

A Few Further Thoughts

On the Deva Realms

By Jason Espada

Preface

This small book is a follow up to the collection titled *On Devas*. It was written as part of my correspondence with one Ajahn Achalo, who is the only Western Buddhist teacher I know of who regularly speaks on this theme.

I have written this mostly for myself, to be as complete and as clear as I can about this vitally important subject. If anyone else should also benefit from these reflections, of course, that would be wonderful.

As I mentioned in the preface to *On Devas*, the existence of different orders of being, and of benevolence, grace and blessings can be understood as an aspect of a Buddhist right view, but we don't get to this, explicitly, until we get to the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings.

Many Westerners leave all this out, and find a path that works for them from within the Dharma teachings. Others will welcome and make good use of this broad, inclusive view of our spiritual lives here.

These thoughts then, which have become somewhat extensive, do feel complete, or almost so. Along with *On Devas*, the essay titled *Sacred Outlook*, and the book *A Belief in the Miraculous*, I have set down all I have thought to date on this wonderful subject¹.

May it be of benefit.

¹ These and *the works cited throughout* can be found on jasonespada.com, linked to in the recent essays section.

Correspondence with Ajahn Achalo I, January 25th, 2025

Nice to meet you.

I've been enjoying some of your talks on the devas.

It's something I've been interested in for a while.

I put together a few passages on the subject, and send it along with a couple of other things to Ajahn Nisabho, here in the US.

Perhaps you will find some of these things interesting as well.

I look forward to hearing more Dhamma from you.

Many thanks,

Jason Espada.

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ps. I also made a document of the first teaching I heard from you, on Devanusatti.

With all good wishes this evening from San Francisco.

{Sent: On Devas, A Belief in the Miraculous, Miracle Stores, and the transcript of his guided meditation on devanusatti}

To Ajahn Achalo II, *Like waving from across the street*, and replies

Hi - if this is not Ajahn Achalo today, kindly forward it to him. Many thanks.

Dear Ajahn, in an interview with Clear Mountain Monastery from a few months back, one of the Ajahns commented that you are one of the few teachers talking about subtle realities, and devas.

When I heard that, I immediately saw it was true, and, *an image popped into my mind.*

You know how it is when you are traveling, and you're the only Westerner for miles around, when suddenly from a block away, you see another, and you call out - Hey! How ya doing? Want to get something to eat?

Well, it's like this for me now.

I've been about the only Western person I know who writes about [Buddhism and prayer](#), or subtle realms, devas and the blessings of connecting with a teacher or a tradition.

So, I thought I should introduce myself properly.

I'm very happy to connect with you, for a number of reasons.

Before I say more, I can tell you of a synchronistic event that happened today, as I was listening to the aforementioned talk, where you were telling of synchronistic events. (Today is Monday, January 27th, 2025)

I was waiting for my mother, who is 93, and who was at her podiatrist appointment. I was listening via my iphone to you telling the story of not liking oil, and how the clairvoyant monk / teacher knew it without your saying anything. You thought that *you prefer lotion*, and lo and behold the next day he called you to his kuti and offered you lotion.

Well, this really happened today: Within a minute or two of hearing that story my mother came out of the podiatrist's office, and got into the car and told me right away that she would be putting some lotion on her dry dry skin. Her words.

I thought, hmmm... devas... we used to call these synchronistic events, 'god winks' or, signs that a person is 'on his contacts'.

I took it as a little confirmation to send you this message, that I was mulling over, going back and forth in my mind just a little about it, and hesitating...

I'd like to invite you to have a look at some of the things I've written, if you have time, and are so inclined.

From the language you use in talking about subtle realms, we have a different Buddhist background. I'm more studied in the Tibetan lineages, although two of my main teachers in this life, I'm delighted to say, are Thich Nhat Hanh, and Luang Por Pasanno;

And before coming to embrace the Dharma, I studied Western Esoteric Traditions extensively, as I wrote about in *A Belief in the Miraculous*.

I'm sure you will find many parallels, and some different language to describe what you have been talking about in your discourses on devas.

Here are a couple of things that were 'buried' in what I sent in an earlier message, that I thought you'd appreciate in particular:

One is an essay that is central to *A Belief in the Miraculous*, called *Sacred Outlook - Seeing Beyond Ordinary Perception in Modern Culture and American Buddhism*.

{Related to this, perhaps you could speak more directly, if you haven't already, about the modern materialistic view, that is nihilistic, and what an obstacle this is to practicing the Dharma.}

And the other is a wondrous story I heard on youtube, that I also included in the selections I sent On Devas.

It's called *Frank Martin's miraculous journey to a new life*

For all I know, lots of people are sending you things such as this. It wouldn't surprise me, but I wanted to reach out, just the same. Like waving from a block away, and calling out, Hey, would you like to sit and chat?

I send this with all good wishes this afternoon from San Francisco, California.

May you live long, and may all your noble aims be fulfilled.

Jason Espada.

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From Ajahn Achalo, January 28th, 2025

Hi Jason,

I am glad that you reached out. Nice to get to know you a bit better.

It is very curious that you have contacted me...

Something that you may not be aware of, is that one of the editors from Shambala had contacted me recently, and asked me to consider writing a book on the subject of Buddhist cosmology and devatanussati.

I feel that this field is under represented, under acknowledged, to the point of it seeming unbalanced, in what has been shared in Theravada Buddhism by Western teachers thus far. Particularly when compared to how Theravada Buddhism is actually lived and practiced in the Theravada countries of Asia.

I would actually like to write this book, with sutta references, as well as contemporary anecdotal stories, and some of my own personal stories and experiences. I see that there is much more interest and receptivity in this area than there used to be. But there is a problem. Teaching is not the only thing that I do.

Being an abbot, and having my own meditation disciplines to keep up with, as well as a regular teaching schedule, means that my available time is rather limited. I had literally been wondering if I might be able to find a ghostwriter (or perhaps a deva writer :) to help me to write this book.

I feel as though I have all of the coloured threads and know what the design should look like, to make a lovely tapestry, but I would need some serious help with all of the hours that it would take to actually weave it.

Now you contact me, and you have written books, touching on these very themes! I am more busy than I should be, Jason.

Tomorrow I am heading off to Bodhgaya for a month of intensive retreat. After which I am meeting up with 60 of my students to lead a pilgrimage for around 3 weeks... after that, upon returning, life permitting, I will have to pay attention to two significant building projects that I have ongoing.

Anyway, I've a question for you. Would you be interested in helping me to write a book? (That would be certainly be an ongoing conversation for us to have!)

Do you have any interest to come and spend a period of a few months living in my monastery, writing and meditating? If you were here in person, I could explain an outline in detail and check in daily, for say 20 minutes after our mealtime, then you'd have time to write. If that doesn't work, if you are interested, we could go over things via video chat when needed, and you could write from home.

I would happy to give you whatever seems appropriate credit, and split royalties fairly should such a book be commercially published. (And royalties from my side would go to the monastery.)

You may have many other commitments, but since you reached out, we share these interests, you are a writer, and I've been asked to write a book... I thought that I might as well ask. July/August/September is when I would be able to give this project some proper attention.

For now, in just a few more hours, I will be heading off to Bodhgaya to meditate for 9 hours per day for a month. (I might see some devas! :)

All good wishes to you, Jason!

With metta,

Ajahn Achalo

{My reply} January 28th, 2025

Dear Ajahn Achalo - how curious and marvelous that you have written this.

I'll try to explain briefly, since you have so much going on, but some things will need more time, which I am of course willing to give to the project you are suggesting.

When it works for you, we should have conversations, either in writing or via video, and in person too should it somehow be needed and wanted by the forces of the universe.

I couple of points of backstory that coincide for me, that it might be helpful for you to know at this point:

The last 11 years, since my father passed away, I've been the steward of [his photographic archive](#). He was a great artist, and I've been helping to get his work into museums and universities all over the country.

One of my aims all along has been to have his social documentary photography, and this collection in New York, and it's finally happened this month that we received a grant to do just that.

{a longer story made short for our purposes here, ha}

In any case, I have asked the University there to let me ship the collection in April, after I've had a chance to do a few more things with it, that will take me from about now to then.

You know what you said, and I'm paraphrasing here, Be careful what you ask the devas / universe for?

Well, I've been waiting for my work with my father's archive to be completed, and, feeling like *that will be this year*, my strongest thought and wish is that at last I have the chance to retreat again, to meditate and renew myself, and also finally finish some writing projects.

I can tell you more about those another time, if you are interested.

It's been a bit exhausting to do this much, and my practice and writing projects have mostly taken a back burner, but I know how to renew myself, and I'm really looking forward to this on a lot of levels.

It's been a big challenge for me as a layperson, as I'm sure you can imagine.

I also thought recently that I would like to meet you and practice with you and learn from you directly, but then, looking at my age (I'll be 65 in April) and energy level, and commitments here, I thought, but how?...

So, it's auspicious that we are communicating, and I look forward to seeing where it goes.

I'm happy we've connected, at least, more than words can express.

It's a gift for me, for sure.

It's a little funny how things happen sometimes, no?

In brief, I'd like to help in any way I can.

You speak about these things - devas and a traditional Buddhist world view already so well to interested students, and some of the talks and conversations I've heard so far I'm sure can be drawn from to create a fine book.

That outline you have in mind already, I'd like to see it please.

One thing I would add to what you wrote in your message, from my perspective here is that - it's not just the in Theravada as it's taught here where the view of Buddhist world view and the existence of devas is lacking, it's really all the schools and traditions here that I know of.

It's strange, right?, but maybe it shouldn't be all that surprising, given the times we live in. This should be drawn out, in no uncertain terms.

It's really moving to recognize how pervasive instead the modern nihilistic view is, the - There is just this life - and let me make it a little more comfortable - view.

Ok, a couple more things, in the spirit of keeping this short as I can. Not an easy task, all things considered. It's a good thing I have a sense of humor

and patience, most of the time at least. Things can get pretty grim without these.

But perhaps you will have a little time to read as you are traveling, and so I will continue.

I rejoice that you are going to be spending the upcoming time at Bodhgaya.

Thank you for telling me about it.

I know you will be offering many prayers for there to be peace in our world, and for the cessation of suffering and its causes.

I'm sure you will be praying for the flourishing of the Dhamma in all our lives.

Please pray and dedicate also that this necessary teaching you have in mind be accomplished,

And, if you can, that whatever I can do for you in that regard, I will be able to do.

And while you are there, please ask the devas and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that anything I have to offer to this world that will help others be completed as well.

This is my prayer these days.

I can tell you about my writing projects another time, as there are a few of them that have been in process, slowly maturing, for years now. They have their own time, it seems, and that would help me too, I'm sure.

For now, I will add just this to our conversation. I'll attach a funny story of mine I was just recently thinking may have been written by the devas (hmmm... curious that you should mention today a ghost writer or '*a deva writer*'). I didn't include this in the passages I sent you on devas but the story of it at least fits with the others.

This is something I wrote down in 1998 while on retreat, and it recounts a dream that I'm sure was a gift from the helpful spirits of the holy place I was staying (which was Lawudo Monastery way up in the Himalayas, in Nepal).

So such things have been known to happen.

I think you'll get a kick out of it too. It's still vivid for me all these years later.

