

A Stream of Stars

Reflections and Aphorisms

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Buddhism in Miniature

The Unseen Flower

Compassion is far more than emotion. It is something that springs
Up in the emptiness which is when you yourself are not there,
So that you do not know anything about it.
Nobody, in fact, knows anything about it
(If they knew it, it would not be Compassion);
But they can only smell
The scent of the unseen flower
That blooms in the Heart of the Void.

A Buddhist does not 'represent' Buddhism. If you represent Buddhism, you are not a Buddhist. A Buddhist *is* Buddhism – in miniature.

Aphorism

If you treat non-violence as the highest principle you can't go far wrong; so much follows from that. But, of course, non-violence isn't just a question of abstaining from killing and from eating meat. To follow the principle of non-violence is to be brought into the very heart of the spiritual life.

Q & A: Tuscany 1981

Ever since the dawn of history ... two great principles have been at work in the world: the principle of violence and the principle of non-violence or, as we may also call it, the principle of love.... The principle of violence is a principle of Darkness, the principle of non-violence a principle of Light. Whereas to live in accordance with the principle of violence is to be either an animal or a devil or a combination of the two, to live in accordance with the principle of non-violence is to be a human being, in the full sense of the term, or even an angel.

The Priceless Jewel

More and more I see the spiritual life in terms of learning to switch from the power mode to the love mode. If one can do that, everything else will follow.

Correspondence

To be a Buddhist in name only is worse than useless. A real Buddhist should change a little every day – should grow a little every day.

Correspondence

Religion cannot be taught; it can only be caught. You have to catch the spirit of religion, and you do that through the influence of other people.

Buddhism and Education. Lecture

Let us do away with the divisions between monastic and lay Buddhists, between men and women Buddhists, and between the followers of different sects and schools of Buddhism. Let us have an integrated Buddhism and an integrated Buddhist community. Let us base ourselves firmly and unmistakably upon our common Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Buddhism and the West

Women should stop looking over their shoulders at men and trying to prove themselves equal to men. This does not mean that the sexes are unequal. It means that the concepts of equality and inequality are inappropriate. Women should simply do what is best for their own development as individuals without bothering about whether or not men are doing the same things or about where it leaves them in relation to men.

Correspondence

To me it seems more obvious than ever that if we are to generate enough enthusiasm and inspiration to enable us to break through the bonds of our own individualism, as well as through the strongly anti-spiritual tendencies of modern life itself, we need the Bodhisattva Ideal. Only the Bodhisattva Ideal can carry us beyond ourselves and the world – and back again into them on a totally different basis.

Correspondence

If our deeper and more powerful emotions are still tied up with things of a worldly nature, our involvement with the Dharma can only be superficial, however sincere we may be. If we are to be truly Buddhist, our involvement with the Dharma must be truly passionate.

Correspondence

The whole criticism of religion as escapism is ridiculous. If you are suffering why shouldn't you get out? What's wrong with escaping? It's the sensible thing to do.

Seminar on the Udana

The more deeply we get into the spiritual life the more our sense of reality changes. What seemed very real before now seems relatively unreal, and vice versa. Things seem more or less real according to the degree of our emotional investment in them. In any case, experiences – strange or otherwise – come and go, and we should not allow ourselves to become attached to them or even to take much interest in them. The main thing is to go on deepening our Going for Refuge in whatever way we can.

Correspondence

Four basic propositions: (1) Man can change. (2) He can change himself. (3) He can help others to change. (4) Together they can change the world.

Aphorism

It is crucial to keep the transcendental element in Buddhism in mind. If you lose sight of that, you lose sight of Buddhism itself – and run the risk of getting bogged down in psychology.

Seminar on the Itivuttaka

Some people like Zen (so they say) because it is iconoclastic. They become quite upset, however, should anyone venture to be iconoclastic about Zen.

Aphorism

The more ‘scholarly’ a Buddhist is, the more firmly he needs to base himself on Going for Refuge, ethics, and meditation. Otherwise his influence may be disastrous.

Aphorism

In order to reconcile Buddhism and Christianity you’ve got to know Buddhism and to know Christianity. You’ve got to be honest. You’ve got to be true to Buddhism and true to Christianity and reconcile the real Christianity with the real Buddhism. If you have an imaginary version of Christianity and an imaginary version of Buddhism, it might be easy to reconcile the two, but have you really reconciled Buddhism and Christianity? To do that you must know them really well; know them in depth; know them thoroughly. Only then might it be possible to suggest a framework vast enough to include them both – and that framework would have to be very vast indeed.

Seminar on the Mahaparinibbana Suttanta

The only real advantage that Christianity has over Buddhism is that it is more poetic.

Aphorism

Buddhists are tolerant in the sense that they are able to differ profoundly from the followers of other religions on certain issues without regarding those followers with feelings of hostility, and without behaving violently towards them. Buddhist tolerance is not based on a belief in the oneness of all religions.

Correspondence

A spiritually barren period is not unusual in the life of even the most committed Buddhist. What is important is that we realize it is only a phase and wait for it to pass, and, in the meantime, do nothing that we may later on regret.

