

On Devas

Jason Espada

Editor and Contributor

On Devas - Preface

This collection of teachings and writings on devas was put together to share with our friends at Clear Mountain Monastery, Ajahn Nisabho and Ajahn Kovilo, as well Ajahn Achalo, whose teachings *on devanussati* have been an inspiration.

As they mentioned recently in one conversation, this subject is not talked about very often. Why is this so?

I wrote to Ajan Achalo last year,

Most teachers here {in the West} leave out other lives, other realms, and the spiritual support we can receive, and so of course, anything I can do to further the interest and understanding of these verities, I would be most happy to do so.

If such things as devas and higher realms *do* exist, then this is surely part of right view.

It goes to the validity of such things as our faith, devotion, and prayer, and, *there is something universal* about it.

In the essay, *Sacred outlook - Seeing beyond ordinary perception in modern culture, and American Buddhism*, included here, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo said,

'We are not alone. This universe is full of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are on our side. And, as is known in all Buddhist countries, although it is not always emphasized in the West, we can pray to them...

and she adds,

'This is not being theistic – this is being practical. If there's help out there, why not invoke that help?... '

I couldn't agree more.

After putting together this first collection in 2025 I wrote out *A few further thoughts on the deva realms*. I did this both for my own sake, to be as complete and as clear about this as I can, and to share with Ajahn Achalo, and others.

I have included my correspondence with him in the beginning of that small book, for context.

On Devas, A few further thoughts, and the works cited throughout can be found on jasonespada.com, linked to in the recent essays section.

May this be of benefit.

May the compassionate activity of the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas continue to flourish

May we receive their blessings,

And may all their noble aims be fulfilled

On Devas - Contents

Preface

1. And the Devas Rejoiced
2. From Patipada - Venerable Acariya Mun's Path of Practice
3. The origin of the metta teachings
4. Extending Metta to the Seen and the Unseen
5. The Discourse On Love
6. The Cultivation of Loving Kindness
7. The Origin of the Sharing of Merit in Buddhism
8. Speaking of Angels
9. On Devas and Maras
10. A Dream to call the Angels
11. The Monastery That Refused to Burn
12. Every Square Inch
13. How Angels Are Known

14. Sacred outlook - Seeing beyond ordinary perception in modern culture and American Buddhism

15. Tenets of pure perception

16. A Simple Visualization

Dedication

And the Devas Rejoiced

Audio

And when the Blessed One had set the Wheel of Dhamma in motion, the earth devas cried out, in jubilation:

Aah! At Varanasi, at the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma, that cannot be stopped by any contemplative, or deva, or Mara, or God, or by anyone in the cosmos!

On hearing the earth devas' rejoicing, the devas of the Four Kings' Heaven understood what they said, and also took up the cry, celebrating... and this was followed by the devas of the Thirty-three... and the Yama devas... and the Tusita devas... all the way up even to the devas of Brahma's retinue...

Rejoicing, they all proclaimed with one mighty voice,

Aah! At Varanasi, at the Game Refuge at Isipatana, the Blessed One has set in motion the unexcelled Wheel of Dhamma, that cannot be stopped by any contemplative, or deva, or Mara, or God, or by anyone in the cosmos!

Thus, this joyful song of praise travelled up even to the realm of the highest divinities, and this system of ten thousand worlds trembled, and quaked, and shook, and a boundless, sublime radiance, surpassing the glory of all the devas appeared in the world...

- From *The Discourses of the Buddha from the Pali Canon*

From Patipada: Venerable Ācariya Mun's Path of Practice, by Ajahn Maha Boowa

{Note: Ajahn Mun is considered the grandfather of the modern Thai Forest Tradition in Buddhism. Throughout his biography by his close disciple, Ajahn Maha Boowa, there are stories of Ajahn Mun and his disciples interacting with different classes of beings, teaching them, and at times learning from them as well. Because this biography offers a different and I believe richer world view than what is commonly accepted these days in the West, I would like to offer here a few selections. These are very much in line with the other teachings on prayer, chanting, and the recitation of the Dhamma in Buddhism, and the world view of other contemplatives.}

Mettā which is experienced as kindness and gentleness is a close and harmonious intimacy with all beings. Both those who would be enemies and all others, including all people, the Devatās, Indra, Brahma, Yama, the Yakkhas and Demons, and all throughout the three realms (Ti-loka-dhātu), and at such a time there are none that can be seen as enemies. The hearts of all the Buddhas and Arahants are full of boundless mettā for all beings and those who have mettā are always happy whether awake or asleep.

* * *

Many groups of Devatās who came to visit him (Ajahn Chob) on various occasions had preferences for different aspects of Dhamma. Some liked to be given the moral precepts (sīla) before listening to Dhamma, some wanted to listen to Dhamma straight away, some liked the higher and some

the lower Samyojana Dhammas, (The Ten Fetters) but most preferred the lower group.

Some liked to hear the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, (The first discourse of the Buddha) others the Karaṇīyamettā Sutta, and yet others preferred to listen to the Sangaha–Dhamma which is concerned with helping each other.

He said that they variously had their own peculiar preferences, each being different but they followed the wishes of the majority when many of them came. They variously liked listening to Dhamma in accordance with their tendencies of character, much as some people do.

Some liked to hear about mettā and the Brahmavihāras, others liked to hear some suttas which I had never heard of before and I could only tell them that I didn't know anything about these suttas. So they asked to hear another sutta which they liked.

He said that the Devatās loved and respected him very much and did not want him to go elsewhere. They wanted him to stay a long time with them, for they told him that while he stayed there their hearts were very peaceful.

At night they would hear the sound of his chanting and developing the Dhamma of mettā, and they were deeply affected by the Dhamma which he chanted a great deal, so that they did not want him to stop.

He said that in doing this chanting he only did it mentally and did not do it out loud such that anyone could hear it. But when the Devatās came to

visit him they would ask him to chant various special suttas which made them feel happy and which they enjoyed listening to more than any other suttas. While he was chanting they listened intently and completely absorbed.

He asked them:

“How do you know when I am chanting these suttas? ”

They immediately answered saying that:

“The sound of your chanting reverberates through all the worlds and how could we not hear it?”

Dhamma is very subtle and refined, and when it is brought out and proclaimed by chanting or recitation it is bound to resonate throughout the worlds to let everyone hear it who is able to hear it in the whole Loka-dhātu.

The origin of the metta teachings

The teachings on metta, or loving kindness in Buddhism go back to the Historical Buddha. The story of how they began goes like this:

Once there were some monks who had found a suitable place to retreat and practice meditation for a season. It was quiet, had fresh water, and some sheltered areas. As they settled in to their individual practice, the local spirits were glad they were there. In the beginning, they were happy to have the company. After a while though, the local spirits started to wonder how long the monks would stay. They started to worry the monks would take over, and so they began more and more to harass the monks. They manifested horrible smells, frightful sounds and visions. The monks did the best they could to tolerate it, but after a while they said, We can't take this any longer! In despair over losing a good place to practice they went to the Buddha to ask his advice.

The Buddha listened, thought carefully, and gave them the teaching that has been handed down to us as the Metta Sutta. It begins,

This is what should be done by those who are skilled in goodness...

The essence of this short teaching is contained in the line,

Even as a mother protects and loves her child,
her only child,
just so should we cultivate boundless love
to offer to all beings in the entire cosmos...

He went on to assure them that for one who practices in this way

their love will know no obstacles

In later generations, the teachings on metta that the Buddha gave that day were set to music, to be chanted, and I understand that it is considered one of the most beautiful chants in the Tradition stemming all the way from those times.

The monks took the Buddha's admonition to heart, and went back to the forest to practice, this time with the metta teaching as their companion, guide, and protection.

