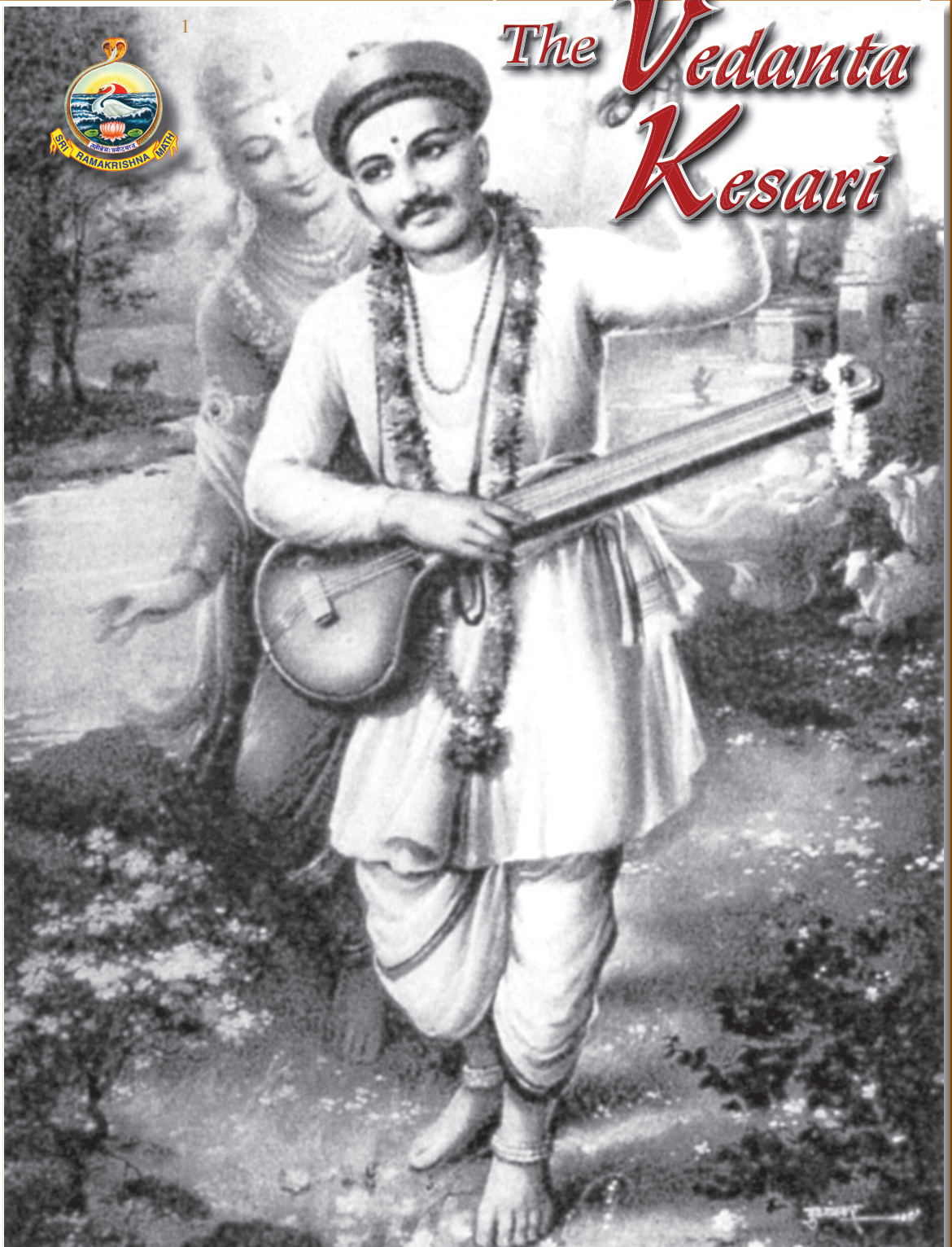




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Dhyana Paramita: The Perfection of Meditation

*Shamatha, Vipashyana, Buddhanupashyana and
Buddhanusmriti*

DR. AMARTYA KUMAR BHATTACHARYA

(Continued from the previous issue. . .)