Correspondence

A Long Way to Go

Unpublished Poems

'Every day is a good day': a thousand doors fly open.
'Every day is a good day': the sun and moon stand still.

The Blue Cliff rises high into the air;
Below it is wrapped in mist, above it is shrouded in cloud.
What use is a path up the sheer side,
If, however far you climb, you can never reach the top?

A hundred peaks behind, a hundred peaks before;
All at once, the Blue Cliff rises in the distance.
Birds disappear into the mist, monkeys' cries are lost in silence;
Darkness gathers, and there is still a long way to go.

For many people today morality amounts to not doing what we want to do, and doing what we do not want to do, because – for reasons we do not understand – we have been told to by someone in whose existence we no longer believe.

Vision and Transformation

Rest on your laurels and they will wither.

Aphorism

Strictly speaking there is no such thing as moral or spiritual stagnation. Contrary to what people usually think, stagnation is not a state in which, while things do not get any better, they at least do not get any worse. It is a state in which things get worse without our doing anything to make them worse.

Aphorism

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish a temptation from an opportunity.

Aphorism

It's much easier to deal with external pressures when there is no conflict within oneself. If you are relatively integrated, even when the whole of you is under pressure you have a better chance of resisting temptation. But if you've got a traitor within that is going to co-operate with the enemy without, you're in a much more difficult position.

Seminar on the Sutra of Golden Light

It is a very dangerous thing to regard oneself as the instrument by which God, karma, or whatever, punishes other people. It could be called the Genghis Khan complex.

Aphorism

It is not that one is dishonest, but that one is only honest up to a point.

Aphorism

Never promise anything which it is not in your power to perform. That is, never promise anything for the performance of which you have to rely on other people.

Aphorism

We may have to leave our roots behind, in a sense, but it is a question of growing beyond them, not severing them abruptly by an act of will. I once wrote a poem entitled 'The Root Speaks'. Sometimes we have to listen to that Root.

Correspondence

Not everything that is legal is moral, and not everything that is illegal is immoral.

Aphorism

Faith is the capacity for being emotionally moved – at least for the time being – by something that transcends the senses and even the rational mind.

Seminar on the Way of Wisdom

If you won't get under the shower you can't complain if it isn't wetting you.

Aphorism

In a sense, to live from one day to the next requires a leap of faith, so it is hardly surprising that a step as momentous as committing oneself to the Three Jewels should require such a leap.

Correspondence

The hindrance of doubt isn't a sort of suspension of belief until such time as you have sufficient grounds to be able to make up your mind. Doubt is almost deliberately refusing to make up your mind – allowing yourself to be in a vacillating mental state, even, so that you will not have to commit yourself one way or the other.

Seminar on the Precious Garland

There is no doubt that spiritual development is sometimes a slow and painful process. It is not difficult to have 'insights' of a general kind, but it is very difficult to apply them to oneself.

Correspondence

It is certainly possible to think of spiritual growth in terms of removing imperfections and becoming more pure, and many people find this approach helpful. But that does not justify dismissing the complementary method – trying to develop – as 'trying to make oneself into something else'. Both models have their limitations, and neither should be understood too literally.

Correspondence

Humility is the pride of the weak.

Aphorism

We should modify the popular statement that one should 'accept oneself'. Dr Johnson defines the verb 'to accept' as 'to receive with approbation' – that is to say, with approval. But surely there is much in ourselves of which we do not approve, even much of which we strongly disapprove. We should not want to hang on to that, whatever it is. It would be better to say: 'Let us accept what is skilful in ourselves, but reject what is unskilful.' Indeed, without such an attitude, no spiritual development is possible.

Fifteen Points for Order Members. Lecture

Humiliation may even be counted amongst the ways in which Perfect Vision might arise – being cut down to size by reality itself – so it can be a very positive experience indeed. If you can take it as such, you find you can survive it. Life goes on. You pick yourself up, dust yourself down, and start all over again.

Wisdom Beyond Words

We should not underestimate the role of the will in spiritual life. It is not enough to have feeling for the Buddha. We have to will to be like the Buddha. One might even say there is no spiritual life without will. Indeed, spiritual life could be defined as the constant willing of the good in all circumstances.

On the Opening of the Manchester Buddhist Centre. Lecture

One of the most important aspects of the spiritual life is that one should be aware of the consequences of one's own actions.

Seminar on the Sutra of Golden Light

Many people experience themselves in a purely passive way, feeling that they are victims of circumstances. Sometimes the important thing is to *do* something: to experience your own energy, experience yourself in action. Otherwise you don't really feel alive. No real spiritual progress is possible until you start experiencing yourself as acting rather than acted upon.

Seminar on the Jewel Ornament of Liberation

Compromise is the enemy of the spiritual life, besides being psychologically undermining.

Correspondence

By itself, experiencing suffering doesn't teach one anything. If there has been no insight into the truth of suffering, one can very quickly forget, even if one has suffered a great deal. And, of course, insight into the truth of suffering can be gained even when one is happy.

Seminar on the Jewel Ornament of Liberation

Try to make sure that the influences that are impinging on you are positive rather than negative. We may not be able to shut out all the input all the time, but we can be much more careful about what we choose to let in.

