

RGYAL-SRID RIN-CHEN SNA-BDUN

—LAMA ANAGRIKA GOVINDA

The ideal of an undivided human world, based on spiritual and humanitarian laws, is one of the oldest dreams of humanity.

Already in the earliest Buddhist Scriptures, in which ancient Indian traditions are reflected, we find detailed descriptions of the events and conditions, which lead to the realization of this ideal. According to the Buddha's own words, as reported in the Mahasudassana-Sutta of the Digha-Nikaya (of the Pali Canon), this ideal had once been attained in the remote past of previous world-cycle.

Thus this prophetic vision is clothed in the garb of the past, in which the leader of this united humanity was none but the Buddha himself in one of his previous births when, as a Bodhisattva, he was toiling along the arduous path towards perfect enlightenment. The remembrance of this episode came to his mind in the last days of his earthly life when—now as Buddha Sakyamuni—he surveyed for the last time the aeons of his career as a Bodhisattva.

At his birth (as Prince Siddhartha) it had already been prophesized that he would become either a world ruler or a Buddha. But the Rishi, who made this prophecy, did not know that sovereignty in the material world was already a past achievement of the Bodhisattva—an achievement which could only be of temporary value and which, therefore, could no more attract him. Thus, only the attainment of supreme and perfect Buddhahood (*samyakambodhi*) could be his aim.

But even when he had achieved this highest aim, his love and compassion for this imperfect, suffering world of ours was stronger than the contentment with this own perfection. And so he returned into this world and took upon him the task of a wandering teacher.

After thus moving from place to place for forty long years and having established his doctrine sufficiently firm, to be carried on by his disciples, he felt that the time had come to retire. He therefore, announced his intention to enter the supreme state of Parinirvana and to pass away at a place, called Kusinara.

His disciples were dismayed at this announcement, and when they saw that they could not reverse the Buddha's decision, they implored him

to choose at least some more prominent place than Kusinara for such an important event. The Buddha must have been smiling to himself at this exhibition of human vanity, so anxious to provide him with a good setting and adequate publicity. However, he set his disciples' minds at rest by telling them that Kusinara was once the scene of one of the greatest events of the past, at the time when he was a world-ruler (*cakravartin*) under the name Mahasudassana.

THE FLAMING WHEEL

Once, on a sacred fullmoon-day, while King Mahasudassana rested on the roof of his palace on his favourite seat, a flaming wheel with thousand spokes appeared in the sky. The King remembered that this could only be the sacred "Wheel of the Law" the *Dharma-cakra* धर्मचक्र of which the wise had told him as the omen of a world-ruler. So, he got up from his seat, showed his reverence to the heavenly wheel and, while sprinkling water from a golden vessel, he uttered the solemn wish: "May the precious wheel roll victoriously to the ends of the world".

And the Precious Wheel rolled towards the east; and King Mahasudassana followed it with his fourfold army. And in whatever place the Precious Wheel stopped, there the King too stopped and camped with his retinue. All the former enemy kings of the east, however, approached King Mahasudassana with respect, welcomed him and put their countries at his feet.

King Mahasudassana thereupon said: "No living beings should be killed; nothing that was not given should be taken; immoral life should be shunned; no untruth should be spoken; no intoxicating drinks or drugs should be taken. But all that is good and wholesome should be enjoyed."

Thus, all the kings of the east became his followers, and likewise also the kings of the west, the south and the north.

After the Precious Wheel of the Good Law had conquered the earth in this way, it returned to King Mahasudassana's capital, which was on the very spot of present-day Kusinara, where the Buddha entered *Parinirvana*. And, as on that occasion the Sal-grove was filled with the radiance of the Buddha, in a similar way the radiance of the Precious Wheel filled King Mahasudassana's capital with light and splendour, because he had gained world-sovereignty not through physical power and violence, but through righteousness and non-violence.

But King Mahasudassana's world-sovereignty was not only based on the presence of the Precious Wheel, but on six other invaluable posses-

sions. The first of them was the Ideal Gem (*mani* or *ratna*, Tib. *nor-bu*), also known as the *cintamani* or the Philosopher's Stone, the embodiment of Truth.

The second of them was the Ideal Wife (*stri*, Tib. *bTsun-mo*), the embodiment of love and compassion and all female virtues.

The third one was the Ideal Councillor (*mantri*, Tib. *bLon-po*), the embodiment of practical wisdom and justice.

