator worked the Persian wheel in rice-fields half a mile from our gate. Sometimes, when I had been deeply moved by the beauty of the scene or by my own reflections, words and descriptive phrases would rise unbidden from the depths, occasionally forming themselves into lines of verse, into poems. For Satyapriya, however, this idyllic existence was not enough. Even with our excursions into the town, most of which I would quite gladly have forgone, a life of meditation and study did not provide him with sufficient outlets for his abounding energies, and he was soon casting about for something else to do. Eventually, he decided to organize the distribution of powdered milk to the children of the locality, a number of whom were clearly under-nourished.

from *The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong* p.289

Meeting monks and learning ānāpānasati

[in Singapore c.1946:]

Having made the acquaintance of the Chinese Buddhists, I was eager to get in touch with the other Buddhist communities. From either Buddha Maharaj or Tan Keng Lock I learned of the existence of a Sinhalese temple on the outskirts of the city. Here, in the tiny reception room, I met the Venerable M.M. Mahaweera, a placid, somewhat inscrutable person who for a number of years had been the incumbent. Apart from Walpola Rahula, who talked only politics, and a monk in Kandy who wanted to go to America, he was the first Theravadin monk I had met who knew English well enough to discuss simple doctrinal questions.

Perhaps because of my Western preconceptions, life at the temple seemed not tranquil but merely stagnant. Two or three Sinhalese and one or two Chinese Buddhists were the only visitors. Consequently I went there much less often than to the Ashram. On one of my visits, however, the Venerable Mahaweera smilingly told me that three learned Sinhalese monks had arrived and would be staying with him for two or three weeks. This was an opportunity not to be missed.

The monks were the famous trio Soma, Kheminda, and Pannasiha... The subject I was most eager to discuss with him [Soma], however, was not the acceptability or unacceptability of the Mahayana, or even the right way for a monk to look at a naked

woman, but meditation. Producing a slender booklet on *ānāpānasati*, or mindfulness of the process of respiration, which I had bought in Ceylon, I asked if he could recommend the method it described. Bhikkhu Soma's reply was unhesitating. It was the best of methods, he said, the method employed by the Buddha on the eve of his Enlightenment. In fact, having himself derived great benefit from it, he had translated the canonical text in which it was expounded into English, together with its commentary. A copy of this work, together with two or three other books he had published, he presented to me. That night, for the third time since leaving England, I sat beneath my mosquito net meditating while others slept. (The Unit had been shifted to a group of houses in another suburb and there were now five or six of us to a room.) This time success was immediate. My mind became at first buoyant, then filled with peace and purity, and finally penetrated by a 'quintessential, keen, ethereal bliss' that was so intense I had to break off the practice. Obviously, the conditions under which I was then living were not ideal for meditation. I therefore resolved to continue the practice later, when they had become more favourable. This resolution I kept. Though the Theravada sectarianism of Bhikkhu Soma and the author of the slender booklet was the antithesis of my own acceptance of the entire Buddhist tradition, in all its ramifications, I remain grateful to them for having introduced me to a practice which was for long the sheet-anchor of my spiritual life.

from *The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong* pp.143–5

First real experiences of meditation

[At Anandamayi's ashram near Dehra Dun c. 1947:]

Having made up our minds to ask Anandamayi's advice about meditation, we requested her to grant us a private interview. This took place the same night between 11 and 12. The ashramites had warned us that the Mother hardly ever granted such interviews, and then only for a few minutes, and the fact that the two black sheep of the Ashram should be thus highly favoured so soon after their arrival gave rise to many murmurs and much heart-burning. 'I've been Ma's devotee for years,' complained more than one person bitterly, 'and she's never given me a private interview.' Even the crane-necked youth, we were astonished to learn, had not enjoyed this favour.

But we were too excited to take much notice of their reactions. Banerjee, who had no previous experience of meditation, was as eager to practise respiration- mindfulness as I was, for he already knew about my experiment with this method in Singapore. Anandamayi apparently had not heard of anapana-sati before, but when, with Banerjee as interpreter, I explained in detail the successive stages of the practice, she nodded approvingly.

Most of the interview was devoted to hints of a general nature which, as we afterwards discovered, were matters of common knowledge. But one hint on how one-pointedness of

mind that had been lost at a higher stage of the practice could be recovered at a lower stage proved useful during the whole of my subsequent practice of this method. At the conclusion of the interview Banerjee asked her to bestow on him a religious name. I was already known as Dharmapriya, 'Lover of the Law', having adopted the name in Calcutta. Anandamayi therefore named Banerjee Satyapriya, 'Lover of Truth'.