An explanation as to the types of meditation in vogue is in order here. Shamatha and Vipashyana or Vidarshana (Pashyana or Darshana means to see in an ordinary way; Vipashyana or Vidarshana means to see in a special way, i.e., with insight) meditations are practised in South Asia and other countries which follow Theravada (the way of the Elders) Buddhism. Lord Buddha presented the technique of Vipashyana meditation in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta or Mahasmritipratishthana Sutra / Satipatthana Sutta or Smritipratishthana Sutra. He delivered this Sutra in Kammassadhammam near Delhi. The Mahasatipatthana Sutta is found in the Digha (Dirgha) Nikaya and the Satipatthana Sutta is found in the Majjhima (Madhyama) Nikaya. Zen Buddhism is practiced in East Asia, that is, in China, North and South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, which are among the countries that practice Mahayana (the great vehicle) Buddhism. In fact, Zen is one of the eight schools of Mahayana Buddhism. Meditation is something that cannot be fully explained in words, it has to be experienced to be understood completely.

Knowing about meditation is one thing; knowing meditation is quite another. One can sit alone in a quiet room and try to enter into Vipashyana meditation. If unable to meditate

by oneself, one should take the help of a guru in the initial stages. One must sit, preferably, in the full lotus posture or, failing that, in the half-lotus posture with the spine erect. The head should be straight as if suspended by means of a string. Another analogy adopted is that the head should be straight as if bearing the sky on its top. The hands may be placed in the Bhumisparsha Mudra, which means 'touching the ground.' This gesture is also called Sakshi Mudra or witness. Alternatively, the hands may be in the Cosmic Mudra with the left hand on top of the right, middle joints of middle fingers together and the thumbs touching each other. The hands should be held against the body, with the thumbs at about the height of the navel. This gesture is very popular in East Asia. The Samadhi Mudra consists of the right hand placed on top of the left hand with the tips of the two thumbs touching each other. Yet another Mudra is Jnana Mudra which consists of the hands straight, placed on the knees, and the thumb and the fore finger touching each other with the other fingers straight. Other gestures are the Dharmachakra Mudra, Varada Mudra, Abhaya Mudra, Vajrahumkara Mudra and the Samaya Vajra Mudra. The Dharmachakra Mudra can be seen in the famous Sarnath statue of Lord Buddha. This gesture is also called the Bodhyangi or Vyakhyana Mudra. The Varada Mudra is the gesture of giving



boon with the right hand while the Abhaya Mudra is the gesture of giving protection with the right hand. The Vajrahumkara Mudra, also called the Trailokyavijaya Mudra, consists of placing both hands crossed over one's chest with the right hand over the left hand and with both the palms facing the chest. A much less common Mudra is the Samaya Vajra Mudra which consists of the right thumb touching the right little finger with the middle three fingers of the right hand suggesting the shape of a thunderbolt. A meditator may also hold a Vajra or a Vishwavajra, crossed Vajra, in his right hand; if he does so, he is called Vajradhara, holder of the Vajra. After sitting in the correct posture, he must close his eyes and focus on the inhalation and exhalation of his breath. Anapana means respiration. There must be no tampering with the natural respiration; the meditator's task is simply to focus attention on his nostrils and observe the natural flow of breath. Respiration is natural, one has no craving or aversion towards it; it is always in the present and since one breathes from the moment of birth to the moment of death, it is in fact a convergence of the past, present and future. Further, it is within the physical framework of the body. Respiration is thus an appropriate object for concentrating the mind, something that is not too easy. The mind does not usually want to stay in the present moment; it resides either in the past or in the future. A little effort is needed to prevent the mind from wandering about. This is called Right Effort. At this stage, there may be strong distractions in the mind that prevent the mind from concentrating. The effort to focus on respiration should be continued in such cases. The key is never to give up. Right Mindfulness, which is mindfulness of breathing, follows Right Effort immediately. Right Concentration leading to Samadhi then follows. It may be described as Sat (being), Chit (consciousness) and Ananda (bliss).

