

THE STAGES OF CHRISTIAN
 MYSTICISM AND BUDDHIST
 PURIFICATION: *INTERIOR CASTLE*
 OF ST TERESA OF ÁVILA AND THE
PATH OF PURIFICATION OF
 BUDDHAGHOSA

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There have been many attempts to define or describe the nature of mystical experience: some have argued for a uniform mystical goal, others have asserted the uniqueness of some particular type of mystical experience, still others have sought to erect a hierarchy of stages or levels of mystical experience either within one religion or across the boundaries of traditions.¹ No real consensus has yet been reached.

I am convinced that to think of a single transcendental mystical experience is in certain respects misleading. I would look at the phenomena of mysticism in terms of a mystical way, involving a series of experiences, some quite distinct from others. But I do not wish to prejudge whether mystical experience in different religious and cultural contexts can be regarded as identical. What I wish to argue is that there is considerable *similarity* in the structure and stages of the mystical way as conceived in different traditions. It is this question which I wish to explore here. I believe that this is possible without regard to the general question as to the nature and validity of mystical phenomena. Theistic religions tend to view the stages of the mystical ladder as more or less supernatural and involving some kind of contact with the divine. A psychologist might think in terms of a series of psychological experiences or altered states of consciousness without feeling the necessity of introducing any external criteria. In either case we are dealing with a series of experiences or perhaps transformations which can, I think, be examined in their own right.

The two examples chosen for this paper may seem at first sight far apart: on the one hand, a sixteenth-century Spanish sister, a devout and loyal Roman Catholic, a lady with little higher learning but great involvement in the practice of spiritual life; on the other, a fifth-century Buddhist scholar, probably not without experience on the Buddhist path, but perhaps not of its higher stages. One would not generally think that the two would have much in common. But this is just what seems to be of the greatest advantage to making a comparison. No one would doubt the existence of resemblances between Christian, Jewish and Muslim mystical traditions and explanations

for them through mutual influence would not be lacking. The same would hardly apply if resemblances are found between Theravāda Buddhism and Catholic Christianity. It is also particularly useful to cross the gap between theistic and non-theistic religions which is often portrayed as if it were a yawning gulf.

St Teresa was an extremely fine observational psychologist as is evident particularly in the *Interior Castle*, the work of her maturity. It contains a wealth of fine detail and exact description which is obviously the product of many years of introspection and careful recollection of her own experiences. She also developed considerable skill in giving spiritual guidance and herself drew on the experiences of her fellows in the Reformed Carmelite communities.

We have no comparable account from a Buddhist equally experienced in the path of his tradition, but in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification) we have at least an account of the Buddhist path which enjoys wide authority in the Theravāda tradition and appears to derive from sources based on genuine personal experience. Buddhaghosa was very conservative and a traditionalist. His work is little more than a systematization and reorganization of materials available to him. He can, therefore, be relied upon, but it will be useful to supplement his account of the Buddhist path with materials from the living tradition of Buddhist practice.

He begins the *Vism* with a verse from S:

A man of wisdom developing mind and wisdom founded on morality, a monk both energetic and skilful, he might untangle this tangle.²

A yogi, he says, needs to know the way to purification, i.e. to *nibbāna*. The Buddha taught various methods and Buddhaghosa gives a number of examples of how the path can be divided, but he points out that in the quoted verse it is divided under the headings of morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). He then elaborates the image. A man of natural intelligence, standing on firm ground and taking up a knife well sharpened on a stone, will be able by making an effort to disentangle a great tangle of bamboos. Similarly a person who is by nature intelligent, established on the firm ground of morality and taking up the knife of insight well sharpened on the stone of concentration with the hand of awareness will, by making an effort, be able to untangle the tangle of craving. Based on this image Buddhaghosa structured his whole *Vism* on this threefold division as well as upon a parallel sevenfold division.