Both of us felt strangely moved and elated by this interview, which not only gave a final sanction to our decision to enter the path of meditation but stamped it as irrevocable, and it was with profounder bows than usual that we retired from Anandamayi's presence and walked in silence beneath the starry vastness of night back to the sleeping mango grove, where in the morning our practice was to begin.

For the next three or four weeks, in fact until the day of our departure from Kishengunj, Satyapriya (as my friend must now be called) and I meditated twice daily, at dawn and at dusk, in one of the small clearings in the strip of jungle running from the mango grove down to the canal.

One's first experience of meditation, like one's first love, retains in memory a virginal freshness too delicate and too delicious for words. We meditated for an hour at a time, sitting cross-legged, with spine erect, chin tucked in, and loosely closed hands resting, thumbs upwards, on our knees. Our meditation seats, each of which consisted of a folded blanket covered with a clean towel, were placed about twenty feet apart. If one finished a few minutes before the other, as usually happened, he uncrossed his legs and quietly waited for him to move. At Anandamayi's suggestion, each of us maintained a spiritual diary wherein, immediately after each meditation session, we recorded the degree of concentration attained, the kind of mental distractions that had arisen, and any unusual experiences that might have occurred.

At ten o'clock every morning, having breakfasted with Pandit-ji and Sudhir in the tent (we always slept outside), we ran down to the canal to bathe. The iciness of the swift-rushing waters, which roared so loudly between their narrow stone banks that we could hardly hear each other speak, contrasted with the intense heat of the mid-morning sun. Soon after Satyapriya's arrival I had adopted Indian dress, a white shirt and sarong, so that soaping myself in the open air was no longer the problem it had been in Ahmedabad. But I could not help feeling slightly embarrassed by the glance of a wandering goatherd, or the inquisitive looks of the village boys sporting naked downstream. Washing clothes was now the problem. Usually Satyapriya, after soaping them, slapped both mine and his on a big flat stone, swinging each one up into the air and then down with a sudden jerk of his powerful arm, as he considered mine too feeble for the strenuous work. We then went to the Ashram. As the time of our meditation session coincided with that of the bhajan we stopped going in the evening. Instead, we passed the time quietly among the mango trees until Pandit-ji and Sudhir returned.

What experiences Satyapriya had in meditation I no longer remember, though each always showed the other his notebook. My own experiences were mostly in the form of visions. Once I saw the Virgin Mary, all in blue and white, as Murillo has depicted her. On another occasion Anandamayi appeared. Once, again, I had a vision of the Buddha, but as I gazed the nose suddenly became enormously elongated and his head turned into that of an elephant. When I asked Anandamayi the meaning of this strange occurrence she explained that the Buddha had given me the sign of siddhi, or success, the elephant-headed god Ganesha being regarded by Hindus as the remover of obstacles, both worldly and spiritual, and hence the giver of success in all undertakings. Presently I began to see beautiful landscapes, then as it were white birds flashing through brilliant blue sky, and finally kaleidoscopic geometrical patterns that seemed made of jewels. All these visions were remarkable for gem-like purity and brilliance of colour, as though one was being given glimpses of a higher and more beautiful world.

from *The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong* pp.206–8

Meditation

Here perpetual incense burns;
The heart to meditation turns,
And all delights and passions spurns.

A thousand brilliant hues arise,
More lovely than the evening skies,
And pictures paint before our eyes.

All the spirit's storm and stress
Is stilled into a nothingness,
And healing powers descend and bless.

Refreshed, we rise and turn again
To mingle with this world of pain,
As on roses falls the rain.

see *The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong* p.213

From faith based on intuition to faith based on reason

[In Muvattupuzha, Kerala, c. 1947-8:]

Though the rapidity and completeness of Satyapriya's volte-face took me by surprise, it did not at first make any significant difference to my own routine. Study, meditation, and

literary work were my only real interests, and these I had diligently pursued ever since our arrival in Muvattupuzha. During the three or four months that my friend had been preoccupied with plans for the Industrial School, his repeated absences from the Ashram had indeed given me additional time for reflection, and a number of things had become clear to me. Six years had passed since I had first read the Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Wei Lang and realized that I was a Buddhist. During that time I had read much, not only about Buddhism but about Hinduism and other spiritual traditions. I had also had the opportunity of coming into personal contact with both Buddhists and Hindus. Very much to my regret, I had to admit that so far I had been more fortunate in my contacts with Hindus than with Buddhists. Among the Buddhist monks I had met there was none who could be compared with the Yoga Swami of Jaffna, or with Anandamayi. Bhikkhu Soma was perhaps comparable with Swami Pavitrananda, but on the whole such Theravadin monks as I had encountered had impressed me as less active, less cultured, and less spiritually alive than their counterparts in the Ramakrishna Mission. But for all these disappointments I was more of a Buddhist than ever. Indeed, so firmly was I convinced of the truth of Buddhism, that even had I never met another Buddhist whom I could respect, or had I been the only Buddhist in the world, it would have been quite impossible for me to follow any other path. My present isolation in the midst of a completely Hindu environment served only to intensify my awareness of Buddhism. Encounters with one or another manifestation of the harsh and divisive spirit of the caste system reminded me of Buddhism's compassionate concern for the welfare of all sentient beings. Pious references to God, or to the Supreme Self, recalled its rejection of a Supreme Being and of an unchanging immortal soul.