It's said that, at first, the local spirits were again hostile, manifesting the terrible smells and sounds and appearances as before, but that after a while, they began gradually to calm down. They noticed something different about the monks this time. They could sense that the monks weren't afraid, or repulsed, or aggressive back. Instead, they were wishing them to be well and happy, safe, and at ease. They were actually praying for the happiness of all the spirits' ancestors and descendants, and for each one of them to have health and provision, comfort and joy. The feeling was so pleasant the spirits decided to support and protect the monks in turn. They made sure that while they were there they had a comfortable and quiet place, with harmonious conditions.

When the rainy season ended, the monks thought it was time to return to the larger community where the Buddha lived and taught. As soon as they began to think of this, it's said that they heard unusual sounds – it was the

sound of the local spirits crying. The spirits had come to love and respect the monks so much, that they didn't want them to leave. The monks assured them that they would return, and, what's more, that they would continue to offer prayers and the energy of their metta practice for their safety, health and happiness.

It was just as the Buddha had said it would be...

Extending Metta to the Seen and the Unseen

{From *So That All Are Included in Our Love - Commentaries on the Metta Sutta and the Prayer of Saint Frances*}

Prayers and having kindness for the seen is clear and obvious, and natural. It is what we can choose to extend and develop more and more. Directing metta to the *unseen* though, that is the domain of the sensitive person, those with some awareness of subtle levels, the psychic, or the mystic.

Most modern day Westerners would dismiss this line as archaic, or mere superstition, but a few won't. Some will see the purpose to it, and offer prayers of kindness, and for peace, and safety to those between the worlds, as well as local spirits; those of the earth where we are, as well as those who are without form, but felt and known in subtle ways.

All of these we wish happiness, health and peace, comfort and safety...
May they be well and at their ease...

The Buddha first taught the Metta Sutta to a group of monks to recite in order pacify conditions where they were meditating. This relates to their awareness of subtle levels, and their communicating a beautiful positive influence to those beings.

It recounts how at first the monks were disturbed by those local spirits who were at first accepting, but then became hostile towards them. As the monks practiced loving kindness as taught by the Buddha, and which

included them, the spirits calmed down and became supportive. It's said they even protected the monks while they were there with them.

This world view is very different from the common materialistic world view, but I think it is more accurate. Those who don't see this world as having many forms of spiritual life would gloss over this line, while others will delight in the thought that they can extend the energy of kindness to beings on all different levels, as it says, excluding none...

For them, the result will be an increase in those they will think of to pray for, and there will be greater harmony and support received in kind from invisible realms.

The Discourse On Love

He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech.

He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, and without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority.

Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones.

And this is what he or she contemplates:

May all beings be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy.

May all living beings live in security and in Peace,
beings who are frail or strong, tall or short,
big or small, visible or not visible,
near or far away, already born or yet to be born.
May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger.
Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate Boundless Love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos.

We should let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below and across. Our love will know no obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity.

Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying down, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

Free from wrong views, greed and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice Boundless Love will certainly transcend Birth and Death.

The Cultivation of Loving Kindness

Having seen that like oneself
all beings seek for happiness,
one patiently then cultivates love for all beings

May all the precious children of this world
be entirely well and at their ease...

May I be happy, healthy, and peaceful
May I be free from suffering

May my family, friends,
neutral ones, and all honored guests
have every happiness
May they be free from all suffering
May they be completely free from all danger, and all difficulty

Within the boundaries of this town,
may all beings have happiness
Likewise those in other places,
in other cities, and countries,
in all places,
may they all have happiness, health and peace

All creatures and all breathing things,
all persons and all entities...
men, women and children,

the Noble Ones, the unawake,
Devas, and unhappy ones
who in the ten directions dwell -

May all beings be happy and at peace,
and may their hearts be filled with joy!

The Origin of the Sharing of Merit in Buddhism, As found in the Tirokudda Sutta

Introduction

The Buddhist ritual of sharing of merits was first established with the story of King Bimbisara.

After the Buddha taught The Discourse on Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma to the five ascetics, they became his first disciples. Then the Buddha went to Gaya and converted the three ascetic brothers, and their one thousand followers.

Then, while proceeding to Rajagaha, King Bimbisara went to visit him with thousands of brahmins. King Bimbisara was established in the fruit of Stream-entry on that very day, and he invited the Buddha to a meal in the palace the following day.

During the alms-giving, pretas who were the departed next-of kin of King Bimbisara stood outside the walls of the palace thinking, "The king will dedicate the merits of the alms-giving to us."

However, after the alms-giving, King Bimbisara did not dedicate the merits to the pretas who were his next of kin, but instead, his mind was thinking about where to build the vihara for the Buddha. Not receiving the merits, these pretas made dreadful cries and wailings outside the palace walls in the dead of night.

The king heard these unearthly noises and became very frightened. At daybreak, the king told the Buddha about his dreadful experience and asked him about what had happened.

The Buddha explained to the king:

‘Former relatives of yours who have been reborn as pretas have been going around for an immeasurably long time, expecting to be released from their suffering.

They had expected you to dedicate the alms-giving done yesterday to them, but you did not. They were extremely distressed by this, and lamented their lost hope.’

The king said, ‘O Blessed One, would they receive the merits, if I give alms today and dedicated the merits to them?’

The Buddha said, Yes, they would.

‘Then let the Blessed One accept my invitation of alms-giving today.’

The Blessed One consented.

During the alms-giving to the Buddha and his Order of Ariya Sangha, further strange things happened. *The Buddha, using his supernormal powers, caused the pretas from outside the walls of the palace to be clearly seen by the king.*

As the king gave the gift of water saying, 'Let this be for my relatives!', at that moment, lotus ponds appeared around the pretas. The pretas bathed in them, and their weariness and thirst was allayed; and their bodies became the color of gold.

The king then gave rice gruel, and both hard and soft food, and dedicated the action. All at once, the pretas had food to eat, and their faculties were refreshed.

The king gave robes and lodging and dedicated these actions, and instantly, the pretas were richly adorned, and they had well-furnished palaces to live in.

When he saw this, the king was extremely delighted;

And when the Blessed One had finished his meal, he expounded this Tirokudda Sutta:

Outside the walls they stand,
and at crossroads.

At door posts they stand,
returning to their old homes.

But when a meal with plentiful food and drink is served,
no one remembers them:

Such is the kamma of living beings.

Thus, those who feel sympathy for their passed-over relatives
give timely donations of proper food and drink -

exquisite, and clean,
 thinking:
 “May this be for our relatives.
 May our relatives be happy!”

Then those who have gathered there,
 the assembled shades of the relatives,
 with appreciation, give their blessing
 for the plentiful food and drink:

‘May our relatives live long!
 We have been honored,
 and May the donors have a good reward!’-

For in their realm, there is no farming,
 no herding of cattle,
 no commerce, no trading with money.
 They live on what is given here,
 hungry shades whose time here is done.

As water raining on a hill
 flows down to the valley,
 even so does what is given here
 benefit those who have departed from this world.

As rivers full of water
 fill the ocean full,
 even so does what is given here

benefit those who have passed on.

In this way,

'He gave to me, she acted on my behalf,

these were my relatives, and companions, and friends'-

Offerings should be given for those who have passed over,

when one remembers our relations in the past.

For no weeping, no sorrowing

and no other lamentation

benefits those who have passed on

But when this offering is given,

well-placed in the Sangha,

they profit immediately,

and it works for their long-term benefit.

The proper duty to relatives has been shown;

Great honor has been done for the departed loved ones;

Monks have been given strength-

and the merit you have acquired is great.

Speaking of Angels

Preface

There's a story only I can tell. If it were not so, I'd leave it to others to say. Trying to use other people's language doesn't quite work for me either. I find myself stuttering, and getting lost too easily.

