



Ratnasambhava and Positive Emotion

4: Shraddha

In response to what symbolises or embodies our ideals, the natural response of Metta is sraddha, so sraddha could be seen as a 5th brahma vihara.

We can see shraddha as a receptivity to the three jewels: to what is real. An openness

- to what seems strange because it is beyond the bounds of the familiar
- to what seems 'other' because it is from beyond the scope of what we identify with and so seems to be coming from beyond self.
- To what seems distant because it is from beyond the tight centre of what is clung to

This opening is an undefendedness that is itself a form of heroism. As the Ratnagunasamcayagatha puts it:

Call forth as much as you can of love, of respect and of faith! Remove the obstructing defilements and clear away all your taints! Listen to the Perfect Wisdom of the gentle Buddhas, Taught for the weal of the world, for heroic spirits intended.

We can relate to this receptivity, metaphorically, as a ground. As Longchenpa puts it:

Within the expanse of spontaneous presence lies the ground for all that arises. Since beginningless time it's never been anything, yet it arises as anything at all!

Longchenpa – The Basic Space of Phenomena

Relaxing from preoccupation with particular experience in to awareness, we move in to presence. This presence is just happening: not something we are contriving, confecting, fabricating, or doing. There is just presence: spontaneously manifest: just happening.

Within this space of spontaneous presence lies the ground for all that arises. As all sounds arise from silence and return to silence. As all movement moves within stillness. The ground from which experience arises is the space of sensitivity and receptivity. Abiding in this ground is shraddha.

The Sufi poet Rumi describes this ground in a poem:

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.
The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep."*

Rumi – A Great Wagon

As the ground for all that arises, this is the dancing ground, the summoning ground, the mystic ground.

It is also the ground in to which all ceases: the cremation ground, the charnel ground, the burning ground. Cessation is the falling away of bondage: liberation. It is the blowing out of the flames of greed, hatred and delusion: nirvana.

All conditioned things are suffering
All conditioned things are impermanent
All conditioned things are insubstantial.
Nirvana is peace.

The Four Seals of Mahamudra

Whilst this openness to the expanses beyond our sense of the familiar is unsettling, it is also enticing. Baudelaire captures this draw towards the open expanses of the unknown in his poem 'Le Voyage':

stay if you can, stir if you must ... One hope remains: to venture forth, with
'Onward!' as our cry ... Death, old admiral, up anchor now: this country
wearies us. Put out to sea! What if the waves and winds are black as ink, our
hearts are filled with light. You know our hearts! ... any abyss will do – deep
in the Unknown to find the *new*!

Baudelaire – The Voyage

Bhante describes this practice of receptivity, remaining with the unknown, open to what might come from outside one's sense of self, in his poem 'Advent':

I listened all day for the knock of the Stranger,
And I often looked out from the door.
The table was scrubbed, the brass shining,
And well swept the floor.

The shadows grew longer and longer,
In the grate the fire flickered and died.
'It's too late. He never will come now'
I said, and sighed.

I sat there musing and musing,
The spinning-wheel still at my side.
The moonlight came in through the window
White like a bride.

As the clock struck twelve I heard nothing
But felt He had come and stayed
Waiting outside. And I listened -
And I was afraid.

Sangharakshita - Advent

Also, in "The Lotus of Compassion" he describes how this quality of spiritual receptivity involves both a going forth and a going for refuge:

The Lotus blooms tonight.
O leave the crowded shore where men buy and sell,
Shake off the soft detaining fingers of your friends,
And in a little boat,
At midnight, when the moon is full,
And glitters at you from the water,
Row swiftly to the quiet Heart of the Lake where the Lotus blooms,
The great golden Lotus of the Lord's Compassion;
And you will feel the sweetness ineffable of its heart-fragrance
Coming on a breeze which ripples the face of the silent waters
To meet you beneath the stars

Sangharakshita – The Lotus of Compassion