Partly as a result of this conflict with Hinduism, partly as a result of its own natural development, at this period my faith in Buddhism underwent a significant change. From being a quasi-instinctive attraction, a sort of spiritual falling-in-love, it became more of the nature of a reasoned conviction that included understanding as well as emotion, clarity as well as passion. While in Calcutta I had immersed myself in the writings of D.T. Suzuki, particularly in his *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* and *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, both of which had given me further tantalizing glimpses into the magical world of the Mahayana. Now, relying mainly on Bhikkhu Silacara's translation of the first fifty discourses of the *Majjhima-Nikaya*, or *Collection of Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha*, and on Mrs Rhys Davids's *Home University Library book on Buddhism*, I started exploring colder and clearer regions of the spirit. Three of the Buddha's teachings in particular drew my attention. These were the doctrine of Dependent Origination (or Conditioned Co-Production), the Four Noble Truths, and the Three Characteristics of Conditioned Existence. Previously, though they were all well known to me, I had given them very little systematic attention. Now they occupied my mind virtually to the exclusion of everything else. Besides reflecting on them during the day I meditated on them at night. Or rather, as I meditated, flashes of insight into the transcendental truths of which they were the expression in conceptual terms would sometimes spontaneously arise.

Something of this concern with the fundamentals of what, for want of a better word, we call Buddhist thought, appears in the articles I wrote at this time. Several of them deal, in one way or another, with the doctrine of anatta, which represents the Buddha's realization of the fact that the 'soul' (atta) is not an entity but a process, so that if one's definition of reality involves the notion of permanence the soul is necessarily unreal. One of these articles, entitled 'The Goal of Life's Endeavour', was the cause of serious unpleasantness with Satyapriya. It had been written specially for the Silver Jubilee souvenir published by the local printing-press, the proprietor of which was an Ashram member. After Satyapriya had read it I pointed out to him that the structure of the article corresponded to that of the Four Noble Truths. Instead of being pleased with this device, as I had expected, he became almost insane with fury. I was trying to propagate Buddhism by underhand methods. I was trying to undermine Hinduism, he shouted. He would expose me, he would denounce me to the authorities, he would see that I was imprisoned. It was an hour before he calmed down. Eventually, he admitted that even though I was seriously at fault he ought not to have become so angry, and declared that since his fault balanced mine he would forgive me for what I had done to him even though, with my usual intransigence, I refused to acknowledge that I was in the wrong.

from The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong pp.301-3

Sangharakshita I and Sangharakshita II

[Studying at Benares Hindu University, c.1948:]

As might have been expected, during the whole of the time that I was with him Kashyap-ji made no attempt to restrict my freedom, in particular my freedom to read and write what I pleased. All his books, as well as his ticket to the University library, were at my disposal, and he never questioned the use I made of them. Indeed, it did not seem to occur to him to question it. When not occupied with Pali, Abhidhamma, and Logic I therefore read more widely than I had done for several years. As the mood seized me, I also wrote. After being confined to works that I had come across more or less by accident, it was delightful to be able to range at will through all the fields of literature, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, sacred and profane. But delightful though it was, such freedom was not without problems of its own. More clearly than ever before, it brought out into the open a conflict in my interests, perhaps a conflict in my nature itself, which the circumstances of my wandering life with Buddharakshita had tended to obscure.

The nature of this conflict was well illustrated by two letters which I received during the second half of my stay at Buddha Kutti. One was from the redoubtable Bhikkhu Soma. He had already taken me very seriously to task for 'gadding about' instead of settling in one place and getting down to serious work, and having seen some of my recent contributions to the Buddhist magazines of Ceylon he now wrote to put me to rights as regards my literary work. When I could write such excellent articles on Buddhist philosophy, he demanded, why did I waste my time writing those foolish poems? By a strange

