

Like Sabbasava sutra it is an exposition of cankers. In it six ways of dealing with cankers have been explained, i.e. penetration into cankers, penetration into conditioned origin of cankers, penetration into variety of cankers, penetration into the results of cankers, penetration into the cessation of cankers and penetration into the path leading to cessation of cankers. In the chapter seventeen, Probing Into Life, life is compared to a machine. To get the best out of a machine one should know its mechanism. What is emphasized is that one should be able to penetrate into one's life in order to overcome cankers.

Chapter eighteen, Persisting Compulsions, chapter nineteen, Uncovering Mind and chapter twenty, Analytical Approach are interesting accounts of Buddhist psychology. The chapter twenty one, The Mundane and Supra-mundane, is an analysis of Sacca, truth, in Buddhism. In this analysis, Vinaya and Sutta are considered as the conventional truth and Abhidhamma as the ultimate truth. Nine tables are included. Three Ultimates, i.e. Citta (mind), Cetasika (mental factors) and Rupa (corporeality) are explained briefly in terms of the Abhidhamma method. The fourth Ultimate, Nibbana, is explained in chapter twenty second as Asamkhatadhatu. In this brief analysis of Nirvana it has been emphasized that Nirvana is the object of supra-mundane states of consciousness which transforms the mind from the mundane to the supra-mundane.

The chapter twenty three, The Cluster of Cankers, is a translation of some parts of the Dhammasangani, the first book of the Abhidhamma Pitaka. The last chapter, is on The Worthy One, the Arahant or Emancipated One in Buddhism. The qualities of the canker-free have been explained in accordance with the Arahanta Vagga of the Dhammapada.

In conclusion it can be said that even though the present work is not the result of academic research, it is an elaboration of cankers and the path leading to overcoming them. The arrangement of the book is done randomly. Even though he

has taken a lot of materials from Nikaya texts as well as Abhidhamma, references are not given clearly in the form of footnotes or endnotes. There is no Index or Bibliography at the end of the Book. Despite these shortcomings, this is a good contribution to Buddhist studies.

--Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya

Shingon Refractions

Author: Mark Unno
Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2004

Shingon Refractions written by Mark Unno and published by Wisdom Publications of Boston is a work dealing with the Mantra of Light - an important esoteric practice of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism. The original text was written by Myōe Kōben, a monk of thirteenth-century Japan. This mantra consists of series of incantatory syllables, translated from original Sanskrit. This practice is said to have originated in India in the early beginnings of Mahayana Buddhism and brought to China by an Indian monk named Bodhiruci during the sixth century CE, who translated it into Chinese. This practice is believed to have power to effect the karmic purification of practitioners on many levels.

The introduction deals with a short history of Japanese Buddhism during the four periods: i.e. Nara 710-794, Heian 794-1185, Kamakura 1185-1333 and Modern 1800-. And also a mention is made briefly of the founder of Shingon sect, Kobo Daishi Kukai. A biographical sketch of Myōe has also been included. In that his contribution to esoteric Buddhism of the Kamakura period has been briefly explained. In the section called Myōe's Approach to the Mantra of Light, it has been pointed out that even though Myōe was ordained and remained as a monk of Shingon and Kegon sects, he entirely rejected their authority and practiced independently.

The book is divided into two parts: Part One is named "Intellectual and Cultural

History: Refraction of Light” and Part Two includes translations of Illuminating Texts.

The first chapter of Part One, The Mantra of Light, is a textual history, which focuses mainly on the Mantra of Light as advocated by Myōe in the thirteenth-century Japan. An attempt is made here to trace the early history of this practice in India. The author surmises that there were Sanskrit texts written in India probably during the first centuries of the Common Era. This mantra was used for the purpose of extinguishing sins, curing illnesses and leading the practitioner to be born in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha. It is mentioned that this cosmic Buddha originated as two separate but closely associated Buddhas in India: Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Amitāyus, the Buddha of Eternal Life. These cosmic Buddhas have their own Buddha-lands (Buddhaksetras). It is said that the origin of Amitābha and Amitāyu cult in Mahāyāna sutras is rather murky. There is also an important note regarding Mahāyāna sutras and their origin.

The author’s opinion is that this practice is related to Amitābha cult, which had been influenced and shaped by Indo-Iranian religion, specially by Zoroastrian cult of Mithra, a deity of light associated with the Sun Worship. It is pointed out that this cult was induced by eclectic influences from Central Asian Kushan practices too.