This is a mysterious world, full of wonder and magic, and spiritual energy that is here to help us, of that much I am sure.

And how wonderful if more people knew this, and oriented their lives to this aspect of Right View!

I recently put together one collection of older essays and newer ones that touches on some of these themes, lamenting the absence of a sense of the

sacred and affirming the truth of this view, called [Opening the Door to Pure Perception](#)

There are passages in that book on what I call *Buddhist paradigms*. I try to say, essentially that, all of them work to some extent, but that of pure perception or sacred outlook, for me, is the most complete, and has the most to offer for our lives and practice.

To my mind, this is what you are describing in your talks.

I also have one collection of essays in progress is called *In Praise of the Vajrayana*, which ties a lot of this together for me, inclusively.

You mentioned that the Buddhism in Thailand is practiced with a view that is more complete and more alive than how it is represented here. I remember that to be the case from when I was there also back in 1997 and 1998.

I thought of how it is also that the ritual and prayers, and their potency and effectiveness is part of the universal working of spiritual traditions in our world. I've written about that some too, from a Buddhist perspective.

See, for example: [On Buddhism and Magical Practice](#).

So, ok, to conclude and put a bow on it for now, let's just make the aspiration to support each other in these worthy endeavors.

I'm sure that much good will come from it.

Thank you for the honor of considering me for this much needed book.

May it reach fruition
and may many people be helped by it,
to a fuller life, to freedom and peace

I look forward to hearing from you again.

Rejoicing in your practice, and in all the help and support you offer to others.

It's amazing, really, wow...

Thank you again,

Jason.

jasonespada.com

On youtube:

[The Discourses of the Buddha from the Pali Canon](#)

and

[Essays](#)

[Audiobooks](#)

Writings on the Avatamsaka Sutra

ps. Here are a few recent writings that came to mind to send you, related to what we are communicating about. If you like reading and have some time between your activities, you may enjoy these.

Blessings to you in your travels and meditations.

May you be safe

May you be healthy

and

May all your noble aims be completely fulfilled

{Sent The Simply Historical Facts About Prayer, Gathering and Dedicating Merit, and Five Essays on Padmasambhava}

May 27th, 2025

Dear Ajahn Achalo, I hope this message finds you well.

We last communicated just before you went to India, if you recall.

Would you like to pick up our conversation on making a book about devas in Buddhism?

At your leisure, of course.

I have had a few ideas, since we communicated that I could run by you, and see what you think.

Perhaps a video call, whenever it's comfortable for you?

While you were there in India meditating, I took to writing out some thoughts, as if you and I were in conversation on these themes.

I called it - 'A few further thoughts on the Deva realms'

Along with what I sent you previously, they continue and just about conclude what I have thought on the subject over the years.

Even though it is a lengthy 'letter', I refer to articles throughout, and so I created this folder with our previous correspondence, as well as the files shared already, and those I mention.

[Here it is all in one place, for ease of access.](#)

As you have said in a number of your talks and q and a's, some aspects of the teachings, like those on past and future lives, and other kinds of spiritual life are part of Right View. These days, when I read or listen to a teacher here, one of the first things I try to tune into is their paradigm.

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

In a message before you left for India, you extended an invitation to come there and live for a while and help you prepare a manuscript.

I don't know if I'm there yet, energetically, but I would welcome communicating with you, in any case.

Thank you again for your practice, and for your inspiring teachings.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Jason Espada

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A few further thoughts on the deva realms

The following began with the title *A few differences in how we see subtle realms, more subtle perception, and angelic beings*, and I've since added to it.

This was written with Ajahn Achalo in mind, as part of our communication, or an imagined conversation.

Ajahn is one of the few Western Buddhist teachers who regularly speaks of devas, and what he terms Buddhist cosmology.

I happened to connect with him earlier this year (2025), right before he was off to Bodh Gaya to meditate there, and then to lead a pilgrimage, but he did mention that a Buddhist publisher had contacted him about writing a book on the devas. He said he didn't have enough time to devote to it, and asked via email if I'd be willing to come to Thailand for a few months (boy, would I!) and help him out with this project.

I look forward to hearing from him again, and perhaps having one or more video calls.

I'd like to do this, but energy and my age are factors, and I'll have a better idea of what is in store later this year after the Spring.

My father's photographic archive will be going to New York, likely in April, and this is something I've been working towards for the last decade, so I'd like to give this my full attention until then.

After that I know I will want to retreat somewhere alone for a while, and restore myself as best I can...

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Perhaps along with a few of the other things I've sent, this can be a starting point for our conversations, or at least give us some more clarity about what is admittedly a rich, complex, and far reaching subject.

Since these ideas have been present while listening to Ajahn Achalo's talks on the devas, I thought I'd write them down, to keep an ongoing record.

The first thought that comes to mind often while listening to the description of accomplished monks with what is called *the divine eye*, is how this is somewhat different from the way the perception of subtle beings and realms is understood in the Western Esoteric Traditions.

Not at all to minimize the great accomplishment of these superb teachers, and realized beings, but in what are known as psychic or occult studies, perception of this kind is much more common. In fact, it's said that some people are naturally gifted, or have these capacities without even having to do any kind of spiritual practice. In Buddhist terms, we would say it could be from their past lives.

To add a little to this: It's said that when it comes to more subtle perceptions, there are two kinds of people:

One is someone who is already sensitive, and their challenge is to learn control, and the other is someone without this capacity, and their task is to increase their sensitivity. In fact, another word for a psychic in esoteric circles is 'a sensitive'.

They were also known, in the South here in particular, and in hispanic cultures as 'a person with second sight'. There are degrees of that, just like everything else.

I've always been something of this second kind, a sensitive, or an intuitive, to some extent at least.

My early experiences of more subtle realms were unfortunately awaked through a drug experience. The first time I got high from smoking pot, when I was 15, I felt the kundalini shoot up my spine to the top of my head.

When they talk about 'opening the doors of perception', drugs can sometimes 'take the door off the hinges.' It was that way for me for about 10 years. My experiences back then were unpredictable, and not reliable, and much more confusing as well.

Some people never recover from their drug experiences, and we see them walking around the streets here in San Francisco, and in just about every city in the States. This is unfortunately pretty common.

What distinguishes accomplished meditators in Buddhism, and those they call adepts, from minor to major in the West is *the reliability* of what they know with their subtle perception, and the extent, or depth of it.

There are ways of testing subtle perceptions, and some uniform guidelines for living across traditions that assure both the safety of the practitioner and the validity of what they know.

From what I learned and remember from the Western traditions is that we have intuitive experiences all the time, but often we don't recognize them, hence the need for some methods to learn to distinguish intuition from what is merely imagination, fantasy, or our own fabrications, hopes and fears and desires.

We underestimate ourselves, and by a lot, if we don't know that we have these capacities for more subtle perception, to some extent at least.

The other thought that has been coming up when listening is the difference between what I have found on investigation, and the simplified introduction to other realms that we read about in Buddhism, the six realms for example, or the description of the Pure Lands that are named.

The best I can do, to offer an analogy is to refer first to this world we know.

If we start with the question of -

How many countries and districts, and different neighborhoods, with different characters or personalities are there? -

Even in one small city, such as mine, of San Francisco, within a few small blocks there are so many lives and moods and emotions.

From there, when I ask now,

Why would other realms be any different?

Even here, we don't see nearly all of what there is to know.

Other realms, in my admittedly limited experience, are not different.

For me, it's better, more useful to think of their being *an unlimited number* of beings and states of consciousness, and hence the realms that they create, and we can say, live in.

And instead of this just washing out into an undefined, featureless generality, when I then look at the names of the different realms and Pure Lands, they serve as *an introduction*, and as *a general orientation* to what we can find, and ourselves experience at any time, including while being alive and in this body.

I'm sure more will follow, but this much I can think of clearly today.

One image I had, to finish up these brief notes this Tuesday, is that of two circles of water on a table top. There is some small distance between them, and when you take your finger and connect them, they become one.

What I'm feeling today is at least a possibility in our knowing each other and communicating what we know on these subjects.

Included in this feeling is what I've verified of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, prayer and mantra, ways of knowing, and the tenets of pure perception.

May this be more widely understood, and experienced.

May it be so.

May what we have to share with one another be given and received, and may it be useful, going forward.

* * *

One other difference in interpretation of the nature of angels, or devas is something I wrote about recently, in an essay called *How Angels Are Known*, which is in turn from something I called *One in Essence*.

Witness how we depict the archetypes of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and angels and saints:

I think on some level we expect life that is of another order of being to look like us - having two arms and two legs, a head with two eyes, and two ears, a nose and a mouth, and speaking with a language something like we speak.

This can be good *as interpretation*, as far as it goes when it's not taken too literally, but there are other ways these divine energies are known in our lives.

Same goes for what we could call devils, or maras, or demi devils or maras.

They don't always show up red, with a tail and horns and a pitchfork. There's the whole range of how both the good, and helpful, and the harmful energies manifest.

This is much closer to the truth of things than our simplified images represent to us, too much of which has been borrowed from Hollywood.

These are also non physical realities we are talking about now.

I'm sure we can learn to read spiritual life more directly, and more accurately.

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Why the Buddha prohibited the display of psychic powers

There's a parallel between the way it's said the Buddha viewed psychic perception, and the warnings given about it by every competent teacher in the Western Esoteric Tradition.

From what I've heard, there are many stories of the Buddha's disciples using psychic abilities to teach someone - Moggallana, for example, showing them other realms, or talking about someone's rebirth and its causes.

I even remember I had a set of two books I found in Bangkok on teachings from the Suttas on psychic realities.

There was also a prohibition, it's said, about displaying these abilities, and the reason is easy to see. One can only imagine in the Buddha's time how much of a circus it would become if someone could walk through walls or on water, levitate, or read another's mind. It could detract from the teachings in a major way.

I'm sure this is something the many Ajahns are familiar with.

The common problems of self deception and ego inflation

In the Western Traditions that teach psychic development, caring and skillful teachers warn from the beginning that a person with even a little ability can become proud, thinking they are further along than they actually are, and that is likely to derail any progress they were making towards wisdom.

They can become fascinated by it - 'ooh, look what I can do', or, 'hey, cool colors in that person's aura', or, like the song says, 'angels in the architecture, amen hallelujah', that sort of thing.

Not that all this is not interesting or compelling, but, *it just isn't the point* of learning in any viable spiritual tradition.

Then of course people can think they are special, and better than others, or use their subtle perception or influence in negative ways. This is in fact the most common use of minor psychic abilities - to control or cause harm, or attract someone.

Go into any 'curio' or occult shop here in the States and what you will see is mostly tailored to that. It's just an extension then of common delusion - to cause harm or exact revenge, or more often to fulfill desires, only compounded. Really, it's bad, and that is common knowledge too.

I remember one kind teacher and friend I had in the early 80's comparing the kind of trouble people could get into using their ordinary capabilities and methods with someone using some kind of ritual or subtle energy. They said it's like digging a hole using just a shovel, compared to using levers and pulleys. A person can get themselves into much deeper trouble.

We would joke back then 'Psychic Development - Affirmation Class \$100', and then a few months later, 'How to get out of the trouble you got yourself in from taking that psychic development - affirmation class, \$500'.