St Theresa also starts with an image: 'I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle of a single diamond or of a very clear crystal in which there are many dwelling places just as in Heaven there are many mansions'

(T p. 7).³ We can hardly imagine ‘the great beauty of a soul and its great capacity’. It is beyond our comprehension, for God, ‘created us in His image and likeness’. We pay too little attention to our souls. ‘All our interest is centred in the rough setting of the diamond or the outer wall of the castle—that is to say in these bodies of ours...This castle...has many mansions, some above, others below, others at each side; and in the centre and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion where very secret things pass between God and the soul.’ As the simile is elaborated in the book it becomes clear that progression is envisaged from the lowest and outermost, perhaps in a spiral, to the central area where God dwells as King. St Teresa divides this into seven stages, but is at pains to point out that each stage has a very large number of dwelling places, making clear that the path can take a number of different forms, but herself making the division into seven stages the structural basis of the work.

It is probably safe to assume that the traditional Christian threefold division of the mystical way (outlined in the introductory paper of this collection), which would of course have been well known to St Teresa, partly underlies her account. Since the first member of the division is purification or *via purgativa*, it is natural to expect a measure of correspondence between the earlier mansions of the *Interior Castle* and Buddhaghosa’s initial section on morality. Neither work attempts to give a full account. St Teresa probably assumes that the reader will have read her other works which gave a fuller treatment of this topic and Buddhaghosa would no doubt refer to his commentaries to Pāli Nikāyas. St Teresa certainly assumes that her reader will know the distinction between mortal or venial sin and the state of grace and she says little about such matters as confession, repentance, penance or observation of the sacraments apart from stressing, at intervals, their value and importance. Equally the *Vism* assumes that the reader will know the detailed precepts of Buddhist training, the different types of *kamma* and the conditions necessary to constitute its full course (*kammamapatha*) which would be capable of bringing about an appropriate rebirth in due course. He often refers, in an abbreviated manner, to relevant texts and lists, assuming their knowledge on the part of the reader.

In fact there is a great deal in common between Buddhist *sīla* and Christian moral theory. Their differences could be accounted for by the basic difference between a theistic and non-theistic system. But then there is a great deal of variation on particular matters also within each of the two traditions. But setting aside general questions it will be more appropriate to examine what the two writers envisage as being of particular value in the spiritual life beyond simple avoidance of wrongdoing.

For the First Mansions St Teresa particularly stresses the need for self-knowledge, humility, courage and not giving way to doubts. To come to the Second Mansions withdrawal from unnecessary cares and business is

needed. Those who have reached the Second Mansions have begun to practise prayer, but are troubled by worldly habits and the bad example of friends. Their perseverance is stretched and they need a firm resolve, and association with others who lead a spiritual life is essential for them. Right attitude to spiritual practice is also important and expectations of sweetness in prayer and the like will be a serious obstacle; it is better to strive to conform one's will to the will of God and be intent on enduring trials. In the Third Mansions St Teresa describes people who have 'lived in an upright and well-ordered way, both of body and mind' (T p. 37); they avoid venial sins, love penance, spend hours in recollection, employ their time rightly, exercise themselves in works of charity to their neighbours, are well ordered in their conversation and dress and govern their households well. But they may experience dryness in their meditation due to excessive desire for spiritual favours and there is perhaps an underlying lack of humility and true detachment. St Teresa seems to imply that they think well of themselves and their behaviour. 'We should look at our own faults, not those of others', she writes, 'for many of those with well-ordered lives are shocked at everything' (T p. 43). Obedience to a good spiritual director is of great value to them.

Buddhaghosa's account of *sīla* is very elaborate, but only some of the more important features can be indicated here. The word is commonly translated by 'morality' or 'ethics', although its original meaning is more like 'nature' or 'character'. Buddhaghosa in fact cites this meaning in connection with canonical passages which refer to unskilful (*akusala*) *sīla*, but rejects it as the sense which the word has 'in the world' (Vism p. 14). The *sīla* of the Vism is different and not unskilful. To explain it he employs an invented etymology of *sīla* as meaning (1) concentrating (*samādhana*), i.e. stilling the mind and settling it so that undesirable states do not occur and (2) upholding (*upadhāraṇa*), i.e. acting as the support or foundation for skilful states. For the advantages of *sīla* he refers the reader to various canonical texts, e.g. A V, 1–2 describing skilful *sīlas* as having the goal and advantage of absence of remorse which itself has the goal and advantage of pleasant feeling (*pāmuḍḍa*). The series continues with joy, tranquility, happiness, concentration and various stages of insight, knowledge and vision of liberation.