Fifteen Points for Order Members. Lecture

True confession is very important in the spiritual life, and very rare. In true confession there is no feeling of irrational guilt and no fear of rejection or any other form of punishment. On the contrary, one has complete trust in the person to whom one is making the confession, which means that one does not see him or her as an authority figure or as wielding any sort of 'power'. It is very difficult for a Westerner, and an ex-Christian, not to see the Buddha as God, i.e. as the embodiment of the power mode rather than of the love mode, and for this reason it is very difficult for a Western Buddhist to practise true confession and engage in true worship.

Seminar on the Sutra of Golden Light

The Courage of One's Positive Emotions

The Stream of Stars

The stream of my desire no more
Rolls through the muddy fields of earth;
Between the azure banks of heaven
A stream of stars has come to birth.
No more on my soul's current float
Dead leaves from wind-dishevelled trees;
But swanlike, many a shining boat
Bends low before the heavenly breeze.
The fountains of my heart no more
Ooze slow into some stagnant place,
But in great tranquil rivers pour
Into the boundless sea of space.

Wherever there is a wish to repeat an experience there is craving.

Aphorism

Buddhism distinguishes between *kamachanda*, 'worldly desire', and *dhammachanda*, 'spiritual desire'. So the aim is not to eliminate desire, but to eliminate craving.

Correspondence

A human being is a stream of consciousness deeply imbued with the dye of craving.

Seminar on the Dhammapada

Our everyday life may be pleasurable or painful; wildly ecstatic or unbearably agonizing; or just plain dull and boring much of the time. But it is here, in the midst of all these experiences, good, bad, and indifferent – and nowhere else – that Enlightenment is to be attained.

Wisdom Beyond Words

Some people, it seems, don't regard enjoyment as a natural thing. They almost have to teach themselves to enjoy life. André Gide, the French writer, had to discipline himself into enjoying the sun, the air, and the sea. It was quite an effort on his part.

Seminar on the Jewel Ornament of Liberation

If what we see is the utilitarian value of something, we are relating to it from a need, which becomes desire, which turns to craving for the object conceived as fulfilling that desire. The tree is seen not as existing in its own right, for its own sake, but as something to fulfil our own need. If, however, we have no desires to be fulfilled, there is no subject and no object. That is the state of the Bodhisattva – empty of any desire to use things for any particular purpose. All that is left is aesthetic appreciation. If you are a Bodhisattva you enjoy the world much as you enjoy a work of art or an artistic performance – with the difference that you do not experience a division between yourself and something 'out there'.

Wisdom Beyond Words

Pleasure is a passive state, happiness an active one. We usually think of ourselves as lying back and enjoying happiness, but it isn't like that. We experience true happiness when we are active. And we are active when we meditate successfully, for then we are powerfully generating skilful mental states, and what can be more active – more creative – than that?

Seminar on the Jewel Ornament of Liberation

The worldly-minded person thinks in terms of happiness, the spiritually-minded person thinks in terms of liberation.

Seminar on the Precious Garland

In the search for freedom, happiness is a by-product.

Seminar on the Precious Garland

It has been said that Buddhism is an ascetic religion and this is very true. But it is ascetic in the original Greek sense of getting into training, to enable yourself to reach the goal of Enlightenment. You won't reach that goal if you are flabby or out of condition, spiritually speaking.

Seminar on the Nature of Existence

The more you enjoy life the more ascetic you will be, and the more ascetic you are, the more you'll enjoy life.

Seminar on the Nature of Existence

Happiness is to be irreversibly creative.

Seminar on the Nature of Existence

It's a bit ironic to talk about giving up worldly pleasures when you take up the spiritual life. It's much more like giving up worldly miseries and taking up spiritual happiness.

Seminar on the Samannaphala Sutta

It was desire that dashed from my hands the chalice that love raised to my lips.
The Veil of Stars. Poem

You can no more confine love within the limits of human hearts
Than you can catch the showering moonlight in cups of gold.
The Veil of Stars. Poem

One can love people only as far as one understands them, and be ready to love them more when one understands them better.

Aphorism

It is better to establish real, living contact with our negative emotions (which means acknowledging them and experiencing them but not indulging them) than to remain in that alienated state and not experience our emotions at all.
A Guide to the Buddhist Path

Despite what the Dharma says, or is supposed to say, I don't think grief (*soka*) is invariably, under all circumstances, a negative (i.e. unskillful) state, though of course undue indulgence in grief is negative. In any case, no negative mental state should ever be repressed (repression being an unconscious process), as distinct from being consciously suppressed, in the sense of not being allowed to dominate the mind or to find inappropriate outward expression.

Correspondence

Passivity is not to be mistaken for receptivity. The wet clay is not the open jar.
Aphorism

It is often said that one should have the courage of one's convictions. Perhaps one should also have the courage of one's positive emotions.

Correspondence

The only way to avoid hating one's fellow men is to love them.
Aphorism

We only too often find it easier to hate the wicked than to love the good.
Aphorism

Love is no mere flabby sentiment but the vigorous expression of an imaginative identification with other living beings.

