

Nine Similes on Buddha-Nature

by Maitreya Buddha

The heart of buddha abides in the hollow of delusions.
It can be understood by these images:

a buddha inside a muddy lotus,
the honey of a bee,
grain inside its husk,
gold in a sewer,
treasure under the earth,
the germ within a seed,
a statue wrapped in filthy rags,
an emperor in an ugly hag's womb,
and an icon covered with slime.

Thus does the essence of buddhahood abide within all beings,
obstructed by the stains of transient delusions.

As for the transient delusions,
they are likened to the muddy lotus, the bee, the husk,
the sewer, the earth, the seed, the rags,
the woman afflicted by the flames of misery,
and the slime.

The Buddha within, the Supreme Sphere of Natural Perfection,
is likened to the buddha, the honey, the grain, the gold,
the treasure, the germ of the seed, the statue,
the emperor, and the precious icon.

When a man with stainless clairvoyance
sees a buddha radiant with a thousand signs sitting inside a muddy lotus,
he removes him from that lotus.

Likewise, the Ones Thus Gone, possessing the buddha-eye,
see truth itself in every being, even those in the deepest hell;
out of compassion, those unobstructed lords work until time's end

to free all from aberration.

When a man with stainless clairvoyance

sees a buddha inside a dirty lotus, he cuts down that lotus.

Likewise, the accomplished ones see that all beings have buddha-essence

obscured by stain of attachment and aversion,

and, out of compassion, they work to destroy those obscurations.

When an intelligent beekeeper with ambitious eyes sees honey surrounded by a swarm of bees,

he tries to separate the bees from the honey.

Likewise, the maharishis, the great seers, being omniscient,

see the honey-like essence of buddhahood

and work to destroy totally its bee-like obstacles.

That ambitious man disperses those billions of bees

and then uses the honey as he wishes.

Likewise, when one eliminates the bee-like delusions surrounding

the honey-like primordial awareness,

one becomes a king of sages.

One cannot eat a grain which still lies in its husk;

he who wishes to eat a grain removes it from its husk.

Likewise, the stains of mental aberration are mixed with the buddha in beings,

and for as long as that buddha is not separated from those stains, for that long its buddha-activity does not manifest in the triple world.

Rice or wheat not removed from its husk

and not cleansed of its bristles

is not fit to be used as food by men;

similarly, as long as the lord or reality abiding within all beings

is not freed from the husk and bristles of mental distortion,

that long one cannot give the taste of blissful truth

to beings tormented by the hunger of confusion.

When a god with the eye of clairvoyance

sees gold which has fallen from a wandering man's pockets

into a foul and filthy place – gold which for centuries has lain waste –

he tells someone just where that gold is;

he tells them to clean that precious substance and to make jewelry from it.

Likewise, the wise see the excellent in beings,

but see that that excellence is sinking in the filthy sewers of delusion;

they release the rains of the holy Dharma unto those beings,

in order to wash away the slime of their delusions.

When a god sees gold which has fallen into a foul and filthy place,
he attempts to show that supreme substance to men so that it may be cleansed and
utilized.

Likewise, the victorious ones see that the jewel-like buddha-essence possessed by
all beings
has fallen into the sewers of delusion,
and they point out reality to those living,
so that it may be purified.

Under the floor of some poor man lies an uncorroded treasure,
but because he does not know of its existence
he does not say that he is rich.

Similarly, inside one's mind lies truth itself, firm and unfading,
yet, because beings see it not, they experience a constant stream of misery.
The pauper with a treasure buried under his shack
does not say that he has a treasure, for he knows it not;
likewise, the treasure of truth lies within the house of the mind,
yet we live impoverished through lack of it.

Therefore the seers take a pure birth into the world, so that it may be known.

From the fertile germ found within a banyan's seed
comes a sprout, which, if planted and tended, gradually produces a kingly tree.
Likewise, within the seed of beings' ignorance is the precious germ of perfection,
and by relying upon that germ the state of a king of wise men is produced.
With the conditions of water, sun, air, earth, time, and space,
the germ inside a banana or mango seed eventually develops into a tree;
similarly, given the proper conditions,
the sprouting germ of innate buddhahood, which abides in the shell of delusion,
gradually produces the vision of reality.