Shamatha meditation is an absorptive meditation whose object is to calm the mind. Vipashyana meditation is an analytical meditation. Shamatha meditation may be an end in itself or it may be a prelude to Vipashyana meditation. It is also possible to perform Vipashyana meditation without performing Shamatha meditation first. There are four parts to the practice of Vipashyana meditation. Kaya anupashyana, Vedana anupashyana, Chitta anupashyana, and Dharma anupashyana. Anupashyana means to see minutely, to scrutinise. Here, Dharma indicates the contents of the mind. Each of the four—Kaya (body), Vedana (sensations), Chitta (mind), and Dharma (mental contents), must be subjected to Anupashyana. The true nature of all four of these reveal themselves to the meditator and he is able to remove defilement from the innermost recesses of his mind. Awareness and equanimity, together, symbolise Vipashyana meditation. If either part is missing, one cannot attain Enlightenment. Vipashyana leads to clear insight into the physical and mental structure and thus leads to Bodhi. The complete knowledge of our physical and mental structure is called Sampragyana, and one who has it is called a Sampragya. In some forms of Mahayana Buddhist meditation, meditation on Lord Buddha is practiced.

Bodhyangas are factors contributing to Enlightenment. There are seven Bodhyangas: Smriti, Dharma-chayana, Virya, Priti, Prashiddhi, Samadhi, and Upeksha. The Four Sublime States are Maitri, Karuna, Mudita and Upeksha. Meditation entails making a conscious and free choice to withdraw from the affairs of the mundane world to pursue spiritual ends; one of the objectives being the subsequent re-establishment of contact with the conditioned world as a purer and wiser man. The decision to meditate is itself an act of freedom. We have, in life, the freedom to pursue an ethical way of living. This freedom leads us to Bodhi and Nirvana and thus sets us free.

Meditation is a pursuit of liberation, realisation is the end result. Post-realisation, one feels that one had been going about with his eyes closed and has now suddenly opened them. In the plane of the senses, his external world does not change but his way of psychologically processing his external world undergoes a drastic change. He becomes more peaceful with himself and with others. An awakened man, possessing an Enlightened mind or *Bodhichitta*, feels that he is surrounded by peace at all times. It is important to understand that nobody tells him this; he feels it himself. He goes about doing his daily activities, but his way of processing his world is fundamentally altered for the better. He realises that he cannot and need not control all aspects of his external physical world. He realises that he gains more by letting go. He becomes aware of the non-peaceful moments in his life and tries to reduce their frequency and intensity. He opts for shifting the consciousness to his mind and becoming aware of his internal mental processes when waiting, for example, in a traffic jam or while waiting in a queue. He opts for harmony in his mental processes rather than chaos.

Zen Buddhism originated in China and is in vogue in East Asia. As mentioned before, it is a school of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism was propagated in China by Indian Buddhist monks like Kumarajiva (344-413 C.E.), son of Kumarayana, who went to China in 401 C.E., and Buddhahadra (359-429 C.E.), who went to China in 408 C.E., and by Chinese Buddhist monks who came to India, like Fa-hsien (or Fa-xian), who came to India between 399 and 414 C.E., and Hsuan-tsang (or Xuan-zang) (600-664 C.E.), who came to India between 629 and 645 C.E. Also, Gunabhadra translated the Lankavatara Sutra into Chinese and Paramartha was another noted translator.

Mahayana Buddhism developed in India a few centuries after the Parinirvana of Lord Buddha. Emperor Kanishka convened

the Fourth Buddhist Council, held probably at Jalandhar, in which the scholar Vasumitra was President and another eminent scholar Asvaghosha, the author of Buddha Charita, was Vice-President. In this assembly, Buddhists became divided into Mahayana Buddhists and Theravada Buddhists. The Pali word Thera is derived from the Sanskrit word Sthavira which means Elder. Theravada Buddhism is the most orthodox form of Buddhism and has preserved the historical teachings of Lord Buddha in its Pali Canon. The Theravada Sutras are the earliest available teachings of Lord Buddha and are fully historical. The Pali Canon is called Tripitaka in Sanskrit and Tipitaka in Pali; the three parts of the Tripitaka are Sutra-Pitaka, Vinaya-Pitaka and Abhidharma-Pitaka.

