

**Part V**  
**Mental Culture in Democracy Politics**



# Chapter 19

## Byama-so tayà: social meditation and the politics of influence

Aung San Suu Kyi in response to a question a journalist posed about the sudden piety of the regime, responded that ‘I would not like to judge other people's religious activities or attitudes and all I would say is that if there is real respect for the teachings of Buddhism on the part of the authorities, it is all to the good of the nation.’ However, to the regime's intolerance towards other religions she responded that ‘if that is so then it's a great pity because Buddhism after all teaches tolerance and loving kindness *myitta* so it would be against the essence of Buddhism to persecute anyone, whether on religious, political or any other grounds.’<sup>1</sup> The question arises whether Aung San Suu Kyi's view of Buddhism is substantively different from that practised by the regime, and, if so, in what ways.

As I have already noted, senior NLD members stress a number of Buddhist practices. The most important is *vipassana*, which operates at the level of coping psychologically with imprisonment and repression. This is so, particularly with the older generation steeped in the teachings of Burmese Buddhism. Among the younger leaders, in particular those who fled from Burma to Thailand, no such emphasis can be discerned. A long absence from Burma has cut them off from these techniques for coping with personal suffering which are openly available in most parts of Burma.

Nevertheless, for Aung San Suu Kyi as a Buddhist, change in and purification of her own mind and attitudes is as important as, if not more important than, calling for a change in the attitudes of others, including one's enemies [O10].<sup>2</sup> She has admitted, during various interviews, to her own addressing of these failings through mental culture [C17]. Nevertheless, though she practices herself, she also has reservations that mental culture necessarily always leads to change in the person, for there are many people who practise ‘not just for days but for months’ without changing their attitudes [C18].

### Samatha and vipassana

#### Vipassana

Many NLD members were sustained through their prison term by practising mental culture, in particular *vipassana* or ‘insight contemplation’. The practices, which Spiro – in his emphasis on Kammatic Buddhism over Nibbanic Buddhism – relegated to footnotes,<sup>3</sup> here take centre stage. The three most senior leaders of the National League for Democracy – Aung San Suu Kyi (General Secretary), Tin U (Deputy Chairman) and U Kyi Maung (Deputy Chairman) – practise *vipassana*.

Aung San Suu Kyi and Tin U practise in the tradition of the Mahasi Sayadaw, whereas U Kyi Maung and

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Patience, pragmatism pays off for “the lady”.’ *The Nation*, 01.11.1995.

<sup>2</sup> ASSK (1997b:91).

<sup>3</sup> ‘Although most Burmese who conceive of *nirvana* as extinction reject it as a goal, this is not uniformly the case. If did encounter some few Burmese – almost all of them monks – who aspired to the attainment of *nirvana* precisely because they conceive of it as extinction. Unhappy and world-weary, their one wish is to bring an end to their suffering. Thus, for example, one monk (who lived in a meditation monastery) said he devoted most of his time to meditation so that he might attain *nirvana*, which he defined as “extinction”. When I asked him why he desired extinction, he said: “Everything is *doukkha*; hence, extinction is much preferable to continued rebirth.” Or, to take another example, a layman (who subsequently entered the Order) said he wanted *nirvana* (defined as “extinction”) because “only in *neikhan* will there be no suffering.” When I asked him if he found none of his bodily activities pleasurable, he said: “No, there is no pleasure, neither in eating, in sex, in sleeping . . .” What, then, I asked him, about other forms of pleasure? Didn't he obtain pleasure from his children (to whom, I knew, he was strongly attached)? to this he said that no doubt he was happy with them, but “ultimately, they too give me *doukkha*.”

What was striking about both of these men – and about the few others for whom extinction was a desirable goal – was their seemingly acute state of depression. Unlike the typical Burman, who at least externally seems outgoing and gay, these men appeared to be markedly withdrawn and, clinically speaking, depressed. That they should have desired extinction over persistence, if persistence meant – as it did for them – the pain associated with deep depression, is hardly surprising.

Theoretically, the world-weary need not be the only type for whom extinction is a welcome or, at least, an acceptable end. There are also those who, having led lives of complete fulfilment, are ready to die (with no expectation of a future life) because, as the Bible says of the patriarch, they are “full of years.” (*Genesis* 25:8) Typically, however, this theoretically possible type is empirically empty, whether in Burmans or elsewhere’ (Spiro 1970:77n4).

U Aung Gyi (formerly in the NLD) practise in the tradition of U Ba Khin. These two *vipassana* traditions were institutionalized by members of government concerned to reform government and society. The Mahasi Sayadaw was brought to Rangoon by former Prime Minister U Nu. U Ba Khin, in turn, was appointed by U Nu as Accountant General of Burma, who then went on to set up his own International Meditation Centre. Both *vipassana* traditions have a long history in anti-corruption campaigns and in the reform of bureaucracy.

### Samatha

In all Burmese *vipassana* methods, *samatha* must be included, but not all *samatha* traditions need include *vipassana*. In particular some *samatha* practices, such as mindfulness of breath (*anapana*)<sup>1</sup> and the *byama-so tayà* or *brahma-vihara* practices of loving-kindness, have been incorporated into *vipassana* as part of a focus on the body and to create conditions favourable for the ‘crossing over’ into *vipassana*.

Nevertheless, *samatha* is what the Buddha practised prior to his enlightenment while he had not yet found the *vipassana* path, both in previous lives and in his life as Gautama before the age of forty. As a Buddha, competent in all forms of mental culture, he also practised *samatha* after his enlightenment.

The Buddha is supposed to have rejected most extreme forms of *samatha* practices of his time, particularly when practised for their own sake without follow-up with *vipassana*. *Samatha* is therefore ambiguous: at the level of technique, it is regarded as both preliminary to and supportive of *vipassana*, but at the level of its many pre- or extra-Buddhist hermetic practices, and in its identification with instrumental control over *loki*, it is regarded as non-Buddhist.

*Samatha* practice is readily characterised as leading to ‘mundane knowledge’ (*loki pañña*) and as concerned with ‘power’ in an instrumental sense to serve goals in this world. Unlike *vipassana*, which seeks to attain direct perception and transparency of all processes that actually take place in mind, *samatha* produces a mind-created state at will. In short, *samatha* creates worlds [*loki*], whereas *vipassana* breaks them down and sees them for what they are. The *vipassana* traditions most worried about the *loki* implications of *samatha* are the ‘dry’-visioned *vipassana* methods, including the method of the Mahasi Sayadaw. On the other hand, *vipassana* methodologies arising from the *anapana* tradition of the Ledi Sayadaw tend to involve more clearly identifiable *samatha* practice. The Hpa Auk Sayadaw, a new phenomenon in Burma, aims to scale the heights of both practices.

### Samatha and political ideology

I have shown that the military (and those in search of *ana*) prefer the *samatha* traditions, since it permits control over *loka*, whereas the democracy movement (and those in search of *awza*) tend to stress *samatha* mainly as an avenue for emancipation from *loka*. At the level of formulating a clearly identifiable political philosophy, *vipassana* is not the most important practice, even among the senior leaders. By far the most important are those practices that bridge the mundane and the supra-mundane practices, and bridge collective and personal aspirations. These in particular refer to *samatha*. Thus, *byama-so tayà*, and in particular *metta* and *karuna*, are the formative practices for creating social and political bonds. *Samatha* is also important for finding legitimacy and support with monks famous for its practice, such as the Thamanya Sayadaw. Furthermore, the term *sati*, which produces the necessary one-pointed mind (concentration) in preparation for *vipassana*, also is of some political significance when it is interpreted as giving rise to political awareness in a multi-party system.

In sum, the political significance of Buddhist terminology revolves almost entirely around the *samatha* or ‘mundane’ (*loki*) element of Buddhist practice. *Vipassana* operates in the background as the purificatory element of last resort, as the final, highest and most noble goal of Buddhist practice, namely final release from *samsara*.

<sup>1</sup> ‘[A]t the time the Bodhisatta reflected on the correct path for realization of Omniscience, for attainment of Buddhahood, after discarding the practice of dukkaracariya, he correctly considered that the eight mundane attainments of Jhana that he achieved after meeting the Sect-leaders Alara and Udaka were just the basis of the round of suffering (vattapadaka); he also considered that the Anapana Concentration which was developed in the shade of the rose apple tree while his father King Suddhodana was performing the auspicious Ploughing Ceremony was the correct path for the realization of Omniscience, for the attainment of Buddhahood since the Anapana Concentration was part of A Mindfulness Meditation of the body, (*Kayaqatasati*), and the basis of Insight Meditation, (*Vipassana*) for all Bodhisattas, (*Mulapaññasa Tika* vol I).’ (Mingun 1990–96, 2, 1:200–201)

## Byama-so tayà

### Socialism

It has often been remarked that Burmese style socialism was ‘less influenced by the international socialist movement than by indigenous factors’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the indigenous factors ensured that communists from Russia and Vietnam simply could not recognize the content of Burmese socialism as socialist at all. The question, however, is what these ‘indigenous factors’ are, and whether these have actually been understood.

Though he had his reservations, Smith nevertheless argued that, compared to U Nu's religious democracy, Ne Win's socialism was evidence of a more secular and more pragmatic ‘ideology’, supplementing or even replacing ‘tradition’ as the ‘prime factor’ in the legitimation of the Burmese political system.<sup>2</sup> However, such an idea that Burma was on the move from Buddhist ‘tradition’ to secular ‘ideology’ after 1962 is deceptive for two reasons. First, as Smith also realised, it is a minority in Burma who view socialism as a secular ideology – most interpret it as a system based on traditional Buddhist values. Second, and this is more important, socialism has mostly *not* been conceived of as an ideology at all, but as a typically Burmese Buddhist *practice*, namely as *byama-so tayà*, a kind of social meditation.

### Legal matters

Maung Maung, biographer of Ne Win, who in 1989 briefly became Burma's president, was appointed Chief Judge after the 1962 coup. He was responsible for revising the Burmese legal system. In January 1965, as part of his effort to ‘decolonise’ Burmese law, he made a judgment about whether an engagement between youngsters fitted into the *Indian Contract*, or the customary *dhammathat* law. In one case, the latter required no minimum age, but according to the former one of the parties was deemed too young to be engaged. Maung Maung decided that the *dhammathat* law applied and the fiancée could sue for breach of promise of marriage. The significant point is that in this judgment, Maung Maung invented a ‘new Burmese legal identity’, namely he appealed to *lokapala tayà* [လောကဝါလတရား] or ‘the principles upholding the universe upon which the *dhammathat* rested’. Maung Maung himself characterised it as ‘non-oppression between man and man, and non-exploitation of man by man’.<sup>3</sup> Huxley identifies this with the Four Kings, representing the Guardians of the Universe and the four compass points. However, there are three other kinds of *lokapala* besides this, namely the Two (shame and fear), the Four (the *byama-so tayà*) and the Five (the five moral precepts). Though I do not have this source at hand, I am inclined to think that Maung Maung intended his revised legal system to appeal to the ultimate Burmese values in line with the adoption of the four *byama-so tayà*, a synonym of *lokapala* as set out below.

### The Buddhicisation of socialism

Ne Win had become acutely aware that socialist ideology could not, in Burma at least, operate entirely as a secular ideology. The Sangha was outraged by the nationalisation of industry and the concentration of wealth in the hands of the government because it was depriving the Sangha of independent support, and if the State was not to support them, who would?<sup>4</sup> Ne Win Buddhicised his rendering of socialism more and more as time passed.

In 1965, the same year as Maung Maung's shift in legal interpretation, Ne Win repealed U Nu's acts in support of Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> Also in that same year, the Mahasi Sayadaw, who was the central person in U Nu's Buddhist reform, was invited to speak on Burmese radio for four successive rainy seasons between 1965–68, addressing the general public in Burmese on each of the four individual *Byama-so tayà*.<sup>6</sup> These were published in 1985 as *The Teachings on Byama-so Tayà* [ဖြေဆိုရန်တရားတော်ကြီး]. In the first broadcast, he explained how he usually preached about *vipassana*, but since it is difficult and not everyone could practise this, he wanted to benefit the general population by preaching on *byama-so tayà*. This could be practised by all, irrespective of ethnicity or religion.

By 1971, barely three years after the Mahasi finished his broadcasts, the BSPP prefaced the Burmese

<sup>1</sup> Steinberg (1981b:30).

<sup>2</sup> Smith (1965:311,313).

<sup>3</sup> See Andrew Huxley. 1998. ‘The last fifty years of Burmese law: E Maung and Maung Maung.’ *LawAsia*, 17, p. 18-19.

<sup>4</sup> Smith (1965:300–301).

<sup>5</sup> Ecclesiastical Courts Act, the Pali University and Dhammacariya Act of 1950, and the Pali Education Board Acts (Smith 1965:305).

<sup>6</sup> Broadcast on 12 August 1965, 1 August 1966, 18 September 1967 and 22 August 1968.

version of every party document with *byama-so tayà* in a single page entitled 'Our Belief', characterising this practice as the foundation of socialism.

We seriously believe that people cannot be emancipated from their suffering because of the prevalence of the evil economic systems [ဝိသမစီးပွားရေးစနစ်ဆိုး] controlled by unjust and avaricious [ဝိသမဗောဓာ] people, who rule the roost and have disheartened the peoples of the world by overturning noble qualities such as considerate behaviour, and foist this upon people they do not understand. We believe that it is a serious matter that people cannot free themselves from suffering. That is why this Union of Socialist Burma wants to silence such avaricious system which seeks unjust prosperity, and which unjustly oppresses people. We seriously believe that we can build a socialist economy which has justice at its basis, and which permits citizens to collectively, through human effort, achieve a new society in which people enjoy themselves, and in which the *Byama-so ta-yà* can flourish, permitting people to liberate themselves from suffering [မတရားစီးပွားရှာစားသော ဝိသမဗောဓ်များကိုချုပ်ငြိမ်းစေပြီး တရားမျှတမှုကို အခြေခံသော ဆိုရှယ်လစ်စီးပွားရေးစနစ်ကို တည်ဆောက်နိုင်မှသာလျှင် ပြည်သူ့လူထုအပေါင်းသည် လူ့ပယောဂကြောင့် ပေါ်ပေါက်ရသောလူမှုဒုက္ခအပေါင်းမှလွတ်မြောက်ကြလျက် ပြုမူစိုရ်တရားများ ထွန်းကားနိုင်မည့်သာယာဝပြောသော လူ့ဘောင်သစ်ကြီးသို့ ရောက်ရှိနိုင်မည်ဟု အလေးအနက်ယုံကြည်သည်။] We vow that, according to these beliefs, even if we do not attain the final socialist goals, we will uplift our lives.

Until 1971 the Ne Win regime had fondly summed up Burmese socialism in 'Our belief' [ကုန်ဝတို့၏ ယုံကြည်ချက်] as 'No full stomach, no morality'. This had been incorporated in the first socialist document produced, namely in the nine-page document *The Burmese Way to Socialism* of 30 April 1962.

The Revolutionary Council of the Union of Burma does not believe that man will be set free from social evils as long as pernicious economic systems exist in which man exploits man and lives on the fat of such appropriation. The Council believes it to be possible only when exploitation of man by man is brought to an end and a socialist economy based on justice is established; only then can all people, irrespective of race or religion, be emancipated from all social evils and set free from anxieties over food, clothing and shelter, and from inability to resist evil, for an empty stomach is not conducive to wholesome morality, as the Burmese saying goes: only then can an affluent stage of social development be reached and all people be happy and healthy in mind and body.

This original statement was evidently a reaction to U Nu's emphasis on meditation. Borrowed from one of Aung San's speeches, some have translated it as 'no full stomach, no morality', and as 'one can meditate only if the stomach is full' (morality precedes meditation) or, in English terms, as 'man does not live by bread alone'.<sup>1</sup>

By 1971 Ne Win realised that, in making this ideology so earthly and low-down, it had become associated with, and was an excuse for, corruption. With corruption cases pending, it was decided to follow his earlier statement of intention and to notch socialist ideology a little higher than the stomach, by incorporating another of Aung San's references, namely to *byama-so tayà*. This seems to have been discovered in the BSPP Internal Party Discussion Document, which also attributes it to one of Aung San's speeches.<sup>2</sup> From 1971 onwards, all Burmese BSPP documents dropped the reference to 'Full stomach first, morality second' and had substituted it with this paragraph added on the first page as 'Our belief'.<sup>3</sup>

I have already noted above how Aung San referred to a 'Socialism underpinned by *byama-so tayà*' [ပြုမူစိုရ်တရားကို အခြေပြုသော “ဆိုရှယ်လစ်ဇင်း”],<sup>4</sup> and I have now shown how this became the core of socialist ideology as expressed by the Ne Win regime. Saw Maung said about these practices that they are 'not very difficult to practise',<sup>5</sup> and through the Thirty-Eight Mangala this has been incorporated into official policy of the contemporary military regime, though not into their similarly named, but much less imaginative slogan today, namely of the People's Desire [ပြည်သူ့သဘောထား။] [ZM3b]. What, we may ask, is the nature of this social and socialist form of meditation, this spiritualisation of politics?

### Byama-so tayà and the moral precepts

In Pali the expression *brahma-cariya* is most readily identified with 'good conduct' [သုစရိုက်], such as taking the vows of abstinence, as included in the Eight, in the Nine and in the Ten Moral Precepts. Thus a distinction is made between the Four Kinds of *Brahma-cariya*, namely (1) abstinence practised by ordinary laity according to the moral precepts, (2) by monks according to the Vinaya, (3) by those who took the Buddha's teachings according to the Buddha's teachings, and (4) the practices of the *ariya* who were able to

<sup>1</sup> Mya Maung (1998:2).

<sup>2</sup> *Party Discussion Document*, Vol. 2 [1968 ဝါတီတွင်း ဆွေးနွေးပွဲမှတ်စုများ၊ အမှတ် ၁], page 19. I believe this reference was taken from Aung San (1971:62) as discussed above.

<sup>3</sup> 'Our Beliefs' was edited three times. At the First Party Congress in 1971, at the 1974 party meeting, and at the Fourth Party Congress in 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Aung San (1971:62).

<sup>5</sup> Saw Maung (1990b:337).

cut off their attachments.<sup>1</sup>

The third of the Eight, of the Nine and of the Ten Precepts are all known as the injunction to ‘avoid ignoble practices’ or *abrahma-cariya sila* [အမြဲတစရှိသသီလ].<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in a special group of Precepts observed at the time of the Kassapa Buddha in the conduct of Vajjian country, there were Five Precepts known as *brahmacariya-pancama sila* in which the third applied to temporary abstinence of sexual intercourse. When to these five is added the precept to take only one meal a day, then this is known as *brahmacariya-pancama ekabhaddika sila*.<sup>3</sup> There is also a category of Five Precepts known as Kumara *byama-cariya* precepts [ကောမရဗြဟ္မစရိယသီလမျိုး], in which the fifth is celibacy.<sup>4</sup>

### Byama-so tayà and the Thirty-Eight Mangala

The philosophical and political importance of *byama-so tayà*, however, is much broader than signifying abstinence and good conduct. This becomes particularly evident in its use as number 32, namely ‘pure life’, in the context of the Thirty-Eight Mangala in the *Mahamangala Sutta* (Discourse of the Supreme Blessings).

*F. Renunciation of the Worldly Life (31–34).*

[31] Tapo ca	[31] To practise austerity,
[32] brahma cariyaca	[32] and the practice of pure life,
[33] Ariya sacana dassanam	[33] to have perception of Ariya [noble] truths
[34] Nibbana sacchi kiriyaca	[34] to realize Nibbana (through Arhatta-phala)
Etam mangal muttamam	this is the highest auspiciousness.

