

Nine Similes on Buddha-Nature, by Maitreya

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

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

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

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

The buddha within,
the supreme sphere of natural perfection,
is likened to the buddha, the honey,
the grain, the gold,
the treasure, the germ of the seed,
the statue, the emperor,
and the precious icon.

When a man with stainless clairvoyance
sees a buddha radiant with a thousand signs
sitting inside a muddy lotus,
he removes him from within that lotus.
Likewise, the ones thus gone,

possessing the buddha-eye,
see truth itself in every being,
even those in the deepest hell;
out of compassion,
those unobstructed lords work until time's end
to free all from aberration.

When a man with stainless clairvoyance
sees a buddha inside a dirty lotus,
he cuts down that lotus;
likewise the accomplished ones see
that all beings have buddha-essence,
obscured by stains of attachment and aversion,
and, out of compassion
they work to destroy those obscurations.

When an intelligent beekeeper with ambitious eyes
sees honey surrounded by a swarm of bees,
he tries to separate the bees from the honey.
Likewise the maharishis, the great seers,
being omniscient,
see the honey-like essence of buddhahood
and work to destroy totally
its bee-like obstacles.
That ambitious man disperses those billions of bees,
and then uses the honey as he wishes.
Likewise, when one eliminates the bee-like delusions
surrounding the honey-like primordial awareness,
one becomes a king of sages.

One cannot eat a grain which still lies in its husk;
he who wishes to eat a grain removes it from its husk.
Likewise, the stains of mental aberration
are mixed with the buddha in beings,
and, for as long as that buddha is not separated from those stains,
that long it buddha activity does not manifest in the triple world.
Rice or wheat not removed from its husk,
and not cleansed of its bristles
is not fit to be used as food by men;
similarly, as long as the lord of reality abiding within all beings

is not freed from the husk and bristles of mental distortion,
that long one cannot give the taste of blissful truth
to beings tormented by the hunger of confusion.

When a god with the eye of clairvoyance
sees gold which has fallen from a wandering man's pockets
into a foul and filthy place-
gold which, for centuries has lain waste-
he tells someone just where that gold is;
he tells them to clean that precious substance,
and to make jewellery from it.

Likewise, the wise see the excellent in beings,
but see that that excellence is sinking in the filthy sewers of delusion;
they release the rains of the holy Dharma unto those beings,
in order to wash away the slime of their delusions.

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

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

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

Similarly, inside one's mind lies truth itself,
firm and unfading,

yet, because beings see it not,
they experience a constant stream of misery.

The pauper with a treasure buried under his shack
does not say that he has a treasure,
for he knows it not;

Likewise, the treasure of truth lies within the house of the mind,
yet we live impoverished through lack of it.

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

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

And when a god sees a buddha statue made of gems,
covered in stinking rags and lying on the roadside,
he speaks of it to a pilgrim,
to salvage it.
Likewise, those with unobstructed vision
see that the very substance of buddha exists even in animals,
but it is wrapped in the rags of mental aberration,
and teach all the various spiritual methods so that it may be salvaged.
When one with the eye of clairvoyance
sees a precious buddha statue
wrapped in rags and lying on the roadside,
he shows it to man,
to salvage it.
Similarly, the cosmic conquerors have seen
that the seed of perfection exists even in animals,
but lies on the roadside of worldliness,
wrapped in the stinking rags of mental distortion,
and teach the Dharma, to release it.

A friendless hag living in a slum
is carrying in her womb
one who is destined to become an emperor,
but she does not announce that in her womb is an emperor,
for she knows it not.
Similarly, in the slums of the worldly realms

live impure beings who, like that hag,
carry within themselves the stainless seed
which will become their own protector.
Although that hag carries an emperor in her womb,
she is clothed in tattered rags,
is hideous,
lives in a slum,
and experiences every form of suffering.
Likewise, although we all carry our own protector within,
we think that we are helpless,
and, consequently
out of the power of mental delusion
we live in confusion,
propelled by misery and turmoil.

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

Thus is it, that like a buddha in a dirty lotus,
the honey of a bee, grain in its husk,
gold in a sewer,
treasure under the earth, the germ within a seed,
a statue in filthy rags, an emperor in an ugly hag's womb,
and an icon covered in slime,
the ultimate nature of mind,

stainless and unobstructed,
abides in the coverings of worldly thoughts,
yet is unmixed with and unhindered by them.

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

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

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

destroyed by a great being's diamond samadhi
resemble the nine examples.

The ultimate truth that is discovered within,
the self-born essence,
is an object found only by the bold;
just as the light of the sun is not seen by those without eyes,
although it shines equally on all.
There is nothing to be eliminated from this,
nor is there anything to add.
It is the very perfection seen by a perfect one,
and, when it is perfectly seen
there is perfect liberation.

Translated by Acharya Konchog Gyaltsen and Glenn Mullin. Lightly edited.