The Vism goes on to give detailed series of numerical classifications of *sīla* from various points of view, partly to define particular types of observance, but mostly to suggest different degrees of observance or levels of practice. Three examples may suffice. (1) *Sīla* is twofold: with limits, in which case it will be broken for the sake of gain, fame, kinsmen, limb or life, or without limits, i.e. kept regardless of such considerations. (2) *Sīla* is threefold: under the overlordship (i) of self, i.e. undertaken to abandon what is not fitting for oneself, (ii) of other people, to avoid the censure of others, and (iii) of *dhamma*, to pay homage to the greatness of the *dhamma*. (3) It

is also threefold as inferior when based on things of the world, middling when undertaken for the sake of one's own liberation and superior if pursued for the sake of the liberation of all beings (Vism 10–16, 46f.).

The most important section on *sīla* is, for us, the last one as it describes its purifying (*vodāna*). It is achieved by not breaking the precepts of training, by penance in case of breach, by absence of sexual activity in any guise, by removal of mental defilements such as anger, jealousy or pride and by developing such qualities as having few wants, complete satisfaction, renunciation, being easily looked after and having generated effort (cf. M I, 13). One should also see the dangers in failure of *sīla* and the advantages of success in it.

Next follows a long section on the thirteen *dhutāṅgas*. According to Buddhaghosa they are the means to develop the above qualities of having few wants and the like in order to bring about the purifying of *sīla*. *Dhuta*, from a verb meaning to shake or wash, may refer to a person who is being washed or cleansed or it can be an abstract noun with the sense of washing or cleansing. *Aṅga*, literally a 'limb', is often used in contexts where it means a factor, constituent or attribute of something. The compound would therefore mean either 'attributes of the person being cleansed' or 'factors of cleansing'. Elaborating further, Buddhaghosa makes the role of the *dhutāṅgas* clear by a simile: *sīla* will be purified and vows successfully accomplished when washed clean of stains by the water of special qualities such as having few wants. The *dhutāṅgas* are, in effect, a series of special practices involving considerable renunciation and asceticism without going to extremes of self-mortification, e.g. eating only alms food, eating only one meal a day, possessing only the one set of three robes, living at the root of a tree or in the open air and sleeping without lying down. One Thai monk described it as 'camping meditation'. Buddhaghosa describes the particular advantages of each of the thirteen, making clear that the purpose is very much to induce a detached state free from expectations and preferences. He also discusses what kind of person they are suitable for. Most of these practices would have parallels in the Christian monastic tradition well-known to St Teresa. Indeed, she herself touches on some of them in her *Way of Perfection*.

Most of the points covered in the first three Mansions of St Teresa seem to be paralleled in Buddhaghosa, although not always obviously so at first sight: e.g. having few wants is used in ways equivalent to humility. The importance of not having expectations and conforming one's will with that of God do not appear explicitly but in various guises in the Vism.⁴ A modern teacher writes: 'Do not think of attaining the results of what you are doing—that they will be as you want them to be...As the old saying puts it, "Don't snatch at happiness before it is ripe", because the mind will not then be steadfast, knowledge will not be clear, diligence and energy will diminish, faith will deteriorate and the final result will be revulsion,

disheartenment, laziness and carelessness.' Conforming one's will to that of God may in practice amount, in one context, to complete satisfaction (*santutthi*) with whatever one gets, in another context to the knowledge that one is heir to one's deeds, in yet another to equipoise (*upekkhā*) and in still another to acting for the sake of *dhamma*. It should occasion no surprise if we find that it is not possible to match concepts on a one-for-one basis. Indeed, it would be very surprising if we could. What we may, and I believe do, find is parallel clusters of concepts functionally similar in their psychological effects.