By far most of what people write never makes it into print, or it is not seen by others - indeed, it is not *intended* for that - but is set down just for the sake of clarity for the one writing it.

Sometimes there is a part of ourselves that understands perfectly, while another part is in the dark. The writer stands between the two, making apparent what had been obscure, making tangible what had seemed remote, making practical what had been inaccessible before.

When I read others' accounts the spiritual life, I enter their world view, and I'm constantly aware of the need to translate what they say so that it makes sense to me. Another part of me flows on, understanding the inner world in my own way.

So much is not born because it receives no encouragement from others in this world. A very few truths make their way to the surface on account of some encouragement felt from within. There's freedom in this, since the work then is only partly my own, shaped as it is by these finer forces I've come to know and write about for my own understanding.

On World View

For me, telling these stories is an act of faith, more than for curiosity. Since a world view *is comprehensive*, it covers all we think and feel, and do, and aim to do. Starting anywhere, as with a circle, will soon bring the full sense of the view that is intended.

Having an experience of a different order from the common life, whoever we are, changes *everything* for a person. It can be denied - 'I must have been dreaming', or it can turn a person's world upside down. It can also fit, somehow, and then our world is made larger, more beautiful, and interesting, with more possibilities.

The knowledge of angels or shining ones is usually kept secret, because of how personal these experiences are for people. We naturally draw back from any disbelief, or doubt, or denigration from others. We organize our inner life around these truths as we've experienced them, and so, until our knowledge is firm, we protect the light that guides our lives.

* * *

Angels I have known

I can tell of healing angels, guardian angels, and those who support my life in this world, 'money angels' I have called them.

As others have pointed out in their traditions, as with God, the angels, devas, and all those we can say are of a higher order of being are not bound

by time and space, as most humans believe and experience themselves to be. They can appear as a circumstance, illuminated with the same feeling of warmth and intelligence as when they appear to us clothed with divine form.

One thing their appearance very often has in common across traditions and folk's telling of angels is that they come when they are most needed.

They can permeate our dreams, or rise up as a feeling when we're just walking down the street one day; they can come as a voice, or as a righteous impulse, or a sense of direction when we're lost.

Their nature is love and wisdom and power, beyond our usual thoughts. They communicate spiritual truth, and help us wherever we are in our lives. As an order of spiritual being, they have this function everywhere they are found. This is most personal. If we're receptive, we can learn a lot from them.

* * *

When the Buddha taught, it's often recounted that *the light of devas filled the grove*. Beings from other levels came to hear him teach the path to liberation and enlightenment. In subtle ways, they celebrate his teaching, with songs of praise and offerings of celestial flowers.

* * *

There is a class of beings who respond to our spiritual efforts. At times we can feel how they rejoice even when we just have *the thought* to practice.

I remember once when I was on retreat in 2012 and I thought of studying an in-depth introduction to the Pali Sutras, and sensing what felt like happiness and encouragement from the local spirits. I don't know the extent of their powers, only that they can facilitate learning in myriad ways.

I've heard one definition of blessing as 'removing obstacles'. There was a time in my early 30's when I felt like the road was cleared of obstructions to learning, and that whatever I turned to study came to me with very little effort on my part. We can say part of it was karmic affinity, but, truth be told, it felt like there was more to it than that. I felt like a part of it was help from the spirit world, surely.

Back before the days of the internet, I found out about the existence of *transcripts* by one of my beloved teachers, Lama Yeshe, and I sent letters out to centers all over the world, asking if they'd be willing to send me copies of whatever they had. Lo and behold, within a couple of months, from every continent, photocopies of the books of these teachings appeared on my doorstep.

Now, you can say there was nothing exceptional happening, but the *inner feeling* was one of being helped.

* * *

An experience at work

I worked for an unusual bookstore for about six years, and there was a period of time when I would do my prayers and meditations at the beginning of every work day there. This sometimes took up to three hours, and it often happened that I had not a single sale during that whole time, but that *within a minute* of completing my practice, someone would approach the counter with books they wanted to buy. This happened so regularly that I almost came to expect it- and this was during a recession, mind you. I knew it was unusual, and that I was being helped by unseen, benevolent forces, and yet, such is the life of a person who is on their contacts, as they say, in touch with the spiritual world, and divine helpers, the shining ones.

* * *

When I was living in the South West, I heard a story from the father of my host. He was disabled, without the ability to walk without crutches, and he told me about the day his second son was born. He said he pulled into the hospital parking lot, and felt unable to move and be with his wife. He told me he felt so angry and and that he prayed powerfully, in a way that shook heaven and earth, and he felt a heat moving from the soles of his feet upwards, unlike anything he had ever felt before. Once this power entered his body, he was able to walk without difficulty to the maternity ward. He also said nothing like that happened again to him.

We keep stories like these in some hidden place, since they don't fit in with our culture's consensus reality. I imagine in another time and place and

culture we'd openly discuss these things, and encourage our receptivity to the divine.

{See: Miracle stories, from *A Belief in the Miraculous - Buddhism, Magic, and a Sense of the Sacred*.}

* * *

How it feels at times

I recall staying at Tushita Retreat Center, in Dharmasala, India, in the late 1990's. By that time, I'd already had my fill of *the theory* of meditation, and the wisdom teachings, and I wanted to practice. Soon after arriving, I remember I made what felt like a half hearted prayer that, if there was anything I could learn while there about what is meant by Wisdom in that tradition, may it be so. Right away, I felt like a gentle breeze had blown open a door- that was the image that came to mind- and, sure enough, I was able to take another step in my study while I was there.

I'm reminded of a verse by Rumi where he says,

*Bring even your dry, hypocritical prayers
God, in his Mercy, accepts even bad coin....*

Why sometimes great effort is needed, and why at other times the slightest movement of thought can change the world is a mystery to me. All I know for sure is that there is this interchange between the worlds that people

speak of, and that we can know and facilitate in our own lives. If it weren't for that, I'd not be writing these words.

* * *

Our Guardian and Protector

The divine has these two sides to it. One is what we feel and see, and trust in; the life we share with others, and our family. The other side of this divine realm is far more personal than that. It is uniquely individual, and can only be talked about in terms of its being *a feeling of Companionship*, beyond this one life even; of a Guardian and Protector; like an older, wiser, loving guide. This connection is one we cherish, and can learn from our whole lives.

It comes to us as healing most often, because when we suffer and are stripped down to what is essential, this is what we spontaneously turn to. This is the one that reaches out to us, and that carries us through the most difficult times; that reminds us of our heritage, and of all the other times that a way was made out of no way;

If we have any capacity to care for others, it's a reflection of the grace and encouragement, the warmth and love we've received from our guardian and protector.

Some may say we're anthropomorphizing- giving a human form to experience, but it does feel true to say it this way.

There is an intimacy, and a trust that isn't being referenced if we're just calling it our true nature, though it is that too. These incredible gifts come to us, inspiring many to try to find language that begins to express the extraordinary.

What to make of these few hints? Well of course that our world is richer, more complex and benevolent than we commonly believe. There are intimations of a greater world, invisible to a gross worldly view- one that is truer, more hopeful than reductive materialism.

The way is open. Our world is filled with loving and intelligent, spiritual force, and if we trim our sails we can receive these blessings. The current of divine help can carry us to the shore of freedom, fulfillment, and peace.

* * *

Divinities and Their Retinues¹

What I have been calling 'The Shining Ones' are naturally existent phenomena. They are talked about in every time and culture. That being the case, there are some ways of thinking about them, and their Activities.

If we read about them, and approach them from the outside, they appear to us in one way, and if we relate to these truths from within, then it is a completely different experience.