The Ten Pillars of Buddhism

Love is a self-giving of person to person, even a surrender of person to person – ‘surrender’ here meaning the complete abandonment of any advantage derived from the power mode.

The Ten Pillars of Buddhism

Personal development is not an easy matter for anyone, and there are times when we must bear with others, just as there are times when they must bear with us.

Correspondence

The Heat of the Furnace

New

I should like to speak
With a new voice, speak
Like Adam in the Garden, speak
Like the Rishis of old, announcing
In strong jubilant voices the Sun
Moon Stars Dawn Winds Fire
Storm and above all the god-given
Intoxicating ecstatic
Soma, speak
Like divine men celebrating
The divine cosmos with divine names.
I should like to speak
With a new voice, telling
The new things that I know, chanting
In incomparable rhythms
New things to new men, singing
The new horizon, the new vision
The new dawn, the new day.
I should like to use
New words, use
Words pristine, primeval, words
Pure and bright as snow-crystals, words
Resonant, expressive, creative,
Such as, breathed to music, built Ilion.
(The old words
Are too tired soiled stale lifeless.)
New words
Come to me from the stars
From your eyes from
Space
New words vibrant, radiant, able to utter
The new me, able
To build for new
Men a new world.

Culture is the preserved remains of what others before us have achieved, experienced, or discovered. By appreciating, understanding, and appropriating it we enrich our own lives and contribute to our own development.

Seminar on the Tibetan Book of the Dead

Culture is a rainbow bridge thrown from the material world to the spiritual world.

Aphorism

On finding itself in a Western environment, Buddhism has become the focus for an interaction between the timeless truths of the Dharma and the language of the secular Western culture through which it seeks to express those truths. Western Buddhism will be the creation of that interaction.

The FWBO and 'Protestant Buddhism'

The fact that there is Buddhist culture does not necessarily mean that there is Buddhism, although there may be. Very often what people from the East bring to the West is Buddhist culture rather than Buddhism proper.

Seminar on the Precepts of the Gurus

Art is a means of overcoming alienation. We repossess ourselves of what we have lost by recreating it from within us.

Aphorism

Art is an object through which we find our way back to the subject.

Aphorism

Religious art is that kind of poetry, music, painting, or any other species of art, which conduces to the experience of egolessness. Much conventionally religious art ... is not religious art in this sense. It not only fails to induce the experience of egolessness, but even positively strengthens the ego-sense.

The Religion of Art

The arts capture crude, egoistic energy and process it until it's more refined. It can then be utilized, so to speak, for the purposes of the spiritual life.

Seminar on the Tibetan Book of the Dead

Religion has been defined as what a man does with his solitude. Art might be similarly defined.

Aphorism

Aesthetic appreciation is pure delight in the object of contemplation for its own sake. This is the difference between lust, which is stimulated by the sensuously attractive, and the aesthetic sense, which is stimulated by pure beauty. If you look with craving, you see things in terms of sensuous attractiveness, but if you look with metta, with loving kindness, you see things in terms of beauty. Metta is disinterested. When it's a question of lust you want to grab; when it's a question of aesthetic appreciation, you just want to stand back and contemplate.

Seminar on the Precious Garland

Only too often people think the poets do not mean what they say. They think it is 'just poetry'. The poets, however, mean *exactly* what they say.

Aphorism

One of the signs of a great writer is that even his bad work is interesting – more interesting than the best work of a mediocre writer.

Aphorism

Every creative writer is the founder of a new religion.

Aphorism

The fact that an author is dissatisfied with his work does not mean that the critics have the right to be.

Aphorism

One does not write a book. One writes sentences.

Aphorism

Writing memoirs is the penance one performs for having lived – or not lived.

Aphorism

The writer invites you to read his book, the artist to look at his painting; the religious teacher invites you to share his life.

Aphorism

When poetry is no longer enjoyed it ceases to be poetry – at least for the one reading it or listening to it.

Aphorism

With so many masterpieces of world literature to read it is a pity to waste one's time on trivia. Indeed, it is a pity to waste one's time on anything that does not genuinely enhance the quality of one's life, that does not deepen one's positive emotions – that does not, in short, help one to become enlightened.

Correspondence

Speaking personally, I never show what I am writing to anybody, and never discuss it. I do not even really like to be asked how I am 'getting on with my writing'. Authorship is an essentially solitary business, and any outside interference, whether from government censors or well-meaning friends, is rightly to be resented.

Correspondence

Diaries can be very misleading – especially when they contain nothing but facts.

Aphorism

Creative writing in the true sense is a spiritual discipline that calls for the same kind of seriousness and dedication as the spiritual life itself.

Correspondence

At the moment of the creation of a work of art, the feelings experienced may be very intense and powerful. They may come welling up from the depths quite uncontrollably. Should anything get in your way, or should there be any sort of interruption or disturbance, you can react quite violently, just because you are so absorbed in what you are doing. In the process of artistic creation you are bringing together into a unity a whole mass of materials, by virtue of the intensity of your feelings, even of your Insight, and great psychic pressure is needed to do that. Milton's artistic inspiration has been described as being like a great furnace which he kept banking up until it was just a mass of glowing coals. Into it he flung all sorts of things – his knowledge, all the materials he had gathered – but such was the heat of the furnace that he could melt down all those materials and cast them into a mould of his own.