Seriously though, people with some capacity already, if they are not careful, can easily get out of their depths, or open themselves to influences they wouldn't want in their lives, if they have any sense. We all need good guidance, and protection, but especially when it comes to spiritual matters.

What we do especially with focus, such as with ritual, can have effects for lifetimes.

So may the devas and forces of light in the universe protects us all!

When I was in my early 20's I learned about the methods of what is generally called psychic development, focusing on chakras and energies and such, that usually came along with the warnings that are like the

warning on a pack of cigarettes - as common as that. Like most people though, I think, I just went full on ahead with it anyway, and only learned later that the ethics and discipline and measures taken for safety sake are there for a very good reason.

Some or most of us have to learn the hard way, but on this - sightseeing route, as it were, we also learn a lot about the casualties on the path of cultivation.

If it's not pride or the misuse of faculties and abilities, focusing on the energetic levels, even the more subtle ones can be a big distraction as well.

There can be an immersion or delight in them, and misunderstanding, or as we call it in Buddhism, delusion, and a person can go astray for a very long time, so this is recognized and clearly taught as an ever present danger when dealing with the occult or esoteric levels.

Homage to the Three Jewels, and to my Venerable Teachers, who show the Way!

At this point, looking back, I'd say if it's not about a higher ideal, higher rebirth, liberation, and helping others, then I'd leave such things be, and find teachers with integrity that we can look up to, and follow and learn from.

They say in the Indian Tradition that if we focus on psychic development, we may reach the spiritual, and then again, maybe not, but if we focus on the spiritual, everything comes along with that naturally, including subtle faculties and abilities.

This has been the experience across wisdom traditions. It's amazing.

There are examples of realized ones with these abilities in every true path of practice.

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An interesting Buddhist warning, make of it what you will

Some of the zen folk call anything visionary 'makyo', illusion, and they are not far off in that. It is often the realm of mistaken perception, and hard to navigate, and those with active imaginations, or sensitive to energies can get caught up more than others.

In their compassionate criticism, they are aiming for wisdom. It's helpful for some though to understand how conventional reality works, even if it is based on wrong view, or a partial view.

The subtle realm, when we first enter into it, is likened to seeing in a mirror; (skrying, they call it when using a literal mirror). It is the place of visions, or dream, and if we are not lost or caught there, it can be one of revelation.

All this does go together, angels, devas, spirits, poetry, visions and their interpretation...

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Hmmm...

There are also what they call 'illusory body' practices in the tantras for this reason. It is a subtle and profound understanding they are realizing, with a lot of perfectly sound Buddhist philosophy to back it up.

Most of the time this isn't spoken about so it should be made clear, for those who can take up the practice. It's not out of the realm of possibility, or beyond any of us, if it's explained well.

As with what stayed with me from my years of esoteric study, *we are already doing this*, working with subtle material, when we have some wisdom. Such teachings just point out what is then already so, with accurate, useful language.

The tantras are the symbolic and meditative enactment, on subtle energetic levels, of the Buddhist insight and intention. For those with an affinity, they help to realize these teachings more fully, and live in this world with more understanding and compassion.

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The value of having a good map

When I was in my late teens, as I mentioned, I was open to other realms and subtle realities, but I had no control back then over what I would experience, and no understanding of where I was and how to live my life, in other words, how to get from where I found myself at times, to where I wanted to go. This was the case for me from 18 to about 25.

Fortunately, as a teenager I happened into a small independent bookstore in Noe Valley here in San Francisco, that was called The Philosopher's Stone. It was an esoteric / philosophical bookstore, and I remember one of the owners telling me that, among the three of them that were partners there, they knew all the books in that store.

They were kind enough to guide me, gently, to what I needed most at that time, which was some teachings on subtle realities, and how to understand and navigate them.

Eventually, without their prompting, as I remember it, I naturally found my way to what is called the Western Esoteric Tradition, and an aspect of that is often the study of the Hermetic Kaballah. This is to distinguish it from how it is studied by some as part of the venerable Jewish Tradition.

I remember one writer on the subject describing its main meditation symbol, called the Tree of Life, as 'representing the universe and the soul of man.'

Now, how does this apply to subtle realities, and devas and angels, and their perception in Buddhism and other traditions?

How can this not be just another elaborate philosophy with little or nothing to do with our lives?

Oh my....

Well, for those with some subtle perception, it helps to have a framework that makes sense, starting with the idea that we exist on all these levels simultaneously - the physical, the energetic, and spiritual levels.

Even knowing that much is so different than the way the average materialist sees themselves and others and this world!

A person with some sensitivity does not have to study anything at all to know this - it's just the way things are for them, all by themselves.

Now, if we *are* interested in who we are and what kinds of conscious life we share this world with, traditions that teach on this subject are a joy to encounter. Naturally, a deep interest awakens, and we can learn what they have to say, generally, or in as much depth and detail as we like.

And if they somehow were *to provide a map* of our present reality, oh my, that would be something truly great and meaningful for us.

I remember being very impressed and having a lot of interest when they showed different levels of awareness represented, and *paths* between them. I remember, I thought, *Eh? What's that?*

There is a map, and they say, as with any good map, that we can use it to find out where we are, or if the 'scenery' changes, where we are going.

I've found this very useful over the years, as I can see what they refer to directly in my own experience.

Most importantly, as with the value of any useful map, we can see how to get where we want to go.

The map describes our life.

And the methods we use from any tradition can be seen functioning in this way, to lead us to freedom, to peace, and fulfillment, so for me, Buddhism dovetails into this.

I know now just how significant a teaching this has been for me, since it has, as we say, 'stuck' to these last four decades. It's been a good map, functional, and encouraging.

Of course, in my late 20's I found my way to Tibetan Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion, placing that right in the center, and, as it includes everything I had been learning up to that point, including the spiritual dimensions of our being here, I changed over to learning and practicing in that Tradition. What I learned prior to that time though has stayed with me, and it is naturally part of how I see myself and others and this world.

{My 2017 book *A Belief in the Miraculous - Buddhism, Magic, and a Sense of the Sacred* is based on that}

There are different levels of beings, as all complete cosmologies will tell us, and those with some sensitivity can perceive them, and benefit from those saints and bodhisattvas and devas who reach and help us with their compassion.

**

One more thing, for now at least

Being interested things like devas, I'm thinking, has got to lead a person in the direction of mysticism, or to the universality of what is found through any valid spiritual practice, if a person goes deep enough, and this is got to bring more respect, naturally, and appreciation for what is found in viable spiritual traditions. After all, the truth is the truth is the truth of our lives here.

And, we may be surprised to find the descriptions of the divine life is very similar everywhere we go.

We may call them devas, or angels, or saints, or arhats, or saviors, but their activity is the same, and the praises we hear, beneath the surface, often sound or feel very similar as well.

There are beings of light who heal us, who guide us, who make their presence felt in many ways;

There are those who surprise us, who comfort us, who warn us away from dangers;

Ancestors do this for us also, as in the story of my father hearing the voice of his grandfather, as recounted in Miracle Stories;

All this of course goes against the common materialistic view of ourselves and each other and the world we live in - that is an impoverished view, that is present *even in some modern day spiritual traditions as well*.

How amazing is that?

In any case, these subjects wait for us, to either disprove or to personally verify.

It's simply too important to be left for others (read: our family, society, or teachers with little understanding or experience) to decide for us.

**

By the way, I seldom talk about this, but my earliest recollection as a young adult of the spiritual in my life was of having a guardian angel.

It was a feeling of being loved and protected, and a constant presence.

When I first heard 'its voice', (and it *was* a voice at that time), She said, 'You don't have to worry'. (And it was a She, that was the sound and feeling of it for me then).

I was maybe 16, and playing my electric guitar, plugged in, by myself in the basement of our family's home, and I stopped and said, What?, (because it had a different quality than my own voice, I don't know how else to explain it but to say that), and it repeated, 'You don't have to worry'....

Ok...

I was later to learn that this is often the first thing people hear from their guardian angel.

I was surprised, and at the same time, not surprised.

From that time on I was set in the direction of learning more about the spiritual life that awakens, and that protects, and guides us.

Ok, 'nuff said, for now.

**

Listening to some of your journey, as you relate in your online q and a's

I thought today again of the practices of grounding and sealing the aura...

These are basic practices in studying in psychic development classes, maybe some of the first things a person learns.

I can share the method, which is traditional and verifiable.

You are already quite grounded, Ajahn, so I'm sure you don't need the first selection that follows, but I'll include it here in any case, since they are often paired. The part on sealing the aura begins on page 24.

Grounding and Sealing the Aura

{These are two practices that are often given to people in metaphysics or psychic development classes, for the sake of stability, and protection. They have proven invaluable to generations of students. The instruction on grounding, I received from my first teacher in the early 80's, and the second I found my way to around the same time. I can affirm that they both work just as they say they do.}

How to Ground Yourself, by Dorothy Schlosser {my first teacher}

What does it mean to be grounded?

Philosophically, it means that a person (and his "being" - soul) is committed to living on the earth, in the here and now. He accepts this life as a place to learn and develop spiritually, and to have his karmic opportunities and experiences. A person who is well grounded, for example, would generally not be the type to commit suicide, or to constantly be yearning for the "after life". Literally, grounding is really being in your body. It is one of the most basic and important steps in being able to train yourself as a psychic.

What are the advantages of being grounded?

Besides being helpful in getting psychic information, you are also more aware and productive. Clumsiness, forgetfulness, dreaminess, are symptoms that tend to disappear when you are grounded. It means you are united with yourself physically, emotionally, mentally, and psychically.

If you are "out of your body" - ungrounded, you are more accident prone, more unstable emotionally, more likely to be hysterical or afraid, and often feel "split off" from part of yourself, as if you are operating on "automatic pilot". You tend to feel detached from yourself.

How can I tell if someone is ungrounded?

Often their eyes look "spaced out", or glassy, or they are excessively clumsy and there is a feeling that they are not really there with you.

Is it hard to learn to ground yourself?

No. Many people who are successful in business or other fields, especially sports, have learned to stay grounded spontaneously. Their extreme ability to concentrate is a fine example of being really grounded.

Your nervous system, especially the spinal cord, is the channel that conducts electrical energy. Its where your kundalini - "life force" flows in largest "voltage". Learning to ground helps you use your life force effectively.

What special skill is needed to learn to ground yourself?

If you can use your imagination, you can ground yourself. At first it may take more effort, but with practice, you can learn to be grounded most of the time.

What makes a person become ungrounded? .

Usually a shock of some kind. Anger, fear, trauma, something upsetting. If a person can't physically get out of the way of danger, they will often psychically move out of their body. It's easier for some to "unground" than to deal with their feelings in the here and now. Everyone becomes ungrounded sometimes. Children, when overwhelmed, will often unground. The habit can stay with one for a lifetime.

What technique will help me ground?

Sit in a straight-backed chair. Close your eyes (or keep them slightly open, with your gaze downward). Plant your feet firmly on the floor.

Relax, and breathe, slowly and deeply.

Now imagine a root (or anchor), growing from the base of your spine, and also from the bottom of your feet into the very center of the earth.

Imagine little root systems extending through the soil, so that the roots are plenty strong enough to hold you in your chair like a plant would be - unable to move - but don't be afraid about this idea. Imagine enjoying being so attached to the earth, that she is your friend, your home, the place you get your energy and sustenance. (It is, by the way!)