This has been defined in the new 1994 syllabus on training in Buddhist culture as ‘abstinence and the practice of noble practices’ [မေထုန်အမှု ရှောင်ကြဉ်ပြုလုပ်ကောင်းမြတ်သောအကျင့်ကျင့်ခြင်း].<sup>5</sup> As Kyaw Htut points out, ‘many people think that *brahmacariya* practice only means abstinence from sex’, and there is a tendency to translate this as ‘celibacy’. However, he proceeds to argue that, since it is the previous [31] *tapa mangala* that involves the practice of renunciation of ‘the worldly life’ and taking up the life of ‘a bhikkhu or an ascetic or a hermit’, abstinence in the case of *byama-so tayà* is already assumed, so that this refers to something more. He says that Brahmacariya Mangala or the practice of the life of Purity in this context ‘should be taken to mean such practices which are based on tranquillity practice’.<sup>6</sup>

As in the case of *tapa*, he distinguishes a Buddhist from a non-Buddhist through this practice:

we find two categories; the Brahmacariya Mangala as practised by the ascetics outside the Buddha's teaching and the Brahmacariya Mangala as taught by the Buddha. The practice of the ascetics is the tranquillity practice (*samatha*), and it is by means of this practice that many ascetics attained *jhanas* (mental absorption) and *abhinnas* or supernormal powers. As a matter of fact, outside the Buddha's teaching, any form of practice that strives for the development of supernormal powers is Brahmacariya Mangala ... the practice within the Sasana and outside the Sasana are quite different. The Brahmacariya practice under the Buddha's Teaching voids the two extremes of self-mortification and indulgence in sense pleasures, and is carried out steadily and steadfastly. Besides, the goal here is not tranquillity but the attainment of insight-knowledge (*vipassana-nāna*).<sup>7</sup>

He then says that ‘it is not easy to explain Brahmacariya practice as it can be interpreted according to context’, and contrasts *tapa mangala* as making for ‘moral purity’ (*sila visuddhi*), while *brahmacariya mangala* makes for purity of mind (*citta visuddhi*).

The significance of this pure life is that it lies exactly at the threshold between the mundane and the supra-mundane life. Indeed, it is the first thirty-two *mangala*, right up to *byama-so tayà* that ‘pertain to mundane (*lokiya*) matters’, and the six that follow are *lokuttara*, of which the first two are practices, and the last four are results.<sup>8</sup> The implication is that, as the last of the mundane practices leading up to the supramundane and as the beginning of the final path, it empowers towards the final release, it permits vision of the unconditioned emptiness of *nibbana* upon which can be projected ultimate ideals of freedom and fulfilment.

<sup>1</sup> Known as the Four Kinds of *Brahma-cariya* Abstinence [ဗြဟ္မစရိယာ၊ မေထုန်၊ ၄-ဖြာ ကိစ္စသိ] Awbatha (1975:402).

<sup>2</sup> In the *brahmacariya pancama sila* the third of the Ten Precepts becomes *abrahmacariya veramani-sikkhapadam samadiyami* အမြဲတစရှိယာ၊ ရေမဏိသိက္ခာပဒံ၊ သမာဒိယာမိ။ This means to avoid ignoble practice and is often linked to the clean mind of a child [ကောမရီဗြဟ္မစရိယာ၊ ကောမရဗြဟ္မစရိယာ].

<sup>3</sup> Mingun (1990–96, 1, 1:162–64).

<sup>4</sup> Awbatha (1975:401, 626).

<sup>5</sup> *The class book for the exam in Buddhist culture* [ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ ယဉ်ကျေးမှု စာမေးပွဲ သင်ခန်းစာ]. Rangoon: DPPS, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Kyaw Htut (1994:91).

<sup>7</sup> Kyaw Htut (1994:90–91).

<sup>8</sup> Kyaw Htut (1994:92–93).

### Rahula and Brahmacariya pariyosana

This idea of *byama-so tayà* as a complete path based on charity, moral practice and mental culture is evident in the designation of The Ten Meanings of *Brahma-cariya* [ဖြေ့စရိယာ၊ ယင်းသဒ္ဒါ၊ ၁၀-ဖြေ့ အနက်ဟော။]<sup>1</sup>, that ranges across charity and virtue, to the final consumption of the path in attaining to the fruits of *ariya*.

That *brahmacariya* means more than celibacy, as it also encompasses the largest, final stretch of the path of the pure life towards a final solution, is evident from the story of how Rahula was threatened by Mara who wanted to get at Gautama Buddha, his father. At that point Gautama said

(‘Hey Mara, a disturbing one! My beloved son) Rahula is one who has realized his goal that is Arahatsip called *Brahmacariya pariyosana*. He is absolutely free from fear, he is purified of the hundred and eight kinds of real craving, he is devoid of the one thousand and five hundred mental defilements, he has uprooted the thorns and spikes of all existences such as sensual (*kama*), material (*rupa*) and immaterial (*arupa*). The body (of my son Rahula) in the present existence is his last body.<sup>2</sup>

The Buddha then proceeded to say that Rahula no longer grasped the five aggregates of the body and the mind as ‘I’, ‘mine’ and ‘my self’. Since Mara was grasped at that point as mental defilements underlying rebirth, Mara himself supposedly made his exit from that place. This conquest by the Buddha over Mara as both deity and the very universal causes of embodiment itself is celebrated in the epithet of the Buddhist as *jhina*. Múneinda (1817-1894) wrote *Zeinathtá pakathani* [Biography of the conqueror *CMS: a\QIP jhina pakasani*].<sup>3</sup> This is a biographical account of the Buddha in terms of his epithet *jhina* [CQ]. It has ten parts with ninety-eight sections in all, starting from the prayer of Gautama Buddha-to-be as hermit Sumedha, his enlightenment and reaching right up until the third synod by Shin Maukgaliputara. The designation *jhina* is explained here as overcoming ‘the five enemies’ [WaYmSá], both within and without.

### Brahma-cariya as recitation

The emphasis placed in Burmese Buddhism on *byama-cariya* as a broad path, including charity and the moral precepts, and as a way of life to be aspired to in the *Mangala Sutta*, means that even the body of thirty-three sutta texts recited for protection, namely the *paritta*, are sometimes referred to as a whole as ‘Recitation of *brahma-cariya*’ [ဖြေ့စရိတ်ဝတ်စဉ်].<sup>4</sup>

### Byama-so tayà and brahma-vihara

The above examples, however, are not usually shortened in Burmese speech and writing to *byama-so tayà*. They are not the most common identification. It is only the Four *brahma-vihara* that are interchangeably referred to as The Four *byahma-so tayà* [ဖြေ့စရိတ် ၄ ပါး], an abbreviation of the Pali *brahma-cariya* (*so* စရိတ် is derived from *sariyá*, P. *cariya* စရိယ).<sup>5</sup> In Burmese, when suffixed with ‘teaching’ [တရား၊ ဓမ္မ], this contraction is presumed equivalent to *brahma-vihara*.

At Gautama's birth an omen took place presaging his ‘attainment of four Sublime States (*Brahmavihara*)’. The omen was the immediate pervasion of ‘loving-kindness [*metta*] ... among all beings at enmity with one another.’<sup>6</sup> The Four *brahma-vihara* [ဖြေ့စရိတ် ၄ ပါး] means ‘the Four Dwellings of Brahma’ as distinct from ‘the Four Brahma Practices’. However, Brahma also means ‘noble’, and it can also be translated as the ‘the Four Nobles’ or ‘the Four Noble Ways of Life’.

The four practices [*cariya*] that make up *brahma-vihara* are conceived as leading to the highest abodes [*vihara*] in Buddhist cosmology, where material sexuality is not apparent with all its attendant problems, and where Brahmanas live by these four practices simply and without difficulties. Hence abstinence is already an attribute of this higher form of life. Indeed, the *byahma-so tayà* are also known as The Four Dwellings of Brahma [ဖြေ့စရိတ်တရား ၄-ပါး], in which reference is made to the way of life and practice of the Brahma kings.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Awbatha (1975:402).

<sup>2</sup> Mingun (1990-96,4:169-70).

<sup>3</sup> *CMS: a\QIP jhina pakasani* is explained as meaning ‘capable of victory’ [K` a>R<R<N], *attha* [ ` M] means ‘events’ [ ` K: a>R< Ya], *okpatti* [EŠM] means ‘their happening’ [TAN], and *pakathani* [S: a\Q] means ‘explaining to make apparent’ [N>h&k` a>R<P<P<].

<sup>4</sup> ဦး သုန်းကျော်၊ ဘေးအန္တရာယ် အသွယ်သွယ်ကင်းပျောက်၍ လာဘ်လာဘဖွံ့ဖြိုးစေနိုင်သောဖြေ့စရိတ်ဝတ်စဉ်၊ ရန်ကုန်စွဲစာပေရိပ်မြူ၊ ၁၉၈၁။ This book describes the moral precepts and also the *Mangala Sutta*, in addition to the other basic prayers and suttas used as methods of protection in Burmese Buddhism.

<sup>5</sup> Mahasi attributes this particular meaning of *brahma-cariya* to *Mahagovinda Sutta* (see ဖြေ့စရိတ်တရားတော်ကြီး Rangoon, 1985, p. 2). However, reference to *brahma-cariya* are also common in medieval Sinhalese (Charles Hallisey, personal correspondence).

<sup>6</sup> Mingun (1990-96,2,1:35).

<sup>7</sup> Awbatha (1975:403).

*Brahma-vihara* is a collection of four *samatha* meditation objects out of forty, namely ‘loving-kindness’ (*metta*), ‘compassion’ (*karuna*), ‘sympathetic joy’ (*mudita*) and ‘equanimity’ (*upekkha*). Commonly translated as ‘the Four Divine Abodes’ or ‘the Four Sublime States’, these are identified as Brahma practices and as leading to the Brahma heavens, the top heavens in Buddhist cosmology (which has thirty-one planes of existence). Their cosmological reach and positive influence on the world, from a Buddhist and a socio-political point of view, means that they are sometimes designated as ‘the Four Guardians of the World’ [လောကဝါလတရားငါး].<sup>1</sup>

They are also known in Buddhist philosophy as ‘Illimitables’ (*apamañña*), as these are ‘the mental qualities to be developed and extended [limitlessly] towards all beings’.<sup>2</sup> By this is meant that ‘in their perfection and their true nature, they should not be narrowed by any limitation as to the range of beings towards whom they are extended. They should be non-exclusive and impartial, not bound by selective preferences or prejudices. A mind that has attained to that boundlessness of the Brahma-viharas will not harbor any national, racial, religious or class hatred.’<sup>3</sup>

These practices are based on moral conduct and concern conduct towards living beings (*sattesu samma patipatti*). Nyanatiloka has argued that they provide, in fact, ‘the answer to all situations arising from social contact. They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. They level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken slumbering magnanimity long forgotten, revive joy and hope long abandoned and promote human brotherhood against the forces of egotism.’<sup>4</sup>

These practices are considered the foundation of Burmese collective life at the very early beginnings of Burmese history. Indeed, SPDC journalists portray artists from the Pagan period as expressing these *brahma-vihara* practices in their painting, which they interpret as uniquely Burmese.

The Bagan artist did not believe in naturalistic art. His art was something akin to the art of the moderns. He knew that a painting needed to exaggerate certain contrasts or to eliminate an enormous amount of detail. He knew that a painting needed to simplify to achieve art. Accordingly he was ready to exaggerate, eliminate or simplify. He was ready to pull his subject to pieces and to reassemble it in accordance with his vision. Because of the success of his effort he was able to give the impression of telling the truth about life around him. He brought out the force and quality of the original. Because of his skill he was able to express in art such concepts as compassion, joy and equanimity.<sup>5</sup>

#### The scriptural passage on brahma-vihara

I. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with loving-kindness, likewise the second, the third, and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with loving-kindness, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.

II. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with compassion, likewise the second, the third and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with compassion, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.

III. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with sympathetic joy, likewise the second, the third and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with sympathetic joy, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.

IV. Here, monks, a disciple dwells pervading one direction with his heart filled with equanimity, likewise the second, the third and the fourth direction; so above, below and around; he dwells pervading the entire world everywhere and equally with his heart filled with equanimity, abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.<sup>6</sup>

#### Samatha and cosmological attainment

In Burma by far the greatest emphasis is placed on the first two, and in particular on the first practice. Thus the four practices were collectively characterised by the Mahasi in *Brahmavihara Dhamma* in particular in terms of the very first practice, namely as ‘the systematic method of developing *metta*’.<sup>7</sup>

Aung San Suu Kyi’s main emphasis throughout has been very much on the first two qualities, *metta* and

<sup>1</sup> Awbatha (1975:538).

<sup>2</sup> Mingun (1990–96,1,1:324); Vibangha Chapter XIII.

<sup>3</sup> Nyanaponika Thera (1958).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *MP*, October 1997.

<sup>6</sup> *Digha Nikaya*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> In the *Patisambhida Magga Pali* 528 kinds of *metta* are developed classed by the manner of attainment.

*karuna*. People should ‘concentrate on cultivating loving kindness and compassion’. From these two practices the third practice, sympathetic joy, ‘would naturally follow.’ However, *upekkha*, the fourth practice, is ‘well-nigh impossible for most ordinary beings’, as it stands for a ‘perfectly balanced state of the mind and emotions, a balance between faith and intelligence, between energy and concentration, between wisdom and compassion’ and is ‘non-preferential without inclination towards excess in any direction’.<sup>1</sup>

The social and political relevance of these practices correlates with the cosmological height to which these practices lead, permitting access to the top twenty heavens. The animal realm and the hells are the lowest five realms (nos 1–5), the human realm is number 5, the deities are 6–11, and the Brahma realms are nos 12–31. The first three practices – *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita* – enable the practitioner to reach up into the third *rupa jhana* leading up until realm no. 20.

However, the fourth practice – *upekkha* – enables achievement of the fourth *rupa jhana* up until realm no. 27. As Ko Lei puts it, equanimity is necessary to attain to these higher realms:

This is the reason: Metta, Karuna, Mudita Jhanas are associated with Sukha Vedana [feeling of pleasure]. The fourth Jhana is associated with Upekkha Vedana [feeling of indifference]. If, therefore, the yogi wants to go up to the fourth Jhana, he must change his object, after he has acquired the third Jhana, by means of one of these three Brahmavihara bhavanas. For example, the yogi is practising Metta bhavana. The object on which he concentrates is the mental image of the person, whom he loves and respects. Up to the same time of achieving the third Jhana, the yogi uses the same object. If, however, he wants to achieve the fourth Jhana, he must give up his original object of the mental image of the person, whom he loves and respects. He must concentrate on the mental image of a person, to whom he is indifferent. And while he has the third jhana, the jhanangas (parts of the Jhana) are Sukkha Ekaggata. However, from the very moment when the yogi achieved the fourth Jhana, the Jhanangas will be Upekkha Ekaggata.<sup>2</sup>

Though the highest realm that can be attained through these practices, this practice is also the least socially relevant. It is of some interest that in the book about Aung San Suu Kyi, the regime responded by saying that she writes well with literary talent, but that she does not practise what she writes herself. On the other hand, I have already noted that Saw Maung dismissed these practices as ‘easy’ and Burmese people criticise the military for having no *metta*.

### Supernatural protection

The main agency responsible for protection, even in lower forms of Burmese magic, are the powers unleashed by recitation of the *paritta*, the words of the Buddha. The power of incantations (*paritta*) to overcome or dissipate danger is also ultimately based on the quality of *metta* of the reciter. The Four Accomplishments of a Reciter are: (1) The reciter must be capable of reciting passages, phrases and syllables of the Pali text with the correct mode of articulation, enunciation and accent; (2) He must have full and exact understanding of the Pali text he is reciting; (3) The reciter should chant *paritta* without expectation of gifts or presents.; (4) *Paritta* should be recited with a pure heart, full of loving-kindness and compassion. So ‘it is necessary to administer *paritta* according to the conditions laid down, with a heart full of loving-kindness, and compassion and resolute inclination towards release from the Samsara and curbing one’s desire to receive offerings.’<sup>3</sup>

The SPDC takes *paritta* seriously, for on Burmese New Year, 17 April 1998, it organized a reciting of *paritta*, and poured the sacred water into the four lakes that supply Rangoon’s water supply ‘for all the people of Yangon to be safe and free from harm and danger’.<sup>4</sup> After this ‘they also dispensed *metta*’.

### Development

Aung San Suu Kyi’s most explicit statements on this particular practice are to be found in her 11th Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture, entitled ‘Heavenly abodes and human development’ presented on 3 November 1997.

In this, she argues that today we recognize that development can no longer be ‘measured purely in economic terms’, since it ‘includes socio-political factors’, and she suggests that ‘true development should also comprise spiritual cultivation’. She quotes Sulak Sivaraksa on ‘the spirit of Buddhist development’, who argued that ‘the inner strength must be cultivated, along with compassion and loving kindness’ and on the goals of Buddhist development as ‘equality, love, freedom and liberation’:

... the means for achieving these lie within the grasp of any community from a village to a nation – once its members begin

<sup>1</sup> ‘Heavenly abodes and human development’. Lecture presented on 3 November 1997. (ASSK 04.01.1998).

<sup>2</sup> Ko Lei (1985:11–12).

<sup>3</sup> Mingun (1990–96,3:199–207).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Paritta water New Year’s gift for Yangonites’. *NLM*, 18.04.1998.

the process of reducing selfishness. To do so, two realisations are necessary: an inner realisation concerning greed, hatred and delusion, and an outer realisation concerning the impact these tendencies have on society and the planet ...

She concludes that

Paradise on earth is a concept which is outmoded and few people believe in it any more. But we can certainly seek to make our planet a better, happier home for all of us by constructing the heavenly abodes of love and compassion in our hearts. Beginning with this inner development we can go on to the development of the external world with courage and wisdom.

This echoes Rewatta Dhamma, who briefly acted as mediator between Aung San Suu Kyi and the SLORC, who said in his 1996 address to Asian leaders that ‘if the central human values of compassion and loving kindness were actually practised in our countries, we would soon find a solution to our problems, and our people would not be sacrificed on the altars of “security” or economic “development”’.<sup>1</sup>

U Nu expounded something akin to this view in 1960, when Thakin Tin, his finance minister, told the press that profiteering and black-marketing would be stopped by appealing to all business men ‘to observe the Buddha’s teachings concerning *metta*’. However, the next year this policy was recognized to have failed and was abandoned, to be substituted by stern measures to control prices of essential commodities. Smith says about this that ‘whether the teaching of *metta* was seriously believed to be adequate, or was simply a rationalisation for inaction, in either case its use was rather pathetic’.<sup>2</sup> Though Smith’s warning that *metta* should not substitute for sound economic policy remains valid, he did not seem to appreciate the intra-cultural significance of this concept (he also mistranslated *metta* as ‘all-embracing compassion’).

### Politics

*Byama-so tayà* plays an important role in Burmese politics, as underlined by its frequent use in the speeches of kings and politicians.

The role of *byama-so tayà* in political crisis was already evident in Kyanzitha’s time, for after he reconquered Pagan from a rebel, he promised to remedy the crisis by his superior loving-kindness and compassion so that the refugees could safely return to their homeland. Adapting a prophecy by Gavampati on behalf of the Buddha, the inscription (c 1102 A.D.) says: ‘of those torn from their dear ones, of those who were sick at heart, by a course of benefits, with water of compassion, with loving-kindness which is even as a hand, he shall wipe their tears, he shall wash away their snot ... Like children resting in their mother’s bosom, so shall the king keep watch over them and help them’ [D3].

Its value as a political instrument was repeatedly emphasised by the monk Wisara in his quest for national independence and the restoration of Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> It was also emphasized by U Nu during his position as Prime Minister of Burma between 1948–62 [E2], during the 1988 disturbances, and while engaged in setting up his political party at the end of 1989 [D2].

U Nu’s emphasis on *brahma-vihara* was particularly pronounced from 1958, when the caretaker government took over. On 28 August 1988 U Nu was the first to declare a new political party, The League for Democracy and Peace [ဒီမိုကရေစီနှင့်ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေးပါတီ၊ ဒီ-ငြိမ်းအဖွဲ့], followed by his declaration of a provisional government on 9 September. It is of interest that his main philosophy for democracy was known as the *Byama-so Way* [ဗြဟ္မစိုရ်လမ်းစဉ်], and that his newsletter was known as the *Brahmacariya Bulletin* or in Burmese as the *Byama-so Bulletin* [ဗြဟ္မစိုရ်သတင်းစဉ်]. He was ‘disqualified’ by the military in December 1989 after he refused to call off his declaration that his party legally constituted the Government. He declared himself prepared to be killed and urged his followers ‘to strive for liberation through the *Brahmacariyavada*’.

