

Studies in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā and Other Essays

By Linnart Mäll

Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, India
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This book is introduced as a study of Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā which Linnart Mäll sees as a breakthrough in Buddhism since it provides an explanation of the emergence of written texts which gradually replaced the previously predominant oral tradition. He sees in this important Mahāyāna text “interesting ideas that have so far received little notice.” As an example, he says that dharmakāya does not refer to Buddha’s cosmic body, but as corpus scriptorium in Western culture it refers instead to a written text. He continues to point out that Prajñāpāramitā refers to a text and to a specific state of mind that, in fact, can also be regarded as a text. It is his view that every Buddhist text is programmed, as it were, to generate new texts and offers as an example the large body of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, which Edward Conze calls Prajñāpāramitā literature. His thesis is further elaborated with statements like the following:

“Since Buddhism considers that mind also a text, an inner text, then the generation of a new state of the mind is considered the creation of a new inner text, which is started up by an impulse from the outer text. Sometimes the inner text has been preserved (either by memorizing it, or by writing it down), which means the emergence of a new outer text.”

It is to grasp what the author is intending to convey that I began reading his brief essay on “Semiotics as a

Possibility for the Study of Religious Texts.” (p. 170) According to Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, he explains that the Buddhist term dharma has a cultural context which enables it to be transformed to a term. This term he says is text. In further elaboration he states,

Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā... that is constantly being read, promulgated, chanted and copied... is a “living body of the text” (Sanskrit dharmakāya) while a sūtra buried in a stūpa represents a “dead body of the text” (Sanskrit dharmasāra).

The more I delved into the essays of Linnart Mäll, the more my appreciation grew of the publisher, Motilal Banarsidass, for making them available to us in English. An Estonian by nationality, the author had published all but two essays in Estonian and Russian. What all these essays show is that some remarkable innovative research has been conducted in Buddhist Studies in former Soviet countries and continues to be pursued since the dissolution of the Union. Linnart Mäll’s article “Zero Way” dates back to 1964 and the rendering of Madhyamā pratipad (middle way) as “Zero Way,” is based on his translation of Śūnyatā as “emptiness” or “zero.” (p. 10) He explains,

“It (śūnyatā) should never be interpreted as ‘nothingness.’ In brief śūnyatā does not mean absolute non-existence.”

By 1969-71, he had proceeded with an in-depth analysis of terms used in Prajñāpāramitā and found a plethora of synonyms for śūnyatā to show that it could be rendered not only as empty and zero but also relativity. I have not come across such an exhaustive study of the Prajñāpāramitā. For that alone, this book is invaluable.

Equally insightful are the other essays which illustrate author's versatility as a scholar and his wide range of intellectual interests. The brief essay by Mart Läänemets (pp 194-197) on Linnart Mäll's contribution to Oriental and Buddhist Studies in Estonia is a fitting tribute of a student to his mentor, who had made many sacrifices in life on account of his devotion to Buddhist Studies but has now emerged as a champion of Estonian freedom in the political scene. This is not a book to be read casually but one to be read with intense attention. This statement refers primarily to the first hundred pages which are a book by itself on Prajñāpāramitā.

– Ananda W.P. Guruge

One Day one Thought: 365 Gems of Buddhist Wisdom

**By Kodo Matsunami
Buddhist Searchlight Center, Tokyo,
Japan, 2005, 382 pp.**

The current world is advancing rapidly with tremendous changes. On the one hand, science and technology has brought immense benefits to human beings. Globalization has become an irresistible trend, a trend in which even the leaders of states are stunned by the rapid progress. On the other hand, wars, diseases, man-made and natural disasters are devouring lives every day. Human beings are in a paradoxical situation – they find themselves helpless in dealing with all these problems, especially the new types of diseases, such as AIDS, SARS and BSE.

It is with deep concern that Professor Kodo Matsunami writes this book *365 Gems of Buddhist Wisdom: One Day one Thought*. He points out that unfortunately there seems to be not a

single politician, thinker or religious leader who, against the background of the currents of today's globalization, is capable of looking into the future and offering us a road map. Today's society, full of competition, lapses into the law of the survival of the fittest and the law of the jungle. This social-Darwinian theory has led competition astray because people become ruthless in the alienated struggle for life.

Seeing the fact that the powerful politicians are incompetent to combat the side-effects of globalization, Professor Kodo Matsunami feels it his responsibility to introduce his road map, based on his understanding of the teachings of the Buddha. He writes this book with a view to awaken the minds of people in our era by introducing a Buddhist way of life as a moral approach to everyday living.

365 Gems of Buddhist Wisdom: One Day one Thought is divided into twelve chapters as twelve months and each chapter is subdivided into either thirty or thirty-one parts. In fact, each page is a sub-chapter. In other words, if the readers read one sub-chapter each day, they can finish the whole book in exactly one year. They gain an understanding of Buddha's teachings gradually in 365 days. The book is arranged in a flexible way that the reader may open the book and start from any point.

Each subchapter begins with the passage from Buddhist scriptures, or words spoken by famous monks. Then Professor Kodo Matsunami further explains the passage he quotes in the first paragraph and in the next two or more paragraphs illustrates his points and advises the readers, urging them to be good men by following Buddha's teachings. The author does not talk of abstruse doctrines of Buddhism, but by using simple words to describe what is happening in daily life, he discusses the need of the Buddhist way of life, which, as he believes, may help modern people