Imagine that the center of the earth is full of energy and that you can draw it up through your root system into your body, just as a carrot would bring in nutrients.

When you feel a slight "tugging" at the base of your spine, and at the bottom of your feet, (and you haven't nodded off to sleep, which is universal with beginners), then you will know you are grounded.

When you can hold this calm, centered feeling for a period of time and can learn to stay grounded without conscious effort you are well on your way. In the beginning I'd remind myself to ground about 20 times a day.

You're doing well when you begin to be aware of when you are, or not grounded. With practice, you'll be able to ground yourself out of trance, just walking around, by just saying to yourself, "oh yes, I need to reground", and then do it.

Grounding will help in countless ways, from raising your bowling score to lowering your "boiling point."

Good luck and stay grounded!

* * *

Sealing the Aura - from 'Psychic Self-Defense', by Dion Fortune

The Christ-force is the equilibrating, compensating, healing, redeeming, purifying factor of the universe. It should be invoked in every operation of psychic self-defense where any human element, incarnate or discarnate, is concerned. Where non-human elements, such as elementals, or thought-forms, have to be dealt with, it is the power of God the Father, as Creator of the universe, that is invoked, His supremacy over all the kingdoms of nature, visible and invisible, being affirmed.

To seal the aura:

Stand upright and cross yourself, by touching forehead, breast, right shoulder and left shoulder, saying, "By the power of the Christ of God within me, whom I serve with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my strength (extend your hands forward as far as you can reach at the level of the solar plexus, finger tips touching, then sweep them round to the back and touch the finger-tips together again behind you, saying), I encompass myself about with the Divine Circle of His protection, across which no mortal error dares to set its foot." This is an old monkish formula. It is very effectual, but its potency only lasts about four hours.

(note: in practice, I didn't cross myself, but I used the complete phrase in quotes, and the gesture)

There are various other devices which are useful, should you meet with any unwanted influence:

If you have to interview persons whose influence you find overwhelming, imagine that they are separated from you by a sheet of plate-glass. You can see them, and hear them, but their magnetism cannot reach you. Visualize this sheet of glass until it appears to you to be absolutely tangible.

If you have to associate with persons who distress you, but are not actually interviewing them, imagine that they are separated from you by a brick wall, and say to yourself, "You just aren't there. I can't see you or hear you, and you simply don't exist."

When dealing with a person who saps your vitality, interlace your fingers, and lay your folded hands upon your solar plexus, keeping your elbows pressed against your sides. Keep your feet touching each other. You have thus contacted all your own terminals and made of your body a closed circuit. No magnetism will go out from you while you maintain this attitude. Your friend will probably complain of your lack of sympathy, however kindly you may speak.

* * *

I thought to tell you this after listening to a few of your talks, answering questions with stories, and hearing of some of the challenges you have experienced.

I'm quite sure this method has been effective for myself, and many others.

See what you think.

It can be adapted, of course, but I did use the exact words of this particular formula, and the visualization for quite a while, just as described.

I remember the first time I tried the method of sealing the aura described above by Dion Fortune, in her book *Psychic Self Defense*.

I went onto a city bus here in San Francisco, and I could see/feel my aura extending out a few feet from my body, and I could feel the energies from others coming and some of it stopping at the edge of the aura, and some of it coming through. The image that came to mind was that it was like the energy was meeting a screen, or a filter. Some of it was let in and some of it was kept out.

This was been a consistent experience for me, for many years.

I would often do this practice before going into some situation that felt unsafe, or that had sad or challenging energy, or where there was illness, a hospital, for example.

The last decade or so, I have felt like I don't need this practice any more as my center, my energy, my sense of protection from devas and angelic beings, my teachers and the Three Jewels is strong enough.

And at the same time I know, should I ever feel I need extra layer of protection, on an energetic level, I can do this again.

* * *

They say, commonly, in metaphysical studies that there is a good karmic reasons most people don't have these subtle, perceptions of other realms and beings.

They say we're here to learn certain lessons. Maybe you've heard this before.

And that if we were too aware of ghosts, spirits, devas, angels, other realms, and divinities, it could distract us from what we need to learn.

Just something to consider, along with the richness of this paradigm that includes those who care for and support us in our practice.

* * *

I recently heard the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Orgyen Chowang say that to know the truth about ourselves and each other and this world, we have to go beyond ordinary perception.

And you know, there has always been this push and pull between the more conservative side of spiritual or religious traditions, and what I think of as the lived experiences of practitioners and everyday people.

This latter side includes the experiences of devas, divinities made manifest to people, revelation, miracles, and alllll that.

It's not just in Christianity that there has been this opposition, and conflict.

The movie *The Third Miracle* for a fictionalized example of that.

This has also been the case in the more conservative Buddhism, and one can understand why, even if it doesn't completely justify the exclusion of a world view that includes the perception of subtle realms and beings that are here with us.

I've written about this some in an essay called *Continual Revelation*, which is one of a set about the legacy and presence of Padmasambhava in our world. You may find it interesting. It is from *Guru Rinpoche - An Anthology*.

The oldest of the four Tibetan Buddhist lineages, the Nyingma, has kept a connection to this world view, as part of its terma tradition.

From Yogananda to Padmasambhava

This is what I thought of writing earlier today

My first exposure to Eastern traditions was the book, *An Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Swami Yogananda, perhaps you've heard of it. I was 18 when I read this, and it made me very strongly want to go to India.

I remember being very impressed with how they thought of the divine.

They have this idea in Indian traditions that it is possible to meet one's teacher in a dream, or a vision, before meeting them physically.

Then, last year, as I was learning about Guru Rinpoche, or Padmasambhava, I was listening to a series of talks from a contemporary Tibetan teacher named Khenpo Sodargye, on the famous Seven Line Prayer to him.

In one passage, he says,

'Nowadays, there are many practitioners who cannot find Lamas to give empowerments, so they are always asking around. Many Lamas are very busy, or they have health issues so they can't arrange empowerments.

If that is the case, then you can ask Guru Rinpoche for empowerment.

Recite the Seven-Line Prayer every day, then his Wisdom Body will come to you and give you empowerment. As long as we have faith, we will definitely receive his blessings and empowerments...

As told in the verse, it is the empowerment of Wisdom:

*The multitudes of Deities of the Three Roots {Lama, Yidam, and Dharma Protectors} will gather like clouds
to grant, unhindered, common and supreme accomplishment
And in your waking life, or in your meditation,
in visions, or in dreams, you will encounter Me
Swirls of rainbow light you will see, and smell sweet scents...*

When we supplicate by reciting the Seven-Line Prayer, the Three Roots, of the Gurus, Yidams, and Dakas {and Dakinis, the Dharma Protectors} will gather like clouds, appearing in front of us to grant us blessings. They will bestow the common and the extraordinary siddhis unobstructedly...

Through such practice we will receive the blessing from Padmasambhava and many Deities. Such feelings, experiences, and perceptions might occur at any time, even in dreams...'

Now, this is not the usual way we hear about teachers or transmission from the more conservative branches of the Tibetan tradition, such as the Gelugpa, with all due respect. There is this range, and some do resist things like terma, which are newly revealed teachings, and visions, but others accept them as entirely legitimate.

I just thought I'd mention it.

Even within the Tibetan Tradition, with all its ritual, invocations, belief in subtle realities, not all of them emphasize this, or teach this world view openly and plainly, even though it pervades all that they teach, and all the ritual they do. It is there for all to see.

It's somewhat strange, or puzzling eh? That's what I think, at any rate.

But of this I am sure:

I'm positive that it makes a great difference to know about things such as devas, and bodhisattva divinities.

It is life affirming, empowering, and a source of joy.

**

On Maha Moggalana, the great disciple of the historical Buddha

It is said, Maudgalyāyana's meditative insights and psychic powers are not only to his own benefit, but benefit the public at large...

In the words of historian Julie Gifford, he {like Dante} guides others *by providing a cosmological and karmic map of samsara.*

**

And I learned recently also about the *Arahant Theri Uppalavanna*, and it reminded me of the modern day teacher who was said to have extraordinary abilities, Dipa Ma.

Have you heard of her? There is *a book about her life.*

It's said for example that she could be two places at once, fly through the air, and move through walls.

She was a student of Anagarika Munindra, and a teacher two of the founders of the Insight Meditation Society here in the US...

**

So such things have been known to happen in the past, and to the present day, as many of your stories attest.

What to make of this?

There are these distinct Buddhist paradigms, and can they each work for a person, according to their temperament, and needs.

Amazing.

As a side note, a funny, instructive story I heard (best I remember it)

Someone was asking the great teacher, Kalu Rinpoche, about his miraculous abilities.

He asked him, Can you fly?

And Kalu Rinpoche said no.

Then he asked, can you read minds?

Again, Kalu Rinpoche said no.

Well then, the questioner asked, What can you do?

and Kalu Rinpoche said, I can have compassion for all sentient beings.

**

Well, since we are bound to bump up against this eventually, I thought I'd mention it now, since, for me, it sort of 'rounds off' our communicating about subtle realms, and such things as the influence, or blessings of Saints and Sages, Devas and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Not to be too philosophical here... but maybe it will fit, and add something I think may be necessary. Or not. Either way.

This has to do with *the ultimate aim* as you express it, and another way to see it, that I happen to agree more with, or at least find more workable and consistent.

From the way you express it, and please tell me if I'm mistaken here - Arhats are further along in terms of their accomplishment of liberation than the beings we meet on the subtle levels,

or,

that those striving for liberation are going directly, while the bodhisattvas, whose who have vowed to become realized in order to help others are, so to

speak, 'taking the long way around', and that is something I *don't quite* agree with.

Those we call bodhisattvas, the ones who have the intention and the vow to help others with the Dharma, can be quite purposeful as well, especially because they see the urgency of their being people with both wisdom and compassion in our world.

The Buddha Nature teachings really do apply here, I believe. How long it takes to realize liberation and to manifest qualities and abilities varies, I'm sure. They say it takes a long time to become a teacher who is able to meet the needs of those they meet, but we or another may have practiced and made this deep aspiration before. We don't know.

There is something I can add this, which seems eminently verifiable, which is, as Swami Vivekananda said,

That which naturally takes a long time to accomplish can be shortened by the intensity of action....

So there's that.

And though I am not there yet, I am distinguishing *ontology* - working statements about the way things are, ultimately, from *epistemology* - or paradigms or ways of thinking that we can work with, practically.

I arrived in the late 90's at what is called *the Buddhayana*, the One Vehicle, not two, or the three that are much more commonly talked about in Buddhism.

I learned this view from Thich Nhat Hanh, after struggling with the apparent conflict between the Theravada and the Mahayana, and eventually in my studies I was able to reconcile for myself what before seemed set far apart.

I'd put it this way now:

The best thing we can do for ourselves and for others is to free our mind completely from ignorance, and I do believe that the Celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Saints and Holy Beings have all reached a conclusion to the path of practice, such that they can guide and inspire us.

There is a verse from the Tibetan Tradition, maybe you have heard, that says,

*Ordinary beings are controlled by karma and delusion,
and realized ones are 'controlled' by compassion...*

In other words, *they have no choice* because of the suffering of living beings and their compassion and wisdom but to care for others, and to act, helping to liberate them.