We have already noted *byama-so tayà* as a major criticism of the SLORC regime by Tin U who proclaimed that by practising *vipassana* the generals will be able to ‘foster *metta* that way’ [C19]. Tin U also emphasizes that he himself learnt this in the course of his monastic education [D3], and sees what he learnt in the monastery as a turning away from ‘a shallow and fearful life’ associated with his life under the military [E1]. Nevertheless, U Kyi Maung points out that there are limitations to the non-violence strategy of *metta* and meditation in a situation of conflict [E4].

Aung San Suu Kyi, through her emphasis on *brahma-vihara*, aims to bring the military ‘into the fold’ of peaceful and harmonious government. However, at the same time, as Kyanzitha did with the refugees in his time, she addresses the numerous Burmese refugees in the jungle and in Thailand. She appeals for *metta* and *karuna* on the part of the Thai government [D5].

<sup>1</sup> ‘Dhamma ethics and human rights.’ (Delivered at the Asian Leaders Conference, Seoul, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Action against profiteers’. *The Guardian*, 06.10.1961; Smith (1965:145–46).

<sup>3</sup> Lwin (1971:146, 148).

Aung San Suu Kyi isolates the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, 'surely one of the leading authorities on, and practitioners of, loving kindness in our world today' [D17]. Chinese repression of Tibet since 1959 means that the Dalai Lama faced a longer struggle than Aung San Suu Kyi, but both share a similar fate in their non-violent struggle against a totalitarian regime, for which both have been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. It is interesting that both should find in *brahma-vihara* the main centrepiece of their politics.

As I will show, the first three *brahma-vihara* practices primarily serve as a way of forming bonds between individuals so as to make possible a sense of groupness. However, this works two ways, for different political factions have emphasized different ideas of the group, with military discourse sometimes one-sidedly using it to either claim ethnic exclusiveness or common Asian values.

### Reconciliation with opposites and enemies

*Vipassana* teacher Rewatta Dhamma, who lives in a monastery and meditation centre in Birmingham, England, is the only person to have briefly secured the co-operation of both sides in an attempt to mediate between the SLORC and Aung San Suu Kyi. Though unsuccessful, these were the only hopeful signs of negotiation taking place.

It is significant that Rewatta Dhamma, who has known Aung San Suu Kyi from youth, has identified the *brahma-vihara* as a typically Burmese Buddhist instrument able to achieve reconciliation between the SLORC and NLD. He encouraged both the SLORC and NLD to develop these mental attributes saying that he sincerely hopes that 'she [Aung San Suu Kyi] walks on well with loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, principles taught by the Buddha, which the majority of the people of Myanmar appreciate ... and have been principles the people of Myanmar have followed for centuries.' He expects that 'If Suu Kyi and the members of the SLORC abide by the principle of the Buddha's teachings and solve their problems, then they will succeed in building a democracy fit for Myanmar, and peace and stability will be restored to the land' [D4].

In preparation for the attainment of 'transcendental wisdom' (*lokuttara pañña*) this practice affords engagement of this world (*loki*) in the broadest of frameworks, transcendent of its oppositional and confrontational differences. Indeed, the practise of *metta* teases out human relationships from the particular narrow, confrontational, political context as framed by the attitudes of the military regime. This mental quality permits compromise and negotiation. If the regime were to respond and develop *metta*, than this situation, Burmese feel, will contribute to a situation where negotiation may take place, and eventually a compromise may be reached [E5].<sup>1</sup> Senior NLD members suspect that regime members, too 'yearn to have *metta* directed towards them rather than it being forced or coerced from people' [E6]. Indeed, even other governments, such as in Thailand, should be appealed to for *metta* towards the plight of Burmese refugees and economic migrants who are threatened with deportation in 'the Asian crisis' of 1997–98 [D5]. However, Aung San Suu Kyi does not consider herself spiritually advanced enough to extend *metta* to the regime in an unqualified way [E7].

Also, *metta* is a mental process Burmese recognize as shared with other peoples and other religions, which makes it transcendent of the particular Burmese ethnic elements, and forges it into a suitable inter-cultural, inter-ethnic and inter-religious instrument [E19][E23][H8].<sup>2</sup> For example, Aung Ko, the chief actor in the film *Beyond Rangoon*, explains how the two very different characters in the film 'meet and have a compassionate relationship ... a love based on *metta*-, or loving kindness', so that these two 'slowly erase [their] differences in race, religion, color and culture when they journey together through turmoil ... because of their regard for the five hundred and twenty-eight strands of *metta* (the basis for a pure compassionate love and affection)'.<sup>3</sup>

With *metta*, and the *brahma-vihara* as a whole, Aung San Suu Kyi believes that 'all peoples and creeds can co-exist in peace, that whatever our race and religion, we can all learn to agree on certain basic values

<sup>1</sup> 'It is only in *metta* that we come upon the idea of the relation between man and man which is independent of all social and worldly relations. *Metta* appears with the distinctive qualification of freedom of mind or purpose. In *metta* the man, the self, meets the man, the self, divested of other relations. Monastic life will serve as a stimulus to that amity which is solely and absolutely disinterested...' (Law 1987:79).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted, for example, that both *metta* and *karuna* are core concepts in the translation of the Bible into Burmese, whereas *mudita* and *upekkha* are to my knowledge not used.

<sup>3</sup> 'U Aung Ko: in his own words'. *Burma Debate*, June-July 1995.

essential for the development of human society'.<sup>1</sup> Such use of the concept of *metta* as reconciliative between diverse interest groups was also evident with U Nu, who argued in July, after his forty-five day meditation retreat, that the Shan's demands for a looser, more federalized type of constitution should be treated 'with love'. At the time, as Trager understands it, 'no one, least of all his Constitution Revision Committee concerned with the proposed amendments for the State religion and for the new states, knew how to interpret Nu's reference to the Buddhist doctrine of Metta.'<sup>2</sup> However, seen in the light of Aung San Suu Kyi's concern to reconcile opposites, the importance of *metta* becomes readily apparent.

It can play a cross-cultural, cross-ethnic and cross-factional role because, unlike the concept of Buddhahood or *nibbana*, it does not appeal to an exclusive central Buddhist teaching, but to a state of mind shared across peoples from different backgrounds.

### Social bonding

It is significant that among these four *brahma-vihara* practices, the first two have the greater social and political implications, and it is these also that are most prominent in Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches and writings. *Metta* as a concept comes first, for it 'forms the foundation of compassion'.<sup>3</sup>

As Rewatta Dhamma put it at the Asian Leaders conference, *brahma-vihara* is what all Buddhists practise and this provides Buddhist societies with the necessary social bonding mechanism:

The Mahayana specifically emphasises the enlightenment of all beings, and even we of the little tug-boat praise the triple gem of Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, where Sangha means community – in a specific way the community of monks and nuns, but in a broader sense, of all beings. Every Buddhist tradition gives a central place to the Brahma-Viharas: Upekha (equanimity), Metta (loving-kindness), Karuna (compassion), and Mudita (joy in the joy of others), the last three of which are directly social.

It is, on the other hand, the last mental state – 'equanimity' – that has been selectively emphasized by King and Spiro as characteristic of 'nibbanic Buddhism'.<sup>4</sup> In adapting Weber's position by arguing that nibbanic Buddhism is about 'detachment' and the 'destruction of emotion', King and Spiro conclude that Buddhism does not concern itself with this world.<sup>5</sup> However, this denies that 'equanimity' is not practised on its own, but in conjunction with the other three qualities of mind, in particular *metta* and *karuna*, which do engage the world and which are far more commonly used in everyday life and in political ideas.<sup>6</sup>

To understand why *brahma-vihara*, and in particular *metta*, plays such a central role in Burmese society we have to understand certain features of its socio-political organization. In Theravada Buddhist countries such as Burma, social organization lacks the concept of congregation or parish, in which large numbers of people are integrated by a regular weekly church meeting [H2]. The absence of the strong social and political bonds such congregations provide, one can say, is made up for by the concept of *metta*. The political significance of *metta* is captured in the way it is sometimes compared to 'adhesion': 'the *loka* [world] is prevented from breaking up as if it is held together by [the glue of] *metta*', and its practice will 'prevent the *loka* from being disorderly'.<sup>7</sup> This underlies Aung San Suu Kyi's aspiration for society to be ruled by *metta*, along with reason and justice; these are the true refuges of society [E8]. Such society unifies in a way quite opposite to what the military regime stands for, which does not unify by *metta* and which is, judging by its actions, devoid of *metta* [D1][D9]. The NLD feel that the regime perceives *metta* as a weakness, and feel it has to make it a more active *metta* [E9].

Aung San Suu Kyi, whose Buddhism has been characterised as 'engaged Buddhism' by the editors of a

<sup>1</sup> ASSK (04.01.1998). That in particular *metta* fulfils this inter-religious and inter-ethnic reassurance was also proposed in the 1961 State Religion Bill, which suggested that 'Buddhism is not a religion which strengthens itself by persecuting others' as 'it has Metta as its basis, it can establish in strength the principles of Justice, Liberty and Equality and ensure peace and prosperity to all beings for all times'. 'State Religion in Burma' (Rangoon, October 1961) as cited in King (1960:261).

<sup>2</sup> Trager (1966:197).

<sup>3</sup> Mingun (1990–96,4:49).

<sup>4</sup> Spiro was quite aware of his selective emphasis of Buddhist concepts, for he stated at the very beginning of his section on Nibbanic Buddhism that 'it should be added that if certain doctrines have been unduly emphasizes and other unduly slighted, it is usually because our theoretical interest in the contrapuntal relationship between textual and Burmese Buddhism demands this kind of shading' (Spiro 1970:31). However, the intricacies of Burmese Buddhism should not be made subsidiary to the aesthetics of intellectual models. Spiro relied mostly on King (1964:161) who saw equanimity as 'the transcendent ethic of Nibbana'.

<sup>5</sup> Aronson (1980:78–96) criticises the positions King and Spiro have on this particular mental state.

<sup>6</sup> See also Paul Mus in his introduction to Sarkisyanz (1965=ix).

<sup>7</sup> 'To bring about the reign of peace in *loka*, beings should cultivate loving-kindness [*metta*] towards one another. The more *metta* is cultivated, the more the *loka* will be peaceful. The more beings love one another, the more the *loka* will be pleasant. The more the *loka* is pleasant, the more benefits one will gain by being born as a human being, which according to dullabha dhamma is a very rare and difficult thing to attain'. (Shwe Aung 1995:273).

volume on this subject,<sup>1</sup> herself characterises ‘engaged Buddhism’ as ‘active compassion<sup>2</sup> or active *metta*’. Such mental disposition stops the fighting and provides crucial support for overcoming fear and caring for the imprisoned and their relatives [D6]. These are a positive force ‘for the happiness of oneself, not just for others’, and, though it is extremely difficult for non-Burmese to understand, these are sufficiently popular concepts to be understood very well by the Burmese themselves [E9]. In addition, it is the form which the people’s support takes for Aung San Suu Kyi, as the daughter of Aung San, who gave his life for the country [E10]. It is also the way in which NLD members work together [E11]. Aung San Suu Kyi herself copes by the social implications of it, for ‘the *metta* between us keeps us going’ [E12].

These three *brahma-vihara* practices, as pursued by the Sangha, represent ‘the social dimensions of Dhamma’ which provides ‘the guiding and softening influence which the ordained Sangha has traditionally exercised over rulers’. Its practice is part of its responsibility of both the sangha and government towards the common people [E13].

### The regime’s uses of *byama-so*

The military has consistently attempted to appropriate these mental qualities into their discourse. ‘Compassion’ and ‘kindness’ were already incorporated into *The System of Correlation of Man and his Environment* [D8], 1963. Indeed, its value was clearly emphasized even by Maung Maung, the civilian lawyer and writer who briefly headed the pre-SLORC regime, who addressed a television audience on the proposed multi-party elections in the wake of Sein Lwin’s resignation saying that ‘the fire of anger can be extinguished with the cool waters of love and compassion’.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, attempts have been made in the mass media to portray the army patronisingly as an adjunct to the *metta* of parents [E16] and even as a substitute for the *metta* of parents [E31]. The Karuna [Compassion] Foundation has recently come into existence which opens remote rural health clinics run by the Ministry of Trade, of which Tun Kyi was a life-time patron, and to which all big business, winning major government contracts, including foreign companies, were asked to make large donation.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Army is portrayed in the national press as having treated Aung San Suu Kyi with unreciprocated *metta* [E17], and Tin U’s release from prison was also based on the army observing ‘the Buddhist tradition of keeping loving kindness in the fore of every deed’.<sup>5</sup>

### Asian values and ethnic exclusiveness

Yet, in spite of the inter-ethnic and inter-religious dimension to *brahma-vihara*, the military use these practices, like everything else, as instruments for ‘consolidation’, unification and assertion of a common Burman or Asian ethnic identity.

The common Asian identity was emphasized by Chief Justice U Aung Toe in the context of one of the ASEAN meetings, in which he said that ‘although there may be some diversity between countries of ASEAN, we share the common sentiments of loving kindness, compassion and desire to help one another in times of need. They represent the noble spirit of the peoples of Southeast Asia’.<sup>6</sup>

Thahkin Kodawhmaing, the grandfather of Burmese political party organization, has emphasized the derivation of ‘Burman’ from ‘Byahma’. In doing so, he has forged *samatha* and *brahma-vihara* into possible nationalist instruments, as these reach into the Brahma heavens and are associated with the Brahma way of life. *Metta*, *karuna* and *piti* lead to ascent into the first three *jhana*, and *upekkha* leads to the fourth.

The sentiment is also conveyed by Thaug Lwin, who says that Burmese people believe that to practise *brahma-vihara* is to become a superior Burman (See Appendix I.9). There has been much emphasis on *jhana*

<sup>1</sup> ‘...Aung San Suu Kyi ... , though not represented in this volume, is another exemplar of a politically/socially engaged Buddhism. She protests throughout her speeches that she is involved in national affairs because of the crisis facing her country, because, as the daughter of a popular national leader she can serve as a unifying focus for the people’s yearning for democracy – but that she herself has no interest in political parties and power politics. Yet the political power she held was a sufficient threat to the Burmese government that she was placed under house arrest for five years following her party’s decisive victory at the polls.’ (Queen & King 1996:421).

<sup>2</sup> See (ASSK 1997b:232) for NLD Tin U on the need for SLORC to develop compassion.

<sup>3</sup> RHS, 19.08.1988 (BBC, SWB 23.08.1988); Smith (1991:5).

<sup>4</sup> Reuters, 16.11.1997. See also summary of ‘TV Myanmar’, 18.10.1996 (BurmaNet News, 20.10.1996).

<sup>5</sup> Maung Kya Ban. ‘Don’t break more laws to commit more offences’. *NLM*, 14.09.1998, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> At the 19th Working Committee and General Assembly of ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization (AIPO), Kuala Lumpur, 24–28 August 1998. ‘Myanmar committed to the creation of peaceful, stable and developed region for posterity’. *NLM*, 01.09.1998, p. 4.

attainment through *samatha* in the nationalist movements of the 1930s, through which Thakhin Kodawhmaing and Saya San proposed to unite the opposition against colonialism. It is therefore no surprise that Aung San Suu Kyi's *metta* and *karuna* also has strong political overtones.

In *The New Light of Burma*, an article was published that indicates that the SLORC views Aung San Suu Kyi as operating outside the group, and as associating with foreigners. They agree that *byama-so tayà* is a typically Burmese practice:

WE Myanmar have Byamaso Taya the four cardinal virtues or sublime states of mind. These, namely *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upekkha* are so deep profound that they can not be defined by such little words as love or kindness.

However, this same article then proceeds to attack Aung San Suu Kyi for associating with foreigners and hence forgetting about the third *brahma-vihara*, namely sympathetic joy (*mudita*) for her own Burman racial lineage in the process:

However deep and profound they [*brahma-vihara* practices] are to us, they may not be so for those who have forsaken their own lineage and origin, having a high opinion only of foreigners and taking them as their spouses.

Aliens may perhaps be able to understand and practise the essence of *metta* and *karuna* but they have no terminology to exactly define *mudita*. So we gradually came to realize that those who speak the Western tongue only with relish would not understand the meaning of *mudita*. As people without *mudita* are surrounding Daw Suu Kyi who had wrested back the party leadership position on the grounds that party backing was needed in politics, it must be said it is, in a way, natural to gradually become devoid of the four Byamaso Tayas.<sup>1</sup>

The above typically seeks to place Aung San Suu Kyi, and the opposition as a whole, within the 'foreign' and non-Burman camp by their inability to practice *mudita*. Or, as Nemoto would put it, the regime places them, the 'Them-Burmans' [သူတို့တို့] as opposed to their own designation of themselves, as within 'Us-Burmans' [တို့တို့] camp.<sup>2</sup> Such perverted use of *byama-so tayà*, which is intended as an open system tolerant of diversity, demonstrates that the regime *ana* style of interpreting this practice is unlikely to ever yield it the electoral *awza* they crave for.<sup>3</sup>

This debate about numerical lists of qualities is extended also to the issue of the Ten Mental Defilements. Aung San Suu Kyi had argued that primary emphasis on material development without of raising the quality of mental life, would merely feed an emphasis on greed, the first and most important *kilesa* that needs uprooting. However, a journalist of the regime responded that the pious meditators of Burma must realise that it is the last of the ten, namely 'jealousy and envy', that are most abominable, for 'envy (*issa*) is common mostly among those who do not know the law.' The author proceeded to identify Aung San Suu Kyi indirectly, saying that the fact that the SLORC had reunited all ethnic groups and had accomplished great infrastructural developments was a matter for rejoicing, but 'that person [Aung San Suu Kyi] offers no help: indeed the person even tried to obstruct and impede ... a deed so vile and so abominable.'<sup>4</sup>

If Aung San Suu Kyi is portrayed here as the envious person, then it is Aung San Suu Kyi who has the better institutional memory. It was indeed the socialist motto 'Morality (*sila*) can only be upheld when the stomach is full'<sup>5</sup> that became identified with such serious corruption that in 1974 it had to be changed to the ideology and practice of *byahma-so-tayà*. There was nothing to be jealous of, for a country run by army personnel who think primarily of their own stomachs causes great divisions within the country as a whole.

### Detachment from power

Another example highlighting the use of *byama-so tayà* is Saw Maung's view that those who lost power, such as U Nu in 1962, should be prepared to detach themselves from it through practise of *upekkha*, the fourth meditation. His view is that U Nu should practise what is wrongly translated as 'indifference' (in SLORC-SPDC English this means 'equanimity'), namely 'indifference meditation' (*upekkha bhavana*):

One says about the matter of 1962 and about 'Give me back power'. Where is Upekkha bhavana? 'Upekkha' means the ability to remain indifferent. I am telling these for ordinary people to think about.<sup>6</sup>

It is through the example of *byahma-so tayà* that Saw Maung proceeds to contrast Burmese against

<sup>1</sup> Sithu Nyein Aye. 'Going too far'. *NLM*, 01.06.1996.

<sup>2</sup> Nemoto (1995).

<sup>3</sup> Other examples of this kind of use of *byama-so tayà* are to be found in Hpe Kan Kaung's ရာဇဝင်ရေးသုံးစဉ်လာ ထွန်းတောက်ခဲ့သလေ၊ published in အမှန်အမှန်ပြောကြပါစို့. (၁)၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ သတင်းနှင့်စာနယ်ဇင်းလုပ်ငန်း၊ ၁၉၉၆, pp. 26–27, who refers to these practices under Shin Arahán and Anwratha, suggesting that with this already practiced under royalty in early Burma there is no need for democracy.

<sup>4</sup> 'Let there be no jealousy or envy'. *NLM*, 1.08.1995.