The fourth one was the Ideal Citizen or Householder (*grhapati*), in Tibet represented as the Ideal Warrior or General (*dMag-dPon rin-po-che*), the embodiment of energy, courage and loyalty.

The fifth was the Ideal Elephant (*hasti*, Tib. *gLan-po-che*), the embodiment of strength, stability and prosperity.

The sixth one was the Ideal Horse (*asva*, Tib. *rTa-mchog*), the embodiment of speed and the symbol of freedom, of final liberation.

King Mahasudassana himself has all the qualities of an ideal ruler, but nothing of the brutal strength and sternness of a dictator. His four qualities are: beauty, longevity, health and kindness. The Mahasudassana-Sutra describes him in a touchingly human way: He loves his subjects like his own children and his subjects look up to him in love and veneration like to a father. His physical beauty is such, that wherever he goes, when he drives out in his chariot, the people entreat him to drive slowly, so that they may enjoy his sight as long as possible.

According to Buddhist ideas such qualities are not the products of chance. They have been acquired through a long, patient practice of virtues. One day, in a contemplative mood, King Mahasudassana pondered: "What is the reason that I have attained a position of such wealth and power?" — And then he realized — "it is due to the threefold practice of charity, self-restraint and renunciation."

Having come to this conclusion, he suddenly saw his future way clearly before his eyes. No more power for him, no more wealth and futile possessions, no more clinging to the pleasures and passions of life! "The more we crave, the more miserable we shall be in death, while he who dies without clinging and craving, leaves this world happily." With these thoughts the King quietly renounced all desires and "like a man who falls asleep contentedly after a hearty meal", he passed away peacefully after a short time, only to continue his way towards the final aim of Buddhahood.

To the Buddhist this story is not merely a tale of the past, but a signpost to the future. According to the rhythmic flow of events, which we like to call the universal laws of nature, (sometimes appearing as evolution, sometimes as disintegration) the things which happened in a former world-cycle are bound to repeat themselves in their essential features in the present and in future world-cycles. It is therefore assumed, according to Buddhist tradition, that before the next Buddha appears on earth, he will as a Bodhisattva and *Cakravartin* vanquish the forces of evil, that keep humanity in constant terror, and establish a rule of peace and justice.

It is for this reason that the seven precious things or, as we may call them better, the Seven Ideals of a World-Ruler, have assumed a prophetic significance in Buddhist history and iconography and have become the ideals of Buddhist life in general. How deeply their symbolism has influenced Buddhist art, can be seen from the fact that they are the most frequent decorative elements in frescoes, reliefs, carvings, engravings, woodcuts, thangkas, as well as in intricate Mandala representations and as modelled or painted altar pieces, which can be found in temples and private shrines, in monasteries and homes all over the countries of Northern Buddhism. Sometimes two of these symbols are combined, so that for instance the horse carries the flaming jewel and the elephant the precious wheel (*dharmacakra*).

The significance of the Ideal Elephant and the Ideal Horse can only be fully understood if one knows the manyfold associations of these highly symbolic animals. In pre-buddhist times already, the elephant, and especially the white elephant, was associated with the rain-cloud which gives life and prosperity to the country, and for this reason it was regarded as the vehicles of Indra, the ancient rain-god, the god of thunder and lightning (the latter symbolized by the *vajra*, Tib. *rDo-rje*). The possession of a white elephant was looked upon as a guarantee for the prosperity of a country. This explains the importance the white elephant was given in Burma and Siam up to the present time, a tradition derived from ancient India, as testified by the Vessantara Jataka, in which the prince, who magnanimously had given away the white elephant to the neighbouring country, was sent into exile.

The most important reason, however, for the prominent position of the elephant in Buddhist symbolism and art is that, according to the age-old tradition of the Jatakas, the stories of the Buddha's previous births, he started his self-sacrificing career in the remote past in the form of a six-tusked white elephant, and that again he appeared in the same shape in Queen Maya's dream, when entering her womb at the beginning of his last life.

Thus the elephant became the symbol of the Buddha's birth and of his unshakable determination and endurance in the fulfilment of his noble mission. In later times, therefore, the white elephant became the emblem and vehicle of the Dhyani-Buddha Akshobhya, "The Unshakable One", whose spatial position is in the east. The element associated with him is water, which shows that the original symbolism of the white elephant had not been forgotten. The east here has a double meaning, it signifies not only a cosmological position or a position in space, but also a position in time, because the east is the place from which the sun begins its daily course - just as the white elephant marked the beginning of the career. And just as the sun is daily reborn in the east, in the same way the Buddha (as a Bodhisatva) went through innumerable rebirths.