And when I look at the lives of the Arhats, I believe this is true. Their activities are *an inconceivable blessing*, offering the best of gifts to the world, and to living beings.

I have heard that Ajahn Maha Boowa said,

For an enlightened being, there is no other response to the human condition, than compassion.

This is why TNH called the Lotus Sutra, 'A Sutra of Reconciliation'.

Now, we can accept this paradigm, that realized beings * continue, and are dedicated to helping us, and are here, or not, whatever works for us, but it is in keeping with the Buddhist world view that includes the existence of angels, devas, fully accomplished Bodhisattas, and Buddhas, Enlightened Ones.

Thich Nhat Hanh, in the conclusion to his retreat in 1990 on the Sattipathana Sutta and Buddhist Psychology offered an interpretation of *the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination*, {audio, *and text*} from a Mahayana or, better yet, from a *Buddhayana* perspective.

To not do so, for me, can so easily tend toward nihilism, or annihilationism, which is not the aim, or not in evidence, *if we can actually call upon fully enlightened beings, as I believe we can.*

I have remembered, in this talk, he said at the conclusion,

The Buddha, in the very first Dharma talk, he cautioned his disciples not to be attached to bhava, to neither bhava nor abhava, or vibhava. Bhava and vibhava are constructions of our mind. Reality is something in between. So he cautioned us not to be caught in either bhava nor vibhava, vibhava or abhava.

Therefore, when you present the Twelve Links like that, and you say, 'If there is no attachment there will be no being', it means we are aspiring to vibhava, which is what the Buddha didn't want. See?

So, If you present the purpose of the practice like destroying being in order to arrive at non-being- this is... a catastrophe...

And, that, with understanding, with Right View,

the bodhisattva rides on the waves of birth and death... reality transcends birth and death...

The way he interpreted it,

The fruit of no return means no return to the world of samsara... So you might be here among us, but you don't share our world of suffering... You are a bodhisattiva in our midst, and you are helping us...

Which is why I have amended end of the translation of the metta sutta, for my own use, to read:

*By not holding to fixed views,
the pure-hearted one,*

*having clarity of vision,
being freed from all sense desires,
is not born again into any samsaric realm...*

It makes more sense to me that way.

{See also [this short video](#) of Thich Nhat Hanh, in response to a question on birth and death, and Right View in Buddhist practice, defining nirvana, and that *Joy and happiness are possible, the transformation of suffering is possible, and you can help so many people suffer less, and life has meaning...*}

One more quote I found again recently on this subject is from the contemporary Nyingma teacher Orgyen Chowang. It's from his book *From Foundation to Summit*, and it says,

This is not the nihilist view that, at death, our senses and our consciousness dissolve and nothing continues...

When we arrive at liberation within the ultimate body of enlightenment, the impulse, or momentum, the force behind our karma, obscurations, and negative emotions that would have had the effect of propelling us into future lifetimes ceases entirely. There is no more energy pushing us to take rebirth. Then we are free to fill the whole world with emanations in pure and impure situations to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment through the force of great compassion and wisdom...

Here are two more Tibetan teachers on the same perspective:

Liberation should not be interpreted as mind disappearing. It is not as though the mind comes to an end at this point of enlightenment. Rather, *the confusion in the mind comes to an end.*

The Buddhas' enlightened activities {then} emanate endlessly and uninterruptedly, helping beings in appropriate ways, and working for their welfare...

- Kalu Rinpoche

Once we achieve buddhahood, we will spontaneously and effortlessly be active in the liberation and awakening of all other beings until they have achieved buddhahood, and, that will continue until each and every being has become a buddha.

When someone becomes a buddha, they become a little bit like the sun in that they impartially, naturally, and without thought or effort impart their light and warmth everywhere...

- Khenpo Kathar

This is a view that I find so moving, practical and encouraging, and it fits perfectly with the paradigm that includes things such as devas, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

I had not intended to say anything about this, as such things are beyond argument, and so personal, but it has come to mind in a few times when listening to your talks and responses to questions, that this is an essential

part of right view, Buddhist Cosmology, or as I think of it a Buddhist world view.

I may add a few more notes to this line of thinking, but for now, this is enough, I think.

Of course, I'm not 'there', so to speak, and so, who am I to say what the ultimate goal is, and how the mind of a Buddha or Bodhisattva or Arhat is? except maybe as an intimation...

All I can say for now is, *it works for me to think this way*, in terms of a Buddhist world view, one that is uplifting, and consistent with what I've found so far.

It fits seamlessly to think that highly realized beings *do* continue in some ways, and their blessings and help is both inconceivable, and much to our great good fortune in this world, accessible.

But, I have thought, at last, that for me it's like the Himalayas - I look up, and up, and up, and I know that however much I can see right now, there is more...

It's like this when I think of my teachers too, and so I need, I think we all need a lot of humility when talking about such matters, really. Then there is more receptivity and continued learning, I am sure.

I say this with all due respect, however you think about these matters.

*May we all realize complete freedom and ease,
guided by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and our Noble teachers,
and help all others to do the same*

**

This relates to past and future lives, and connecting with a spiritual teacher or tradition

I remembered *the story of Dhammaruwan* this morning, the young boy who chanted in ancient Pali, and remembered his past life in India and Sri Lanka. It fits completely with all that has been said above. Perhaps you are familiar with it. It's a wonderful story, well worth reflecting on. Here is [an interview](#).

It reminded me of when I was in my early 20's - nothing as dramatic as that story of course, but I remember feeling like I knew things I had not studied in this lifetime. I had the feeling of some understanding rising up from a place deep within me, in a way that was distinct from other kinds of experience. Thinking and speaking followed, and I was astonished by it;

The first time I opened *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, I heard a voice rise up to my surface consciousness that said, 'Here we are again', and I noted it as unusual at the time;

And the one and only time I saw the Tibetan Buddhist teacher, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso at our local center, KDK, I heard myself saying, 'Oh, here

he is again', and it felt like he had just left the room for a few minutes and was re-entering. There was that feeling of familiarity;

I remember in the 1980's, in my mid twenties, writing one of the only pieces of fiction I've ever written, and watching how it ended, like watching a movie in my mind.

I was surprised and delighted as it was happening, and, looking back, I recognize that some of the symbolism that appears at the end of the story is found in the Vajrayana practice I have had the most affinity to in this life.

This was several years before I encountered the practice, and that symbolism.

When I think about these events, and others like them, it awakens in me a sense of faith in our having a continuity of lives, like a rosary of lives.

The talks I am listening to again on the Abhidharma help for all this to make more sense to me now. We hold mysteries within, and we can come to know them.

A well known Tibetan teacher named Chagdud Tulku has an autobiography called Lord of the Dance. In it I remember he says, *I went though this life exploring my karmic connections...* I can relate.

What evidence do I have, personally, for past existences? I've thought a lot about this, from the time I was in my teens and early twenties, and one idea that has been helpful is this:

It is that *the presence of a seed indicates a previous moment of consciousness.*

That is something I can touch, something I can know, and remember.

Of course, looking back, not all of my recollections, or impulses have been wise and positive and uplifting, but the totality of them makes me now want to be much more conscientious, to practice the Dharma, and to encourage others to also be careful, and diligent, and to make the best use of this precious life.

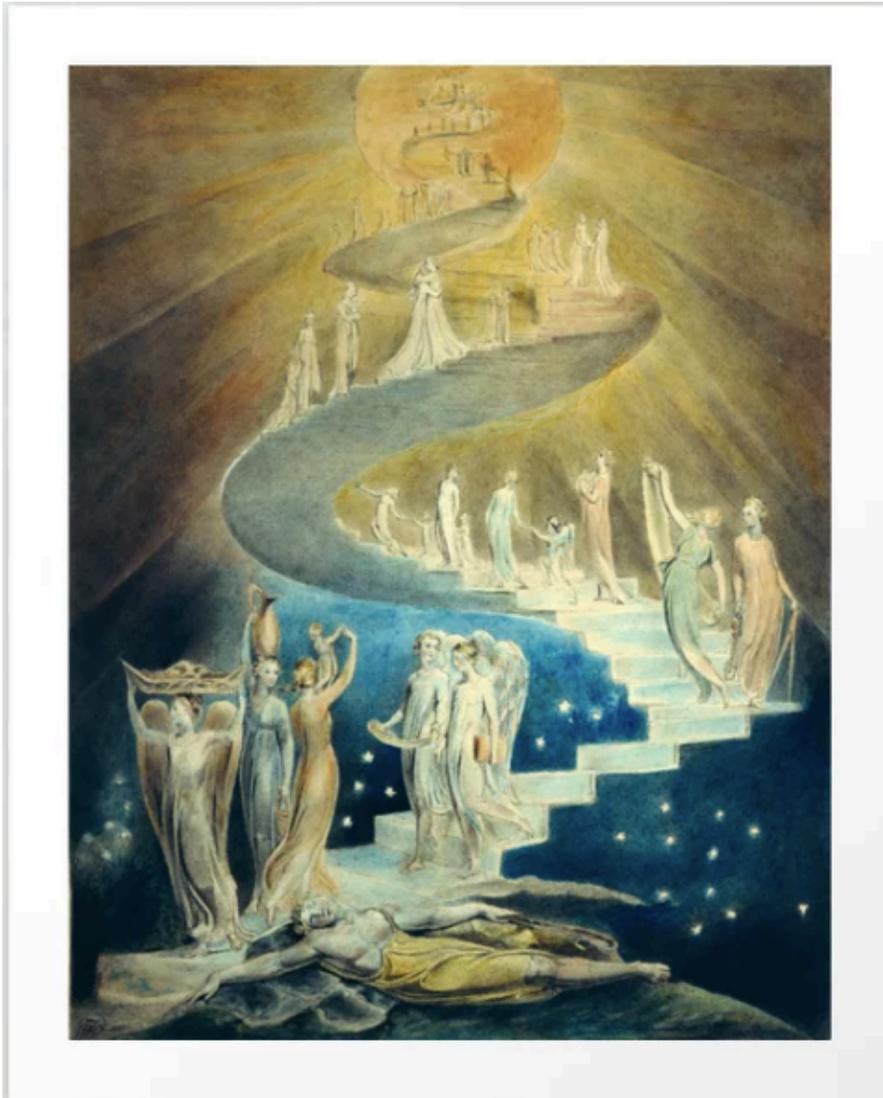
This naturally includes the contemplations taught to uplift the mind.

*May we all learn the Dhamma well,
accomplish freedom from all suffering forever,
and out of love and compassion,
May we continue the teachings for the sake of all others in this world,
without even a single exception
Jai-yoh! Em Ah Ho! Sa-dhu!*

**

I remembered this today, and thought to ask you about it. Are you familiar with Jacob's Ladder, the story from Genesis? I wrote [an essay about it](#).

Here is an image by William Blake, who had visions of these things regularly, and wrote about them, and painted them...



The realm of devas is universal truth. It's described differently, but the accounts have much in common, as we see.

And, as for the life of someone like William Blake, we are still learning from it.

See [this video](#), about the book, *William Blake Verses the World*, by John Higgs.

For some, the seers, including artists, the spirit world is as real, or more real even than this one.

See also the work of the artist [Alex Grey](#).

They've got it right, I think.