<sup>5</sup> ASSK (1995=:241).

<sup>6</sup> Saw Maung (1990b=:337).

western ways of democracy and development.

### Metta and karuna<sup>1</sup>

I have already dealt with some aspects of *metta* and *karuna* under the previous section. However, here I would like to draw attention to particular features of *metta* and, to some extent, *karuna*. *Metta* or ‘loving-kindness’ is the most important mental state in Aung San Suu Kyi’s thought, as she has used it persistently throughout her writing since her house arrest,<sup>2</sup> and *karuna* or ‘compassion’ comes close second in frequency.<sup>3</sup> It is also the most important quality of Burmese culture that Aung San Suu Kyi wishes to see preserved in the future [D7], and in that respect she is not alone, for in the book *The history of Burmese culture* it is indeed argued that this is the foundation of Burmese culture as influenced by Buddhism.<sup>4</sup>

Aung San Suu Kyi’s first use of *metta* was about three paragraphs into her very first speech at Shwedagon, in which she made explicit some of the objections the Burmese had for her arrival on the Burmese political scene, namely, that having lived abroad and having married a foreigner she was not familiar enough with Burmese politics. To this she responded that ‘these facts have never interfered and will never interfere with or lessen my love (*metta*) and devotion for my country by any measure or degree [ကျမတိုင်းပြည်အပေါ်မှာထားတဲ့ မေတာဟာ ဘယ်လိုနဲ့မှကျဆင်းမသွားနိုင်ပါဘူး]’.<sup>5</sup>

However, her first major documented use of the term *metta* is in her speech at Insein on 25 June 1989, and it coincides with her criticism of Ne Win for dividing the army. She talks of countering the fear [ကြောက်စိတ်] associated with life as a human being under the repressive regime:

We will have to strike back with *metta*. Let us cultivate and direct *metta* to our country. Let us direct *metta* to our people. We must cultivate courage to bear whatever suffering befalls us with *metta* and to face our problems by basing it on *metta*. To direct *metta* in this way is much-needed. Cultivate the courage that solves problems by the incessant development of *metta*. Only when courage is developed in this way, will we attain democracy within the year.

။မေတာခါတ်နဲ့ပြန်ပြီးတော့ တိုက်ရမှာဘဲ။ ကိုယ့်တိုင်းပြည်ပေါ်မှာပြန်ပြီးတော့ မေတာထားကြ။ ကိုယ်လူမျိုးပေါ်မှာ မေတာထားကြ။ ဒီလိုမေတာထားတာကြောင့်မို့လို့ဘာပဲ ခံရခံရခံမယ်ဆိုပြီးတော့ မေတာအတွက်နဲ့ မေတာကို အခြေခံပြီးတော့ပြသနာ အားလုံးကိုရင်ဆိုင်မယ်ဆိုတဲ့ သတိကိုမေ့ကြပါ။ အဲဒီလိုသတိတော့မှူးနိုင်မယ်ဆိုရင် ကျမတို့လိုချင်တဲ့ဒီမိုကရေစီစနစ်ကိုတနှစ်တည်း ရမယ်လို့ကျမတို့ယုံကြည်ပါတယ်။

Here it evidently represents a response to the military regime, and Winston King was right when he described *metta* as ‘the most emphasized of the positive Buddhist moral attitudes today’, which he related to a Buddhism ‘confronted increasingly by the activist and socially conscious culture of the West’.<sup>6</sup> This has been echoed by a student of Burmese political history who sees *metta* and non-violence as ‘the ethical well-springs for Buddhists on domestic polity as well as on problems of war and peace and international relations’.<sup>7</sup>

When we look back at the U Nu period we realise that *metta* served primarily as a way of introducing a sense of ethics into politics. During his 1959–60 campaign U Nu made statements about political principles involving sixteen rules for the practice of *metta* on the part of the public servant. Also, because of political leaders’ inability to obtain the status of *sotapana*, he advocated that they should at least practise *metta*. U Nu advocated *metta* rather than sanctions by price-control committees. Also, he advocated *metta* in the Sino-Burmese border commission. However, it would be wrong to delineate *metta* as a modern political concept, for it was already greatly elaborated in the royal inscriptions.<sup>8</sup>

*Metta* has been described as ‘more powerful than the other three sublime mental states’,<sup>9</sup> and U Thittila goes so far as to sketch *metta* as the most important ingredient in the transformation of the Hindu ritual of sacrifice towards Buddhism, ‘a religion of understanding’ which liberates from slavery, stops wars, stops conquest and revenge, encourages the setting up of life-preserving and life-enhancing institutions such as hospitals, and asserts the equality of man.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Later I will show how *metta* and *karuna* may be related to her vegetarian diet and to *samatha* practice (see next section).

<sup>2</sup> For *metta* see ASSK (1997a: ix,3, 11, 17, 133; 1997b: 3, 4–5, 17–21, 32, 56, 66, 90, 118, 122, 133, 134, 143).

<sup>3</sup> For *karuna* see ASSK (1997b: 3, 17, 18, 56, 238–39).

<sup>4</sup> ။ဗုဒ္ဓဝါဒ၏ ယဉ်ကျေးမှုသည် ဗြဟ္မစိုရ တရားကို အခြေခံသော ယဉ်ကျေးမှုဖြစ်သဖြင့် ပိုမိုခိုင်မြဲ၍ အမြစ်စွဲနေတတ်ပေသည်။ သိပ္ပံနိုးရင်၊ မြန်မာ့ယဉ်ကျေးမှုသမိုင်း၊ စပယ်ဦးစာပေ၊ ၁၉၇၄၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၁၄၅။

<sup>5</sup> See Burmese (p. 193) and English editions of *Freedom from fear* (ASSK 1995:193; ASSK 1993:174).

<sup>6</sup> King (1964:150).

<sup>7</sup> Trager (1966:126).

<sup>8</sup> Pe Maung Tin (1920:67); Than Tun (1978:11).

<sup>9</sup> Mingun (1990–96,1,1:167)

<sup>10</sup> Thittila (1996:171–74).

### Metta Sutta (Hymn of Universal Love)

Who seeks to promote his welfare,  
Having glimpsed the state of perfect peace,  
Should be able, honest and upright,  
Gentle in speech, meek and not proud.  
Contented, he ought to be easy to support,  
Not over-busy, and simple in living.  
Tranquil his senses, let him be prudent,  
And not brazen, nor fawning on families.

Also, he must refrain from any action  
That gives the wise reason to reprove him.  
(Then let him cultivate the thought:)  
May all be well and secure,  
May all beings be happy!

Whatever living creatures there be,  
Without exception, weak or strong,  
Long, huge or middle-sized,  
Or short, minute or bulky,

Whether visible or invisible,  
And those living far or near,  
The born and those seeking birth,  
May all beings be happy!

Let none deceive or decry  
His fellow anywhere;  
Let none wish others harm  
In resentment or in hate.

Just as with her own life  
A mother shields from hurt  
Her own son, her only child,  
Let all-embracing thoughts  
For all beings be yours.

Cultivate an all-embracing mind of love  
For all throughout the universe,  
In all its height, depth and breadth –  
Love that is untroubled  
And beyond hatred or enmity.

As you stand, walk, sit or lie,  
So long as you are awake,  
Pursue this awareness with your might:  
It is deemed the Divine State here.

Holding no more to wrong beliefs,  
With virtue and vision of the ultimate,  
And having overcome all sensual desire,  
Never in a womb is one born again.

*Myit-ta* [မေတာ], P. *metta* [မေတာ], ‘loving-kindness’,<sup>1</sup> like meditation, is ‘increased’ or ‘cultivated’ [မေတာပွားတယ်] by one’s own mental application.<sup>2</sup> It is, however, also possible to ‘send *metta*’ [မေတာပို့တယ်], which turns it into a social and political instrument with which one can benefit, but also overcome, the animosity of others. If these are technical terms, the concept is in more general use in the homily (lit. ‘letter of *metta*’ [မေတာစာ]), ‘wishing well’ [မေတာထားသည့်], ‘selflessness’ [မေတာရို၊ မေတာရင်ခံ], and a ‘complementary gift’ [မေတာလက်ဆောင်]. Negative qualities are associated with those who have no *metta*. In short, *metta* is a religious, but also a social and political instrument.

*Metta* has three important functions in Burmese society. First, at the mundane instrumental level, *metta* is a very powerful mental process which Buddhists believe removes all kinds of dangers and thus copes with fear. Whenever the Buddha or his disciples faced dangers he sent *metta*, and this was invariably successful in dissipating the dangers faced. This is how we must understand the Thai amulet cult in which the amulets, representing the fetishization of the inexhaustible *metta* of the saint, can be used to ward off danger.<sup>3</sup> However, in the Burmese context the commercialisation of charisma has not yet developed to the extent of Thailand where amulets are bought and sold, though it is applied to the selling of photographs of holy monks, wizards and the like. For the most part the Burmese still rely on a direct personal relationship with their monks (see also the section on ‘supernatural protection’ and *paritta* in this chapter).

Second, *metta* creates the right conditions for, and anticipates success in, mental culture. Immediately prior to his enlightenment Gautama spent many days practising *metta-bhavana*.<sup>4</sup> *Metta* relates to mental culture in two important ways. On the one hand, the practice of *metta* leads to *samadhi*. It is this combination of attributes – namely of loving-kindness and concentration (plus morality) – that are at the heart of the roles of the exorcist, the future king and the *weik-za*, for this practice permits access to, and permits one to benefit from the protection and knowledge of, the highest deities and Brahmas.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, *metta* is conceived of as an important departure point for the practice of *vipassana*, for in its practice, ‘a primary task ... is to watch that no deed, word of thought offends against the spirit of

<sup>1</sup> Also variously rendered as ‘amity’, ‘love’, ‘sympathy’, ‘friendliness’, ‘benevolence’ and ‘goodwill’ (Law 1987:78). However, it is ‘physical love’ in the sense of sexual attraction is opposed to this as ‘desire’ (*raga*).

<sup>2</sup> *Pwà thi* here means to increase in the sense of multiplication.

<sup>3</sup> Tambiah (1984:342).

<sup>4</sup> Just after he left the ascetic Udaka, under whom he learnt the Eight Jhanas, he ‘spent a large number of days practising meditation for the development of loving-kindness (*metta-bhavana*)’ at the market town of Sena while collecting alms to sustain himself prior prior to his practice of severe austerities (Mingun 1990–96,2,1:180).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the discourse of the exorcist and the aspirant universal kings (Spiro 1967:189; 1970:164–80).

unbounded loving-kindness (*metta*)'.<sup>1</sup>

Third, *metta* stresses the social elements of Buddhism and it permits the emergence of feelings of solidarity and the formation of a society. The Buddha-to-be was conceived by his mother while he himself was in a state of *metta jhana*.<sup>2</sup> *Metta* is presupposed to have important implications for other people than oneself, for this state of mind permits a transfer of benefits to others. As the Mingun Sayadaw put it, 'those who receive *metta* not only love him who directs *metta* to them, but they show goodwill to one another under the influence of his *metta*'.<sup>3</sup>

*Metta* is therefore a crucial ingredient in the politics of crisis, namely in the context of electioneering and in the context of fierce opposition when one is left at great risk without instruments or authority to fight back by more powerful means. As Winston King once put it, it is part of Buddhist politics of persuasion (i.e. influence) rather than control (i.e. authority).

A set of eleven advantages of *metta* is often expounded, including: 1. Sound sleep with undisturbed mind; 2. Happily aroused from sleep; 3. No evil dreams;<sup>4</sup> 4. Having noble attributes, one will be subject to adoration and affection;<sup>5</sup> 5. One will be loved by devas; 6. One will be protected by devas<sup>6</sup>; 7. Invulnerability;<sup>7</sup> 8. Mind becomes quickly stabilised and calm; 9. Complexion of the face can become clear; 10. Death takes place without bewilderment or perplexity.

### Metta and charity

The Buddhist concept of charity cannot be understood without understanding *metta* as practised by both the donor and the donee. It is said that offerings to a neutral person or an enemy should be done 'in the same way' as 'to a dear person', namely 'with compassion and preceded by loving-kindness'.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, those who receive material support should attempt to give *metta* in return. For example, monks, only by developing *metta* on accepting offerings towards the donors, 'shall be deemed to have accepted the gifts in the role of a real owner'. Not to send *metta* in this context, 'will amount to taking things on loan for which he will have to account for'.<sup>9</sup>

This is why *metta sutta* is routinely recited at offerings, and why a crucial component of the water libation ceremony concluding the offerings includes the sending of loving-kindness to all sentient beings. It is to be practised by both the donor and the donee.

Furthermore, *metta* underlies the '(equally) sharing of merit' [အမျှဝေငွေ] derived from the donation with all sentient beings, which should always follow the donation, and neither the donor nor the donee should attempt to concentrate the benefits of *metta* solely for themselves or for their families.

### Metta and the nine moral precepts

The significance of *metta* is further underlined as an extension of the regular Eight Precepts taken during duty days. The Nine Precepts [နဝင်္ဂဝိပဿနာ] <sup>10</sup> have not so far been discussed in the anthropological literature on

<sup>1</sup> The Buddha is supposed to have connected loving-kindness and Satipatthana as follows:

'I shall protect myself' with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. 'I shall protect others' with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. By protecting oneself one protects others; by protecting others one protects oneself.

'And how does one, by protecting oneself, protect others? By repeated practice (of mindfulness), by its meditative development, and by frequent occupation with it.

'And how does one, by protecting others, protect oneself? By patience, by a non-violent life, by lovingkindness and compassion.' *Samyutta-Nikaya* 47, 19 (Nyanaponika 1962:77).

<sup>2</sup> Mingun Sayadaw (1990-96,2,1:13).

<sup>3</sup> Mingun Sayadaw (1990-96,1,1:335-6).

<sup>4</sup> 'A person developing *metta* will not have ... weird or frightful dreams, but will have pleasant and sweet dreams, as if he is worshipping the Buddha or is flying through the air with jhana, or listening to the sermon and the like which give him delight.'

<sup>5</sup> 'Developing *metta* from the bottom of his heart is the best attribute which invokes or causes to invite affection and respect from others.' (Mahasi 1985:30).

<sup>6</sup> 'The manner of giving protection or guard is stated to be similar to the kind of protection given by the parents to their only son through love. If the Nats are going to render help and protection, one will definitely be free from dangers and will also gain happiness' (Mahasi 1985:34).

<sup>7</sup> '...no danger, such as, fire, poison, and lethal weapons like dahs, spears, arrows, etc, can cause bodily injury to an individual who is developing loving-kindness.' (Mahasi 1985:34-35).

<sup>8</sup> Mingun (1,2:31).

<sup>9</sup> Mahasi (1985:24).

<sup>10</sup> These are the eight precepts but with additionally: 9. sending of loving-kindness to all sentient beings. Scriptural reference to

Burma. It has two special features. First, these precepts prepare for interaction with the supernatural (including those in the Brahma heavens), and are particularly popular with those who practise concentration meditation and wish to attain the *jhanas*. These precepts are commonly taken by those with a special spiritual goal such as seeking supernatural power, practising alchemy, attracting supernatural beings, or becoming a *weik-za*.<sup>1</sup>

It is worthy of interest to note that members of the regime have been taking the Nine Precepts at some special events. For example, it is a mark of their emphasis on *metta* as an avenue to power that on 22 April 1998 the SPDC, including General Than Shwe and many of his ministers, took the Nine Precepts at the enshrining of objects in the Nanda Loka Pagoda.<sup>2</sup> This coincided with the increasing interest on the part of high officials in the regime for the meditation methods of the Pa Auk Sayadaw, who encourages the taking of the Nine Precepts. These precepts have also occasionally been reported to have been taken by Buddhists more generally at festive days in the regime-controlled press.<sup>3</sup>

### Metta, freedom from fear and success in mental culture

There is a strong association between the practise of *metta* and mental culture in the forest. Thus, bodhisattvas characteristically develop *metta* towards all the animals in the forest. As the Buddha said in *Cariya Pitaka*: ‘when I was Suvannasama, living in the residence made ready by Sakka, I directed loving-kindness towards lions and tigers in the forest. I lived there being surrounded by lions and tigers, by leopards, wolves, buffaloes, spotted deer and bears. None of these animals was frightened by me: nor am I frightened [by] any of them. I was happy living in the forest as I was fortified with the powers of *metta*.’<sup>4</sup>

The strong power of *metta* is inherent in the *metta sutta* preached by the Buddha to five-hundred monks who were experiencing trouble practising their mental culture. The reason for the monks' trouble was that the deities who lived in the trees where they practiced were deprived of their homes, having to stay outside with their children, as they could not reside higher than the noble monks. Wanting back their abodes, they then began to create frightening appearances and emitted awful smells to deter the monks from their habitat.

The monks were unable to practise their mental culture and, intent on leaving, they consulted the Buddha who said that if they recited the *metta sutta* this ‘serves as a deterrent to the perils caused by those deities’, and would also ‘help towards better realisation of the Dhamma in the practice of Kammatthana [mental culture]’. The deities, because of their implementation of *metta sutta*, ‘were so pleased and happy’ that they went further than not troubling the monks, they assisted them in anyway possible. Consequently, all five-hundred monks gained enlightenment. This *sutta* is recited in Burma at every major donation, and on taking the moral precepts.<sup>5</sup>

The *Metta Sutta* has three parts representing distinct aspects of *metta* (see *sutta*).<sup>6</sup> The first part (lines 3–10) covers that aspect ‘which requires a thorough and systematic application of loving-kindness in one's day-to-day conduct’. The second part (lines 11–20) ‘expresses loving-kindness as a distinct technique of meditation or culture of mind leading to *samadhi* – higher consciousness induced by absorption’. The third part (lines 21–40) underlines ‘a total commitment to the philosophy of universal love and its personal, social and empirical extensions – loving-kindness through all bodily, verbal and mental activities.’<sup>7</sup>

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the nine precepts is to be found in *Navaka Nipata Pali* (AN 9) as follows: (1) abstention from killing; (2) from stealing; (3) from intercourse; (4) from lying; (5) from intoxicants; (6) one meal and abstention from food at wrong times; (7) abstain from looking on at shows and fairs, where there is dancing, singing and music; from wearing, decorating or ornamenting themselves with garlands, scents and salves; (8) give up large and lofty beds and lie on low beds, couches or strewn grass; (9) send loving-kindness to all living beings in all four quarters (the state of the first *brahmavihara*), above, below, around, and everywhere, pervading with thoughts of amity, far-reaching, abounding, measureless, free from hatred and ill-will.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. see Gyi (1968:17) on how he took the Nine Precepts for life.

<sup>2</sup> The Nine Precepts have been reported at the following events: ‘Religious objects enshrined in middle reliquary of Lawka Nanda pagoda in Sittway’. *NLM*, 23.04.1998; ‘Relics enshrined, Shwehtidaw of Tilawka Wizaya Hsutaungpyay Pagoda hoisted in Lashio’. *NLM*, 10.05.1998; ‘Ananda Theindawgyi, ShweKyaungdawgyi consecrated, foundation laid for pilgrims hostel in Lumbini Park’. *NLM*, 03.05.1998.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Pagodas, monasteries crowded with devotees on fullmoon day of Waso’. *NLM*, 09.07.1998.

<sup>4</sup> Mingun (1990–96,1,1:334)

<sup>5</sup> Mahasi (1985:81–82).

<sup>6</sup> *Khuddaka Gatha*, 9. Cited in Acharya Buddhharakkhita. *Metta: the philosophy and practice of universal love*. The Wheel Publication No. 365/366. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Acharya Buddhharakkhita. *Metta: the philosophy and practice of universal love*. The Wheel Publication No. 365/366. Kandy: Buddhist

The importance of using *metta* to placate the innumerable seen and unseen creatures is itself a justification for the institutionalization of practices that placate and please the spirits. Some Burmese, who frown on nat worship, have argued that nat shrines are ‘*metta* offerings’, i.e. they are an expression of *metta* rather than worship, and are therefore excusable.<sup>1</sup> Such view helps transcend Spiro’s ‘psychological’ conflict between spirit-cults and Buddhism.