¹ See *A note on the translation of one word*

We use art and poetry to communicate about things that don't come across when we only use ordinary language. An example of this can be found in the descriptions of Divinities in Tibetan Buddhism - which are not creator gods, as in monotheism, but are *enlightened beings*, and aspects of our own nature. I remember something I wrote a number of years back called *The Power of Symbols*. In it, I said that what are called Archetypes are aspects of the universal soul we all share. They also exist outside of ourselves, or we could say in the realm where the inside and outside are one.

It's axiomatic across spiritual traditions that we don't fully know ourselves. Vajrayana practice can be a great help in that respect. Meditating on these divine forms brings out their qualities, helps us to awaken to who we are, and gives us the means of benefitting others.

It is often asked if that's all there is to these 'Yi-dams' - the names and forms used in meditation, and the question is an interesting one if we look into it carefully. It assumes we are here, our ordinary selves, in an ordinary world, with perhaps, we hope, some light in the sky we can use to help us see and make our way through life. The Divine, as I understand it, has no such limits. We can't say it is there, but not here, or that it works in one way, but not in others.

How can we begin to speak of these things? And, what does this have to do with liberation and enlightenment?

If we take the Buddhist path as exclusive, in the sense of it being the one and only way to Universal Truth, and to living fulfilled lives here, helping each other as much as we can, then it would seem that Enlightened Beings

as represented can be a help, but only somewhat. Another view is that the Buddha discovered and taught a universal path, with many ways to express liberating teachings, including though visionary forms that then get passed down as poetry and religious art.

Such is the case, I believe, when we come to the Tibetan Buddhist Divinities. They are given names and forms, and they act to free us from confusion, and to benefit us in countless ways. How to speak of them more fully? Art does this with a *mandala*, with the main divine form in the center, surrounded by his or her *retinue*.

One way I heard to describe the retinue is that when a King travels, he has his Queen and Ministers, his doctors and Generals and soldiers with him at all times. Wherever we have one, we have the others.

Esotericists would say that the retinue of Divinities are elements that are 'enfolded' in their nature. Practicing any mantra and visualization will make all this clear as can be. These are qualities that are here for us to be revealed from within, and then they are fully self evident.

In the Vajrayana practices from Tibetan Buddhism, they take refuge in the Three Jewels, and they also have what they call Tantric Refuge, which is refuge in the Lama, the Yidam, and the Dharma Protectors (Devas). Here are lines used for this combined practice:

I take refuge in all the Glorious, Holy Lamas;

I take refuge in all the Yidams, the Divinities gathered in the mandalas;

I take refuge in all the Buddhas, those who have conquered and gone beyond;
 I take refuge in all the Supreme Dharma;
 I take refuge in all the Noble Sangha;
 I take refuge in all the Dakas, Dakinis, Protectors and Defenders of Dharma,
 who possess the Eye of Transcending Awareness

In this practice, it's taught that the Lama is the Blessing Root, the Yidam is the Accomplishment Root, and the Dakini is *the Activity Root*. This is a way of talking about Divine Activity.

Dakinis are called 'Sky Goers', and the reference is clearly to their abiding in the space of the mind.

Without understanding the poetics of these practices, we'll take them all too literally, and they will become fixed in our perceptions and traditions, instead of liberating us, and moving throughout our lives, illuminating and healing, providing for our needs, and and those of our loved ones.

A couple of examples: in Medicine Buddha practice, both in its Sutra and Tantric forms, the main Medicine Buddha is accompanied by healers and what they call oath bound protectors, who are described as having the ability to help us with material resources;

The well known practice of the loving Bodhisattva-Divinity Tara often makes use of prayer to the Twenty-One Taras, which are different expressions, or manifestations of Tara, that meet different needs.

Experiencing these individually increases the sense of richness, and our understanding of the basic practice.

Tara is also known as 'the Queen of the Dakinis', since she is the Activity of all the Buddhas.

One verse of praise says:

Homage to Tara, she swift and fearless,
 whose eyes flash like lightening,
 born from a lotus in an ocean of tears of Avalokiteshvara,
 Lord of the Three Worlds...

And one teaching has it that the Bodhisattva of Compassion, on seeing how much more needed to be done in samsara, felt great sorrow, and from his tears Green Tara and White Tara manifested, and told him, *We will help you!*

With love and compassion, and an understanding of Buddhist Wisdom, all this makes much more sense than reading about it as if it were something separate from the Mahayana in general.

In practice from the heart, all that is said in the mytho-poetics, about the mandala, the Buddha and retinue unfolds beautifully, and quite naturally.

Engaging in these practices from within, faithfully, and over time reveals everything we need to know about them, and accomplishes the purpose of both ourselves and others.

* * *

Angels, Devas, Shining Ones

Sometimes a strong prayer opens the door
for you to manifest,
sometimes a few words on a page;

Sometimes you arrive unbidden,
and you are always welcomed

You always bring comfort,
and encouragement,
and increase faith
in divine activity in our world

Whenever I hear stories about you,
no matter the distance,
or how long ago they happened,
they feel as if they are talking about *today*,
and in *this place* where I am now

Honored Friend,
companion throughout all my lives,
guardian and protector,
help me to remember you

and may Devas kindly guard and protect
all children,
all mothers and fathers,

all elders,

all those who are poor,
the vulnerable,
the infirm

the doubting,
the despairing,

all travelers,
all those who struggle and suffer,
all those who are lost,
and all who are in need of healing

I pray,
comfort them,
and lead them all to safety,
health, and peace

Devas and the Arts

There are countless ways the divine can communicate with us, and remind us of our true nature, our heritage, that to be born here is to be in a sacred place at all times. We forget, remember briefly, and then forget again, and we struggle and suffer so, having lost our true identity, having misconceived who we are and who others are, and the nature of this our holy earth.

There is *no limit* to the beauty of nature , and to the arts, and often they are the nearest we come to re-membering, to embodying this profound knowledge of the sacred. What *is* voice and instrument, color and movement, the inspired word, the unity and enrichment we experience through the arts? We know it as ancient and eternal, and we know ourselves and all others as worthy of reverence and celebration.

When I think of experiences of listening to Bach, or Mozart, for example, and being lifted out of the sense of this struggling, suffering world, it seems the angel of grace herself is with me then. I know it is this way for others also today, and every day, and I'm left wanting to clarify and enjoy just what has moved through this day and this form. It is light and subtle nourishment I wish for everyone, for all beings, at all times, this wonder and ease.

The arts will go on forever because these are eternal truths we are graced to be here with, and to enjoy. There is no end to the inspiration today, and it is something altogether outside of time, reaching into our experiences of name and form, and time. My joy will also go on forever because of this.

And oh how we need the grace of inspiration in our lives! We need this as we do air and food and water, and we need to share the gifts we have received every day, in as many ways as we can. This is all entirely natural, without effort.

Praise to the holy form, the sound of the divine, the loving heart of the world!

* * *

Can we become angels?

In the Taiwanese Buddhist and Taoist Tradition, a person can ascend to the level of a God, through having lived an exemplary life. If we ask how can we become an angel, I have to admit my vision dims at this point. The most I can say is that it seems we'd be speaking not of lifetimes, or aeons of spiritual development to reach that level, but of evolutionary time.

What we can do is aim to go in that direction, of being more purely loving, more dedicated to the benefit of others, more gentle, and patient, and more generous. We can celebrate all the things the angels do, the right efforts people make, every small success, and every positive motivation, and every great action that benefits living beings. If we do these things, we feel we are in the company of the angels, holy beings, sharing in their work, being cared for and supported by them.

* * *

Healing with angels

It's natural to ask whether we can use prayer and meditation to heal ourselves and to help others heal with the help and support of this Divine Activity. It seems to me there are Beings of Light that exist for exactly this purpose, that we can align ourselves with them, and their energy can flow through us. This quickly reaches the limits of language, but at least this much should be said. For those who disbelieve, it's almost but not completely impossible to offer convincing evidence. For anyone with receptivity, and a willingness to consider other possibilities far from the usual, some perception of this pure spiritual life can happen.