The horse is originally a solar symbol. It was supposed to draw the sun-chariot. Also its fiery nature proved its connection with the sun. To the Buddhist, however, it is first and foremost a symbol of the fiery, independent mind, the symbol of speedy liberation from the fetters of *Samsara*, the non-ending cycle of births and deaths, because the Buddha in the decisive hour of leaving his home and exchanging his princely position for that of a homeless beggar in search of truth, was carried into his new freedom by his faithful horse Kanthaka.

If the elephant had marked the beginning of the Buddha's earthly career, the horse marked the end of his wordly life and the near-zenith of his spiritual life. In later times, therefore, the Dhyani-Buddha Ratnasambhava, whose place is in the south, where the sun attains its highest position, was associated with the emblem of the horse, as well as with that of the jewel, which is often shown upon the horse's back, as already mentioned. The elephant as the vehicle of the *Dharmacakra* has been depicted already on the stone-gates (*torana*) of the famous Sanchi Stupa.

That the *Dharmacakra* is another solar symbol is obvious. But while the horse represented a secondary property of the sun, namely its fierceness, the *Dharmacakra* is primary sun-symbol, representing its radiance. Its solar origin is testified by the description of the flaming and radiating wheel, which appears in the sky with its thousand spokes ('rays'), when a virtuous ruler has established a reign of righteousness and has attained the spiritual power which entitles and enables him to extend the beneficial rule of the Good Law (*dharma*) over the whole world.

Similarly the "Turning of the Wheel of the Law" (*dharmacakra-pravartana*, Tib. *chos-hkhor-bskor*, the origin of the Tibetan prayer Wheel, "ma-ni chos-hkor") has become a synonym for the Buddha's first proclamation of his doctrine, by which the thousand-spoked sun-wheel

of the Dharma was set in motion, radiating its light throughout the world. Thus the Buddha again became a "world-ruler", through not in the ordinary sense of the word, but as one who conquered the world by conquering himself and by realizing the highest possibilities of his being in the "thousandfold Cakra" (*sahasrara-cakra*) of his enlightened mind.

The *Cakra*, like every symbol, has a variety of meanings, according to the level of understanding or the plane of consciousness to which it is related. It denotes the universal law as well as its reflection on the human plane in the moral law of man; it denotes the universal power and its localized form in the spiritual power of human consciousness; it symbolizes the universal sun and the inner light that leads us towards illumination or Buddhahood.

While the legendary *Cakravartin* ruled over the physical world, a fully enlightened Buddha is supreme in the world of the spirit. His *Dharmacakra* embraces the whole universe. Its laws are not imposed by force, but are the very essence of life. To know these laws means to be free, to be sovereign; not to know them means to be their slave. Thus the Buddha's sovereignty does not imply that he is ruling the world, but that he knows it and, therefore, is free from it and is able to free others by his knowledge.

The symbolism of the wheel (*cakra*) applies also to its component parts: the rim, the spokes and the hub. The rim forms a circle, the symbol of infinity, of the world in its entirety. The rim, furthermore, is in motion, while the hub remains static. The rim, therefore, does not only represent infinity, but infinite movement: the infinite cycle of birth and death, the unending *Samsara*. However, each point of this *Samsara* is related to the resting centre, the hub, through the spokes.

The hub, then, symbolizes liberation, enlightenment, *Nirvana*, where all passions come to rest, while the spokes represent the ways which lead from the restless movement of *Samsara* to the realization of the peace of *Nirvana*.

It is significant in this connection that there is not only one way towards realisation, but many. In fact, from each point of the samsaric world there is a possible way towards the centre, towards liberation and enlightenment. Though the aim is the same for all, the ways are many. This conception is the basis of Buddhist tolerance. Thus the wheel does not only represent law and sovereignty, but also tolerance. It combines both aspects of reality: the universal and the individual, stability and movement, *Nirvana* and *Samsara*.