### Metta and samatha

This *metta* ‘glue-effect’ that permits living beings to incline towards one-another positively is reinforced by its relationship to concentration meditation. *Metta* is one of the most important qualities in the development of the *jhanas*, ‘even if the feeling of *metta*, loving-kindness, is fostered for the very brief duration of a split-second, he who exercises this goodwill or benevolent feeling towards others may be said to be a person who is not devoid of *jhana*-contemplation’.<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, linked to mastery over the cosmology:

Herein [is wealth] that a brother abides letting his mind fraught with love pervade one quarter of the world, and so too the second quarter, and so the third quarter, and so the fourth quarter. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and everywhere and altogether does he continue to pervade with love-burdened thought, abounding, sublime, beyond measure, free from hatred and ill-will.<sup>3</sup>

Practise of *metta* leads to a high as high as the Brahma heavens. ‘Loving-kindness is for the purpose of staying in the company of Brahmas as a companion, nay, it is a path leading one to become a Brahma’, so that ‘radiating the feeling of *metta*, loving-kindness, to all beings in the ten regions is the way or the path of practice to ascend to the Brahma world’.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the Brahmas themselves have *metta* as their most suitable object of meditation.<sup>5</sup> As noted before, in the Brahma heavens life is long, relatively pleasurable and a temporary shelter from calamities.

In its relationship to the Brahma heavens, *metta* has the ability to overcome difference (as it knows no gender). The ability of *metta* to transcend difference motivated Aung San Suu Kyi to advocate its practice as a way of overcoming the gender-gap [E14], and of overcoming diversity of self-interest, which underlies ‘hardness, selfishness and narrowness’ associated with ‘greed’ [D1].<sup>6</sup> Indeed, one of its most important characteristics is its ability to integrate diverse peoples and to prevent discrimination of non-Buddhists [E15].<sup>7</sup>

This ability to overcome difference means that it is not only a useful instrument in strategies of warfare, but also in non-violent instruments such as law, medicine and ‘good’ political traditions in society, such as the higher ideals of monarchy, socialism, democracy. It reaches across boundaries and builds confidence in people, freeing them from fear where major changes are taking place.

However, when the regime emphasizes *metta* it has no particular universal applicability, but is almost exclusively in the self-serving context of the army. For example, the large number of soldiers fighting on the front-line has resulted in a large number of veterans who have lost limbs in the wars, and the army is ‘consoling’ them with the pretence that the people have *metta* for them:

As the Tatmadaw is providing every assistance for these disabled soldiers, the public is also taking part in the task with immense generosity, indicating the perpetual unity, goodwill and love between the Tatmadaw and the people toward building the nation’s modern armed forces, he pointed out, urging military personnel to value the *cetana* and *metta* of the people.<sup>8</sup>

Publication Society, 1989.

<sup>1</sup> Trager (1966:127).

<sup>2</sup> Mahasi (1985:23).

<sup>3</sup> *Digha-Nikaya (Dialogues of the Buddha)*, Sutta 28, PTS Edition, IV, 76; King (1964:151).

<sup>4</sup> Mahima Paññasa quoted in Mahasi (1985:27). As Vajiranana (1975:264) put it, though re-birth in the Brahma-world is the result of higher consciousness, ‘that is the moral consciousness of the form-world, called Mahaggata-Citta and induced by Rupa-Jhana’, it is ‘the four principles of Metta, Karuna, Mudita and Upekkha’ which ‘form the essential virtue of the life of a Brahma’ due to their ‘intrinsic value in the attainment of that state’ so that ‘meditation upon them is specified as the direct path to the Brahma-world’.

<sup>5</sup> The *Kassapasihanada Sutta* gives *metta* as the suitable subject of meditation for ‘the true Samana or Brahmin’, who ‘cultivates universal and boundless benevolence (Metta), diffusing it to all beings, and thereby obtaining full knowledge and final release of heart’ (D.I. 167–71). Paraphrased in Vajiranana (1975:13).

<sup>6</sup> Nu’s idea of socialism as a place analogous to Byahma heavens, with no differences in class or property works along the same lines.

<sup>7</sup> This cross-cultural effect of *metta* is pointed out by Law (1987:78) who argues that the practice of *metta* is based on an attitude of ‘good will towards fellow men without restriction of colour or habitat’.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Thanmyanthu presents cash assistance to in-service Tatmadawmen who sacrificed limbs for national cause’. *NLM*, 19.03.1998.

### Metta and enlightenment

As the ninth of the Ten Perfections for Buddhahood (*parami*), *metta* is a crucial precondition for the attainment of enlightenment as a Buddha. Gautama Buddha-to-be practised *metta bhavana* upon conception in Queen Maya. It is also a crucial quality for his message being carried into the world and for saving the people, for ‘only by fostering infinite loving-kindness for them [all beings] can a Bodhisattva establish all beings in Nibbana’.<sup>1</sup>

### Metta and Arimettaya

Arimettaya, the coming Buddha, is extremely important to millenarian politics of purity in Burmese crisis situations. This Buddha will appear after his counterpart, the universal king, restores order. This is the only Bodhisattva, capable of attaining Buddhahood in a single rebirth, that Theravada Buddhism shares with Mahayana Buddhism, and, as Jaini points out, ‘the name Metteyya itself, which expressed mastery over the *metta-bhavana*, a favourite form of meditation among the Theravadins, might have also contributed to the popularity of this bodhisattva ...’.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on loving-kindness among the millenarian cults coincides with their aim to time their rebirth at the time of Arimettaya’s manifestation and with the cult of the universal king. Therefore, through the production of influence by means of *metta*, this reinforces the association between *metta* and authority. The Arimettaya cult is more evident, for example, in the pupils of the Ledi *anapana* than in the Mingun *satipatthana* tradition, and this is built into a complex attitude that also pertains to the greater proportional emphasis on *metta* and vegetarianism in the former.

### Metta and authority

Nemoto’s assertion that *metta* is the distinguishing feature of Aung San Suu Kyi’s *awza* as opposed to that of the SLORC’s is correct.<sup>3</sup> This permits us to understand the need, in Burmese politics, to incorporate reference to strife for Buddhahood, for that is to emphasize the *metta* that is a prerequisite to *awza*.

Since kings are commonly conceived of as *bodhisattva*, *metta* is a vital qualification for kingship. Hence, *metta* becomes an attribute of ‘good’ power. In this way, *metta* was part of Mindon’s coronation ceremony, when it was directed ‘O King, ... love compassionately everyone ... treasure their lives as though your own ... Look after everyone as though after yourself. Guard their welfare as though your own ... Deign to watch over the country’s inhabitants’ welfare ...’.<sup>4</sup>

In her essay ‘The true meaning of *Boh*’, aimed at the military regime, Aung San Suu Kyi portrays Aung San, once he attained political power, as able to ‘lay aside his sword without fear’ and ‘could say with absolute sincerity and a complete lack of self-consciousness that he would govern “on the basis of loving kindness and truth”’.<sup>5</sup>

Also, as Ko Lay put it, the Nine Precepts (including *metta*) are characterised as appropriate to universal monarchs.<sup>6</sup> This relationship between *metta* (as an intensification and extension of morality) and kingship is reinforced when we look at the Ten Royal Duties in which nos (5) kindness [EKSá\N] and (7) non-anger [အဝိဝေဒါ] are equivalent to *metta*. In addition, merit derived from the practice of *metta* may itself be considered a substitute for the great ‘royal’ *dana*, the first of the royal duties.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mingun (1990–96,4:48)

<sup>2</sup> Padmanabh S.Jaini. ‘Bodhisattva career of the Thathagata Maitreya’. In *Maitreya: the future Buddha*. Alan Sonberg and Helen Hardacre (eds), Cambridge UP, 1988, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> ‘As for her *myitta* (‘mercy’), the people must have felt it through her understandable speeches on democracy and human rights, encouraging them to push non-violent mass movements against SLORC. I think they have found a “prophet” figure through her activities. ... I mean a person with a special sense, who can understand the people’s sufferings which they can not put in words, and a person with the ability to phrase those feelings clearly for them. This kind of prophet is full of “mercifulness” even to the extent that she or he is able to share the people’s sufferings. It is my supposition that the Burmese people have recognised this sort of “mercifulness” in Aung San Suu Kyi.

... Do [SLORC] have *oza* (‘power’)? Yes, they certainly do, indeed. But the meaning of it with reference to SLORC is quite different. ... Their “power” which is mainly secured by their exclusive possession of arms has been directed to the people who feel they have been deprived of freedom. Therefore, the people’s interest goes naturally to the other side to seek another person who seems to possess “power” to abolish the hateful regime for them. This is deeply connected with SLORC’s lack of *myitta* (‘mercy’), because *oza* without *myitta* (or “power” without “mercy”) means nothing, or just vice for the people.’ Nemoto (1996a:28–29).

<sup>4</sup> Yi Yi (1961:133); Sarkisyanz (1965:67).

<sup>5</sup> ASSK (1995:191).

<sup>6</sup> In Nu (1985:147).

<sup>7</sup> ‘Developing your mind with *metta* for a brief period of time involved in milking a cow once in the morning, once in daytime and once at night time, or smelling a fragrance for once only, is far more advantageous than the offering of meals by cooking a hundred

We find this as an attribute of Kyanzittha (1084–1113), known as ‘the uniter of Burma’, who would receive living creatures by the thousand from his subjects and would, after pouring holy water, release them so that ‘by the power of loving-kindness ... all the birds on the high roads, in the lanes, and at the palace, would not flee. They would lodge in cages. They would come and perch on the roofs, ... and the king would stroke them with his hand ... and call them “Birds of the Dhamma”’.<sup>1</sup>

### Metta and imprisonment – the Jatakas

I have already noted above that *metta* permits the release of creatures from prison into a life of freedom. Two *Jataka* deal with effecting the release from imprisonment by means of the practise of *metta*.

In *Seyya Jataka*, King Brahmadata of Baranasi was a righteous king who faithfully practised the ten kingly duties, gave alms and kept the moral precepts. One of his ministers, whom he had expelled for a crime, went to a neighbouring country and advised King Kosala to attack Baranasi. The attack took place and King Brahmadata was imprisoned:

In the prison, Brahmadata directed his metta towards Kosala, who had robbed him of his kingdom, and in due course attained *mettajhana*. Because of the power of that *metta* the robber King Kosala felt burning sensations throughout his whole body as if it were burnt with torches. Suffering from particularly severe pain, he asked his ministers: ‘Why has this happened to me?’ They replied ‘O King, you suffer thus because you have imprisoned King Brahmadata who is endowed with morality.’<sup>2</sup>

Kosala released him and gave him back his kingdom. The *Ekaraja Jataka* is similar to *Seyya Jataka*, except that Brahmadata is hung upside down from a doorstep in the palace.

### Metta and anger

From Aung San Suu Kyi’s point of view, one of the important psychological values of *metta* is its effectiveness in countering anger, both which she experienced herself, and of which she was the object. Considering what has been done to her and to the senior leaders of the NLD in terms of imprisonment and scandalising their person, their emphasis on *metta* even towards the most despicable actions of the regime, is a sacrifice performed by one who has realised the right view in the Buddhist sense.<sup>3</sup> That *metta* appeases anger was already extensively drawn attention to by U Nu.<sup>4</sup>

In *Visudhimagga* it is said that ‘extinction of anger means fulfilment of *metta*, but arising of passion means destruction of *metta*.’<sup>5</sup> The concept ‘angerlessness’ (*adosa*) encompasses *metta*, though angerlessness is broader in the sense that it can be exercised with reference to inanimate beings, while *metta* only has animate beings as its reference.<sup>6</sup>

### Metta, evil, fear and invulnerability

*Metta* ‘casts out fear’ in the hearts of people under the regime [D9]. Aung San Suu Kyi’s discovery of its importance motivated her to change some of her ideas. In her early work she spoke of ‘freedom from fear’. However, freedom from fear is divisive if it is not directly fostered by *metta* [E18]. She discovered the practice of *metta* during her period of incarceration [E19], and in her later work ‘freedom from fear’ became translated mostly in terms of this concept, which is more relevant to the Burmese context. In particular, she relates it to the spirit of friendship with her colleagues and friends in the face of adversity and hardship.

Fear is caused by perception of evil. In Buddhism ‘evil’, in turn, is seen as brought about by incorrect perception due to one’s own mental defilements (*kilesa*). Thus, Mara the Evil One is conventionally represented as a deity with an army from which anyone would flee in fear except experienced meditators who have accomplished purification of their mental defilements. Loving-kindness enters the picture as an expression of sympathy with which one regards ill will, animosity and anger towards one’s person as

big pots of rice, once in the morning, once in the daytime and once at night time, which would, of course, tantamount to feeding about (3000) people in all.

It is therefore quite evident that developing metta only for a moment and deriving much benefit thereof, is really precious and invaluable without incurring expense, and without involving time and labour’ (Mahasi 1985:28).

<sup>1</sup> Luce (1969,1:64).

<sup>2</sup> Mingun (1990–96,1,1:337–38).

<sup>3</sup> ‘If a sacrifice is performed by one whose mind has dispelled the darkness of delusion and realised the right view, having placed amity [*metta*] in the forefront (*metta pubbangamena*), that sacrifice will help him to get rid of anger, delusion and hatred.’ Law (1986:79) citing *Suttanipata Commentary*, p. 417.

<sup>4</sup> Nu (1960:164–65).

<sup>5</sup> (Mingun 1990–96,1,1:336).

<sup>6</sup> (Mingun 1990–96,1,1:324).

defilements in the minds of the originators of this emotion. The Buddha is shown to confront anger and ill will, such as that of Angulimala [E20] who plans to kill him and cut his fingers, with *metta*. The result is invariably that the perpetrator has no grip on the Buddha, that the anger of the perpetrator subsides, and is usually converted to Buddhism because of the kindness with which he is met.<sup>1</sup>

The ‘enemy’ subsequently is often represented as himself attaining the state of *yahanda* which frees him also from fear. Thus Angulimala, once converted to Buddhism, was not frightened of an attacking bull elephant. The Buddha said in relation to Angulimala's lack of fear, that *yahanda* (i.e. Angulimala) no longer experience fear as they are the ‘ultimate Brahmana’ who have ‘washed away’ their ‘mental dirt with the clear water of the Path’:

(Monks!) The Arahāt with his *asavas* destroyed, who is courageous as he knows no trembling like a bull-king,<sup>2</sup> who possesses noble energy, who has sought and acquired the aggregate of virtues, who has triumphed over the three evils, namely Mara as deity, Mara as moral defilement, and Mara as conditioning factors, who has quenched all craving for existences, who has washed away his mental dirt with the clear water of the Path and who has realized the Four Truths, him I declare an ultimate Brahmana as he really is.<sup>3</sup>

By dissolving the *loka* constraints operating upon one's own person, mental culture culminates in its transcendence. Mara, when personalised (i.e. when not represented as impurities or the laws of conditional relations), is said to be particularly afraid of losing the Bodhisattva from his domain<sup>4</sup> because he thinks he will also lose his control over the population, who will follow the path to *nibbana* mapped out by the Buddha and thereby overcome the three kinds of existence in *samsara*.<sup>5</sup> The Buddha's sermons turn out to be ‘beneficial and effective like the *vajira* weapon hurled by Sakka’, and ‘men and Devas who are established in his teaching became invisible in *samsara*.’

Conceptions of Evil in the *vipassana* traditions, however, go a step further. Instead of starting with threats to self-identity by means of the deity-view of Mara, here we have only mental defilements, as self is no longer visible in high Buddhist practice.<sup>6</sup> Here Mara is commonly interpreted, not even as an external embodied enemy, but solely as the force leading to one's own personal embodiment, namely Mara conceived as one's own mental defilements, and Mara conceived of as the laws of conditional relations.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the deity-view of Mara is substituted by the impersonal non-self view. As Aung San Suu Kyi put it, absolute purity of thought, word and deed means that ‘no one can hurt you but yourself’,<sup>1</sup> so that evil is merely one's own stupidity and ignorance rooted in one's own mental defilements which must be uprooted through mental culture [C25]. The Three Battalions of Mara's Ninth Army are nothing but the dangers in

<sup>1</sup> This emphasis on *metta* as part of *vipassana* practice is why the association introducing *vipassana* into British prisons is known as the Angulimala Trust.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Bull-king’ is a reference to martyr (*azani*).

<sup>3</sup> *Brahmana-vagga* cited in Mingun Sayadaw (1990–96,4:295).

<sup>4</sup> Just as the Bodhisattva was about to leave the palace Mara appeared ‘who did not like and had always opposed and obstructed the emancipation of sentient beings from the round of rebirths’ with the purpose to ‘deter the Bodhisattva from renouncing the world by tricking him into believing that the deterrence was for his own good’. He predicted that ‘On the seventh day from today, the celestial Wheel Treasure for you will certainly make its appearance’. The Buddha replied ‘I already know even before you that the divine Wheel Treasure will certainly arise for me. As for myself, I do not have the least desire to become a Universal Monarch ruling over the four Continents’ and told him to go away. (Mingun 1990–96,2,1:146–47).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Then Mara reflected and came to know in anger thus: “While I am moving about, the Monk Gotama has taught ten thousand Brahmas and set them free from my dominion.” So furious was he that he once again possessed a young attendant Brahma.’ The Buddha responds saying “‘Evil, Mara, I know you. Do not think that I do not know you. you are Mara... you have spoken thus because ... You fear that those who follow my preaching will overcome the three kinds of existence that lie within your domain.’ (Mingun 1990–96,4:344)

<sup>6</sup> ‘The fact that we use the word “I” constantly to refer to ourselves seems to imply the existence of an ontological subject corresponding to the grammatical subject “I” of the sentences we use. In many of the Upanisads where the identity between the individual soul and the ultimate world-ground was being taught there was little doubt that “aham” in sentences like, *eso aham asmi* (this I am) (Ch 8.11.1) meant the personal ego conceived as a substantial entity and generally considered to reside within the body... Against this the Materialists argued that the personal pronoun “I” (also “My”) in “I”-sentences referred to the body and not to a mental substance... The Buddhists appeared to have opposed both these schools of substantialists by contending that there was no permanent substantial entity that could be observed to correspond to the term or concept “I” or “soul”...’ (Jayatilke 1963:320).

<sup>7</sup> ‘(Monks!) The Arahāt with his *asavas* destroyed, who is courageous as he knows no trembling like a bull-king, who possesses noble energy, who has sought and acquired the aggregate of virtues, who has triumphed over the three evils, namely, Mara as deity, Mara as moral defilements, and Mara as conditioning factors, who has quenched all craving for existences, who has washed away his mental dirt with the clear water of the Path and who has realized the Four Truths, him I declare an ultimate Brahmana as he really is’ (Mingun 1990–96,4:295).

one's own life of 'material gain in the form of donations from followers, the reverence of devotees, and fame or renown',<sup>1</sup> and the Ten Armies of Mara are negative personal mental habits.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, 'greatness' or 'goodness' is not represented by conquest over your enemy but 'the taming of one's own passions' [C23]. As NLD Tin U put it, repressed people must face their fears, for 'fear is against the teaching of the Buddha' who 'taught us to confront our fear' and 'fearlessness must become a habit' [O12].

This internalizes the enemy and consequently, much of the political battlefield is thereby internalized too. The 'core' of the democratic movement is thus not a physical strength oriented outwards, but an 'inner strength', 'a spiritual steadiness' which helps 'shore up your spiritual powers' [S6] and which is intrinsically related to *metta* directed initially at and within oneself, yet which is capable of benefiting everyone. Fear is no longer faced by annihilating the enemy, but rather by seeing fear itself as a 'habit' on the part of the mind which can be 'broken in meditation' [C22], much 'like mindfulness in meditation' can be turned into 'an effortless habit' [S7]. To confront the enemy directly is to tackle one's own mental impurities in mental culture, with a clear mind in a non-confrontational and unaggressive manner, without fear.