Seminar on the Jewel Ornament of Liberation

What we need is a new generation of writers and artists who are committed to the spiritual life, as well as dedicated to their particular art, and for whom the former inspires the latter while the latter provides the former with a means of expression. This is, of course, something much more subtle than simply using the arts as a vehicle of religious propaganda.

Correspondence

The written word remains. Even the noblest actions and the wisest utterances are known to us only by their being – eventually – written down.

Correspondence

Writing is no substitute for face-to-face communication – unless one can write a whole book.

Correspondence

Cultivate an aphorism as you would cultivate a rose; but be careful not to remove the thorns.

Aphorism

Sometimes we use words very loosely and inaccurately, because we do not ask ourselves what they mean. Our speech is laden with jargon from various sources, and that does not conduce to clarity. So let us understand the meaning of the words we speak, and especially the words we write, consulting the dictionary if necessary. The most useful book in the world, I think, leaving aside the scriptures, is the dictionary.

Fifteen Points for Order Members. Lecture

I plead for a greater, more vivid realization of the poetic nature of speech. This should be our approach to language all the time, because language, as applied to non-material realities, is essentially metaphorical, poetry rather than prose.

Q & A on the Jewel Ornament of Liberation

In metaphor language begins to transcend itself. Metaphor offers us a clue to the nature of reality.

Wisdom Beyond Words

Language – even abstract language – is essentially metaphorical. Of course, one can ask how, if this is so, words can describe reality. But that assumes that reality is not metaphorical, that it is somehow abstract, as science usually thinks of it. But if language *is* metaphorical, this suggests that reality too is metaphorical, and that one can get closer to reality by *realizing* that language is metaphorical.

Q & A: Tuscany 1984

The Real Revolutionary

I Want to Break Out

I want to break out,
Batter down the door,
Go tramping black heather all day
On the windy moor,
And at night, in hayloft, or under hedge, find
A companion suited to my mind.
I want to break through,
Shatter time and space,
Cut up the Void with a knife,
Pitch the stars from their place,
Nor shrink back when, lidded with darkness, the Eye
Of Reality opens and blinds me, blue as the sky.

Children aren't just members of the family; they are eventually going to be members of society. They have to be brought up to consider other people's feelings and respect other people's property.

Fifteen Points for Buddhist Parents. Lecture

One of the most important things we can teach our children is to empathize with others – with other children, with animals, with all living beings. Otherwise their recognition of the distinction between right and wrong will be purely theoretical.

Fifteen Points for Buddhist Parents. Lecture

Parents will always be deeply affected by anything that concerns their children, whether for good or ill; but we have to try to remain detached, without losing our human feelings. In fact we should try to universalize our feelings, and feel as much for our neighbour's child as for our own.

Correspondence

The first purpose of education is to enable the individual to take his place as a functioning, responsible member of the wider society to which he belongs.

Buddhism and Education, Lecture

The group is a collectivity organized for its own survival, in which the interests of the individual are subordinated to those of the collectivity. The group is also a power-structure in which the ultimate sanction is force.

New Currents in Western Buddhism

Group attitudes die very hard.

Correspondence

The truly human, consciously evolving individual is characterized by awareness, emotional positivity, responsibility, intelligence, creativity, spontaneity, imagination, and insight.

The Priceless Jewel

The Buddha's teaching is concerned solely with the individual, both alone and in free association with other individuals. It shows the individual how to grow, shows him or her, by means of actual methods, how to develop awareness and emotional positivity, how to live spontaneously and creatively, how to accept responsibility for oneself and for others. Gautama the Buddha, the original teacher, was and is an example of a true individual. Indeed, he was an individual of the truest kind: an Enlightened individual.

New Currents in Western Buddhism

If one is healthy, one has energy, and if one has energy, one naturally wants to put it into something – that is, one wants to work, whether the work consists in digging the soil or painting a picture.

Correspondence

Without unremitting effort nothing truly great is ever achieved. All the great artists seem to have been great workers. Perhaps this was because they loved their work.

Correspondence

Sometimes I think work – real work, work in which one believes – is the greatest enjoyment in life.

Correspondence

Work should be an expression of one's life, not simply the means to one's existence.

Correspondence

'A load of sandalwood is still a load,' said the camel.

Aphorism

Much of what is thought of as history is really myth. Not that it is necessarily any the worse for that, of course, but it would be better if things were called by their right names.

Aphorism

Though rights and duties are reciprocal, one should place the emphasis on one's duties rather than on one's rights. If you faithfully discharge your duties, the chances are that other people will observe their duties towards you, and you will in fact get your rights. If there is a mutual recognition of duties, there is no need to speak of rights at all. Other factors being equal, people start claiming their rights only when other people have been very remiss in the performance of their duties.

Seminar on the Duties of Brotherhood in Islam

Rights exist only within the group: within the spiritual community there are only duties.

Aphorism

From a Buddhist point of view, your duty is what you see as incumbent upon yourself in view of the principles in which you believe, and the situation in which you find yourself.