Mahayana is a way of Buddhism followed widely across India and northern and eastern Asia. In Mahayana Buddhism, individuals strive to take all others along with them to the ultimate goal of liberation. Mahayana Buddhism emerged in the context of the development of a different disposition towards Buddhism by some Buddhists; in terms of concepts relating to the Sangha, the Dharma and Lord Buddha.

Firstly, schisms occurred on the level of 'Sangha'. The primary concern of several venerated Buddhist monks was to keep the Dharma and discipline or Vinaya pure. They felt that this was the only way to sustain Buddhism in the long run. These Buddhist monks became some of the most sophisticated theoreticians in the Indian intellectual world. Certain other monks wanted the Vinaya to be flexible. The case of the Mahasanghika monks is the best example to show the conflict between these two viewpoints. These monks had added ten minor precepts for their group, for example, monks could get, keep and use money. In the Second Buddhist Council, held at Vaishali, they were called *Papishtha bhikshus* or the sinful monks. Their behaviour was unacceptable from the viewpoint of the orthodox Buddhists.

These monks established their own tradition and called themselves *Mahasanghikas*, the monks of the Great Sangha. In this connection, it may be mentioned that there were as many as eighteen early schools including the Sarvastivadins, the Pragyaptivadins, the Sautantrikas, the Vatsiputriyas, the Sammitiyas, the Dharmaguptakas, the Lokottaravadins, etc.

Fissures also occurred on the level of 'Dharma'. Three months before Lord Buddha's Parinirvana at Kusinagara, He declared in the Mahaparinirvana Sutra that the monks and the laity would have the Dharma and the Vinaya as their leaders in the future. However, some Buddhists, mostly the Mahasanghikas, found themselves having no shelter left except the Dharma. So they searched for the true Dharma. The statement of Lord Buddha, 'He who sees the Dharma, sees me; he who sees me, sees the Dharma', also supported their quest. If one uses logical arguments to judge this sentence, an interesting question emerges. How must one see the Dharma so that one also sees Lord Buddha? For some Buddhist scholars, even today, Dharma is not merely the sermons of Lord Buddha. His life contains more latent implications, for example, the implications of His silence in certain contexts as in His silence in response to questions by Vacchagotra. The sermons are merely a part of Lord Buddha, not the totality. Simultaneously, the assumption that Lord Buddha still existed, pervaded and caught the faithful minds of Buddhists. Dharma turned out to be a means to reach the state of Buddhata. If man realises the ultimate truth of all things, he is sure to free himself from all types of bondage. To see Dharma is to see the truth of phenomena. When the truth of phenomena is seen, the wisdom of Lord Buddha is fulfilled within oneself. That is the reason why when one sees the Dharma, he also sees Lord Buddha. Further, the state of the mind is linked to liberation. A human mind, that is pure and detached from all types of impurities, is synonymous with the state of

liberation. Also, there were groups that defined Dharma as the Ultimate Truth of Lord Buddha. The more these Buddhists investigated His life, the less they believed that He had gone away. Hence, to see Dharma is to see Lord Buddha's power penetrating through all things. These groups also tended to relate Dharma to Lord Buddha's great compassion or Mahakaruna and felt that to see Dharma is to see the Buddha-Dhatu within oneself. Mahakaruna is Karuna combined with Pragyā or wisdom. Clearly, the most important duty of man is to live and spend his life in accordance with Lord Buddha's intention. As His intention was to liberate all sentient beings from suffering, in order to realise the Buddha-Dhatu within oneself, it is crucial that one has to assist other sentient beings and take them along on the way to liberation. Pragyā is required, in fact it is vital, because different expedient means should be deployed to bring different sentient beings on the path to Bodhi. The notion of Bodhisattva sprang up from this attitude. Bodhisattvas are perfect in Dana, Shilar, Kshanti, Virya, Dhyana and Pragyā. These are called the six perfections or Paramita of a Bodhisattva. Sometimes, ten perfections or Dasha Paramita are considered (Maharatnakuta Sutra, Sutra 45, Translated into Chinese by Bodhiruchi) wherein perfection of ingenuity, power, volition and knowledge are added to the usual six perfections.