In the story of the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment both 'material' (deity-view) and 'mental' interpretations (mental defilements) of fear overlap. It is recounted how the Buddha faced his own mental defilements in mental culture while physically in an 'invincible' bodily position, 'the posture for conquering the enemies, not for conceding defeat'.<sup>3</sup>

This helps us understand the emphasis in NLD political discourse on developing personal mental purity, and in removing the mental defilements of its leaders and followers. This represents more than an engaging a *representation* of the battlefield – the battlefield within the mind *is* the primary arena of conflict in and of itself, which has the greatest of implications for the 'material' battlefields; did not the Buddha conquer Mara by conquering his mental defilements first, not the deity itself? He committed himself to a war not with Mara, nor Mara's representation, but his mental defilements. Indeed, this helps us understand how mental culture permits escape from the constraints of the powers that are attempting to imprison you [K4]. Because of this approach to politics, Burmese politicians see little conflict between politics and mental culture, and between their political and their spiritual quest [E9]. This explains how U Nu was able to practise *vipassana* in the midst of a national crisis. This is why Burmese crisis politics is suitably referred to as 'the mental culture of Burmese politics'.

This very same logic moved Aung San Suu Kyi when confronted by two trucks of soldiers barring her way in Rangoon to tell her followers 'please don't be perturbed. Only if we can control ourselves can we win over our enemies.'<sup>4</sup>

The famous Danubyu incident, in which Aung San Suu Kyi, by walking alone in the middle of the road, faces up to a captain aiming to shoot at her caused dissent amongst the commanding officers. On this occasion she would have been shot, but for the last-minute intervention of a major who frightened of the potential consequences of her death would casue, overrode a colonel's instructions. This would have produced a 'second martyr' and 'would hardly be to its [the government's] advantage'.<sup>5</sup> She herself interprets her actions at that time as being due to her 'lack of fear as a habit'.<sup>6</sup> But from a popular point of view, it is also readily interpreted as one of the three most importantly perceived advantages of *metta* practice which is highly strategic in the political arena, namely 'invulnerability' from attack, 'to be guarded by deities' and to be 'subject to adoration'. These are conveyed, almost as a matter of right, on the practitioner of *byama-so tayà*. Their protection, therefore, is to be found in the act of mental culture itself.

Therefore it should be emphasized that, however much *metta* may be directed to entities outside oneself, or what Rhys Davids called 'televolution', it primarily begins with oneself:

Metta – Universal Love – is generally taken to exist in connection with other people but in reality love for self comes first. It is not a selfish love, but love for self ... By having pure love, Metta ... for self, selfish tendencies, hatred, anger will be diminished. therefore unless we ourselves possess Metta within, we cannot share, we cannot radiate ... Metta to others.

To love the self means not be free from selfishness, hatred, anger, etc. Therefore, to clear ourselves from these undesirable

<sup>1</sup> Pandita (1992:274).

<sup>2</sup> Ten Armies of Mara – sensual pleasures; discontent; hunger and thirst; craving; sloth and torpor; fear; doubt; conceit and ingratitude; gain, renown, honor and whatever fame is falsely received; self-exaltation and disparaging others (Pandita 1992:278).

<sup>3</sup> Mingun (1990–96,2,1:215)

<sup>4</sup> Taperecorded response in Kanbawza Win. *Daw Aung San Suu Kyi*, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> ASSK (1995:286).

<sup>6</sup> ASSK (1997b:27–28).



1997, a rare event as the regime had not hitherto permitted a congress to take place, she encapsulates the significance of the NLD, the democracy movement, and the hope that the regime may change their disposition, all in terms of this concept of *metta*. While she was under house arrest she told her captors that what they identified as ‘wrongs’ on the part of the powerless people should be responded to with *metta* [E24]. Furthermore, since they renounced violence, *metta* that remains for the democracy movement and the NLD to hold itself together:

Our League may be a democratic one but we are not an organization that is unjust or repressive to others. If there are any grudges that stem from the past between our party members and the people, we will resolve them. At this time, as I have said, our party is thriving on *Metta*. We have no power, we have no weapons. We also don't have much money. There is also the matter of that eighty thousand dollars ... (laughter). What are our foundations? It is *Metta*. Rest assured that if we should lose this *Metta*, the whole democratic party would disintegrate. *Metta* is not only to be applied to those that are connected with you. It should also be applied [to] those who are against you. *Metta* means sympathy for others. Not doing unto others what one does not want done to oneself. It means not obstructing the responsibilities of those whom one has *Metta*. It not only means not wanting harm to befall one's own family, but also not wanting harm to befall the families of others. So our League does [not] wish to harm anyone. Let me be frank. We don't even want to harm SLORC. But SLORC also doesn't want to harm us. Our Congress has come this far because we have managed to reach a degree of understanding with the authorities. I would like to say from here that I thank the authorities for making things possible since this morning. We do not find it a burden to give thanks where thanks are due. Not is it a burden to give credit where credit is due. So it is not true that we do not give thanks or credit where it is due. There will be thanks where thanks is due, credit where credit is due ... so be good. One is never overcautious. This is a Buddhist philosophy.

We are not working solely for the benefit of our party. We are not working to gain power. It is true, we are working for the development of democracy. Because we believe that it is only a democratic government that could benefit the country. Let me make it clear that it is not because we want to be the government. And also because we believe that it is only the people that have the right to elect a government. That is why we asked that the government be made up of people that were elected by the people. Not because we want power. Power only gives stress. Power comes with responsibility and I believe that anyone who understands that cannot be power-crazy. I know how much responsibility goes with a democracy. That is why we are not power-crazy people. We are only an organization that wants to do its utmost for the people and the country. We are an organization that is free from grudge and puts *Metta* to the fore [E25].

Aung San Suu Kyi gives the regime a choice of fulfilling two kinds of roles. They can be a Devadatta, the ever-scheming Buddha's detractor who does not respond to or generate *metta*, who is unwilling to listen to advise, and who is incapable of attaining enlightenment until the time of death. Or they can be an Angulimala, the fearsome killer and mutilator who, while attempting to kill the Buddha, is transformed by *metta* only to achieve enlightenment at that very moment, and who ends up making a constructive contribution to the monastic community of which he became part [T1]. This is an important element in the ‘revolution of the spirit’.

### Karuna

If evil is the mental disposition of ‘fear’ which must be uprooted by *metta* and mental culture, Aung San Suu Kyi expresses the converse idea of ‘goodness’ as another mental disposition, namely to be ‘serene’, ‘sensible’ and, in particular, to be ‘compassionate’.<sup>1</sup>

Aung San Suu Kyi would like to see a greater measure of compassion in Burma, a quality she admires in Mahayana Buddhism [I1]. Her view is that the regime's fear is the product of their lack of compassion for others, and developing compassion would dissipate their fears [D10]. This view she shares with Tin U, who holds that ‘fear compromises the feelings of compassion’ and ‘when SLORC eases their fear a bit they will have a dialogue with us’.<sup>2</sup> Whether a human-rights activist or a despotic leader, ‘we can always find ways to be more compassionate’ for ‘through our compassion the world will be a much better place’, it makes for a ‘world without fear’ [F3]. The regime has a choice between following the model of Eastern Europe, South Africa and Latin America, where eventually authoritarian governments came to accept change because ‘they realized it was inevitable and it was best for them to go along with it’, or to adopt ‘the real change that comes from inside through learning the value of compassion, justice and love’ [D11]. Aung San Suu Kyi's emphasis on compassion in the face of adversity has inspired Buddhist leaders in other countries.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ASSK (1997b:62–63).

<sup>2</sup> ASSK (1997b:234).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Sulak Sivaraksa in a lecture in the United States in spring 1992 was motivated to refer to Aung San Suu Kyi as: ‘She maintains a compassionate feeling for those who put her in jail, who killed her people, and for those who destroy her political party... If you take up arms against oppressors, you will end up destroying each other.’ (Swearer, D. ‘Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist vision.’ In Queen & King (1997:220).

# Chapter 20

## Samatha meditation and the politics of power and control

I have already shown that the practice of *byama-so tayà* leads to the Brahma heavens. Its role in politics and in formulating Burman ethnic identity suggests that *samatha* is, in combination with these practices, an instrument for forging Burman ethnic identity. In particular, *metta bhavana* is the most popular form of *samatha* practice.<sup>1</sup> This contributes to the NLD's view that in practising these, the NLD will influence the country's fate.

At the basis of all human life, Aung San Suu Kyi argues, are the five moral precepts.<sup>2</sup> As her teacher, Pandita, points out, these moral precepts represent the first phase – morality – of the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, incorporating ‘right speech’, ‘right action’ and ‘right livelihood’. On the basis of this, it is possible to develop the concentration group, the second phase of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely ‘right effort’, ‘right mindfulness’ and ‘right concentration’.

### Samatha , power and revolution

Concentration, the second phase of the Noble Eightfold Path, has two aspects to it. On the one hand, it is a form of mental culture which individual practitioners undertake for their own benefit to empower themselves in order to attain the spiritual heights of mental culture on the Buddhist path. On the other hand, by virtue of gaining control over *loka*, it is a political instrument to effect some transformation in this world. In the latter sense, it plays a role in the effort to build a nation and, more generally, of rebellion, revolution and conquest.

Aung San Suu Kyi is aware of the role *samatha* played in the anti-colonial politics in 1930s Burma, in particular in the ideas of Saya San<sup>3</sup> and Thakhin Kodawhmaing.<sup>4</sup> She is possibly also aware of its importance in Ba Maw's concept of ‘revolution’ against British colonialism.<sup>5</sup> That she is aware of this quality is suggested by her praise for some of her student followers who ‘had tremendous powers of concentration’, as she says ‘such are obviously the qualities necessary for those who wish to pursue between the new national elite and the old ideals as these lived in the countryside.’<sup>6</sup> It was certainly widely regarded as an attribute of her father's [M2].

Thakhin Kodawhmaing (1875–1964), whose picture often appeared alongside Aung San's during the demonstration, was renowned for his practice of alchemy and his meditation retreats in the mountain resort of Sagaing. He played a significant role in supporting the entry of Aung San into the Dobama Party and, as editor of *The Sun* and as national poet. In 1940 he published the *Sub-commentary on the red dragon (or serpent) (na-gà ti-ka)*, in which he encouraged early U Nu's (at that time still in his concentration meditation phase, and as yet not crossed over to *vipassana*) founding of the Red Dragon Club by contributing a little poem which clearly associated the fate of Burma with concentration:

<p> <math>\dot{\text{W}}\text{od} \dot{\text{S}}\text{F}\text{F}\text{F}\text{m} - \text{St} \text{m} \text{aM}\text{b}\text{p}\text{h}</math>  <math>\text{Q} &lt; \text{aQ} - \text{Nt} \text{z} \text{aS}\text{M}\text{a} : !</math> </p>	<p>as muddy – the puddle becomes, the ‘Red Dragon’ – when it comes out to reveal itself</p>
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<sup>1</sup> Spiro's encounter with two Mandalay ‘Future Kings’ implicated meditation (concentration) and loving-kindness. Ba Pwa, a ‘Universal King’ (Setkya Min) was ordered by his guide *weik-za* Bo Min Gaung ‘to live with love and concentration’, as did Bodaw Setkya dispensed his students advise to ‘practice meditation... practice both love and tolerance’ (Spiro 1970:176,179).

<sup>2</sup> ASSK (1997a:24,124).

<sup>3</sup> Saya San who was a healer wrote two books on *loki pañña* before he got involved in the rebellion.

<sup>4</sup> After I gave a talk in Oxford in 1983, Aung San Suu Kyi asked about the meaning of ‘yogi’. Only just returning from fieldwork, at the time the significance of this question was not clear to me. However, I was later to discover that Thakhin Kodawhmaing, who was a great supporter of the entry of her father into the Do-Bama Party, adopted the title of ‘yogi-hermit’ (*yogi yathe*). The significance of his meditation to the Burmese national independence politics dawned on me only much later.

<sup>5</sup> Ba Maw (1968:74), in a conversation with Aung San, indicated that the appeal of the *Burmese Freedom Bloc*, which had been phrased in terms of concentration meditation symbolism, allowed a binding between political leadership and the Burmese masses necessary as the characteristic of a ‘true revolution’, as distinct from a ‘conspiracy’ (leadership only) or an ‘insurrection’ (the masses only). The significance of this concentration symbolism for the success of a true ‘revolution’ which gave the masses a joint purpose with their leaders, should not be underestimated

<sup>6</sup> ASSK (1997a:33).



but she was scheming to set fire to the nation.’<sup>1</sup>

According to this perception, she is pretending not to be harmful (a cat retreating its claws) whilst yet ‘scheming to set fire to the nation’. He thus refers to her doing the worst possible harm with her meditation. The ‘setting fire’ is also related to the practice of *metta* and the *jhanas* for, as we have seen in *Seyya Jataka* above, those who have *jhana* are able to heat up the seat of those in authority (the king), causing them to act in their favour. This also confirms depiction of Aung San Suu Kyi on the front cover of Hpe Kan Kaung’s collection of articles on her with candles, about to set fire to the nation.

Furthermore, this idea that her *samadhi*, the power also attributed to her father (chapter 1) and to revolution and national planning (chapter 11) can set fire to the nation is perhaps best of all confirmed by the comparison a journalist made between her and the head of King Brahma. The story goes that King Brahma lost a bet and was beheaded. Because the head, due to the king’s *jhana* powers, was purportedly very hot, it threatened to scorch the earth or dry up the oceans. The King who won the bet ordered four female celestial beings to hold it and keep it from reaching earth, each for a period of one year. The passing of the head from one celestial being to another marks the beginning of a new year. Supposedly in Burmese tradition, a ‘Byamma’s head’ is the name given to a trouble-maker. ‘Hoodlums, hecklers, bullies, and persons who borrow money are ... always referred as the Byamma’s Head.’ The article then names Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as a Byamma’s head, and outlines various ‘trouble’ she has stirred up. The article concludes with an echo from the mass rallies:

Even though you are being held by golden hands, your terrible heat will melt them down as you are the Byamma’s Head. So, you’d better leave this nation. As citizens, we are demanding deportation of Mrs. Aris. The only word we have to say to you is ‘Get out.’<sup>2</sup>

The beads are instruments for *samatha* practice, for getting what one wants and for receiving supernatural protection from danger.<sup>3</sup> The heat is the natural consequence of attaining *jhana*. Because leadership is associated with the ability to generate powers through *samadhi*, as already demonstrated in relation to Aung San and Bo Bo Aung, rebellion is normally associated with fire (*teiza*).

When ex-Prime Minister U Nu was still a student, not only did he make a vow to become a *bodhisattva*, but ‘he did spend many hours in meditation, and proclaimed that he would aid the attainment of independence by saying rosaries’.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, one interpretation of Nu’s escape from the Aung San assassination says something about the belief in the power of the rosary in Burma: ‘devout Buddhist Nu was found by his would-be executioner to be counting a Buddhist rosary at the time, a sight which melted the ferocity of his assailant and reduced it to harmless impotence.’<sup>5</sup>

In referring to ‘beads’ and a ‘vegetarian diet’, which are the hallmarks of the concentration meditator, Byatti has therefore revealed the regime’s deep-seated fears of Aung San Suu Kyi, namely as a high profile *samatha* meditator with all the long-feared destabilizing influence which motivated the regime to arrest practitioners outside its own realm of influence.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, there are also allegations of her involvement in *loki pañña* or ‘magic’. As Byatti says elsewhere, ‘the democracy sayagvis and sayamagvis who tell fortunes with cowries and are descendants of

<sup>1</sup> (#11095 soc.culture.burma). In an email reply, Myint Oo Maung finds this accusation ‘is a very insulting remark on ... Buddhists’ daily practice... what DAung San Suu Kyi does is simply a daily process of the Buddha’s way. What is wrong with this? Byatti (the SLORC mouthpiece) says as if this process is a criminal act.’ See also ‘Foreign dependent skinny person.’ *NLM*, 08.08.1996. Saw Maung had already intimated this criticism when in his 27 March 1989 Resistance Day address he criticised ‘internal and external destructive elements’ taking advantage of disorder, that ‘as the saying goes, the cats dance in glee while the forest is on fire’” (Saw Maung 1990b:77).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Byamma’s Head’. *NLM*, 09.1998. Interpreted on Radio Free Asia (RFA) by Aung Zaw, 29.09.1998.

<sup>3</sup> For example, this has also been used to explain why U Nu was not killed at the same time as Aung San for when they came for him he was counting the beads which protected him.

<sup>4</sup> Butwell (1969:18).

<sup>5</sup> Brohm (1957:394).

<sup>6</sup> Certainly, monks renowned for their practice of concentration meditation such as the Bodhi-ta-haung Sayadaw, who currently has a fleet of forty cars and a large area of land populated with cheaply built religious structures funded mostly by soldiers and their wives, receive requests for helping protect soldiers going into battle. However, some of the most potent monks, such as the Thamanya Sayadaw, whose photograph is in almost every taxi in Burmese towns, are beyond government reach. Once the protective power of meditating monks slips from government control, and becomes focused on monks within NLDs domain, there is little doubt that the regime will not survive. How can its soldiers keep up their morale and go into battle with the blessings of ineffective monks? There is some evidence of Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army {DKBA} army members have been instructed to meditate in order to gain victory over their enemy. They have also been instructed to be on a vegetarian diet (article 1674, soc.culture.burma)

Devadat [who argued for vegetarianism in Buddhism] are afraid to tell the truth so much so that they even criticize the Lord of Nats, who had assumed the form of a buffalo that its horns are spread out.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, substance to the allegation that Aung San Suu Kyi is involved with *samatha*. I do not believe she uses the rosary, but the vegetarianism<sup>2</sup> she practised from the time she visited the Thamanya Sayadaw until the car arrest episode when she stopped as she was so seriously weakened, invariably accompanies the practice of *samatha*. This is not just simply for the fact that *metta* and compassion (*karuna*) are indispensable to peaceful practice of all forms of mental culture. It is because the practice of *samatha*, since it emphasizes mind-created states and does not see all phenomena in terms of their transitory nature, is more readily disturbed by fear. In ascending to the higher abodes, it is therefore more crucially dependent on the 'liking' that the Brahma residents of the highest heavens supposedly have for people who do not eat meat (they cannot stand the smell of meat).

However, though included as part of *vipassana* traditions which place relative emphasis on *samatha* as a separate activity (as in the Ledi *anapana* tradition), vegetarianism is not a prominent attribute of the 'dry' approach *vipassana* practice of the Mahasi tradition, as U Pandita, Aung San Suu Kyi's *vipassana* teacher, himself emphasizes.<sup>3</sup> Here vegetarian diet is adopted by some people, but is not a feature of the tradition as a whole.

### Samatha, metta and Thamanya Sayadaw

The most successful role model of *metta* held up by Aung San Suu Kyi is described in the first four chapters of *Letters from Burma*. These deal with Aung San Suu Kyi's 4 October 1995 visit to the U Winaya, better known as the Thamanya Sayadaw, who used to live on Thamanya mountain in Pa-an, but today lives at the foot of this mountain.<sup>4</sup> This was Aung San Suu Kyi's first visit outside her home immediately after her release from house arrest. The Thamanya Sayadaw is of some significance to the 'spiritual warfare' that is happening between the SLORC and the NLD. Having almost four thousand Karen refugees living around him, and living in an area which has not been under full government control since 1948, he has openly criticised the SLORC and has openly expressed support for Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Thamanya Sayadaw is a Pa-o monk held in great regard by the Burmese, described in U Sandima's *Events in the life of Thamanya Mountain Sayadaw* [ဘာမညတောင်ဆရာတော် ဘဝဖြစ်စဉ်] (Rangoon: ရွှေပုဂံပုံနှိပ်, 1993, pp 52). The history of the mountain resort where he lives is described in *Serene pinnacle of Thamanya Mountain* [အေးမြသာခေါင်သာမညတောင်] (Rangoon: မင်္ဂလာစာတိုက်, 1993, pp 172).

I myself visited the Thamanya in early July 1998, taking the bus from Rangoon in the early evening and

<sup>1</sup> Byatti. 'Not satisfied dear love, let's begin from the start'. *NLM*, 07.06.1996.