A wheel may have any number of spokes; but in order to express the fundamental principles of the Buddha-Dharma, the Buddhist *Dharma-cakra* has generally been given either eight spokes or multiples of eight, in order to emphasize the importance of the Noble Eightfold Path (*arya astangika marga*), which leads to liberation through complete or perfect*understanding (*samyag drsti*), perfect aspirations (*samyak samkalpa*), perfect speech (*samyak vak*), perfect action (*samyak karmanta*), perfect livelihood (*samyakajiva*), perfect effort (*samyag vyayama*), perfect mindfulness (*samyak smrti*) and perfect absorption (*samyak samadhi*).

Finally the *Cakra* stands also for the spiritual faculties of man, and in this case the spokes are conceived as radiations of psychic or spiritual power, emanating from various centres of consciousness, located in the human body. They ascend in a perpendicular line from the base of the spinal column to the crown of the head, with steadily increasing radiations or qualities, symbolized by an ever increasing number of spokes or petals (since the *cakras* are also represented as lotus blossoms in this case), until the *Sahasrara-Cakra*, the "Thousandfold Wheel" of the highest centre is reached. The latent faculties of these centres of psychic power cannot be realized by the ordinary, undeveloped consciousness but have to be awakened and activated by meditation or through the practice of Yoga.

Thus, he who has reached the highest centre, controls all the *Cakras* and their spiritual and psychic powers. He has become a *Cakravartin* in the truest sense.

*If I am using the word "perfect" here, it is not meant in a final, static or absolute sense, but in the sense of a *completeness* of action and of mental attitude, that can be established in every phase of life, on every stage of our spiritual development. That is why each of the eight steps of the Path is characterized by the word *samyak* (Tib. *yang-dag*). This is a word whose importance has been consistently overlooked, by rendering it by the weak and nebulous adjective "right", which introduces into the formula a taste of dogmatic moralism, quite foreign to Buddhist thought. What is "right" to one person may be "wrong" to another. But *samyak* has a much deeper and more definite meaning: it signifies perfection, completeness, fullness of an action or attitude, in contrast to something that is half-hearted, incomplete, or onesided. A *Samyak-Sambuddha* is a "perfectly, fully, completely Enlightened One" —not a 'rightly Enlightened One'

Under this aspect the “seven precious things” of a world-ruler take on a deeper meaning and a hidden connection with the seven psychic centres, and we begin to understand the profound truth of the Buddha’s words, when he declared that the world is contained within the six cubits of this our body.

The man who has brought under his control the hidden forces of body and mind, in which all the forces of the universe are reflected, has it in his hand to become a ruler of men or a world-teacher, a Perfectly Enlightened One, like Buddha Sakyamuni.

The more or less apparent relationship between the qualities of the psycho-physical centres or *Cakras* of the human body and the “seven precious things” of a *Cakravartin* may be established in the following way:

1. The Ideal Elephant, as embodiment of stability and strength, is the symbol of the Root Centre, *Muladhara-Cakra*.
2. The Ideal Citizen (conceived either as provider (*grha-pati*, householder) or as defender (*senapati*, general) - corresponds to the *Svadhithana-Cakra* in the plexus hypogastricus, which represents the basic functions of the human organism’s household assimilation (providing the elements of sustenance) and elimination (rejecting what is harmful).
3. The Precious Jewel or Flaming Gem, known as *mani* (Tib. *Nor-bu*) or *cintamani* (Tib. *nor-bu dgod-hdod dpunqs-hjom*), corresponds to the *Manipura-Cakra*, the solar plexus or navel centre, where the ‘Inner Fire’ (*tapas*, Tib. *gTum-mo*) of yogic integration is kindled.
4. The Ideal Wife, the embodiment of love and compassion, corresponds to the *Anahata-Cakra*, the cardiac plexus or heart centre.
5. The Ideal Councillor corresponds to the *Visuddha-Cakra*, the Centre of Speech, the plexus cervicus or throat centre.
6. The Ideal Horse, the symbol of freedom and speedy liberation, corresponds to the *Ajna-Cakra*, the Centre of Spiritual Vision (the place of the “Third Eye”).
7. The Thousand-spoked Wheel corresponds to the *Sahasrara-Padma Cakra*, the Crown Centre or the Centre of the Thousand-petalled Lotus.

Thus, the Seven Precious Things of a *Cakravartin* represent not only the ideals of Buddhist life, but also the potentialities of the human mind and its psychic qualities on all levels of conscious and subconscious life, which can be realized through spiritual training (*sadhana*), yoga and creative meditation (*bhavana*) and which ultimately lead to liberation and enlightenment.