It is clear that for Buddhaghosa and the whole Buddhist tradition there is an intimate connection between the three aspects of *sīla* and *paññā*, as is indeed illustrated in the well-known image of the eightfold path as an eight-spoked wheel. Equally, for St Teresa and the long tradition of Christian mysticism which precedes her the spiritual path is founded in purification. The present discussion of altered states of consciousness which sees them purely as the result of techniques or of genetic accident would, I suspect, have seemed trivial to both. For both of them the disciplining of mind and body was a *sine qua non*. One of the clearest explanations of this feature is given by St Augustine in *De Quantitate Animae*,⁵ probably following Neoplatonic sources, where he describes seven stages or levels of the soul. In the fourth stage begins 'a mighty struggle for purification' which he describes under the image of cleansing and healing the eye of the soul. At a later stage he points out that just as the injured eye should not be exposed to the full light of the sun before it is fully healed and grown strong, so also the eye of the soul should not be exposed to the light before it is fully cleansed and strengthened lest it may 'think there is in it not only no goodness but even great evil'.

It might be argued that there are forms of mysticism where this is not the case. No doubt St Teresa and Buddhaghosa would admit that there might be individual exceptions. St Teresa comments on occasional cases—exceptions and not the rule—which for her are gifts of the Lord and not for us to judge. They may be a special aid given to weaker brethren. For the Buddhist such cases would simply be the result of practice undertaken in previous lives and hence not real exceptions. For both of them such cases would merely mean that purification had been achieved in some other way and they would expect the effect to be a definite if not necessarily permanent improvement in character. Neither would admit to any kind of higher state without prior purification.

The objection that such views are merely a kind of dogmatism is, I suspect, mistaken. In some states of mind there is an intimate connection between our emotions and attitudes on the one hand and the form taken by the experience on the other. In dream states we can often find that attachment or fear related to a dream object can transform the dream into a nightmare. The same comes across from many accounts of altered states

under hallucinogenic drugs. It is known that the prior setting can have a crucial influence on the course taken by an LSD 'trip'. St Augustine was determined to avoid similar phenomena.

With the Fourth Mansions St Teresa describes the Prayer of Quiet and the Prayer of Recollection where the natural and the supernatural are mingled. These mansions are nearer the King's dwelling and very beautiful; so subtle are the things seen and heard in them that the mind cannot give a sufficiently lucid description of them to make them clear to the inexperienced, but those who enjoy such favours will easily understand. There is nothing ineffable about this stage. Difficulties in description are the same as those which normally accompany any attempt to describe inner experience.

Although St Teresa describes the Prayer of Recollection after the Prayer of Quiet, she comments that it almost invariably begins before it, meaning perhaps that it becomes deeper and fuller as the Prayer of Quiet becomes deeper and more frequent: 'Without the display of any human skill there seems gradually to be built a temple for the prayer already described; the senses and all external things seem gradually to lose their hold while the soul is regaining its lost control' (T p. 59). She uses the simile of the King's gentle call summoning inhabitants who have strayed from the castle to return. Then 'they become markedly conscious of a gentle interior shrinking' (T p. 60) like a hedgehog or tortoise retiring into itself, but while they can do so at will, 'with us it is not a question of our will'—it happens only by God's favour. She suggests that God grants it to those who are already leaving the things of the world.

At this point St Teresa remarks that one should not try to suppress thinking prior to obtaining the absorption, because that would bring more harm than profit. Our effort would get in the way. 'When His Majesty wishes the understanding to cease, He employs it in another manner' (T p. 63).

But the main part of the discussion of the Fourth Mansions is dedicated to the Prayer of Quiet. Its key feature is the experience of a new kind of religious emotion. Here St Teresa distinguishes between spiritual enjoyments (*contentos*) and spiritual joys (*quitos*) in a very careful and precise manner (T p. 46ff.). The former are pleasant emotions aroused by prayer and good works and stem from our own nature even if aided by grace and they are not fundamentally different from strong pleasant emotions in ordinary life, although they may be nobler. But they do not make one holier and may be even connected with the passions and lead then to intense results of an undesirable kind.