Q & A: Tuscany 1982

The remedy for any injustice or inequality in human relationships, whether domestic, social, civic, political, cultural, racial, or religious, is an insistence not upon the rights of one party, but on the duties of the other.

Crossing the Stream

Formerly one needed courage to attack institutions. Now one needs courage to defend them – and still more courage to create them.

Aphorism

It is not on ideological grounds that one tries to break down class barriers. One tries to break them down simply because one wants to be able to relate to other people as individuals.

Q & A: Tuscany 1982

Liberalism is the belief that life should be fair. Pseudo-liberalism is the belief that fairness can be achieved by unfair means.

Aphorism

Equality is a concept that has a place only in arithmetic.

Aphorism

Inequality is life. Equality is death.

Aphorism

A good man sometimes helps to perpetuate a bad system, and vice versa.

Aphorism

The larger society needs to have a set of shared values, in however dilute a form. Otherwise it could not cohere – could not be a society at all. At the same time, there is little doubt that the truly ideal society could exist only on a small scale, in a number of different embodiments within the larger society.

Correspondence

‘Political correctness’ is one of the most pernicious tendencies of our time – far more pernicious than pseudo-liberalism, of which it is probably the extreme form.

Correspondence

It would seem that there will always be a minority of people in society who will try to harm others. The majority will therefore need to invoke force, at least to restrain them from their anti-social conduct. I don’t think one can get round that.

Q & A: Tuscany 1982

It is in the interests of Buddhists to work wherever possible for a pluralistic society; a threat to any minority is a threat to Buddhism. But for there to be a pluralistic society, the adherents of the religions and other ideologies which exist within that society must recognize the possibility, even the desirability, of their peaceful coexistence. That does imply a certain common ethical outlook, certain ethical values, such as the ideal of tolerance, or the spirit of live and let live.

Q & A on the Noble Eightfold Path

If everyone bears his or her full share of responsibility, there will be no room for authoritarianism. Unfortunately, people criticize others for authoritarianism while at the same time they are reluctant to recognize their own responsibility within a given situation. They want others to accept all or most of the responsibility, and do all or most of the work; at the same time, they want to be able to control those others.

Correspondence

It is sometimes said: ‘There is no revolutionary like an old revolutionary.’ The young revolutionary is just hot-blooded, just impulsive, and usually he gets over it and settles down and conforms, but the real revolutionary is one who, the older he gets, the more revolutionary he gets.

Seminar on the Sevenfold Puja

No Last-Minute Methods

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.

'All worldlings are mad,' said the Buddha, and in the long run a mad person may do anything. Hence the importance of developing insight into reality.

Correspondence

There are no last-minute methods. Since one is, in principle, facing death every minute, all insight meditation practices are methods of 'coping' with the problem of death and consequently with the fear of death. At times when death seems near one should therefore do whatever practice one is most familiar with, or has most faith in. One should be careful not to relax one's efforts when the crisis has passed, or appears to have passed, which is what usually happens.

Correspondence

Meditation is essentially the willing of the Good.

Aphorism

Without regular meditation, our spiritual life has no sheet anchor.

Correspondence

The optimism of the creative mind persists despite unpleasant stimuli.... [It] loves where there is no reason to love, is happy where there is no reason for happiness, creates where there is no possibility of creativity, and in this way 'builds a heaven in hell's despair'.

Mind – Reactive and Creative

Most people either repress fear completely or allow it to diffuse itself throughout the whole of their experience in the form of a vague feeling of anxiety or dread. But fear is inseparable from one's consciousness of oneself as a separate individual. As one advances in the spiritual life, and especially as one practises meditation, one is sure to have to face it.

Correspondence

As what we fear approaches, we realize it is not really this that we are afraid of after all. What it is that we are afraid of, we do not know.

Aphorism

Logic is a highly irrational phenomenon.

Aphorism

Reason must be supreme in all human affairs, say the Rationalists. But on what grounds do they accept the truth of this statement? If it is on authority, reason is not supreme; if on rational grounds, then they assume the supremacy of reason in order to establish the supremacy of reason.

Aphorism

A philosophy cannot be founded on reasons.

Aphorism

The development of positive emotions ... is absolutely crucial to our development as individuals. It is, after all, our emotions which keep us going; we are not kept going by abstract ideas. It is our positive emotions which keep us going on the spiritual path, giving us inspiration, enthusiasm, and so on, until such time as we can develop Perfect Vision [i.e. vipashyana or Insight] and be motivated by that.

A Guide to the Buddhist Path

The problem of how to combine reason and emotion, so that we think what we feel and feel what we think, at ever higher levels, is one that all who are concerned with personal development have to face sooner or later. In their most developed forms, reason is vipashyana or insight and emotion is shamatha or calm – though by that stage of development they have already begun to coincide.

Correspondence

'External understanding' is an understanding which is not part of yourself, which is dissociated from yourself. It is that alienated intellect which in Blake's symbolism is represented by the figure of Urizen. Not only is one not able to understand the Buddha's teaching with alienated intellect: one can't understand anything with it. From Blake's point of view the whole of modern science is an attempt to understand life by the alienated intellect.