In this world, there is more delusion, so much more of the common, mundane view, along with loss of depth and awareness of potential;

In the higher, more subtle realms, by comparison, there is more joy, more perception of light and truth, and more awareness and ease.

{This can be said of meditative states as well, as I'm sure you know}

We can be aware of these realms, even here, but there is really a lot that opposes such recognition. This is just the nature of our lives here.

Taking vows, connecting with realized teachers, clarifying the mind, and awakening the heart reveal this place to be the Pure Land.

This life is precious, may I use it well...

May I see the truth of impermanence,

that death comes to all in this world, the time of death is uncertain,

and rebirth follows...

May I use this understanding well...

I have been thinking that seeing this life as *one in a continuum of lives* changes how we feel about death, which is both our greatest fear and our deepest sadness.

It also changes how we think of our life now, how we care for ourselves and those we love. Our care then has a much longer view and aim in mind.

If we are thinking in Buddhist terms, we direct ourselves towards liberation, or rebirth in the human or deva realms in all our lifetimes to follow, and if we are thinking in theistic terms, we have Heaven, Paradise, or the Kingdom of God as the ultimate aim.

Without this longer term perspective, much of what we do is stripped of meaning; we'll be less patient, diligent, care-full if we believe that this life is it, *finis*, than if we have this perspective.

Though many modern day Western Buddhists feel that they can live and practice without a belief in other realms and states of being, what they are practicing, while meaningful in that context, is limited.

More than that, as you have taught, it's not fully Right View.

*May we all accomplish that,
and receive all the support and encouragement we need
to fulfill our aims*

Thinking all of our lives here as being both beyond birth and death, and subject to suffering until we are liberated changes our priorities, and what we invest with importance.

No more will we cry over games, like children, or be concerned just with 'feathering our own nests'; no longer will we chase the illusions sold to us by materialists. We've got the right perspective, at last.

Neither will we underestimate our small, simple actions, or the import of right action, the ethical conduct that aligns with our most important aims, and leads to their accomplishment.

I know you know all this, Ajahn, I'm just riffing here because it goes along with the theme we have started to talk about, that of devas and other realms, what you call Buddhist Cosmology, and I think of as Buddhist Paradigms.

**

A couple of notes on stories you told

One was of the thread blessed by Ajahn Jumnian, as a protection

I met a person in Thailand who visited the jails and introduced me to that scene. I later heard of how once, when they went to execute a prisoner, they could not do it, despite trying to shoot him a number of times. The reason, they discovered, was that he had a blessed amulet on his person.

I also remember the translator and teacher, Alan Wallace, telling a story about someone who was mentally unbalanced up in Dharmasala, in Northern India. This was in the 1960's or early 1970's. One of the things they tried, that calmed her for some time was they took some of the cloth from a robe that belonged to the Junior Tutor of the Dalai Lama, and burned a few threads from it, as incense for her.

When I think of these stories, and the one you told, about the power of *punya* in our lives and in this world, it makes me think that there is something universal about spiritual activity of this kind. We find ritual and spiritually beneficial activity, done by saints, or groups of practitioners in every religion.

How amazing is that?

We don't talk about these kinds of things much, and they should be more widely known.

The other story I just heard you telling was of the highly accomplished Ajahn who could see what kinds of affinities a person has.

Here is something that relates, that I wrote about in *an essay on mantra*:

This is how karmic affinities are thought of in the Indian spiritual traditions:

'Sometimes it's asked, with so many mantras, where should a person begin? I think of one analogy I heard years ago, that points to an answer,

and that at the same time offers an explanation of why one mantra may be more suitable for a person, and another not work for them. It goes like this:

'Imagine a field or a plot of land, and beneath the surface of the earth, at different depths, are different kinds of seeds. The seeds that are closest to the surface are those that will give results first, or the most quickly. This is why gurus, or teachers with insight into a student's nature, their 'field', so to speak, are traditionally the ones who tell the student what mantra to practice.

'The theory of karma - past experiences determining one's character and affinities - can be useful for some people, but it's not essential to accept as a prerequisite for practice. Just do some practice and you will see for yourself what mantra brings you what, if any results...'

**

Most people who have some minor psychic abilities, it's sad to say, make a big deal about them. They may have their own tv show, or get a following or make some money doing readings, but often they have been deceived by some small accomplishment or other. This is just my opinion, of course. They see just a little more than the average person, and it's so easy to become proud with the least little bit of extra sensory perception, or unusual experiences. It's a warning to everyone.

Almost all the time, it's said, *those who know do not say, and those who say do not know*. This has been a truth *for ages*.

What to make of this then, as beginners, or as a person whose more subtle senses are waking up, and new experiences are dawning? What can help us understand the different levels of being, why and how things happen as they do, and how best to live?

Here is where we need good guidance, preferably from someone with these same capacities who is further along than we are. Without that, just going by what some books say, or what someone heard from someone else, we're really lost at sea without a map or compass, and it's even worse than the commonly known vast ocean because the mind and other realms are such that they go on in a far greater fashion. The dangers are real, but so is the help that is available. This is also the testimony of sages through time and traditions.

**

On the ten thousand world systems you mentioned in your Q&A on July 21, 2021

This is so right, as a starting point.

All those poetics are to encourage us to go beyond what the conceptual mind can grasp. There are more than we can count, just as it is here, in a lot of ways, people, and their karmas, species of animals, plants and insects, the beauties of this world - and the horrors - there are oceans of them, in the language of the Avatamsaka.

How to manage with this?

Later on in the same q and a you responded to someone asking about malevolent beings, and there are such, as well as those who can protect and help us in extraordinary ways, ways well beyond counting too, but we have to start somewhere to talk about these things.

I remember one part of the book *Psychic Self Defense*, by the great esoteric writer, Dion Fortune (mentioned earlier). She said very simply, if you feel you get out of your depths, or feel threatened by psychic phenomena or beings with some negative intention, you can just call out *Psychic Police!* and *Help!*, and they will come.

It sounds almost too good to be true, but it worked for me the first time I tried it, as objectively as I could. The feeling of being helped was there right away.

She explained that there are those who listen for just such a call. Maybe they are like the inner plane equivalent of calling 911 (our emergency number here). In any case, when something like this works for a person it's bound to make what they think of this life that much larger and more interesting.

It seems essential to me for this life to start making some sense, to know at least this much, and to have an orientation that includes all this richness and diversity and mystery, and spiritual truth.

Here is something I have shared in what I have sent along so far, but it fits, and so I had the thought to include it again here.

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!*

Now, when we speak of the ten thousand worlds and other kinds of spiritual life, other realms and other lives, we can do so with a framework that consistently includes *all* these wonders.

Compare this with the ordinary world view, also called mundane perception, and you will see that in every case people these days seem, by default, to shut out so much of what is viable, and useful to know about.

So once again I wave from across the street and call out to one of the only other people, who is a westerner at least, that I have heard speaking these truths.

Heya, I look forward to seeing where this goes.

I am at your service.

ps. A thought as I am gathering your responses to questions about devas, you may enjoy what I sent in an earlier message,

On Sacred Outlook - Seeing Beyond Ordinary Perception in Modern Culture and American Buddhism

and,

A Belief in the Miraculous - Buddhism, Magic, and a Sense of the Sacred

These speak about some of the themes you are replying to. Wondrous.

Such an interesting karma that we have connected at all.

May it be useful

and,

May all the kind intentions of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and our teachers be completely fulfilled.

**

Though I seldom feel capable of writing about such subtle and profound things, still in a way it's something I have to do. I don't understand that

either, and so here I am today, admitting my limitations, and looking out over a great distance.

Some things we think about, or feel, or read or hear stay with us, while most of it simply falls away. Now why is that do you think?

Onwards, as we say.

I have been thinking of my misadventures as a young person, and that phrase we have in our culture of there being *a special providence of angels* for madmen, and children...

I often felt protected in some mysterious but very tangible way. I thought of it back then and for years afterwards as my guardian angel, or angels.

So when I hear these days about devas or angels with special roles to play, I know a little of what that means.

In an essay titled *Aspiration, Dedication, and Benediction*, I wrote,

I have heard that often mothers and grandmothers in Latin America will bless their children as they are going to school, praying for their safety and health, and happiness. Oh my....

When we pray like this, that energy is woven throughout our lives. I know this from experience.

When I was a teenager, I was a bit of a wild child, and my mother told me many years later that she prayed for me *continually* from the time I left the house in the morning, right up until the time I returned home.

Looking back at what so often felt like miracles that held me back from danger, this was her doing, I am sure, and the spiritual energy that she called on.

As it is said in the Bible,

The prayers of a righteous person availeth much...

**

I will circle back to this, as it is personal to me, and important to get across, somehow.

I don't fully know the nature of angels, or myself or others for that matter. I'm still learning, and here is where I'm at with it all these days.

On Mysticism

'The only thing that keeps this from being idolatry is seeing the one in the many...'

To bring the divine into it, there is a line I like, where it says,

I am the one who heals you...

It feels very personal at that point, intimate, and direct, to be known each for themselves, as they say.

But what are we to do when we find that same spiritual nature in other places, being expressed by other teachers, and traditions?

For someone who finds healing through only one teacher or tradition, it's understandable that they would deny the legitimacy of every other - calling them false prophets, or at least, not the truth.

I think they need to get out more.

But seriously, it leads to dogmatism, with all that leads to, and more than that, we're not even understanding our own faith when this happens.

It's my ontological (sorry for the big clumsy word) my belief, my working belief that there is a universal spiritual nature, an indivisible unity that is everywhere, that transcends time and place and custom and tradition, and that we can know, and honor and celebrate and draw from.

This light heals us, guides us, and is what we learn to give to one another (epistemologically) practically speaking.

This one true universal divine nature is everywhere, and it manifests in whatever way is necessary to meet the needs of living beings.

It could arise as a teacher, or a book, or an angel rescuing, or guiding us.

Avalokiteshvara has a thousand arms, each with an eye in its palm, and holding different implements, such as a dharma wheel, a vase with nectar, a vajra - thunderbolt, and a wish fulfilling gem.

One description I found reads: *The diversity of hands, heads, and eyes symbolizes the countless ways that Avalokiteshvara can perceive, hear, and assist all sentient beings.*

This symbolizes that Chenrezig, Avalokiteshvara, or Quan Yin can manifest in any form that we need to reach us and to help us.

White and Green Tara spring from his eyes, out of compassion, to reach us;

and not only that, as the aspiration prayer of Shantideva says,

*As long as diseases afflict living beings,
may I be the doctor, the medicine, and also the nurse
who restores them to health*

*May I fall as rain to increase
the harvests that must feed living beings
And in ages of dire famine
may I myself serve as food and drink*

*May I be a treasury
for those desperate and forlorn.
May I manifest as what they require
and wish to have near them...*

And we have teachers who are considered the incarnation of Avalokiteshvara, such as Padmasambhava , and the lineages of the Dalai Lama, and the Karmapa.

What to make of all this?

To circle back to devas, or angels, that are called by different names in different cultures and traditions

In Christianity, angels have a function, and, they are the expression of the divine for those purposes.

In Buddhism, devas, or dakinis accompany the saints and care for and support them.

Places have their own local spirits, but those who are of a higher nature, I don't believe are limited by time or place or any one function.