The joy or delight in God of the Prayer of Quiet is something quite different. To make the difference between the two clear, St Teresa uses a traditional expression: spiritual joys widen the heart whereas spiritual enjoyments narrow it. She further uses the simile of two fountains. One is

fed with water brought in conduits from a distance and is therefore noisy and requires labour. It represents the spiritual enjoyments which occur particularly in the first three Mansions. The other one draws directly from a spring, is noiseless and represents the spiritual joys of the Fourth Mansions. 'We experience the greatest peace, calm and sweetness in the inmost depth of our being', she writes. 'This joy does not appear to me to originate from the heart, but from some even more interior part, as it were from the depths... it appears to dilate and enlarge our whole interior and to benefit us in an inexplicable manner' (T p. 54-5).

All of this can be recognized by results: 'In the after effects and the subsequent behaviour one discerns the true value of the prayer; there is no better crucible to test it' (T p. 56). If this prayer occurs frequently, the soul will be strengthened in all virtues. St Teresa maintains that the soul is less constrained in the service of God: there is no fear of hell or servile fear of God; the soul has firm confidence in its destiny which is like a dilation or enlargement of the soul, as if the fountain were equipped with some contrivance so that its basin grew larger as the water flowed more freely. She warns, however, that if the health is poor, interior joy may lead to physical weakness and a kind of spiritual sleep or absorption. 'One person,' she writes, 'was in this state for eight hours; she was not unconscious nor was she conscious of anything concerning God' (T p. 66). This can easily lead to self-deception and is quite different from the genuine case in which there will be joy in the soul and the experience is not long-lasting, nor does it overcome the body or produce any exterior sensation.

In the Fifth Mansions St Teresa describes the Prayer of Union. 'Do not think it is a state, like the last, in which we dream; I say "dream", because there the soul seems to be, as it were, drowsy, so that it neither seems asleep nor feels awake. Here we are all asleep, and fast asleep, to the things of the world and to ourselves; in fact, for the short time that the condition lasts, the soul is as if without consciousness, for it has no power to think, even though it may desire to do so' (T p. 70). It is as 'a death full of delight'. Hands and feet cannot move and breathing either stops or occurs without the soul realizing it. 'Neither imagination nor memory nor understanding can hinder this blessing.' Essentially the soul seems to have left the body in order to abide more fully in God. In this state 'the soul can neither see nor hear nor understand'. The period is always short and seems to the soul even much shorter than it probably is' (T p. 73).

St Teresa acknowledges that there are many other kinds of union which she treats as being of diabolic origin. But they are quite different in quality. There is not the same delight and satisfaction of soul nor the same peace and joy.' The quality is very different. 'It is as if the one kind had to do with the grosser part of the body, and the other kind penetrated to the very marrow of the bones... What has been said will be sufficient for anyone who has experienced this; for there is a great difference [between the false and

the true].’ The clearest indication of the true union is the sense of certainty it leaves behind. ‘God implants himself in the interior of that soul in such a way that, when it returns to itself, it can in no way doubt that it was in God and God was in it...Although for years God may never grant it that favour again, it can neither forget it nor doubt that it has been received.’ St Teresa in fact cites here the doctrine that God is in all things ‘by presence and power and essence’. Indeed, if this certainty is absent, she would say that union of the whole soul with God has not been experienced.

She elaborates the account of the Prayer of Union with the simile of the silk worm—an ugly worm which has to die in order to become a beautiful butterfly. It must spin its cocoon which is compared to good works necessary to prepare for this favour. The image of the emergence of the little white butterfly seems intended to suggest a new purified state of the soul. But the result of union is intense dissatisfaction with worldly things which leads to a great increase in detachment. This results in fresh trials and renewed motivation together with a sense of exile and desire to leave the world. A deep grief arises which ‘without any effort on the soul’s part, and even at times without the soul wanting it, seems to tear it to pieces and grind it to powder’ (T p. 82). The intention seems to be to portray a further process of purification.