The Mahāyāna scriptures describing the practices leading to birth in the Sukhāvati (Land of Bliss) of Amitābha Buddha belonged to a very early period of development of Buddhist thought and practices. These early Mahāyāna sutras began to appear around the beginning of the Common Era, when both the Larger Sukhāvativyūha and Smaller Sukhāvativyūha sutras were composed.

The author, on the authority of Gregory Schopen, considers that the Sukhāvati cult in early Mahāyāna developed independently, that is, without any link to Buddha Amitābha. The idea of Sukhāvati

existed symbolically similar to that of Mount Sumeru. The author’s idea is that later the sutras expounding the Mantra of Light became a part of devotion to Amitabha and Sukhavati.

Tracing the history of the practice of Mantra of Light in Japan, it is stated that the Amoghavajra’s translation of the Sutra of the Mantra of the Unfailing Rope Snare of the Buddha Vairocana’s Baptism was first brought to Japan by the Shingon sect’s founder Kukai. According to the author, initially the practice did not receive much attention in Japan. Mantra of Light, at the beginning, was an auxiliary practice of Amitābha (nembutsu) cult. We are informed that the earliest use of the Mantra of Light in Japan took place in 880 for a memorial service for the emperor Seiwa. The implementation of the Mantra of Light as a major practice took place for the first time at funeral rites for the nobility in order to expiate evil karma of the deceased. In this chapter the author describes the complex ritual of seven stages and sixty-eight steps.

Following that are short accounts of Myōe and Eizon, and the Mantra of Light in the late Kamakura period and beyond, and also Iconographic Representations from Nara to Kamakura.

Chapter Two of Part One is “Knowledge of Enlightenment and Religious Authority.” At the very outset, it is made clear that there are many ways of acquiring knowledge of Buddhism, for example by reading, listening to sermons and so forth. Knowledge and enlightenment are two things that should be distinguished. The enlightenment is attaining through the proper practice, for which, having a qualified master is important. Here, very important information is provided regarding the practice of Buddhism in medieval temples in Japan. Women and those who engaged in lower occupations were not allowed to come to temples and they did not have access to sacred learning. Only the members of the aristocracy and nobility had access to sacred scriptures. This chapter further deals with Lineage–

continuity and -discontinuity, Scholarly Confusion Over Questions of Lineage, Myōe and His Lineage, The Three Buddha Bodies and the Three Mystic Powers of the Buddha, Scriptural Authority and The Three Learnings.

Chapter Three on “Emptiness and Illusion in the Mantra of Light,” is a description of the doctrine of emptiness in Buddhism and its emphasis by Myōe. It is pointed out that all sects of Japanese Buddhism accept Nāgārjuna as the key figure. Myōe attempted throughout his career to expound and emphasize the centrality of emptiness. It is mentioned that when Myōe was expounding emptiness he did make references to earlier scriptural and commentarial sources, but made his own interpretation.

‘The Logic of Illusions’ describes Myōe’s understanding of the twofold truth as it appears in his Kōmyō Shingon dosha kanjin ki (Recommending Faith in the Sand of the Mantra of Light). Myōe pointed out that learning without faith is counterproductive. He emphasized that knowledge driven by faith is what really empowers practice.

Chapter Four is on ‘Purity and Defilement in the Mantra of Light’. The text, Arubekiyōwa, “As Appropriate” - a text inscribed by Myōe on wood in his own hand - is divided into three parts: first, the daily schedule of temple activities; second, rules of comportment while in the temple study hall including the handling of scriptures and meditation cushions and third, rules of comportment while in the Buddha-altar hall, including care of the altar and handling of ritual implements. The author says “As Appropriate” is the heading of the first section only. The other two have separate headings: “Etiquette in the Temple Study Hall” and “Etiquette in the Buddha-Altar Hall”.

Chapter Five “Gender Power of Light: Passion and Compassion” is on women’s involvement in religious activities. Medieval Japan was very much dominated by males, even though like in other

societies, women were integral to the religious and social life of Japan too and women played a considerable role in religious activities. But women were not allowed to come to some Buddhist centers like Mount Hiei and Mount Kōya until nineteenth century. It was Myōe, according to the author, who was the first to impute a gender-based reading of the Mantra of Light. Referring to women’s role the author mentions that they facilitated Myōe’s journey between the two worlds of form and emptiness, samsāra and nirvāna. In this chapter titles like Lady Sanmi, Uisang and Shanmiao, Vairocana the Queen, The Women of Yuasa and the Kasuga Deity, Female Power of Light have been discussed briefly.