Also, fault-lines occurred on the level of 'Buddha'. When the Vinaya and the Dharma showed fault-lines, the only way out for unenlightened Buddhists was to go back to Lord Buddha as apart from Him, there is no other refuge. At that time, many Buddhists conceived the existence of Lord Buddha in the transcendental state. The Saddharma Pundarika Sutra or The Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana Sutra, conceives of a transcendental Lord Buddha. Lord Buddha had returned to His universal form after His Parinirvana and He still existed. Lord Buddha had Three Bodies, Trikaya. The first and most fundamental body is called the Cosmic

Body, Dharmakaya, The conceptualisation of Lord Buddha's All-Pervading, Eternal, Omniscient, Omnipresent and Radiant Dharmakaya provided for a more intense and immersive spiritual experience. The nature of the Dharmakaya is called Dharmakaya-Dhatu. When meditating, the state of Lord Buddha is the Blissful Body or Sambhogakaya. The third body is the Constructed Body, Nirmanakaya, which signifies the historical Lord Buddha. The Nirmanakaya of Lord Buddha had come and gone under the Will of the Dharmakaya. He was born to fulfil His human functions in leading human beings to liberation. It is believed that as long as humans do not realise the true Dharma, the anguish of departure from Lord Buddha takes place and that when the human mind is able to make a distinction between pure mind and the impurities, the truism of Buddha-Dhatu becomes clear. In the conception of the Mahasanghikas, the concept of Rupakaya existed and Rupakaya was later split into Nirmanakaya and Sambhogakaya in Mahayana.

Mahayana Buddhism combines the emotion of devotion with the wisdom of logical reasoning. This is the appeal of Mahayana Buddhism. The primary devotional school of Mahayana Buddhism is the Pure Land School of the Far East, where the Sanskrit *Namah Amitabha Buddha* is translated into the Chinese *Namo Amito Fo* and the Japanese *Namu Amida Butsu*. The practice of invoking Lord Buddha's name is known as *Buddhanusmriti*. Devotion is also directed towards the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*, The Lotus Sutra with the invocation *Namo miao fa lien hua ching* in Chinese and *Namu myoho rengekyo* in Japanese.

A certain school of Mahayana Buddhism conceives of four centres called Chakras located at different levels of the spine. At the level of the navel is the Nirmana Chakra. At the level of the heart is the Dharma Chakra. At the level of the neck is the Sambhoga Chakra and at the level of the head is the Mahasukha Chakra. Meditation may also be initiated by focussing

on the Nirmana Chakra with progressive focus on higher Chakras with the last focus being on the Mahasukha Chakra. In addition, while the meditator is focussing on the Dharma Chakra, he may imagine a five-pronged white thunderbolt (Vajra) emitting beams of light on the Dharma Chakra. At this stage, the meditator imagines himself to be *Vajrasattva* (thunderbolt being or diamond being). After the last focus on the Mahasukha Chakra, the meditator can perform Shamatha meditation. If he so wishes, the meditator may conclude his meditation by performing *Vipashyana* meditation after Shamatha meditation.

Reverting to Zen Buddhism, we find that although Zen Buddhist experts were found amongst the laity, Zen Buddhism's greatest geniuses were found in the highly regulated life of the monasteries. Zen Buddhism spread to Korea and Japan from China. In Japan, circular brushworks called *enshos* are calligraphic motifs often used in Zen Buddhism.