And when a god sees a buddha statue made of gems
covered in stinking rags and lying on the roadside,
he speaks of it to a pilgrim, to salvage it.

Likewise, those with unobstructed vision see
that the very substance of buddha exists even in animals
but is wrapped in the rags of mental aberration,
and teach all the various spiritual methods so that it may be salvaged.
When one with the eye of clairvoyance sees a precious buddha statue
wrapped in rags and lying on the roadside,

he shows it to man, to salvage it.
 Similarly, the cosmic conquerors have seen that
 the seed of perfection exists even in animals,
 but lies on the roadside of worldliness,
 wrapped in the stinking rags of mental distortion,
 and teach the Dharma, to release it.

A friendless hag, living in a slum, is carrying in her womb
 one who is destined to become an emperor,
 but she does not announce that in her womb is an emperor,
 for she knows is not.
 Similarly, in the slums of the worldly realms
 live impure beings, who, like that hag
 carry within themselves the stainless seed
 which will become their own protector.
 Although that hag carries an emperor in her womb,
 she is clothed in tattered rags, is hideous,
 lives in a slum, and experiences every form of suffering.
 Likewise, although we all carry our own protector within,
 we think that we are helpless, and consequently
 out of the power of mental delusion we live
 in confusion, propelled by misery and turmoil.

When someone sees a precious icon of pure gold, covered with slime,
 he, knowing of the gold within, clears away the covering of filth.
 Similarly, the all-seeing ones perceive that
 our truth nature, clear light, is stained,
 but that these stains are transient.
 These wish-fulfilling gems amongst men
 inspire beings to purify their obscurations and attain full enlightenment.
 The wise one who knows that inside the slime
 is a beautiful icon, made of stainless, radiant gold,
 removes that slime.
 Just so, the omniscient ones know of the mind of peace,
 likened to gold,
 and, by demonstrating the path to knowledge, they disperse
 and purify the obstacles obstructing it.

Thus it is, that, like a buddha in a dirty lotus,
 the honey of a bee, grain in its husk, gold in a sewer,

treasure under the earth, the germ within a seed,
 a statue in filthy rags, an emperor in an ugly hag's womb, and an icon covered in
 slime,
 the ultimate nature of mind, stainless and unobstructed,
 abides in the coverings of worldly thoughts,
 yet is unmixed with and unhindered by them.

By these nine similes are shown nine delusions:
 attachment, aversion, narrow-mindedness,
 obsession, instinctual ignorance, and
 the stains abandoned by the paths of vision, meditation, impurity, and purity.
 Thus one travels to the end of the millions of mental distortions.

It is pleasant to see a fresh lotus,
 but a faded and rotting lotus is not pleasing;
 pleasure gained through attachment is the same.
 When a bee becomes angry, it stings;
 when anger arises it brings misery to the mind.
 Obsession is likened to filth and slime,
 for its cause is based upon lustful greed.
 A hidden treasure cannot be used, for its existence is unknown;
 the self-originated nature of beings, buried
 in the earth of instinctual ignorance, lies ignored.

The gradual growth of a sprout cracks open the shell encompassing it;
 just so, the growth resulting from perception of ultimate truth
 destroys the objects to be abandoned by the path of vision.
 The heart of destructive views is related to the path of a high one,
 the negativities destroyed by the wisdom of the path of meditation,
 are likened to tattered rags.
 The stains abandoned by the first of the seven of the ten levels of a bodhisattva
 are likened to the ugly hag's womb;
 the baby leaving that womb is likened to the ripening of nonconceptual wisdom.
 The stains dealt with on the three pure levels
 should be understood as the covering of slime.
 Thus do the nine delusions destroyed by a great being's diamond samadhi
 resemble the nine examples.

The ultimate truth that is discovered within, the self-born essence,
 is an object found only by the bold;

Just as the light of the sun is not seen by those without eyes,
although it shines equally on all.

There is nothing to be eliminated from this,
nor is there anything to add.

It is the very perfection seen by a perfect one,
and when it is perfectly seen,
there is perfect liberation.

Translated by Acharya Konchong Gyaltsen and Glenn H. Mullin