Seminar on the Heartfelt Advice to Rechungpa

Unless your alienated intellect is transformed by being brought into contact with very strong emotion so that the two are fused, there is no possibility of developing Insight. Insight is no nearer to intellect than it is to emotion.

Seminar on the Heartfelt Advice to Rechungpa

When we get on to the spiritual path, the conflict between the rational and the emotional has been virtually resolved, so that you have a sort of unified energy, still mundane but unified, and orientated in the direction of the transcendental.

Seminar on Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism

It is true that one needs to unify one's energy. But if one's energy is not unified one should not worry about it, otherwise energy will be wasted in worrying and unification will be further away than ever.

Correspondence

Positive emotion is emotion which is pleasurable and at the same time skilful.

Aphorism

Only when a man feels strongly will he act effectively. It is for this reason above all others that Buddhism starts not with a concept but with a feeling, not with intellectual postulation but with emotional experience.

Crossing the Stream

Friendship and Communication

Four Gifts

I come to you with four gifts.
The first gift is a lotus-flower.
Do you understand?
My second gift is a golden net.
Can you recognize it?
My third gift is a shepherds' round-dance.
Do your feet know how to dance?
My fourth gift is a garden planted in a wilderness.
Could you work there?
I come to you with four gifts.
Dare you accept them?

Nowadays people don't have friends; they have psychotherapists, lawyers, and hairdressers.

Aphorism

Spiritual fellowship is indeed the whole of the spiritual life, as well as being the panacea for ordinary psychological problems.

Correspondence

True competition is a form of collaboration.

Aphorism

'Take rhetoric and wring its neck', said the French poet. Charisma, one might add, is the psychological equivalent of rhetoric.

Aphorism

'Joviality' sometimes masks competitiveness and even antagonism. Thus it is the near enemy of mudita (sympathetic joy).

Correspondence

Friendship is certainly a vital part of Buddhism, but non-exclusiveness is equally a vital part of friendship.

Correspondence

Our real friends are indeed people who welcome us with a warm hug however long we have been away, and who are not interested in what they can get out of us for themselves. Such friends are Bodhisattvas in the form of ordinary human beings, as Gampopa calls them.

Correspondence

Friendships must certainly be kept up. They can't look after themselves, or be kept in cold storage.

Correspondence

The emotions connected with friendship are skilful but weak; the emotions connected with sex are unskilful but strong. The former therefore need to be cultivated, the latter gradually eliminated.

Aphorism

A sexual relationship is like a lobster pot – easy to get into but difficult to get out of.

Aphorism

Without chastity it is difficult to experience spiritual androgyny, and without the experience of spiritual androgyny it is difficult to achieve a vision of the Truth.

Aphorism

It is difficult to know which is worse: not to be believed when you speak the truth, or to be believed when you tell a lie.

Aphorism

Not to be believed means to be cut off from communication. It means to be treated as an object.

Aphorism

The Enlightenment experience is not self-contained in a one-sided way. It contains an element of communication and therefore an element of spiritual friendship, even transcendental friendship – friendship on the highest conceivable level.

Correspondence

The primary meaning of *kalyana* in *kalyana mitrata* (spiritual friendship) is 'beautiful'. In spiritual friendship we take delight in the spiritual beauty of our dear friend. This aspect of 'taking delight' means that we not only see a person as a person, but also like what we see, enjoy and take delight in what we see, just as we do with a beautiful painting or poem – except that here the painting or poem is alive: the painting can speak to you, and the beautiful poem can answer back. This makes it very exciting and stimulating indeed.

Correspondence

It is appalling to think how much time, energy, and initiative it takes to get to know even one person very well.

Correspondence

A fool can give more advice in a day than a wise man can follow in a year.

Aphorism

It seems extraordinary that people should have such difficulty understanding what seems to be a straightforward point. Perhaps it is because they are thinking of something else.

Aphorism

Things that are allowed to remain unspoken eventually build up an insurmountable barrier to communication. Either one communicates or one is blocked. There is no middle way.

Correspondence

'Manner' is such an elusive thing. Different people can perceive a person's manner in quite different ways and therefore have quite different reactions to it. So, it is usually better to pay attention to the substance of someone's communication, not to its manner.

Correspondence

Speaking personally, I do not want disciples who are meek and obedient and afraid to speak their mind. I want disciples who are bold, self-confident, and independent and who are capable of standing against the whole world if necessary.

Correspondence

In spiritual life there will always be ups and downs, and during the down periods our spiritual friends are our main source of help and inspiration.

Correspondence

We have to try to appreciate people's positive qualities, without dwelling on their weaknesses.

Correspondence

Criticism is not condemnation. Personally I never condemn anyone, since I believe that human beings are capable of change. Criticism, if taken in the right spirit, helps us to grow.

Correspondence

Don't be impatient, especially with other people. Realize that sometimes they have their problems too. Though they may want to be friends, in practice they may find it difficult. Try not to think in terms of what other people should be giving you, but rather in terms of what you can give them.

Correspondence

When people make you more than human they in effect make you less than human. The only important thing is for us to be friends; and whatever teaching is to happen will come over naturally in the course of the friendship.