<sup>2</sup> *Thet-thak-lut*, 'life-killing-free from' is the Burmese term for vegetarianism. There are important differences in the way this term operates in the Burmese language as compared to its English equivalent. First, rather than a dedication to a diet of vegetables, as the English 'vegetarianism' (one who prefers vegetables) implies, the Burmese term is clearly an extension of the first and the last of the Nine Moral Precepts (*thilá kò bà*). The first precept is not to kill, and the ninth precept is to send loving-kindness to all sentient beings (including 'enemies'). In Burmese vegetarianism means to take the moral precepts to an extreme degree of difficulty, namely by eating in a way which avoids killing in action, intention, and desire. Though Pythagorean ideas held vegetarianism as important, in the Christian heritage, on the other hand, killing of animals for food is morally quite acceptable, which leaves vegetarianism thereby as having a very different status in Burma as compared to, for example, England, the country with the largest number of vegetarians in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> '... I would like to talk about vegetarianism. Some hold the view that it is moral to eat only vegetables. In Theravada Buddhism there is no notion that this practice leads to an exceptional perception of the truth.

The Buddha did not totally prohibit the eating of meat. He only lay down certain conditions for it. For example, an animal must not be killed expressly for one's personal consumption. The monk Devadatta asked him to lay down a rule expressly forbidding the eating of meat, but the Buddha, after thorough consideration, refused to do so.

In those days as now, the majority of people ate a mixture of animal and vegetable food. Only Brahmins, the upper caste, were vegetarian. When monks went begging for their livelihood, they had to take whatever was offered by donors of any caste. To distinguish between vegetarian and carnivorous donors would have affected the spirit of this activity. Furthermore, both Brahmins and members of other castes were able to join the order of monks and nuns. The Buddha took this fact into consideration as well, with all of its implications.

Thus, one needn't restrict oneself to vegetarianism to practice the Dhamma. Of course, it is healthy to eat a balanced vegetarian diet, and if your motivation for not eating meat is compassion, this impulse is certainly wholesome. If, on the other hand, your metabolism is adjusted to eating meat, or if for some other reason of health it is necessary for you to eat meat, this should not be considered sinful or in any way detrimental to the practice. A law that cannot be obeyed by the majority is ineffective.' (Pandita 1992:40-41).

<sup>4</sup> 'Burma's Suu Kyi leaves Rangoon for first time'. *Nando Times*, World Briefs, 04.10.1995.

arriving at Pa-an early the next morning, from which the Thamanya mountain resort was an hour's bus ride. I stayed one night at the monastery. During my visit some of the attendants of Thamanya took me around the projects, including two schools, the many monasteries and retreats on top of the mountain and the monasteries below. The grounds owned by the Sayadaw cover a three mile radius around the mountain where about 7000 families live. The Sayadaw owns 22 vehicles, including heavy duty trucks, that are used for various construction projects, including the building and maintenance of roads and various public utilities.

Thamanya's most distinctive emphasis is on *metta*. It is said that people used to come mainly to receive Sayadaw's *metta*. People mostly have come to the Sayadaw because of poverty in this financial crisis. Increasingly, some wealthy business people – both women and men – have come over the last year. This suggests that *metta* is becoming more commercialised as the free market takes hold of Burma. When I asked him about this, the Sayadaw did not emphasize the donors, but said that it was a single monk for whom this entire empire was built up.

The Thamanya Sayadaw, however, is clearly a product of the political and economic situation. He is viewed as a monk who contributes to the well-being of all those who visit him, and, increasingly to their businesses. In this sense he is seen by the pilgrims as a 'productive' monk. This explains why he collects such enormous wealth, which he redistributes to the destitute. For example, I met several young children there, some of whom had run away from home and others whose parents had abandoned them. Apart from receiving *metta*, they get as much free food as they like for which the finance comes from the wealthy – this is clearly a mechanism for redistribution at difficult times.

The military regime has always relied on twenty or so monks whom they will cultivate for their powers and occasionally invite to Rangoon. However, the greater the geographical distance between the monks and Rangoon, the more difficult it is to keep these monks tied to their patronage; on the other hand, also, the further away these monks are, the more useful they are to gain control over far-flung regions. The military was very keen on fostering a close relationship with the Thamanya Sayadaw, but this monk responded to their overtures by daring to criticise them quite openly.

The stories about his powers are legion. Some have alleged him to be a *yahanda* which would put him in the same bracket as Shin Arahant, the monk who assisted Anawratha in his reform (See App I, 7). During my visit, some of his attendants placed him as 'more than a *weikza* and more than a *yahanda*', suggesting that he is a kind of small Buddha. Like many monks who practise *samatha* he is vegetarian. His power is readily conveyed<sup>1</sup> through pictures distributed to pilgrims visiting him. For example, in Rangoon and Mandalay, the majority of taxi drivers have a picture of this (or some other) renowned *samatha* monk fixed against their windscreen for safety.

The Sayadaw's *metta* was extended to his environment and shaped the community around Thamanya mountain, for today within a radius of about three miles the people who live there eat only vegetarian food and only vegetarian food is sold in the food stalls. Visiting pilgrims eat vegetarian food for several days prior to departure. I was accompanied by five people, all of whom were vegetarian for the duration of the trip. One had already spent one year eating vegetarian food according to the instructions of this same Sayadaw. They do so in sympathy with the monk's emphasis on *metta* (of which vegetarianism is part since it is about avoiding the killing of sentient beings). His *metta* is so great that he feeds all who come to see him, without fail.

As Aung San Suu Kyi once said, the people at Thamanya live in 'a sanctuary ruled by the *metta* of the *Hsayadaw*' and in 'a domain of loving-kindness and peace'. In criticising the SLORC, Aung San Suu Kyi remarks how bad the roads become when one leaves Rangoon, yet how good they are in the Thamanya Sayadaw's hands, 'far superior to many a highway to be found in Rangoon'. She describes the situation where the SLORC forces people to contribute labour to build roads, whereas the Sayadaw achieves his works by voluntary contributions from the people. At Thamanya, 'whenever the Hsayadaw goes through his domain people sink down on their knees in obeisance, their faces bright with joy'.<sup>2</sup>

At the two schools surrounding Thamanya Sayadaw's monastery, 375 children are taught by thirteen teachers with a lack of resources such as books. She concludes that the monk's works 'are upheld by the donations of devotees who know beyond the shadow of a doubt that everything that is given to him will be

<sup>1</sup> The actual taking of a picture of someone with power permits it's transfer to the photograph, known in Burmese as 'conveying energy' [ခေါ်တို့တယ်].

<sup>2</sup> ASSK (1997a:13).

used for the good of others. How fine it would be if such a spirit of service were to spread across the land'. Her conclusion to this piece sums up her interest in *metta*:

Some have questioned the appropriateness of talking about such matters as *metta* (loving-kindness) and *thissa* (truth) in the political context. But politics is about people and what we had seen in Thamanya proved that love and truth can move people more strongly than any form of coercion.

This suggests an important criticism of the regime, which can only pretend to have *metta* in their slogans [E16][E17][E31]. It also suggests that only in *metta* do the destitute find refuge, thus producing more powerful monks than the regime can handle. Once again, it is the regime that produces its own enemies.

Aung San Suu Kyi's intention initially appeared to have been to visit a monk greatly respected by both the people and members of the regime alike, with the aim of working towards reconciliation. Some even speculated that she met with some high-ranking military officials at the Thamanya in preparation for future dialogue. A senior advisor close to her father supposedly even suggested she pay her respects to Ne Win. The idea being that, while they may not be able to formally reconcile, they may be able to arrange a Buddhist ceremony where they could meet informally. Soon after returning from her visit, Aung San Suu Kyi held a ceremony to mark Buddhist Lent day, and included among the invited guests was General Ne Win, though he did not attend.<sup>1</sup>

The many informal stories of the meeting between Aung San Suu Kyi and the Thamanya Sayadaw turned her into something of a heroine in opposition to the regime, and these stories are still popularly recounted by Burmese people today, even years later. Though many are obviously mythical, they invariably demonstrate Aung San Suu Kyi's spiritual upperhand over the SLORC's General Khin Nyunt:<sup>2</sup>

1. The Sayadaw manages through his superior jhanas to enter her compound despite all the guards and is able to talk freely to Aung San Suu Kyi; yet Khin Nyunt repeatedly invited the Sayadaw to Rangoon but he would not come
2. Khin Nyunt visited U Thamanya after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did. U Thamanya came down the mountain to meet Aung San Suu Kyi and later invited her to come back and visit again. Khin Nyunt had to walk up the mountain by himself, and he was not invited back. Khin Nyunt tried to give U Thamanya a van, but U Thamanya said monks don't need vans, take it back.
3. The Sayadaw openly spoke out in support of Aung San Suu Kyi's efforts when they met; he openly told Khin Nyunt off
4. The Sayadaw only permitted his picture to be taken with Aung San Suu Kyi; Khin Nyunt was not permitted
5. Khin Nyunt was only given a brief audience; Aung San Suu Kyi was given over an hour.
6. When Khin Nyunt tried to start his car as he was leaving, he couldn't. He had to go back up to U Thamanya and ask for help. U Thamanya told him that when he stopped being angry, his car would start. Finally after a period, he was able to start the car. Such incident did not happen to Aung San Suu Kyi during her visit.

Aung San Suu Kyi's emphasis on *metta* and her involvement with *samatha* practice is clearly significant in her image as a powerful politician with the Burmese people.

<sup>1</sup> Aung Zaw. 'Suu Kyi extends olive branch as convention delayed once again' *Nation*, 13.10.1995.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful for example 2 and 5 to Christina Fink.

# Chapter 21

## Vipassana contemplation, democracy and the politics of wisdom and purity

In his book *Buddhism, legitimation and conflict*, Peter Jackson comes to the conclusion that in Thailand the practice of *vipassana* ‘has come to be associated with the denial of the traditional Buddhist cosmology and Thai supernaturalism’, and that *vipassana* teachers regard *nibbana* ‘as a state of wisdom or insight into imminent reality in this world here and now’.<sup>1</sup> He also says that direct access to, and the universal relevance of *nibbana* ‘parallels the desire for a democratic political system in which individuals, in particular individual members of the middle class, have more direct access to the manipulation of political power.’<sup>2</sup>

In Burma, *nibbana* was democratised under the Ne Win government, i.e. brought within reach of every person through the *vipassana* centres. Thereby the concept of knowledge and wisdom has been redistributed also. The current regime may not have human rights, but it does not mind pre-occupation with *nibbana* on the part of the individual person. What it does mind is that the wisdom realised could possibly be in disagreement with theirs. King Mindon, U Hpo Hlaing, U Nu and the General Secretary of the United Nations U Thant were all reformers, and were all what we might call ‘internationalists’ – they had a broad view of identity and never conceived of Burma as an enclosed hermit land. They were also practitioners of *vipassana*. Aung San Suu Kyi and many other NLD members are working hard to prise open hermit-land, but it is a difficult task for which *vipassana* is one of the only instruments available under the political conditions that still pertain in Burma today.

### Wisdom

During July 1998, Aung San Suu Kyi made repeated attempts to meet members of her party in different parts of the country, but was obstructed by the regime. While Aung San Suu Kyi was in her car, the regime wrote that it alone had the necessary wisdom to guard life within its realm.

There is an expression in Myanmar as ‘one’s own life can be safeguarded only by one’s own wisdom’ [အသက်ကိုညွှန်စောင့် ] upon which in this scenario the government’s wisdom is becoming purer and clearer in conscience in saving a life of a human being since the other party seems to find it difficult in producing or coming up with the nearest sense of any solution. The authorities hope that anyone who considers him or herself to be a political leader to act more accordingly and that action taken should be more befitting one’s own projected status.<sup>3</sup>

The regime’s proclamation that it alone had the wisdom to safeguard Aung San Suu Kyi’s life, is a parody of what they know a government needs, namely ‘wisdom’ [ဝညာ]. The irony is that this is self-evidently what the regime does not possess for wisdom is not bounded by the boundaries of race or culture. Nevertheless, this statement shows that wisdom, having long been a requirement of government (see App. I.2), is a particularly desirable quality. In short, the regime greatly hankers to be seen to be wise.

Why is it that members of the regime cannot convince that they have attained ‘wisdom’? It is because, so Tin U argues, its active members do not practice *vipassana*, and so can have little wisdom. Indeed, the regime does have military intelligence, but could not even predict its own failure in the elections. Furthermore, its attempts to delineate racial, linguistic and cultural mappings of the people is evidence that it is doing the opposite – it is creating an environment of compartments and frameworks, a confrontational environment that is not consonant with vernacular, or indeed cross-culturally operative ideas of wisdom. In this respect, the regime is out of touch with the core Burmese value system that links wisdom to mental culture.

*Vipassana* is characterised as a practice which leads to ‘wisdom’ [*pañña*, ဝညာ], and in particular ‘transcendental wisdom’ [*lokuttara pañña*], which means ‘intuitive knowledge of ultimate truth’,<sup>4</sup> the highest wisdom possible leading to *nibbana*. The *Visuddhimagga* defines wisdom as ‘insight knowledge (*vipassana-nyana*) associated with wholesome states of consciousness’ [ကုသိုလ်စိတ်နှင့်ယှဉ်သော ဝညာကိုသာလျှင် ဆိုကုန်အံ့၊ ကုသိုလ်စိတ်နှင့်ယှဉ်သော ဝိပဿနာဇာနည်သည် ဝညာမည်၏။]. Mastered to perfection by the Buddha (as part of the Ten

<sup>1</sup> Jackson (1989:203).

<sup>2</sup> Jackson (1989:52).

<sup>3</sup> *IS*, 30.07.1998.

<sup>4</sup> Pandita (1992:287).

Perfections (*parami*) of all Buddhas) who taught *vipassana* as its principal path to enlightenment, the *vipassana* traditions are therefore often characterised as ‘wisdom traditions’. Technically speaking, ‘wisdom’ is the third and final stage in the Noble Eightfold Path, after morality and concentration, namely the attainment of ‘Right Aim’ and ‘Right View’.

Wisdom is an important element in Aung San Suu Kyi's ideas. Monks provide her with ‘words of wisdom’ [H6], human beings must ‘strive to attain enlightenment’ and ‘use their wisdom to teach others’ [Q2], lack of wisdom on the part of government leads to refugee crises [Q1], and Burma's deterioration since WWII is attributable to the country being ‘ruled by men without integrity or wisdom’ [Y13]. Furthermore, if the Burmese can ‘persevere with wisdom’, this will ‘overcome complacency’ of the people will help to ‘achieve success’ in the fight for democracy [Q3]. It is also closely related also to the concept of understanding, about which Aung San Suu Kyi has said ‘if there was understanding, in fact, there would be few problems’ [Q4].

I will come back to the concept of wisdom later, as it is a crucial element in Burmese politics, as indeed in politics everywhere. Suffice to note here two points. First, that Aung San is generally portrayed as having acted out of wisdom, and to have avoided physical force. Thus Kyaw Zaw attributed to scholars the view that ‘Bogyoke, in building the country used only wisdom and never used power (or) force’.<sup>1</sup> Second, the wisdom Aung San Suu Kyi describes is of a particular kind. It is the outcome of *vipassana* practice, that it must be based on ‘morality’ (*sila*) and ‘concentration’ (*samadhi*), and for it to be effective it must be balanced with and accompanied by other mental qualities, in particular the mental quality of ‘awareness’ (*sati*).

It is extremely important to appreciate this idea that *vipassana* practise, and the wisdom derived from it, are not some escape from or denial of the world, as the Weberian and some Buddhological models of Buddhism hold.<sup>2</sup> The practise of *vipassana* is firmly constructed over and above what are mundane (*loki*) Buddhist preliminary practices, namely charity, morality and concentration; this turns the practice into more than ‘escape’ from the world, for their preliminary practice helps to attain final release from the constraints of the world, and permits reform, refinement and ethicising one's own position in society without fear of the consequences of doing so. In this way, wisdom is necessary for remedying world-wide problems, including the refugee crisis [Q1]. Through *vipassana* is produced ‘greatness’ [C23].

### NLD practice, mediation and purity of mind

*Vipassana* is by far the most important and most highly regarded spiritual practice that Aung San Suu Kyi is involved in. As already noted, this practice is closely followed also by her personal advisor U Win Htein, and by her principal colleagues U Tin U and U Kyi Maung [R1]. The special role of *vipassana* in the democracy movement is furthermore evident in the intercession by *vipassana* teacher Rewadatta Dhamma in the only mediated peace talks attempted since 1989, until the UN representative began its peace talks in January 1998. *Vipassana* is also evident, as already noted, in the frequenting of the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha by military leaders. This practice is of great importance, paradoxically at one and the same time, to comprehend the ideology of purity and reform of the democracy movement, and yet also the mechanism of control which the regime exercises within the country and to control Burmese elements outside the country.

I have already noted that the ultimate reward of *samatha* and *byama-so tayà* is attainment of ultimate power belonging to rebirth in the Brahma heavens as part of the ‘wheel of transmigration’ or ‘wheel of *loki*’. However, the ultimate goal of *vipassana* traditions is a radical exit from the ‘wheel of transmigration’ itself. Because of the control the regime feels they have attained over mundane affairs (*loki*) they are not worried that people should seek ‘transcendental wisdom’ – it does not lead to control or power, and does not lead to militant nationalism. Though it would not appear to greatly upset the order as they have imposed it, nevertheless, historically we know that the greatest exponents of government reform have at the same time been practitioners of this method. There is no doubt that Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD are challenging the regime's attempt to monopolise *loki*, and that the Burmese people have started to apply the techniques of transcendental wisdom to effect change in their mundane existence under a restrictive polity.

<sup>1</sup> Kyaw Zaw (n.d.:85).

<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Parenteau (1994:20) is wrong, namely in considering Buddhists as ‘tending to be contemplative’, and therefore as withdrawn from worldly problems. It merely dissolves the immediacy of these problems in terms of problems of a higher order called wisdom.

The role of a human being, according to Aung San Suu Kyi, is to strive ‘to achieve enlightenment’ and ‘to use the wisdom that is gained to serve others, so that they too might be free from suffering’ [Q2]. For Aung San Suu Kyi herself, the highest aspiration is ‘very much a spiritual one’, namely ‘purity of mind’ [V1]. In expressing this aspiration she puts the state of arahant at the pinnacle of human achievement: ‘I doubt that anybody who is not an *arahant* [enlightened one] could actually say, “There’s no impurity in me.” But ... for people brought up in Buddhism, I don’t think it’s so difficult, because we have our concepts of greed, hatred and ignorance which create impurity ... anything you can trace to ill-will and greed, that is impure ...’ [V2].

Aung San Suu Kyi’s idea about ‘purity of mind’ – i.e. freedom from mental defilements – as the highest goal of human beings, and, indeed, of herself, is entirely related to the practice of mental culture, for in the Burmese context this is perceived as the *only* way to suspend, and in the case of *vipassana* practice, permanently uproot mental ‘impurities’ or ‘defilements’ (*kilesas*) and to attain the state of *arahant*.<sup>1</sup> This in turn, transcends *loki*, for *vipassana* punctures the *loki* as defined by the regime through their tight control over *loki pañña*. The result is that the military are left, like Mara (as representing *loki*) attacking the Buddha (as representing *lokuttara*) in order to keep the people from leaving *loki*. So Aung San Suu Kyi realises that purification of herself can only guarantee her an ever-stronger political following.

### Aung San Suu Kyi's encounter with vipassana

When asked how she learnt meditation, Aung San Suu Kyi recounts how she began with the Mahasi Sayadaw in her twenties, which would be some time between 1966-76, at the same centre which U Nu set up in the 1940s, and where Tin U also practised later.