* * *

The 'How-to', in part

For accessing angels and witnessing their extraordinary Activity, the first thing I think we would need is a world view that allow for such things. Even without that, at times, the working of the Divine makes itself known, but, we may also block out any awareness of such subtle and profound events.

{See [this wonderful story](#), for an inspiring example, *Frank Martin's Miraculous Journey to a New Life*}

We can be open to the thought that such beings exist, and that they communicate in many ways. This is a start, and it makes the rest, of contact,

and understanding, and being in harmony with them easier, beyond anything that can be expressed in language.

In addition to this *receptivity*, we can *take care of our physical environment, and our ethics*. When we keep these clean, the spirits are happy, and we can feel their presence and support.

Angels can come through in times of despair and disarray, but then it's a more difficult revelation. We are loved, and for the divine, for holy ones, there is no barrier to that. When we *pray* for help in times of need, we can feel the presence of what can be called the angels of comfort. When we pray for others, if our inner vision is open, we can see and feel their blessings being shared.

Celebrating all the wonderful things in this life, in particular those of a spiritual nature, puts us in accord with the divine. When we praise and rejoice in activities of good people, and of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, we join the angelic host.

We can also practice *gratitude*, and *humility*, a part of which is *deep listening* and attentiveness throughout our lives. Then we'll see more and more of what is happening in the spirit realm, woven throughout our own lives.

It may seem strange to add, but because it's so obvious we may miss it, and that is to say that if we want help in some area of our lives, *we should ask*. There is some spiritual help that comes to us in part because of our willingness. It's as if it's waiting eagerly for our assent, for our own openness, to change or to learn.

* * *

More can and should be said on this subject, but for now, perhaps this is enough.

May all beings benefit.

May we all receive all the help we need in our lives

May the sick and injured be completely healed,

May the lonely find good friends all their lives,

May those who need work and material resources receive all they need in abundance,

and may this whole world be a manifest place of love and harmony, peace and celebration!

On Devas and Maras

{Formerly: A little of angelology and demonology}

If you read more than a few pages of the life of Padmasambhava, the one who brought Buddhism to Tibet, you will find references to him subduing demons on his journey there. He is said to continue this same work everywhere he goes.

For those of us in the West, we will likely dismiss that part of his story as, quote, 'just mythology', and not applying to our lives and practice, or else we will interpret it with Western religious associations. Both of these miss the mark.

To understand the great gift we have received with Tibetan Buddhist teachings, we should know a little about the environment and beliefs of the world it comes from. This includes the indigenous Bon world view, as well as that of Eastern spiritual perspectives more generally.

In the East, they recognize other worlds and various classes of spirits, and that these can either help or oppose the aims of human beings; There are also those who offer greater help, and those who can cause more harm to a person.

Of course, as modern Westerners, we are right to ask about the nature of these other kinds of conscious life.

There are hierarchies of both lower realm beings, and those living in more refined states. There are countless worlds, but for convenience sake, the sum of these worlds are described in Buddhism as being six in number. These are referred to as the hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, demi-god and god realms.

Each of these are in fact myriad, but that is too much to hold in most people's consciousness, and so we simplify the totality, to be able to talk about them. In so doing, we can miss much of the richness, the breadth and depth and complexity, but this is where we begin, if we choose to understand this life of ours more completely.

It helps to know a little about devas and maras, or what we can also call angel-ology, and demon-ology. There is truth also when expressed in those terms. If presented and understood well, we'll then be in a better position to make our way through whatever realm we find ourselves in, and to skillfully handle meeting with different types of spiritual life.

Perhaps this is a poetic way of talking about the world and our experiences. For those with sensitivity to subtle truths though, there is more to it than their being 'merely' metaphor. These ways of talking have a corresponding reality that some do experience, and it's especially for those with more refined perception that speaking of other worlds and classes of beings is useful.

For those *not* sensitive to other realms and kinds of spiritual life, we also have a completely valid psychological interpretation where many of these same terms apply.

They say, for example, that in Buddhism the 'demons' or maras are generally four in number:

the afflictive emotions (traditionally, greed, anger, jealousy, pride and ignorance, to which I add fear, and sadness), impermanence, the psycho-physical collections that make up a person, and the allure of and attachment to mere pleasure and comfort.

It is taught that the chief of all of these maras is ignorance.

There was a recent display of the nature of ignorance as the chief of all the causes of suffering. In the scene that is the pinnacle of the series called Game of Thrones, Arya kills the night king, and as soon as this is done, all the other demons fall.

This is exactly what is said by the Saint Tilopa, in the 11th century,

A tree spreads its branches and leaves -
 Cut its root and ten thousand branches fall...
 Likewise, cut the root of mind
 and all of samsara falls...

This is a teaching on dealing with disruptive forces internally, on a psychological, or inner spiritual level.

* * *

Returning to what are most commonly thought of as devas and maras, angels and troublesome spirits, we can say generally that there are forces that help, and there are those that harm. That is also a way to think about them and to work with them, overcoming, or taming, healing and balancing them out as needed.

This has been the testimony and the basic world view of many different peoples, across cultures, and throughout the centuries, and this includes every country where Buddhism has taken root.

Now, we are in the West, which is mostly materialistic, mostly caught in mundane views, so few people actually give any thought at all to other forces, or to other planes of existence. I am not be one to argue with such people. I can only say that, it works for me to think this way, and that I have had some direct experiences that I can refer to.

When I hear people talking about this subject, of devas and maras, often I feel like they are describing what they have only read about, or what they have only imagined such things would be like. I do know a little better, and so I have to at least try to write something out, for my own clarity at least.

I was set on this journey inspired by Dante about six months ago. Reading the Divine Comedy led me to remember and then to search out other world views that aim to be comprehensive, and, this brings me this evening to what we can call demonology and angelology.

Now, the higher, angelic realms are much more rarified than this one, such that they are not easily accessed, and the beings there communicated with.

We may know something of them, and of guardians and protectors throughout the course of our lives. Their influence can be especially felt in times of crisis, or of great love and devotion. These may be memorable events, even to the point of setting our whole life's direction, but for most of us, unless we are visionaries, they are relatively rare events.

The experience of the infernal, on the other hand, those experiences of harm, or malevolence, and what I would call maras or the demonic in this world are by far more common.

A word here about the language we use to talk about these things -

If we speak of angels, or of holy beings, there is some consensus about their nature. To think of them brings peace, and confidence, a feeling of being protected.

On the other hand, in English at least, a term such as 'demon' is frightening, and we usually turn away from that, not wanting to think of it. The Buddhist word *mara* is not felt to be as threatening, which is a good thing, but... perhaps it leaves something out.

As we make our way to understanding the Dharma in the West, we are trying to use language in a way that conveys the entire meaning of an idea, or an experience. Both of these terms say something essential to understanding what is meant in full, and so I alternate in my use of them.

Now, I had the thought today of waving my arms, and shouting to my internal entire movie studio crew and director, 'Shut it down!' 'Shut it

down!' We create so many imagined worlds from what we have seen in films and on the tv, and now online that it's difficult talk at all of other kinds of beings without the interference of all those associations. They are the cause of superstition, and of so much unnecessary fear. All this comes from viewing these in an unexamined way.

Actually, ghosts and ghouls, and also angels and divinities as they are depicted in movies barely hint at the reality, and so the Hollywood depictions are something we need to mostly set off to the side, if we are to hear anything new.

If we begin by seeing what films and fiction show as representing psychological realities, then I think we are getting closer to the truth of it; And if we take that further to disembodied or subtle bodied forms, then it is an even more complete picture.