coincidence the other letter, which was from a Sinhalese Buddhist laywoman, arrived on the same day, and expressed exactly the opposite point of view. When I could write such beautiful poems on Buddhism, she asked, why did I spend so much time writing those dry, intellectual articles? The truth of the matter was that I agreed – and disagreed – with both correspondents. The conflict was not so much between the philosophically-inclined monk and the poetry-loving laywoman, as between Sangharakshita I and Sangharakshita II. Sangharakshita I wanted to enjoy the beauty of nature, to read and write poetry, to listen to music, to look at paintings and sculpture, to experience emotion, to lie in bed and dream, to see places, to meet people. Sangharakshita II wanted to realize the truth, to read and write philosophy, to observe the precepts, to get up early and meditate, to mortify the flesh, to fast and pray. Sometimes Sangharakshita I was victorious, sometimes Sangharakshita II, while occasionally there was an uneasy duumvirate. What they ought to have done, of course, was to marry and give birth to Sangharakshita III, who would have united beauty and truth, poetry and philosophy, spontaneity and discipline; but this seemed to be a dream impossible of fulfilment. For the last two and a half years Sangharakshita II had ruled practically unchallenged. Aided and abetted by Buddharakshita, who strongly disapproved of poetry, he had in fact sought to finish off Sangharakshita I altogether, and but for the timely intervention of Swami Ramdas, who firmly declared that writing poetry was not incompatible with the spiritual life, Sangharakshita I might well have died a premature death in Muvattupuzha.

However, despite the bludgeoning that he had received he had not died, and after leading a furtive existence in Nepal he was now coming into his own again at Buddha Kuti. Kashyap-ji's dealings were of course mainly with Sangharakshita II, but he had no objection to Sangharakshita I being around, and even spoke to him occasionally. Soon Sangharakshita I was feeling strong enough to demand equal rights. If Sangharakshita II devoted the afternoon to *The Path of Purity*, Sangharakshita I spent the evening immersed in the poetry of Matthew Arnold, which for some reason or other exerted a powerful influence during this period. When the former wrote an article on Buddhist philosophy, or edited the second edition of Kashyap-ji's *Buddhism for Everybody*, the latter composed poems. Sometimes, while one self was busy copying out extracts from the books he had been reading, the other would look idly out of the window and watch the falling of the rain. One day there was a violent clash between them. Angered by the encroachments of Sangharakshita I, who was reading more poetry than ever, and who had written a long poem which, though it had a Buddhist theme, was still a poem, Sangharakshita II suddenly burned the two notebooks in which his rival had written all the poems he had composed from the time of their departure from England right down to about the middle of their sojourn in Singapore. After this catastrophe, which shocked them both, they learned to respect each other's spheres of influence. Occasionally they even collaborated, as in the completion of the blank verse rendition of the five paritrana sutras that had been started in Nepal. There were even rare moments when it seemed that, despite their quarrels, they might get married one day.

from *The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong* pp.449–5

The Six 'Baskets' of Bhante's Complete Works

<p>Foundation</p> <p>1 <i>A Survey of Buddhism + The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path</i> 2 <i>The Three Jewels I (The Three Jewels +++ various shorter works)</i> 3 <i>The Three Jewels III (Who is the Buddha? What is the Dharma? +)</i> 4 <i>The Bodhisattva Ideal (The Bodhisattva Ideal + Endlessly Fascinating Cry +)</i> 5 <i>The Purpose and Practice of Buddhist Meditation</i> 6 <i>The Essential Sangharakshita</i></p> <p>India</p> <p>7 <i>Crossing the Stream: India Writings I (Crossing the Stream +++)</i> 8 <i>Beating the Dharma Drum: India Writings II (Various)</i> 9 <i>Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism I (Ambedkar & Buddhism +)</i> 10 <i>Dr Ambedkar and the Revival of Buddhism II (Lecture Tours in India)</i></p> <p>The West</p> <p>11 <i>A New Buddhist Movement (Various)</i> 12 <i>Previously Unpublished Talks</i> 13 <i>Eastern and Western Traditions (Various)</i></p>	<p>Commentary</p> <p>14 <i>The Eternal Legacy/Wisdom Beyond Words</i> 15 <i>Pali Canon Teachings and Translations</i> 16 <i>Mahayana Myths and Stories</i> 17 <i>Wisdom Teachings of the Mahayana</i> 18 <i>Milarepa and the Art of Discipleship I</i> 19 <i>Milarepa and the Art of Discipleship II</i></p> <p>Memoirs</p> <p>20 <i>The Rainbow Road from Tooting Broadway to Kalimpong</i> 21 <i>Facing Mount Kachenjunga</i> 22 <i>In the Sign of the Golden Wheel</i> 23 <i>Moving Against the Stream</i> 24 <i>Through Buddhist Eyes</i></p> <p>Poetry, Aphorisms, and the Arts</p> <p>25 <i>Poems and Stories (Complete poems +++)</i> 26 <i>Aphorisms and the Arts (Peace is a Fire, Religion of Art +++)</i></p> <p>27 Concordance and Appendices</p>
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