The ones who qualify as worthy refuge in the Vajrayana, are expressed this way:

I take refuge in all the Glorious Holy Lamas

I take refuge in all the yidams - the Celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas gathered in the Mandalas

I take refuge in all the Buddhas and Arhats, those who have completely conquered and gone beyond

I take refuge in all the Supreme Dharma

I take refuge in all the Noble Sangha

*and I take refuge in all the Dakas, Dakinis,
Protectors and Defenders of Dharma,
who possess the Eye of Transcending Awareness...*

{For more on this subject, see the essay titled *Tantric Refuge*}

As they express it, there are those with realization who are subtle bodied beings, willing and capable of offering help. To rely on anything less would be taking too great a chance. Maybe they can help, but maybe not, like it says in *the Dhajagga Sutta*.

What I wanted to say this morning is that there is divine activity that can reach us, in many ways.

What we name it is personal, but I think something very similar, if not the same is going on in other places and times.

This brings me again to the feeling of - going beyond culture and tradition, and any one way of saying things.

The truth of it remains, and we can relate to it in any way that is helpful for us, but it's interesting to think on, isn't it?

Feeling kinship with what others are doing, and the sometimes miraculous help they have received awakens greater faith in our own path and practice, in those sources of safety and protection and healing we have known in our own lives.

I don't need to know the ultimate nature of all this right now to have faith that it works. I'm still learning what all this means.

**

Another thought I've had the last few days, that I'm only getting to write down today is along the following lines, both of which feel true to me.

I have been walking around calling this something like, 'aeons, and it's already here...'

I have a small booklet that is a transcript of a talk by Jetsumna Tenzin Palmo, who I hope you will have a chance to meet. She's a great teacher.

The title of this talk is *Regaining Delight in the Dharma*.

Early on in the talk there is this passage:

The Lord Buddha himself says that you yourself must walk the path, Buddhas only point the way. So even if we met the greatest master in the world, all he could do would be to say, 'practice'. He is not going to do it for us.

{Another} misconception is that if we just sit down and do a little meditation everyday, then quickly we can overcome all our mental defilements and get enlightened. Well, we think, 'Nowadays I am pretty depressed, but I think if I do a week retreat, that should help set me up'.

Somebody asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Which is the easiest and quickest path to enlightenment? (He's got no time, so let's do it now.) And His Holiness put his head down and wept, and said, 'Since I was about six years old (he's 67), over 60 years I have been trying so hard to practice the Bodhisattva's path, and I have made in this lifetime a little progress, but you cannot even think in terms of lifetimes. You have to think in terms of aeons! We resolve to spend aeons of time in constant effort, not only for ourselves, but to benefit all beings. It's not a question of how quick, it's a question of how much one will commit oneself to the path.'

The other view is also inspiring and amazing to think about. Perhaps you will be able to relate, as you are of Ajahn Chah's lineage, a lineage of liberated, Noble Ones, whose minds are completely free of ignorance, free of fear and afflictions. Pure bright sky mind, like that.

I found this recently, and I could feel that there is also truth in the view that's expressed. This is from the Sixteenth Karmapa

When a Bodhisattva makes a prayer of aspiration, it is never meaningless; it has a great effect on those for whom he prays. This effect comes from the great strength of his aspiration affecting others. It does not come from his trying to do anything, but rather it comes from effortlessness. No amount of effort could ever have such strength. Effortlessness is an ultimate approach. Trying to do something is a mundane approach.

I will pray that you will all develop greatly in love and compassion and that the dharma will go on increasing until you all attain realization.

There is an interesting connection between the Nature of Mind teachings, as expressed in the Nyingma and Kagyud lineages, that teach the Great Perfection and Mahamudra, and the liberation taught and embodied in the Thai Forest Tradition. It could be that you already know all this.

Perhaps we could talk about this someday.

What does this have to do with devas? or angelic beings, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas?

* I read Dante last year and came away from it very impressed with how clear and inspiring his Trilogy is as a Dharma teaching.

It is an epic poem on the different realms, karmic perception, and liberation, expressed in Christian terms for the most part, and there is divine help throughout.

One thought I had was, when going through the different realms and meeting different beings, to ask them how they got there, how long they would be there, and what they did there.

It's the same when we think of the lives of the Saints, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, angels and devas of different kinds.

How did they get to be a deva ?, which as you teach is devanusatti, to inspire us to be generous, to be ethical, to care for ourselves and others well.

Or, how does one get to be an Arahant, or a Bodhisattva?

Does it take aeons? or are we already that?

Or, are both true, and it takes time to manifest such wisdom and compassion?

I'm thinking along these lines these days.

I've been scanning my father's photographs, many of which are of our family through the decades, in preparation for sending the Archive to a university in New York.

It got me thinking of the passage of time, and at last, in a way I can really believe in, I hear myself saying, as I heard Thich Nhat Hanh say, *Long live impermanence.*

It was clearly the blessing of time that allowed my father to grow up and marry my mother, and have us three kids; it has been time that enabled us to grow up and learn and become older kids, then young adults, and now, where we are today.

Instead of something to deplore, as Thay said, time and impermanence has enabled all this to be.

He would say, time here makes it possible for the seed to become a flower, or for the child to grow up to become a lovely young man or young lady.

I understood this intellectually, but *to celebrate* impermanence and our being here together? Isn't that celebrating old age and the inevitable separation from loved ones?

But all this is also beautiful in a way, especially if we have the faith that *this life continues*, as I do more and more now.

I'm endlessly, endlessly grateful for all this, for all my family and experiences, and for the lives of my teachers.

I've been so fortunate to connect with them in this lifetime, and to learn from them.

How long it takes to fully integrate and to understand make known this spiritual nature we all have, I don't know. In a way, it doesn't matter as much as going in that direction.

This brings the two together.

Does it take aeons? So be it.

Is it here with us in all we do? May that be understood and embodied, just as taught, and as we see in our accomplished teachers.

I know more should be said about the illuminations found in Dante, but I will save that for another day.

May all beings have happiness, and dwell always in safety, and in peace.

**

By the way,

This is the way I have heard the teachings on Maitreya

'In the future, because of the growth of delusion, the beings in this world will degenerate – their lifespan will decrease and their lives will be filled with much suffering. When human life expectancy has decreased to only ten years, Maitreya will manifest in the form of a great spiritual leader and demonstrate the path of virtue...'

- Lama Yeshe

I also remember hearing that because Maitreya is loving kindness, and this is his main practice and teaching, his form will be very attractive to people of a future coarse and degenerate age. He will be beautiful and interesting to them, and so they will want to be near him and they listen to him.

An interesting thought about degenerate times relates to the bodhisattva vow, and with that as a basis, in Tibetan Buddhism there is *mind training*, known as *lo-jong*.

Perhaps you've heard of this. The worse the conditions are the more they act as a cause for people to practice the dharma. There is that dependent arising relationship. It's said that it's like a wind blowing a fire and making it increase greatly. The intention and practice is stronger.

Here is something I wrote about these times in an essay about Padmasambhava, also known as *Guru Rinpoche*. The activity of spiritual beings responds in times such as these.

This relates to the dependent arising how things are in our world, and commitments and spiritual practice.

The Relevance of Padmasambhava Today

When I think of Padmasambhava, what I would most want people to know is his relevance today. It is said that Guru Rinpoche is especially needed, and his blessings are especially powerful in what are called *degenerate times*.

Reading how such times are described, it seems to me they fit our world these days exactly.

Traditionally the five degenerations are said to be those of views, the afflictive emotions, the times in general, beings or relationships, and lifespan. Here is a brief description of each. See for yourself.

Views - Perhaps it starts with this - but when we really look, we can tell that all these conditions arise interdependently.

We deny karma, or causality; we either don't see or we don't care about the effect our actions have on ourselves, and others, and our world.

In many places then, there is a breakdown of universal ethics, which only makes people more accepting of materialism, gluttony, greed, sexual immorality, violence, and dishonesty, and in times such as these people become increasingly dumb, callous, and loud;

There is an increase of dogma, closed mindedness and intolerance. We can say it's always been like this, but in times of the degeneration of views, there is more and more of it.

We celebrate all the wrong things these days, militarism, violence in so called 'entertainment' and in our communities and world; we exalt athletes and performers and businesspeople who are rich, and while at the very same time we neglect precious lives all around; we don't pay attention to or respond at all to the needs of the world and our family;

Emotions - There is an increase in the what are called the afflictive emotions - of despair, fear, aggression, addiction, and arrogance. Antidotes to these that were once effective personally and socially no longer work completely, if at all.

The times we live in - There is more that is polluted, the environment suffers, there is an increase in the the loss of species; the quality of food and medicine decreases; and things politically and socially are uncertain, contentious, divisive and hostile; there is fear and aggression between

people and nations; There are more refugees worldwide, and more exploitation, more dishonesty and mistrust between people and groups;

Beings, or relationships - There is more divorce, infidelity, and instability; there is less community and fewer lasting friendships. All these grow increasingly difficult to begin, or to foster and maintain in times such as these;

and, *lifespan* - Our length of lives here are uncertain these days, for many reasons.

Look - isn't it this way?

As Venerable Rita, in her teachings on the Medicine Buddha practice, has said,

'We are living in what can be called degenerate times... We can see the signs. Actually, there are other signs we can see, in more detail.

'One is that there is no more music, only rhythm; another is that people walk around with a weapon in their pocket...'

I think of how it is depicted in most science fiction, when there is no green nature, no colorful flowers or plants or trees to be seen. We also have more apocalyptic series these days that depict soul loss, as rampaging zombies, or ghouls. There is a lot of truth being expressed in these fearsome manifestations from our creative collective unconscious. The light dims, and we degrade and descend in times like this.

These are especially needful times, when almost nothing seems to work, or offer hope, and so we cry out. Individually and together as one, are seeking the light and a deeper solution to what threatens us.

*A cry in the darkness,
and the cry itself is light...*

The contemporary teacher, Khenpo Sodargye, in his commentary on *The Seven Line Prayer* [in these videos](#), says the following,

‘Now, at this time, when the Buddhadharma is in decline, evil forces and tirthikas {heretics} become extremely active.

‘Our wrong attachments and negative thoughts might consume us at any time. In such a dark age, without relying on the support of an extraordinary and powerful force, we are confronted with difficult circumstances. If we count on our own feeble effort, we will have a hard time in accomplishing our practice.

‘Therefore, I appeal to vajra friends again and again to pray to Guru Padmasambhava constantly and with fierce conviction. If you do so, your practice will be good from the beginning to the end.’

They say in Tibetan Buddhism that certain practices, such as those found in the Thought Training teachings, in tantra, and the termas, and in particular the activity of Guru Rinpoche would be even more effective in dire, truly difficult times such as these.

As Khenpo Sodargye said, 'The more defiled the world is and the more corrupted the times are, the stronger the blessing of Padmasambhava becomes.'

And if it weren't the case that I've experienced something of this for myself, my life would be very different, and I would not be moved to write about these practices, and to encourage others to explore them, to see how it is for them as well. It could be that they have an affinity with the Dharma, with Tibetan Buddhism, and these practices, and then, we can't begin to measure the benefit...'

This of course relates to all I've written so far, about divine activity, devas, and spiritual help that comes into our world, mysteriously, sometimes powerfully, changing lives. This accounts for the devotion people feel before and after receiving such help. There are no words of praise that are enough to express the gratitude a person feels.