Take for example, on the negative side, what are called zombies - those who are walking in a stilted way, but who are dead inside, soulless; they are unnatural, and they are a danger to everyone; or ghouls, those without feeling, dead eyed and ravenous, and here you have a very good description of what I've been seeing in the reporting on the war against the Palestinians, to take just one example. Other wars and war criminals can be remembered or studied. I use this as an example only because it is most recent in our collective experience.

The politicians, propagandists, reporters and spokespersons are numb, and if you listen, what they say is ghastly, in truth, ghoulish; and if you see the

barbarous soldiers, right there I would say you are seeing evil; it has always been this way...

See the crazed look in their eyes, listen to their unhinged rants, and what they are actually saying... it is not different in the least from the deranged who are in institutions, and in haunted places. They have the same dangerous, disturbed minds and spirits...

The root of all this is ignorance, but this is the manifestation of evil, defined as what causes suffering in our world.

The antidote, what is to be done, is almost never found in Hollywood. There needs to be a radical awakening, and this is something spiritual teachings tell us is possible.

We do need to be more poetic when understanding what is meant by a zombie or a ghoul, or a deva, or a divinity. Then we can see both what we live with, as well as those who inhabit the lower and upper realms.

Some higher and lower realm beings *are here*, with us, and can be seen even now. Noble Ones are here too, all around. This is what we see with clear intuitive awareness.

How to approach all this safely?

Here is where we need great compassion, and wisdom to see through illusions, and especially the help of holy beings.

Can we apply this these days to war criminals, and their supporters? To militarists and deceivers in our government and media? To callous materialists?

After leaving Tibet, it is said that Padmasambhava, who is Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, goes to pacify and illumine and to overcome what are called cannibal demons, which is descriptive. There are those who feed on the innocent, harming precious ones here, in an uncaring and utterly out of control way.

We need to call upon the Saints and Saviors for that very reason. Often we feel we cannot oppose them by ourselves, with our own limited resources.

All of the Divine Beings we have a connection with and call on then have this same effect, of pacifying suffering conditions and restoring harmony. This may happen all at once, or in stages, but the result is the same, wherever you find it.

Prayer then, and faith, reaching out, and receiving blessings from the source of healing, strength, and protection in our lives is essential.

We often don't see what we live with, or the forces that move in our own lives and psyches, but, for those who want to look, here it is. Everything they say in both demonology and angelology, or devas and maras is true of each of us as well. There is truth to it both in our shared experience, and psychologically, in our inner world.

In Buddhism, good and what we call evil are not fixed. This is related to the truth of *anatta*, or what is found in the emptiness teachings, that there is no fixed, independent self nature. We see through this appearance. This is important to understand, and then to remember, to know about, and then to practice.

Good and evil are states of being, or states of consciousness. This is actually optimistic...

The good news, *the best possible news* in fact for those of us in the human realm, or those caught in lower realm experiences is that beings of light, we can say divine celestial beings, are here to help. Their nature is compassion, and activity, and when we connect with them, they lead us from where we are to the higher worlds, to freedom, and to lasting peace.

We may not see the fullness of experience while here, but the truth of it remains, and is greatly helpful to know about.

May we all find our way, healed, and protected,
guided, and supported by beneficent teachers, all holy ones
May our freedom increase, and may we use the great good fortune of this
life to care for all others in the best of ways

- From *Guru Rinpoche - An Anthology*

A Dream to call the Angels

I was awake and all morning it was raining silver in my room. Gradually everything I could see became translucent, visible still in outward structure, but also clear, showing the inside, like through a membrane.

The room's light was stronger, in a soft and gentle way, than the early morning outside, and seem to come not from any one place, but to be arising evenly in myself and all that I saw.

The feelings began with a dream.

I was taking a test in an ordinary over bright classroom with other young people, and everyone had a copy of the test except me. I opened my test booklet to find answers, on separate scraps of paper, to other tests.

I brought the booklet to the teacher, a woman with mid-length brown hair, and she brought me back to my seat and held up something with writing on it, telling me to copy the writing down.

At first I didn't not understand, but then I came to realize that to copy this paper down constituted the whole of my test.

The paper at first just looked ordinary, then it changed into an ornate colored woodcut - with fancy writing and colored pictures.

It said something to this effect:

'In the late Renaissance year of 17 ? Father _____ had brought to him his charge, _____ , so that he could be nearer.

It ended with the line,

'The tutorial is completed.'

At first I thought the young person brought to the priest was some kind of prisoner, and then I realized (beginning the feeling of angels) that the young man was his student and that it was a fortunate event for all involved that the young man was being moved in closer proximity to his teacher.

In reading this over, copying it and coming to the line, 'The tutorial is completed', this bright and beautiful feeling started to rise slowly, clearly felt throughout my whole being. (I was awakened by this.)

It is an indescribable feeling of peace and well-being, pleasurable, billowing at times towards intensely so, a clarity and presence that is palpable, fixed, steady.

The presence of these spirits, angels I can only call them, brought with them gifts in the form of opening me up to certain truths that I had not seen with such a complete clarity before.

It was like being in that soft and warming glow, all over feeling of well being, opened ways of seeing.

I felt something open and began to see the fortune, the wealth of this earth that I am surrounded with. I count among these the elements of making music, of writing and learning. I count among these the people I know and am made rich by knowing, my family, also the beauty and tenderness of people I don't know as well.

I was able, am able still to see the treasure of being touched by beauty and how it waits, all this that is rich in possibility waits to be responded to with an open heart. I feel I have seldom if ever appreciated my surroundings so much. How fortunate I am!

Next, following right after this I began to see the wealth of ideas that have come through to me - I saw each of these ideas - expressed in friendship, poetry and philosophy, as if they were individuals, alive with their impulse and message, like people.

I had to ask as some point that I only be shown enough to keep my clarity. I didn't want to be overcome by the pleasurable feelings that were steadily growing.

I don't know what loosened, but these presences are quite tangible, taking up all I can see and feel, outside, inside, healing...

{Mid 1980's}

The Monastery That Refused to Burn

And just as the monk's dwelling place
was protected from fire,
so too, may other homes and persons
and animals be protected...

There were two hundred foot flames on the ridge,
and ten battalions of heroes,
the fire came right up to the edge of the trail,
and went no further

The crews that were there at Abhayagiri Monastery
couldn't believe what they were seeing -
but it happened
'the fire reversed itself and went back up the mountain', they said.
The Devas were working overtime.

May we all be so protected by the Dhamma
from the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion
May we dwell in safety and peace, and coolness,
owing to the Dhamma within

Every Square Inch

If we were to ask, where is the divine life? Where are the angels, ancestors, guides and bodhisattvas? The answer is - the divine is everywhere. In every square inch there are countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, saints and saviors. We don't see this because of our obscurations, laziness, lack of faith and practice. Having a glimpse is enough though. Just as they say in theistic traditions that God is everywhere, and all his or her blessings are ever available to us all, the same is true when speaking of the light and power of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It's endlessly beneficial nature is everywhere for us.

How Angels Are Known - from the essay One in Essence

Angels are a manifestation of the Divine, known in our world, and in our lives...

Once we are able to see beyond the common form of what we call angels, we can begin to notice, and to look for Divine Activity we can call *angelic* throughout our lives.

Sometimes it comes to us as a light, in a manner of speaking; It can be felt as a special kind of clarity guiding our steps;

At times, it can be felt as an amazing strength rising up that we didn't know we had in us;

It can be some sense of a miraculous, a-causal arranging of conditions outside, perhaps seemingly inconsequential in themselves looking back, but part of something larger, that had a good purpose, after all.

The complexity of events is often beyond what we can fully understand with our concepts, but there can be an intelligence and benevolence felt through it all, guiding events and our lives with such care...

In the Bible, they would say this is the working of Divine Providence, and when we reflect on this in our lives, it increases our faith, our trust that we are cared for, and that things will somehow work out...