She is known to have visited the Chanmye Yeiktha Sayadaw<sup>2</sup> prior to her house arrest, who is a renowned *vipassana* teacher and pupil of the Mahasi Sayadaw.<sup>3</sup> She then proceeded more seriously with another Mahasi pupil, namely U Pandita, during the period of house arrest:

Aung San Suu Kyi: I did go to the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha meditation centre but that was long ago, when I was in Burma on one of my visits. I was in my twenties. But I never really meditated very much. My real meditation took off only during my years of house arrest. And for that I had to depend a lot on books. U Pandita’s book, *In this very life*, was a great help.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting that Aung San Suu Kyi, like many Burmese intellectuals steeped in reading foreign literature, should come to familiarise herself with Burmese *vipassana* traditions through the English medium whilst there is such vast literature on the subject in Burmese.<sup>5</sup> This is indicative of the role of *vipassana* at the interface with other countries, and it affirms the role of *vipassana* centres as the only Burmese establishments to represent Burma abroad alongside the Burmese embassy. This is a legacy we have already noted in the case of U Hpo Hlaing, who did the opposite, namely he sought to bring foreign political ideas into Burmese government while engaged in practising and writing about *vipassana*.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s personal statement of her interest in *vipassana* is further elaborated in ‘Teachers’, one of her ‘Letters from Burma’, from which it becomes clear that she first met U Pandita immediately

<sup>1</sup> She also relates ‘perfection’ to ‘purity’ – in this sense she relates it to the way her ‘father once talked about purity in thought, word and deed’. Here, ‘the greatest protection in life is absolute purity’ where ‘nobody can hurt you but yourself’ (ASSK 1997a:52).

<sup>2</sup> One example of the concern of overseas Burmese communities for Aung San Suu Kyi is the offering of donations and the making of merit for the well-being and victory of Aung San Suu Kyi. These usually involve *vipassana* monks. For example, for her 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday a donation was held in South Africa: ‘Burmese compatriot done “Ah-hlu-dar-na Ku-tho” to the most venerable Chanmyay Sayadaw (Ashin Janakabhivamsa) aiming for Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at Burmese Buddhist Phone-Gyi-Kyaung, No 30, Mckay Road, Ashburton, Pietermeritzburg in South Africa on 52nd birthday of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. While offering this donation to Chanmyay Sayadaw, Burmese Community from Durban and Pietermeritzburg, were attending and pay respect to Sayadaw. The aim of donation is, to away Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from 5-enemies, and also for healthy longer life and peacefully to her and her colleagues. Burmese Community donated “Burmese Buddhist Phone-Gyi-Kyaung” to Chanmyay Sayadaw on 14th June 1997 in South Africa. Chanmyay Sayadaw arrived to SA on 30 May 1997.’ (‘Donation to Chanmyay Sayadaw, aiming for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, 52nd Birthday, in South Africa’).

<sup>3</sup> The Chanmye Sayadaw Ashin Janakabhivamsa was ordained in 1947, in 1954 he performed editorial duties for the Sangayana, and in 1957 he lived at the Mahavisuddharam monastery in Colombo for six years. He taught at the Mahasi centre in 1967, and was donated his own monastery in 1977, since when he became known as the Chanmye Sayadaw. He accompanied the Mahasi abroad in 1979–80 and is now internationally renowned for his teachings which he has disseminated through lecture tours and various media.

<sup>4</sup> ASSK (1997b:65–66).

<sup>5</sup> e.g. the author of U Ba Khin’s biography, who was vice-chancellor of Mandalay University, knew *vipassana* teacher U Ba Khin but paid no attention to him until a foreigner waxed liberally about the benefits of his teachers by a black American while on a trip in America.

prior to her house arrest:<sup>1</sup>

Not long before my house arrest in 1989, I was granted an audience with the Venerable U Pandita, an exceptional teacher in the best tradition of great spiritual mentors whose words act constantly as an aid to a better existence. *Hsayadaw* (holy teacher) U Pandita spoke of the importance of *samma-vaca* or right speech. Not only should one speak only the truth, one's speech should lead to harmony among beings [O13]; it should be kind and pleasant, and it should be beneficial. One should follow the example of the Lord Buddha who only spoke words that were truthful and beneficial, even if at times such speech was not always pleasing to the listener [R2].

Apart from 'right speech' her letter describes how U Pandita, whom she paid several visits at his monastery,<sup>2</sup> urged her to pay particular attention to *sati*, which unlike other spiritual qualities such as faith, energy, concentration and wisdom, 'can never be in excess' [R3].

Stewart put is as follows

Alone in her Rangoon home, Suu Kyi set up a daily routine for herself to keep her mind and body strong. She only varied her routine on Saturday and Sunday, when she let herself enjoy leisurely activity. At four-thirty each morning, she rose and tidied herself up. Then she sat in a half-lotus position – legs crossed with one foot up on the opposite thigh – at the foot of her bed. There she meditated by concentrating on her breathing and being aware of everything around her.

This practice, called insight meditation, helped her to become focused and calm and to understand her mental habits. As a Buddhist, Suu Kyi had learned to observe herself 'from outside' and to recognize her own imperfections of character. Daily meditation during house arrest helped her understand herself even better.<sup>3</sup>

U Pandita, Aung San Suu Kyi's *vipassana* teacher, received in 1996 the NLD offering of *kathina* robes at his new Panditarama monastery, permitting enjoyment by the opposition of 'a small, precious spiritual respite' while under the thumb of an authoritarian regime.<sup>4</sup>

### Awareness ( *sati* )

The practice of 'awareness', known as *sati* (ဆီတိ, Pali *sati*), and sometimes also translated as 'mindfulness' or 'attention',<sup>5</sup> is at the heart of all *vipassana* traditions in Burma, and this concept is much used by NLD leaders.

*Sati* is the first of the Seven Enlightenment Factors (the others are investigation, effort, rapture, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity). It logically precedes the others since the direct perception of reality to which *sati* gives rise, makes it indispensable to all the other factors. It stops negative emotional states, characterised as mental defilements, from developing from the point of contact with the senses.

*Sati*, as the seventh element in the Noble Eightfold Path, also belongs to the second phase of the Noble Eightfold Path, namely Concentration (together with Right Effort and Right Concentration).

Supposedly, the last exhortation before the Buddha passed away was on mindfulness, and it is generally accepted that Emperor Asoka of India was motivated to become Buddhists because of the following passage on mindfulness:

Mindfulness is the way to the Deathless (*Nibbana*),  
unmindfulness is the way to Death.  
Those who are mindful do not die;  
those who are not mindful are as if already dead.<sup>6</sup>

The Mahasi technique that Tin U and Aung San Suu Kyi practise is often referred to as the *satipatthana* or 'awareness' technique which is 'the clear and single-minded awareness of what actually happens to us and in us, at the successive moments of perception ... either through the five physical senses or through the mind which, for Buddhist thought, constitutes the sixth sense':

When attending to that sixfold sense impression, attention or mindfulness is kept to a bare registering of the facts observed, without reacting to them by deed, speech or by mental comment which may be one of self-reference (like, dislike, etc), judgement or reflection. If during the time, short or long, given to the practice of Bare Attention, any such comments arise in one's mind, they themselves are made objects of Bare Attention, and are neither repudiated nor pursued, but are dismissed,

<sup>1</sup> First published in *The Nation* (10.09.1996) and in the Japanese-English *Mainichi Daily News*, and later republished in Sulak Sivaraksa's *Seeds of Peace* (Jan–Apr 1997, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 7–8).

<sup>2</sup> ASSK (1997b:9).

<sup>3</sup> Whitney (1997:93–94).

<sup>4</sup> ASSK (1997b:200–1).

<sup>5</sup> In the Ba Khin tradition which U Kyi Maung practices, the concept of *sati* is often translated as 'awareness', whereas in the Mahasi tradition it tends to be translated as 'mindfulness'. It may be that Aung San Suu Kyi is influenced by U Kyi Maung's ideas here.

<sup>6</sup> *The Dhammapada* Translated by Daw Mya Tin. Rangoon: Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana, 1993, pp. v, 9 (verse 21).

after a brief mental note has been made of them.<sup>1</sup>

*Sati* accomplishes, in combination with *metta* and *karuna*, protection of oneself and others:

‘I shall protect myself’ with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. I shall protect others’ with that thought the Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated. By protecting oneself one protects others; by protecting others one protects oneself.

And how does one, by protecting oneself, protect others? By repeated practice (of mindfulness), by its meditative development, and by frequent occupation with it.

And how does one, by protecting others, protect oneself? By patience, by a non-violent life, by lovingkindness and compassion.<sup>2</sup>

Mindfulness is often described as a way of ‘self-reliance’ and ‘self-help’, as it does not require ‘initiation’, ‘esoteric knowledge’, or ‘any elaborate technique or external devices’, having ‘the daily life ... as its working material’. It is also described as a form of ‘self-liberation’, which needs no ‘saving divine grace’ or ‘mediation by priests’. These contribute to the view of mindfulness as ‘an island’, as the Buddha said to Ananda just prior to his death:

Therefore, Ananda, be ye islands unto yourselves! Be ye a refuge unto yourselves! Betake yourselves to no external refuge! The Truth (Dhamma) be your island, the truth be your refuge! Take no other refuge! And how is this done?

Therefore, Ananda, A monk dwells contemplating the body, in the body – contemplating the feelings, in the feelings – contemplating consciousness, in consciousness – contemplating mind objects in mind objects, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome, in the world, hankering and dejection.

And whosoever, Ananda, either now or after I am dead, shall be an island unto themselves, a refuge unto themselves, shall betake themselves to no external refuge, but holding fast to the truth as their island and refuge, taking refuge in nothing else – it is they, Ananda, among my Bhikkhus, who shall reach the very topmost height – but they must be anxious to learn.<sup>3</sup>

Through the awareness of impermanence (*anicca*), *vipassana* prepares people for arrest and for prison. In particular Tin U would practise, not just in prison, but also in preparation for his rearrest [C11]. It was the development of ‘awareness’ (*sati*) whilst in prison that made him stop his ‘blind obedience’ and which accomplished his transformation to a democrat; he believes it would work similarly for regime members were they to practise it [R4].

However, beyond a technical term, the concept of ‘awareness’ is also extended to mean the idea of ‘good friends’ who work to increase one’s awareness by pointing out one’s faults with an attitude of sympathetic joy (*mudita*) and loving-kindness (*metta*).<sup>4</sup> Just like the enemy is internalized, so is the friend. This is how NLD Tin U can characterise, while incarcerated in solitary confinement, how he ‘had a friend in prison, myself, my mindfulness’.<sup>5</sup> As he also put it, ‘as a Buddhist, I firmly believe that oneself is one’s enemy or one’s friend. This is very Buddhist, that from one’s mind the world originates’.<sup>6</sup> This of course, has been asserted by *vipassana* teachers such as U Pandita who says that ‘practising the Dhamma, you truly care for yourself, protect yourself, and act as your own best friend’.<sup>2</sup> If friends bring awareness, the idea of ‘friend’ is also closely related to the meditation teacher, who is known as a *kalyana metta* [E22].

This concept of ‘awareness’ has, furthermore, also been extended to the idea of political opposition, for ‘the opposition in a democracy plays the role of Devadatta for any legal government. It stops the ruling party from going astray by constantly pointing out its every mistake’ [Y1]. Political opposition therefore means increased awareness; conversely, not practising mindfulness, not having ‘good friends’, and not allowing an opposition, means not having the necessary ‘awareness’ to rule (i.e. ignorance). And ignorance is at the root of misgovernance.

Aung San Suu Kyi has argued that the struggle for democracy is a struggle ‘for a change in our everyday life’ [Y23]. The awareness advocated in the Mahasi techniques, is a superior awareness of everyday life.

While under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi felt her progress was limited until she had access to the book *In this very life* written by U Pandita (first published in English in 1992), from which she recalled the preaching of this monk which emphasized ‘mindfulness’ [C24]. She eventually integrated meditation eventually into her daily schedule, meditating first thing in the morning for one hour after arising at 4:30 a.m.

Aung San Suu Kyi responds to the suggestions some have made of her as a ‘female *bodhisattva*’ by saying

<sup>1</sup> Nyanaponika (1962:32).

<sup>2</sup> Samyutta-Nikaya 47, 19; Nyanaponika (1962:77).

<sup>3</sup> Maha-Parinibbana-Sutta; Nyanaponika (1962:77–84).

<sup>4</sup> ASSK (1997b:31–32).

<sup>5</sup> ASSK (1997b:229).

<sup>6</sup> ASSK (1997b:231).

that she is 'nowhere near such a state'. She has a temper, but *vipassana* practice (like *metta*) has proved beneficial to control her anger through improved 'awareness' [C25].

In relation to the concept of evil, her views are that it is not an embodied essence, but the problem of embodiment itself. Evil represents ignorance ('stupidity') combined with 'greed' and 'anger'.<sup>1</sup> This can only be cut through by means of meditation and by fostering 'awareness', which she has discovered in relation to dealing with her own anger [C25]. Awareness is also important for leaders to keep on their toes and to avoid self-deception [R5].

The issue of uprooting fear (rather than temporarily suspending it) was addressed by U Pandita in *In this very life*. He views it as a result *vipassana* practice, a view Aung San Suu Kyi had not quite understood at the time her book *Freedom from fear* came out. According to U Pandita, Mara's Sixth Army is known as 'fear' itself,<sup>2</sup> and only *vipassana* leads to the final solution to fear as it leads to a 'safe haven', namely *nibbana*, where 'not a single danger, nothing fearful, remains', for 'old age and death are conquered', 'the burden of suffering falls', and 'a person who reaches *nibbana* is completely protected and can therefore be called "The Fearless", the one without danger'. This is attained 'even before arriving at the perfect safety of *nibbana*', for 'one is protected from fearful things while walking the Noble Eightfold Path', so that 'this path itself is the haven'.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the question 'What does Buddhist meditation mean to you?' she once again emphasizes that it is 'a form of spiritual cultivation' and that the 'awareness' it generates also helps avoid 'impurities' [R6]. *Vipassana* is furthermore implicated in her concept of 'soldiering on' in true conquest of herself [C23], aided by awareness [R7]. This is the only way to reach perfection, to become a truly great person.

In particular, she also used meditation to cope with the 'anger' and 'fear' of the people around her. It should be noted of course, that fear is considered related to anger.<sup>2</sup> When asked what 'truth' means to her, she again says that this mental state of awareness (*sati*), both of oneself and of others, contributes to objectivity of mind [R8, R9].

In answer to the question whether meditation has been 'a process of self-discovery', she denies that it helped her discover things about herself. Nevertheless, the development of awareness in everyday life permits conscious and careful living [R10]. Aung San Suu Kyi also indicated that she is after a particular kind of 'awareness', namely 'impermanence' (*anicca*).

During her house arrest, there were periods when she practised longer because she was improving and enjoying it [C26]. As for the actual changes in her mental states, she points at the stages described in U Pandita's book [C27].

### Vipassana and kamma

Many students of Burmese society attribute the resigned attitude to life and the acceptance of inequality to Buddhism. In particular this is attributed to the quality of *kamma* which is inherent in people and over which they have no control. In this sense, Buddhism is often seen as pessimistic.

In Pali, *kamma* [ကမ္မ] literally means 'action'. In Burmese, *kan* [ကံ], has two main meanings. First, it means one's deed, word or thought which predetermines one's future, and secondly, the meaning of luck, fortune or lot. To suffer the consequences of these actions is 'to be hit by the great *karmas*' [ကံကြီးထိုက်တယ်], meaning 'to be punished for having committed any of the five cardinal sins'.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, to do good

<sup>1</sup> Meditators commonly represent Evil as the impurities (*kilesa*) in one's own embodiment, which can only temporarily be suspended by concentration meditation, but permanently be uprooted through *vipassana*. There are many examples in the Buddhist teachings which how evil is inefficacious to those who have managed to do this successfully.

<sup>2</sup> Sixth Army: Fear. The Sixth Army of Mara is fear and cowardliness. It easily attacks yogis who practice in a remote place, especially if the level of ardent effort is low after an attack of sloth and torpor. Courageous effort drives out fear. So does a clear perception of the Dhamma which comes as a result of effort, mindfulness and concentration. The Dhamma is the greatest protection available on earth: faith in, and practice of the Dhamma are therefore the greatest medicines for fear. Practising morality ensures that one's future circumstances will be wholesome and pleasant; practising concentration means that one suffers less from mental distress; and practising wisdom leads toward *nibbana*, where all fear and danger have been surpassed. Practising the Dhamma, you truly care for yourself, protect yourself, and act as your own best friend. Ordinary fear is the sinking form of anger. You cannot face the problem, so you show no reaction outwardly and wait for the opportunity to run away. But if you can face your problems directly, with an open and relaxed mind, fear will not arise. (Pandita 1992:71).

<sup>3</sup> Pandita (1993:225–26).

<sup>4</sup> The Five Cardinal Sins: 1 matricide, 2 patricide, 3 killing an *Arhat*, 4 shedding blood of the Buddha, 5 creating Sangha division among the *Sangha*.

things, like charity morality or mental culture, improve one's good fortune in life. Thus, 'to be lucky' or 'to be fortunate' is to 'have good *kamma*' [ကံတောင်းတယ်].

It is said of kings that '*karma* is exhausted' [ကံတုန့်], which meant that they had died. Furthermore, the serious and detailed preoccupation with the *kamma* of monks means that 'great *kamma* and small *kamma*' [ကံကြီးကံငယ်] is an expression for the preoccupation with the *Vinaya* for the greater rites, such as ordination into monkhood, that take place in a *sima* accompanied by ritual recitation of sacred Pali texts, and the lesser rites such as absolving oneself of minor infractions of the *Vinayas* which require no ritual.

All Buddhist practice will affect *kamma*. However, one of the most important features of *vipassana* perspective on life is that this is the only practice that can truly 'burn' *kamma*. In other words, it can erase misfortunate and status differences arising from past action. There is no other technique or knowledge that supposedly is able to level inequality and difference at the speed that *vipassana* is able to. This ability permits it a role in the reform of all sorts of inherited assumptions, ranging from ritual and culture, to government and economics. That is how it can work at the forefront of government reform in Burma. This is what makes *vipassana* truly 'revolutionary'.

### Vipassana and ethicising the polity

*Vipassana* would appear to be an instrument for politicians to generate constructive awareness of their own sufferings, their own anger and their own fears in the face of repression and imprisonment. It permits them to see their misfortune as transitory, and their condition as impermanent. However, we have already seen, with the battle against evil in the political battlefield having been internalized, that *vipassana* is the weapon of choice to attain true freedom from the constraints of *loki*. This turns it into a potent political weapon.

As already noted, when the Buddha attained enlightenment it brought out the worst in Mara who, fearing his control over the world would be lessened by the outflow of people from his *loki* realm, attacked the Buddha with an enormous army throwing into the battle all possible weapons. These weapons were rendered harmless by his *metta* and *karuna*. The repeated attacks on these courageous politicians, who espouse non-violence, is a sign that the regime is unable to confine the implications of Buddhist practice for the liberation of Burma as a whole. The NLD, by all popular accounts, has mastered the high ground and has come to be seen as a guardian of the *lokuttara* realm; by implication the regime has become the equivalent of Mara's army. Wiser regimes would have avoided this development by timely transfer and sharing of power, leaving the opposition jointly responsible for any mistakes. However, by not seizing that opportunity, the regime now lives in the shadow of, what is from their point of view, a most formidable adversary. An adversary which has built up an unprecedented world-wide reputation for purity.

Seen in this light, *vipassana* has important social and political implications. This link is rarely made explicitly, because Burmese people see *vipassana* as an instrument which should not consciously be made to serve 'mundane' [*loki*] ends. However, in response to the question about what motivates her to meditate as a daily practice, Aung San Suu Kyi describes this less as a personal preference or indulgence than a personal duty to be performed compassionately for the benefit of others 'in the name of justice' and 'love' [C28]. In addition, she believes that awareness of impermanence prevents corruption [R11]. Meditation is not about the values that lie outside her family environment. It is about the qualities of honesty that she was taught during her youth, and helps protect against corruptibility [C29]. Were 'awareness' of greed to be cultivated more widely, a better society would result, for emphasis on material progress as the primary aim of society maintains the culture of greed and selfishness that causes the refugee crises in the world [C2].