And so here we are.

I praise all this divine activity in our world. It is pure water in the desert. It is true medicine arriving when it is needed most.

Whatever tradition, name and form people use or relate to most matters much less to me than that they are helped through difficult times, so I have to be broad minded about this.

Looking far and wide for what has helped in the past, and what is working now had led me here.

There is a prayer that concludes the Avatamsaka Sutra, that recited in Tibetan Buddhism and called by them *The King of Prayers*. It has lines that read:

*May all beings meet the Dharma that befits them best!,
and so may all their hopes be fulfilled!*

I think of this often. How else could it be?

One more thing I would note, while I'm at it

(I'm not sure this will ever reach you, or that you will read it at all, let alone make it this far in the letter, and so, why not?)

It's about numbers in spiritual practice, Buddhism in particular

I think when we get to spiritual teachings, when it comes to numbers, they are not meant the same way as in ordinary, conventional language. I think Ajahn Buddhadasa has some deep teachings on Dhamma language.

In any case, this relates to our understanding metaphor, which to me is essential in reading spiritual teachings. I've written a bit about this over the years.

But essentially, in spiritual teachings numbers do not mean the same as our ordinary, conventional use of them. When we speak for example of time, there is an outer aspect, with clocks and watches and calendars, and then

there is the subjective aspect, *how we experience time*. If we don't make this distinction we are left with a very materialistic reading of spiritual subjects.

Often there is more truth in metaphor than what is conveyed by the ordinary way we use language. Not everyone is a poet, or someone with an affinity with poetry, but we reach an impasse just here. Either we can cross over to understanding what is meant, or we project all of our common ideas onto spiritual subjects.

I'd say, better then to leave scripture or suttas alone, but that's not going to happen. Since we're already immersed in all this spiritual language and metaphor, it seems to me the only way forward is to learn to appreciate what is meant.

This can involve learning to read poetry and think differently about what is said, or the way can open from our own experience of writing. Either way, this becomes something essential if we're going to use metaphor to talk about more subtle realities, the activity of holy beings, spiritual realms and the like.

What *is* the meaning of this golden Buddha? What *is* this elevation of seeing someone as being like a king or a universal monarch? What *are* these jewels that adorn the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? If we lose the meaning, we're left the same as common materialists are, worshipping glittering form, or edifices.

In *The Diamond Sutra*, the world's oldest printed book, there is a verse that says,

*He who looks for me in form,
or seeks me in sound,
goes on a mistaken path,
and is unable to see the Tathagata...*

and this is said to cancel out mundane materialism. And think about it. How often is there form without substance? How often are people deceived by mere appearances when it comes to spiritual matters?

Thankfully, in the very next verse, there is a teaching that then says we can include form, and name, so it's not just saying that the Tathagata, the Buddha, or Wisdom is form-less.

When I bring these two together, my sense is that what we need most of all is discernment. Then if there is form, we look at the essence of it, and when there is invisible, formless, ungraspable, transcendent light, we look at the meaning of that as well.

To use the language of Tibetan Buddhist Dharma, the dharmakaya here naturally gives rise abundantly to the subtle samboghakaya celestial forms, like the sunlit sky, they say, and the embodied, and nirmanakaya forms of this world arise from this same basis.

Who knew I'd feel like I had to arrive here, when talking about something as mysterious and personal and tangible as angelic beings, as devas.

I suppose these days I turn most of all to refuge in the Three Jewels and Three Roots, and to the teachings on *Mahayana Thought Training*, to hold all

this. Then it is workable, and more, it's a delight to be here, with the intention to practice and share the dharma as much as possible. This is the most meaningful thing we can do with our lives.

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I thought of another view on the different functions of devas... (Whew!)

It could be like it is with people, where there are different natural gifts. I heard part of a program earlier from a Western Tradition that speaks of (divinely ordained) particular roles that people, or that groups can have.

I imagine that there are angels who specialize in healing then, others in guidance, and there are those who help with provisions, and like that for other activities.

I know this doesn't sound scientific, but I'm basing this line of thought on what we find with humans in our world. There are different natural talents people have, and when we honor that, and celebrate and support their activities, everyone benefits.

The level of an angelic being, or a deva can reach further than the usual human. They can have far more understanding and ability.

When we call upon spiritual agency to help us accomplish a good purpose, it could be that one with a range of abilities comes to our aid; it could also be that those with special capacities hear us, or attracted to what we are even just intending to do, before we even think or say anything.

Just as in the human world, the spiritual starts there and extends past what is commonly thought of and experienced here.

More subtle spiritual beings interact with us, meeting us where we are and extending what we can know and achieve. They open the divine eye in us, and we work together to accomplish our aims.

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To follow a little on this - I remember when I lived in Taiwan, and I noticed that once a month or more, altars were set up in public, with offerings and incense. When I asked about these, I was told that they were offerings to what they called the local gods. I asked, How many local gods are there in Taipei? and after going back and forth in Mandarin with a co-worker for a few minutes, I remember I was told, There are fourteen.

I did a little research, naturally, and found out that someone could be raised up to divine status by their actions while on earth, as a protector, as a teacher, or a hero of some kind. They could then be appealed to, and for some they would grant their blessings, of protection, or guidance and care.

It makes sense that if devas, or angels became as they are through their virtue and generosity, they may have had human form at some time.

We can extrapolate then from what we see here on earth to the spiritual realms. The same kinds of generous, creative, joyful, dedicated people we find here are also, sometimes on a higher, more purified level also present as various kinds of divinities, devas or angels.

We even have the expression that someone is an angel on earth, and I think this is leading in the same direction, of seeing the spiritual life as one, manifesting here, on the physical, and then on more subtle planes, and at times tangibly interacting with this one.

I think of some children who their parents would say they are not of this world, or that they are or were angels.

The same has been said of animal companions, by their caretakers, and Divine animals in visionary and traditional beliefs.

I really believe such things to be true and not at all an exaggeration.

O, that we have the senses to know such things.

You may have heard of the naturalist and mystic John Muir. He saw things as they truly are when it comes to the divine natural world. And I saw this week that there was a book written in the 1990's called The Deva Handbook that explores this same idea, that has been present throughout history in indigenous cultures worldwide.

Less commonly known or talked about are the devas or the angels here in our lives, guiding us, protecting, healing and comforting. At times, they call these Invisible Helpers.

This seems to me to be more the domain of the psychics, or metaphysics, as with the Theosophists. It's appealing to those with some of these capacities already developed, to some extent at least, and as I said at the outset of this

tract, in the Western Esoteric Tradition, it's not just a few special advanced meditators that have these subtle perceptions.

There are entire schools devoted to their study and development, with a spiritual purpose throughout. One organization I know and find trustworthy is called *The Servants of Light*.

To bring this - devas and Celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas - to Buddhism is not really accurate to say, since *this view* of ourselves and others and the world we live in *has been there all along*, throughout time and cultures, except, it seems this modern western one.

We've got a very mixed inheritance. On the one hand, Westerners in general have very good analytical minds, and can read and study and learn a lot using the intellect. We also have, surprisingly, a strong faith element in each of the three main theistic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Unfortunately, we've also inherited some of the dogmatism of these traditions too. When someone is right in a way, so often they fall over into the extreme of believing they alone have the one true way. The results have been disastrous collectively. On a personal level, they only lead estrangement from others, to closing ourselves off to other sources of knowledge, and means of helping ourselves and others, but these too are a very great loss.

We're also the products of the so called 'enlightenment', in philosophy that got rid of much that was not rational, and scientific, and of our materialistic age, which is based in many ways on the view that the physical self is all.

Still, truth is truth, for those who want to know for themselves, and the minds and hearts of living beings, our teachers, our ancestors, and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and deva helpers are really something great. They communicate to us in many ways, and we flourish, just as when our natural world receives the rain, and as flowers open to the sun.

A passage you may enjoy from Angel or Deva Helpers

(This is from a book first printed in 1916, titled Principles of Occult Healing, by Mary Weeks Burnett, M.D.)

'We will look into a few of the more recent, well-attested instances of the work and place of these invisible Helpers among the great Health Intelligences.

'I was very ill with pneumonia, and on account of the long-time weakness of my heart, the physician despaired of my recovery. One of my favorite books, *The Voice of the Silence* (1889), was open near me, and I read '*And greater still is... the Buddha of Compassion*' A wonderfully cool and refreshing thrill penetrated me, and my love rushed out to the Blessed Lord Buddha, whose teachings are the guide of my life.

'I asked humbly if I could also be permitted to serve Him and the other helpers of humanity. The answer came with lightning rapidity. With my eyes open I saw at the foot of the bed, the snowy-white, sun-like Blessed Master, sitting in meditation, in a dazzling, radiant, outflowing light. With that came a new, stronger and somewhat different thrill, as if warm sun-rays had penetrated me through and through; and I felt happy and full of

peace. I thought - May I, too, learn to be unselfish to the endless end! -and I lay there full of a measureless peace.

'Shortly after I got up, and took up my duties; the weakness of the heart was gone, to return no more.'

So such things have been known to happen, and are happening now, and will continue. Such is the nature of the world we live in , with its devas Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Arhats and Noble Ones.

We see these things, or know them according to our affinities, and preferences. Sometimes I have heard, we may connect with a form we don't remember, and maybe we learn the significance later... Life' is full of mysterious and wonderful things.

Shakespeare wrote about it in Hamlet, saying,

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy...

Namo Buddha

Namo Dhamma

Namo Sangha

May all beings know peace,

Live long and accomplish virtue and good works here

May we all care for one another in the best of ways

and with the guidance and support of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,

*and Noble Ones,
let us celebrate this day and our knowing each other
and helping each other on the Way*

ps. There are very few books by Westerners about Buddhist cosmology, or a paradigm that includes a range of living beings.

Those done by scholars may be of interest to like minded people, but I get the feeling that too often professors and such don't actually practice what they speak and write about - or practice in such a way that they can speak from their own experience of these matters. Remarkable!

By comparison, in Tibetan Buddhism, and in the countries where Source Buddhism is emphasized, the world view is much more extensive, and inclusive.

I'm sure you can speak to this, and ask your teachers about it as well.

It's part of Right View.

I thought I'd mention two books by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. You may have heard of him. One is called *Ultimate Healing*. It covers a range of subjects and practices, and includes some unique information on other levels of beings, and how to benefit them.

The other by him is more exclusively on engaging meaningfully with other kinds of conscious life. It's called *Practices to Benefit Pretas, Nagas, and Spirits*.

Thich Nhat Hanh also has a ceremony offering to hungry spirits in his book *Chanting From the Heart*. Their world view is more inclusive than is usually taught in the West.

Both of the books by Lama Zopa available from the FPMT. Let me know if you'd like me to send them along to you.

He doesn't go in to great detail on the Tibetan Buddhist world view, or compare it to our modern materialistic Western thought, but the view he holds pervades this small book. It's assumed the reader is following along, even though there's a great distance between this kind of more inclusive view, and where we're at in our thinking collectively.

I've tried, in my own way to make a bridge, but it is a big challenge to even begin.

I am sure your teachings on the Buddhist world view you practice with will help many people to understand themselves and this world more completely in the years to come.

Again, anything I can do to support your efforts, I am at your service.