Sacred outlook - Seeing beyond ordinary perception in modern culture,
and American Buddhism

'Beware of confining yourself to a particular belief and denying all else, for much good would elude you – indeed, the knowledge of reality would elude you. Be in yourself for all forms of belief, for God (Truth) is too vast and tremendous to be restricted to one belief rather than another.' - Ibn 'Arabi

{I write this for myself, and my family; Here is the great 'what if it is so?' ...}

So much of our pessimism and despair comes from the limited views we that hold of ourselves and this world that we live in. This is not entirely our own fault. It comes as well from our culture and upbringing.

We would expect that religions, such as Buddhism, would offer an alternative to the one dimensional world of consumerism and competition, and to the flat, affect-less life of scientific rationalism. Instead we find that Buddhism is often presented strictly as another philosophy, or just as psychology, and divorced from many of the elements that would classify it as a religion. This is understandable- to a point. Many people come to Eastern religions because Christianity and Judaism didn't work for them. And what's worse, they've had those teachings proselytized at them by arrogant, narrow minded fanatics.

We like to joke that many American Buddhists are in recovery from Western religion. For many, the straightforward, practical teachings on how to take care of our minds are of great appeal and benefit. This is all good, but, if this is all it is, there are some profound and precious things that are

being left out of our understanding of ourselves, and our world and of Buddhist teachings.

One of the great things about these times is that we are able to look at how other people received and practiced these teachings. One thing we can notice is that the starting place for many other people, in other cultures and times, has been very different than our own.

In most places, Buddhism is a tradition that is alive with wonder, rich with the presence of the sacred, and with the guiding influence of Enlightened beings. Here are a couple of quotes from modern teachers: The first is by Ani Tenzin Palmo, a British born nun, ordained in the Tibetan Tradition. She says,

We are not alone. This universe is full of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are on our side. And, as is known in all Buddhist countries, although it is not always emphasized in the West, we can pray to them.

And Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said:

You are not alone because all the time there are numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas surrounding you, loving you, guiding you, that is what they do....

Now, if we compare this way of thinking to the general way people view themselves and this world, and the way that Buddhism is usually taught in the Theravada and Zen centers in America, there is a very great difference. One perspective says that we're pretty much on our own. Another

perspective says that there are many enlightened beings we can call on, and that can help us. Now, suppose for a moment, What if this were so?

If this is true, as I think it is, then we've reduced our view of this world and ourselves, our traditions, and our options, and this is surely a great loss to us all. What we have when this is the case is a tradition that has been greatly dis-empowered, and therefore generations of students, and those they are connected with, are being deprived of very great benefit.

I recently heard an interview with Sister Joan Chittister, where she said that the maps we use are important, because they are what will be followed by future generations to make their way in the world.

My world is rich, but many modern day Buddhists don't share this view, and they explicitly or tacitly deny so much of our potential and possible experience. There are abundant resources available by which we can actualize our aims, and if these are not taken advantage of, then it's like going hungry, and having our whole family go hungry, while there are fields nearby that can satisfy those needs. It is such an unnecessary tragedy to not see this much.

Ani-la added that: 'This is not being theistic – this is being practical. If there's help out there, why not invoke that help?..

May we all be well and happy

May we all awaken to the blessings that are continually here for us!

In a rich world view, Saints, Buddhas, Enlightened Intelligence, Bodhisattvas, and Divine help are available. If we don't know this much, then what are we left with? – a string of doctrines, and we're on our own? No! Our lives, our world, our Traditions hold inconceivably so much more than that! And while it's true that not everyone can perceive these things, or has an affinity with thinking this way - this is how it is in the world - they should at least consider the possibility of help from these sources. And they should at least not dissuade others who can draw great benefit, solace and inspiration from the presence of enlightened beings in their world view.

Another thing that leads people to reject all religious views is that prayers or the methods used don't always work in the way they want them to. It's the truth that many factors are involved either in bringing a result, or when something does not work. Our lives have this inconceivable complexity to it, as much as we may want to over-simplify things. I can say with many others that the sum of it is beyond me. What then to do?

Where the methods, and the views they are based on enter into it, and I think the reason they shouldn't be rejected outright, but taken up where and when we can, is that they are born of our collective instinct for knowing, and for making things right in our lives. These are methods that have been reaffirmed in every generation. They are our inherited wisdom of what has worked in the past, very often beyond anything that was thought possible.

Let's look at this together. This is how it is in these times: the common, mundane perceptions we live with and pass around are really more

accurately de-valued, degraded views, of ourselves, each other, and our world. This reaches these days, unfortunately, even into how religions traditions are taught and received.

I wrote this poem a few days ago:

*A grey scale teacher
splashes his grey scale paint-views
onto everyone and everything
They are a danger!*

*There is no joy there,
no color,
little depth of feeling,
little or no poetry or wonder,
richness or inspiration*

*Deprived themselves,
they deprive others...*

Part of the problem for us Westerners is our over-reliance on rational thinking. This function has its place, but there are also some things that only come to us through the door of the love, the door of the heart, through faith and intuition, or direct experience. If we rely too much on the intellect here, it blocks us.

I've thought that one analogy that works to describe both what's true about the rational view and what it leaves out is a black and white photograph of

a color scene. It's true as far as it goes, but there are many elements that are not seen.

Another analogy I thought of is this:

*If we look at an ocean through a pinhole,
what we see
is a pinhole's worth of the ocean
It's like this.*

Many spiritual truths don't lend themselves to being contained within concepts, and those who live just in the intellect suffer the loss of so many things, like the perception of beauty, mystery, wonder, intuition, inspiration and delight... These things are seen with the eyes of the spirit, and not with the eyes of the intellect alone.

Another element that plays into a common, mundane view is our pride. Every tradition, and common sense too tell us that humility is necessary for learning. It would be one thing if we knew we were arrogant, but when even this much self knowledge is lacking, it's really hard to learn from our teachers, this world, and our deeper nature. This is related to our receptivity. We can say: great humility, great receptivity; small humility, small receptivity; and no humility, then no receptivity whatsoever...

From culture comes a self created world view, and self fulfilling prophecy

{Here is a sketch of how de-valued, ordinary perceptions of ourselves and our world develop, and how they can be undone. Like any sketch, it leaves

out many things, but hopes to catch enough of the essential structure of what's going on to communicate its message.}

We live in a culture and a time that is lacking in its sense of the sacred. Wherever the best of human values are not given enough attention, or where religious culture is mocked or ignored, and where a sense of the beautiful is overridden by the volume and quantity of meaningless things, then we become inwardly impoverished.

We live in grossly materialistic times, that deny of the existence of everything beyond the reach of our ordinary five senses. Be assured, this has not always been the case in other times and cultures.

We may pride ourselves on having gotten over what we haughtily call 'infantile' views, of a spiritual world, or any higher order than what the average person can see. We denigrate 'magical thinking' as naïve, uneducated, false and misleading. We're so proud of our reasoning and science, and we set that as the standard for everything.

Modern consumer culture then isolates people, and over time, the human connections we all need grow thin. We become suspicious of our neighbors and friends, and set apart from family. The prevalent perspective is actually nihilistic, life denying, a tragic distortion of who and what we are.

The views many of us have inherited, just by the fact of having been born here, are then reinforced by our emotional reactions, which are then reflected back to us as appearances that are colored or tainted by our own minds. If our mind is not dealt with skillfully, a patina can cover

everything. What all this adds up to is a disempowered view of what it is to be alive, to be a human being in this precious world of ours.

Collective views are shared in mostly unnoticed ways. They are pervasive, and are the ground of our sense of the choices we have, for change or development, or to remedy the problems we face.

To counteract this perception, or rather, misperception, we should be able to recognize diminished values, and degraded views wherever they exist, in ourselves, our family and neighbors, and in the world, so that we can replace them with something truer, something ever closer to the ideal. At the very least, our religions traditions and philosophies should offer us an alternative to nihilism. Life is available, and someone should say it out loud.