Chapter Six, Concluding Beginnings, is the conclusion of the study. In his concluding remarks the author says ‘It is somewhat surprising that this is the first monograph devoted to the topic in Western-language scholarship.’ This study of the history of the Mantra of Light mainly limited to the period from its early beginnings to the time of Myōe. Author plans to publish a second volume regarding the development of the practice thereafter.

Following these Chapters are translations of Illuminating Texts comprising Arubekiyōwa (As Appropriate), Commentary on the Significance of the Syllables of the Mantra of Light of the Baptism of the Buddha Vairocana of the Unfailing Rope Snare and Lectures on the Commentary. “Recommending Faith in the Sand of the Mantra of Light” is a supplement, which runs in the form of questions and answers. There is an addendum called “Chronicle of Things Not To Be Forgotten.”

There are three appendixes mainly on questions of textual criticism. Three glossaries in English transliteration and Japanese are on Authors and Titles of pre-modern works, Proper Nouns, and general terms. The bibliography of pre-modern and modern works as well as the index of words adds to the usefulness of this book.

In conclusion it can be said that the present study is a commendable introduction to one of the most important esoteric practices of Japanese Buddhism, which has been popular from the eighth century to the present day and counts at present a large following of twelve million adherents.

---Kottegoda S. Warnasuriya

Approaching the Great Perfection

Sam Van Schaik
Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2004

Approaching the Great Perfection, translated, annotated and introduced by Sam Van Schaik, is a work on Tibetan Buddhism. The work includes English translations of ten Great Perfection Texts written in Tibetan language by Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa of Nyingma tradition. The book is divided into three parts. In addition it includes a preface, a list of abbreviations, three appendixes, notes, a bibliography and an index.

In his preface the author has mentioned that even though he lived over two hundred years ago Tibetan tradition considers him as a recent figure. For those who practice Great Perfection his works remains vitally important. All four schools of Tibetan Buddhism honor him as a great master. We learn that his *Longchen Nyingtig* cycle has been handed down through generations of practitioners as a complete path to enlightenment. The author mentions that Jigme Lingpa is best known as a figure of the yogic side of the Nyingma tradition in Tibet. He wrote on his own experience of meditation in a colloquial style.

There is an advice given by the author to readers regarding missing something when a scholarly scrutiny is done. And he mentions that most readers might prefer to begin with the translations in part III

before turning to the discussion in part one.

Part I is the introduction which is the study. Introduction consists of three Chapters. The first chapter is Approaches to Enlightenment. In this chapter one finds a definition of the Great Perfection at the very outset. It is a Buddhist approach to salvation. Then there is a brief mention of early history of Tibet, its early rulers and expansion of political power.

Referring to early Great Perfection texts the author has mentioned that the earliest Great Perfection texts used in Tibet were from the manuscript cache found in the central Asian Monastic complex of Dunhuang. During this period Dunhuang was under Tibetan control. And also the history of The Great Perfection as a distinct system of yoga is given. In Tibetan Buddhism this is called *Atiyoga*, the highest of the three supreme forms of yoga, the other two being *anyuyoga* and *mahayoga*.

Next, in the first chapter, there is a note on *the end of the empire and the new schools*. The suppression of Buddhism by king Langdarma in mid ninth century, his assassination and revival and reestablishment of Buddhism is mentioned briefly. Arrival of Atisa, Dipankarasrijnana, in Tibet and the establishment of Kadampa tradition by this Buddhist yogi is also mentioned. There is a brief note regarding the establishment of Nyingma, Sakya, Gelugpa and Kagyu schools in Tibetan soil.

In this chapter there is a sub-section regarding the development of the *Great Perfection*. Under *Simultaneous and Gradual*, distinction between simultaneous and gradual approaches to perfection is explained in terms of Tibetan Buddhism. One should recollect in this respect that there was a heated debate on the subject of simultaneous and gradual enlightenment between Hashan Mahayana and Shantarakshita and the latter's death due to the defeat of simultaneous method.

Chapter two of the introduction is the biography of Jigme Lingpa. The reader is informed that the life story of Jigme Lingpa