The synonyms of the Sanskrit word *Dhyana* are *Jhana* (Pali), *Ch'an* (Chinese), *Thirn* (Vietnamese), *Son* (Korean), and *Zen* (Japanese). In Zen Buddhist practice one can take the help of *Koans* or spiritual puzzles with the aid of which he can propel the mind to a transcendental state in which he can meditate. At the usual existential level, *Koans* cannot be said to have any coherence; an existential leap is needed to bring harmony. The spiritual puzzle posed by a *Koan* may be such that even a strong will may be unable to go to the transcendental plane. The role of the Zen Buddhist master is important here. He can deliver a shock, an emotional one usually suffices, but a physical blow or other corporal shock may be needed so that the spiritual aspirant is propelled into a higher level of consciousness. The fundamental viewpoint of Zen Buddhism is that one is to point directly to one's mind, see it as it is and become a Buddha. A very important difference between Theravada Buddhism and Zen Buddhism is that the former believes that

Enlightenment is obtained slowly by means of practice while the latter is a believer in sudden Enlightenment.

Here is an example of a Koan:

*Before Enlightenment,
chopping wood, carrying water;
After Enlightenment,
chopping wood, carrying water.*

The meaning is self-explanatory. Bodhi does not change the Samsara I am immersed in, but it does change and completely restructure my attitude towards that Samsara. Hsuan-tsang, the great Chinese monk who visited India during the time of Emperor Harshavardhana, once made the following remark about the state of realisation: 'It is like a man drinking water; he knows by himself whether it is cold or hot.' Once, Hui-hai Tai-chu came to the Zen master Ma-tsu Tao-i, the first of possibly the four greatest Chinese Zen masters. Ma-tsu asked him: 'Why are you here searching when you already possess the treasure you are looking for?' 'What treasure?', his interlocutor asked. Ma-tsu replied: 'The one who is questioning me right now.' Ma-tsu had an unswerving ability to bring the empirical 'I' into focus at just the right moment. On another occasion, when asked, 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from India?', Ma-tsu replied with a classic answer: 'What is the meaning of your asking this at precisely this moment?'. Ma-tsu followed the Hung-chou style of Zen. Ma-tsu Tao-i's disciple was Pai-chang Huai-hai. Pai-chang Huai-hai's disciple was Huang Po Hsi-yun whose disciple was Lin-

chi I-hsuan, the founder of Rinzaï Zen. Soto Zen is the other major form of Japanese Zen.

Buddhism preaches ultimate tolerance to all faiths. A Buddhist hates none, loves all. Lord Buddha's love for man was like a father's love for his sons. The overarching philosophy of Buddhism encompasses loving-kindness for all sentient beings. Buddhism is particularly relevant in the violence-ridden world today. Pacifism and non-violence are fundamental tenets of Buddhism. However, this does not mean that a man should not resist aggression. If an evil power engages in aggression, then a man should resist it with all powers at his disposal. Something called 'Engaged Buddhism' is emerging in the West now. In this, Buddhists take up environmental and social issues as a part of their practice of the Dharma.

Lord Buddha showed how man can integrate himself to the cosmos. In this and in many other aspects, he was a student of life and a leader of men. In a caste-ridden society, he strove to establish the equality of all men. In this, he was the world's first great socialist. He was the ultimate Tyagi renouncing a throne, comforts of a palace, a wife and a son in search of Truth. In this, he showed Himself to be an exemplar of holiness inspiring millions of others to follow suit. He elevated himself to the level of a Purushottama and a Mahapurusha.

The essence of Buddhism, as summed up by Lord Buddha Himself, is: To cease from all error, to cultivate virtue, and to purify the heart. When this is achieved, our false self, or nothingness, dissolves into a vibrant awakened being. *

(Concluded.)

Bibliography: 59 Buddhist scriptures and 43 other books

The original Pali words for some of the Sanskrit words used in the article:

Chatur arya satya (Four Noble Truths) —Chattari Aryasachchani; Duhkha—Dukkha; Ashtanga Marga— Atthaganga Magga; Madhyama Pratipada—Majjhima Patipada; Shila—Sila; Nitya—Nicca; Mukti—Mutti; Satya—Sacca; Shanti—Santi; Moksha—Mokkha; Anitya—Anicca; Trishna—Tanha; Dvesha—Dosa; Arhat—Arahant; Bodhisattva—Bodhisatta; Bhikshu—Bhikkhu; Sutras—Suttas.