To love is to begin to remember who we are

What is it that brings light back into our lives? What will cause us to see ourselves and our world as it really is? Where will we find strength for all we need to do, and vision, and grace? Everyone, no matter whether they are affiliated with a tradition or not, can love. It can be a love for family, for art, for nature, for our teachers, for our young...

Love is the eye that sees beauty. In that one virtue there is light, and strength. There is daily food for the journey, courage and healing. We can add to this affection for our world a basic practice of meditation that quiets and clarifies the mind. Together, these two can enhance and deepen each other.

We struggle more than we need to, when we do everything but our inner work. That, we give short shrift, but this is that 'one needful thing'. With love, and regularly taking time for meditation and self cultivation, as a basis, and a way of life, we can begin to appreciate what Traditions offer, their great gift to us all.

In Tibetan Buddhism, basic ignorance manifests as what they call 'impure perception', or 'ordinary perception', the mundane view of the world that we carry with us, and this is seen as the root cause of how we limit ourselves and suffer. The opposite of this is called an enlightened view, pure perception, or sacred outlook. This is a way of experiencing the world as essentially divine in nature, having great beauty and potential.

The following principles go beyond Buddhism alone, to reflect something of what is seen and lived with in other Traditions as well, and in the lives of contemplatives. They stand in radical contrast and in eternal opposition to the common, mundane view. Here are few tenets of a magical world view, pure perception or sacred outlook:

that all life is sacred;

that the Divine, freedom and peace, the Kingdom of Heaven, is within us
all

that our fundamental nature is pure

therefore, that we all have the potential to become free from suffering and attain happiness; we can accomplish great benefit for ourselves and others

that this world is sacred, alive and responsive, and that we are inseparably connected to it;

that we are always connected to each other, to our whole family

that there are other worlds, other realities

that there are many levels of beings, seen and unseen

that we are not alone in this world

that there are powers we can call on, Saints and Saviors, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Ancestors, and divine beings that will respond and help

that we are multi-dimensional beings, and so, things such as distant viewing, absent reading, and distant healing are possible

that there are faculties beyond the ordinary that can be developed, each according to our unique temperament and gifts, but to some extent by everyone

that prayer is effective

that ritual works

that mantra works

An enlightened world view, however we come to it, offers us spiritual food, expansive vistas, and the means to accomplish our aims; it offers us support, whenever and wherever it is needed most. I find such views closer to the truth of how things are. Whatever methods we then use, there is a workable operating basis for living that is full and rich. We are empowered by such views, and the heritage of our great resources is again, as ever, open to us.

From an enlightened perspective of this kind, the spiritual practices we do, such as study, meditation or prayer, aim to clear away what keeps us from knowing the truth about ourselves, and our lives here; the fullness of the gifts our teachers and benefactors have given to us, and what we have to draw from to act, to set things right as much as we can here in this world.

*May we all be aware of our true heritage,
and live lives of generosity,
great joy, and fulfillment,
of great peace, well being,
and benefit to all!*

Tenets of Pure Perception

Sacred outlook is a way of experiencing the world as essentially divine in nature, having great beauty and potential. It is seeing:

That all life is sacred;

That the Divine, freedom and peace, the Kingdom of Heaven, is within us all

That our fundamental nature is pure

and therefore,

That we all have the potential to become free from suffering and attain happiness; we can accomplish great benefit for ourselves and others

That this world is sacred, intelligent, alive and responsive, and that we are inseparably connected to it;

That we are always connected to each other, to our whole family

That there are other realms of existence

That there are past and future lives

That karma works, negative actions create suffering, and that grace and blessings, and positive actions create happiness, and bring light into the world

That the way we experience ourselves and each other and the world depends on our mind

That true mind sees things the way they are, and naturally has right values, and is healing

That the purpose of our lives here is to care for each other, and,

Those who show us the best ways to do this are our venerable teachers

That there are many levels of beings, seen and unseen

That we are not alone in this world

That there are powers we can call on, Saints and Saviors, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Ancestors, and divine beings that will respond and help

That we are multi-dimensional beings, and so, things such as distant viewing, absent reading, and distant healing are possible

That there are faculties beyond the ordinary that can be developed, each according to our unique temperament and gifts, but to some extent by everyone

That vows are powerful

That prayer is effective

That ritual works, and,

That mantra works

*May we all be aware of our true heritage,
and live lives of generosity,
great joy, and fulfillment,
of great peace, well being,
and benefit to all!*

For more information on Sacred Outlook, and Pure Perception, see:

[A Belief in the Miraculous - Buddhism, Magic, and a Sense of the Sacred](#)
(2018)

An excerpt: [Miracle Stories](#)

[The World As It Truly Is](#) (2021)

[Opening the Door to Pure Perception](#) (2023)

[Speaking of Angels](#), from this collection,

and,

Devanussati - Recollecting Devas, A Guided Meditation by Ajahn Achalo

[Audio](#), [Video](#), and [Transcript](#)

A Simple Visualization - The Refuge Tree

In this practice, we imagine the Buddha, ourselves, and others, as having bodies that are made entirely of light... and we see ourselves as being in a Paradise, or in a Pure Land, such as Sukhavati...{that is also made entirely of light...}

Imagine that you are in a large, open, sacred space, beautiful, adorned with flower gardens, lakes, and wonderful trees, with birds sweetly singing...

The sun is brightly shining, as a few clouds float by... It's a lovely day... perfect in every way...

We see before us now the Buddha, the Divine Form we are meditating upon, or our main teacher, at the center of what appears as a great Refuge Tree, surrounded by Bodhisattvas, and all our ancestral teachers, going back generations, right down to our very own Root Teacher or Teachers...

These holy ones are all made entirely of beautiful light, and appear in the space in front and above us, on celestial clouds, on lotuses and moon cushions... They smile upon us...

Whatever is most pleasing and uplifting, that is what we see and feel before us now...

Imagining yourself to be praying in a Paradise, or in a Pure Land, or in the Garden of Eden can be very helpful...

Imagine that you are now praying in a perfect Pure Land, together with, and in the presence of all the exalted souls of the Saints and righteous people of the past, present, and future...

*Imagine, as you are praying, that the Saints you have personally known, physically seen, or have heard about * are praying with you...*

Feel the elevated bliss, light, and power generated from such a visualization flowing through your prayers...

Have the sense that all these Noble Ones, the whole company of heaven and faithful here on earth are present...

'All should join together - one to the other and one above another - so that they all can receive the heavenly flow of blessings {shefa}, by way of those above them who are closer to the source of supernal goodness...'

{The Baal Shem Tov}

With this Right View and a pure motivation, as we recite verses of refuge and aspiration prayers, meditate, and recite mantra, we visualize that we receive blessings from the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, from all the Bodhisattvas and Devas, from all Holy Beings, and from all that is sacred and pure in the universe, in the form of light and nectar...

These dissolve into ourselves, and into all those we see as being with us now, our family and friends, those we don't know, and those who are experiencing any difficulty at all...

We visualize that the light and nectar purifies, heals and calms, nourishes, strengthens and inspires us all...

May all share in these blessings...

May all beings receive all they need to awaken and be free...

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing...

Meditate like this... Make prayers of aspiration...

To conclude, dedicate the merit to all beings.

I call upon my Teachers and Spiritual Ancestors,
Lord Buddha with your Retinue of Holy Ones,
please come to this place

May we all receive your blessings
May we all receive your light, inspiration, and strength...

* * *

May the Great Healing Light of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
of all Holy Beings,
and of all that is sacred and pure in the universe,
pacify, completely pacify,
and fully remove the sufferings of living beings,
and bring us all true and lasting health and happiness