Conversation

Few are great enough to serve.

Aphorism

Authoritarianism and spiritual life are completely incompatible. Most 'gurus' are simply exploiters.

Correspondence

If in each generation the disciples fall below the level of attainment of the guru, in a few generations what's going to be the state of affairs? So a guru should consider that he has not been successful as a guru until his disciples do better than himself. Otherwise the chances are that the whole tradition will degenerate very quickly.

Seminar on the Heartfelt Advice of Rechungpa

It is sometimes necessary to criticize the weaknesses of others, but people often seem to find it difficult to do so without doing it in a 'hard' sort of way that excludes compassion. Perhaps, in some cases, people criticize others as a way of paying homage to the ideal without actually having to practise that ideal.

Correspondence

As Buddhists, we have to learn to live, work, and communicate together on the basis of our common commitment to the Three Jewels, without attaching too much importance to differences which are, after all, only part of our general psychological and social conditioning.

Correspondence

One of the great disadvantages of the mass-media is that trivialities can be given an importance that they absolutely don't possess. People need to be delivered not just from tragedy and disaster, but from triviality. Triviality, in fact, is one of the greatest disasters that can happen to us.

Q & A: WBO Convention 1985

Where there is trust, explanations are unnecessary. Where there is no trust, explanations are useless.

Aphorism

Sound judgement is a very rare quality. People do not necessarily possess it because they are sincere and well-meaning and spiritually committed, or because they have one's interests (where it is a question of giving personal advice) genuinely at heart. In refusing to accept someone's judgements one is not, therefore, questioning their integrity or their spiritual development.

Correspondence

There is no time in life for misunderstandings.

Correspondence

If you do not wear your heart on your sleeve for daws to peck at, the daws will accuse you of having no heart.

Aphorism

Don't argue. Discuss. When you get into an argument, what you are concerned with is to win, to beat the other person. But the aim of discussion is to find out between you the truth of the matter. If you are not very careful, what starts off as a genuine discussion can become an argument.

Fifteen Points for Order Members. Lecture

There is no wound that man can give
That nature cannot heal.

The Veil of Stars. Poem

To understand all is perhaps to forgive all. But sometimes we have to forgive without understanding.

Aphorism

One of the problems facing the religious teacher is that literal-minded people want literal answers to literal questions.

Aphorism

Fooling other people can be dangerous, but fooling oneself is fatal.

Aphorism

The Circle of Eternity

Above Me Broods

Above me broods
A world of mysteries and magnitudes.
I see, I hear,
More than what strikes the eye or meets the ear.
Within me sleep
Potencies deep, unfathomably deep,
Which, when awake,
The bonds of life, death, time and space will break.
Infinity
Above me like the blue sky do I see.
Below, in me,
Lies the reflection of infinity.

If one always tries to explain the unknown by the known one will never learn anything.

Aphorism

Beware of premature syntheses.

Aphorism

Only those who experience death in life can experience life in death.

Aphorism

The fundamental principle of my philosophy is that power and value do not coincide.

Aphorism

A perfect sphere on a perfect plane: are they or are they not in contact?

Aphorism

Time is unable to square the circle of eternity.

Aphorism

Security is insecurity. 'That which is supported has no support.'

Aphorism

A white dot against a black background: how does one tell whether it is revolving or stationary?

Aphorism

Soul is reticulated into souls.

Aphorism

It is not that there are two worlds which, while distinct, equally have ontological status. The distinction is between the ontological and the —?

Aphorism

Change your consciousness and you will see a different world. Change your consciousness and you will see the world differently. What is the difference between these two statements?

Aphorism

Intellectual clarity is not everything, but it counts for a great deal, especially when one remembers that Right View constitutes a basis for the development of Perfect Vision.

Correspondence

Perhaps dreams have no explanation in the ordinary sense. They are their own explanation. Probably the best thing one can do is reflect upon the images of which the dream consists and try to retain and intensify the distinctive emotional quality of the dream experience. The dream, after all, is you, though a part of yourself which you do not usually experience, and with which you need, perhaps, to be more in touch.

Correspondence

To distinguish between thoughts and things, between the concepts which merely indicate realities and those realities themselves, is an art belonging to a highly advanced stage of philosophical discipline and spiritual culture.

A Survey of Buddhism

‘There is nothing in the mind that was not previously in the senses.’ If this were true, the recollection of former lives would be impossible.

Aphorism

The Pali scriptures speak of multiple consciousnesses associated with single bodies, besides the more usual one consciousness to one body. I suppose that in this area, as in so many others, we have to beware of thinking too much in terms of fixed patterns, and be open to the possibility of there being patterns different from those with which we are familiar.

Correspondence

There can be no absolute duality between dualism and non-dualism. The absolute truth is the absolute truth of the relative truth. They are inseparable.

Wisdom Beyond Words

The doctrine of 'no-self' represents the possibility of change, radical change – change from reactive to creative, conditioned to unconditioned, mundane to transcendental.

Seminar on the Nature of Existence

Thought is incommensurable with reality and reality with thought.

Seminar on the Nature of Existence

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