Unexpectedly St Teresa goes on to suggest that this Prayer of Union is not the real characteristic feature of the Fifth Mansions. The Lord has the power to enrich souls in many ways and bring them to these Mansions by many other paths than the short cut which has been described’ (T p. 87). In fact, the Prayer of Union proceeds from another, much more important union which consists in submitting one’s will to the will of God. This is shown by the two consequences of love of God and love of one’s neighbour. But then she returns again to the Prayer of Union and compares it to a meeting between a couple prior to becoming engaged. ‘In a secret way the soul sees who this spouse is that she is to take’ (T p. 94).

In the *Vism Buddhaghosa* specifically excludes discussion of unskilful and other types of *samādhi* on the grounds that there are too many kinds of them for it to be practical to discuss them all. He also excludes, at this stage, the discussion of transcendent *samādhi*, reserving it for a later section, and limits himself to the definition of *samādhi* as skilful one-pointedness of mind. But he devotes a large space to answering the question how *samādhi* is developed which can be summarized as follows.

Having already purified *sīla*, the meditator should remove himself from possible distractions and ‘approach the good friend, the giver of a meditation subject, and receive from among the forty meditation subjects one that suits his own temperament’ (*Vism* p. 89). Having ensured that the monastery in which he lives is suitable to develop concentration, he should sever any minor obstructions such as cutting nails or hair, mending robes,

cleaning the room and so on and ‘not overlook any of the detailed instructions for development’.

Comparing his procedures with those of St Teresa we do not seem to meet a clear equivalent of her Prayer of Recollection, although her description does recall Patañjali’s ‘withdrawal’ (*pratyāhāra*) and the simile of the tortoise is familiar to the Indian tradition. But Buddhaghosa does not describe the process of withdrawal as such. Yet the frequently mentioned guarding of the sense faculties and his description of *jhāna* do imply such a withdrawal. The latter is illustrated by the development of the nimitta in *kaṣiṇa* practice. It is the stage at which the object of meditation, previously external, becomes a fixed mental impression or an eidetic image and the external object can be discarded. This is clearly a feature of the process of withdrawing the mind within, though of different type than the one described by St Teresa. We may nevertheless assume that in practice the Prayer of Recollection would have been quite recognizable to Buddhaghosa as part of the process of developing *jhāna*.

With the Prayer of Quiet the case is much clearer. St Teresa’s description of the distinction between spiritual enjoyments and spiritual joys makes it quite clear that we are dealing with the *jhāna* factors of joy (*pīti*) and happiness, especially the former. I have dealt with this subject extensively elsewhere,⁶ so I will now only summarize the matter, Buddhist tradition distinguishes between *sāmisa-pīti* and *nirāmisa-pīti*, effectively ‘joy derived from the senses’ and ‘joy not derived from the senses’. The latter will only be fully developed at a stage in meditation when the hindrances are suppressed and the mind takes as its object a pure idea not in sensory form: the Buddhaghosa’s semblance *nimitta*. Technically the senses do not operate at this time, but in practice such moments are intermitted with some sensory perception. Buddhaghosa elaborates different stages in the development of this joy, of which the last is both more stable and free from excitation. So we can loosely affirm that the access concentration (*upacāra-samādhi*) which precedes full *jhāna* in the Vism account corresponds reasonably closely to St Teresa’s Prayer of Quiet without necessarily ruling out the possibility that there are also significant differences.

A modern account may make it clearer: ‘...by using one of these forms of *kammaṭṭhāna* for controlling the heart with mindfulness, one will gradually be able to curb the “outgoing exuberance” of the heart. Calm and happiness will then arise and develop, and there will be only one thing influencing the heart which will be a knowing of the heart alone without any disturbance or distraction, or there will be nothing which can irritate or disturb the heart to make it fall away from this state. This is the nature of happiness of heart freed from all vain imaginings and thought creations. When this state is attained, the person who is doing the practice will know that which is wondrous in his heart, the like of which he has never

encountered before. This is a deeply-felt state of happiness, more so than anything which he has previously experienced.⁷

To understand Buddhaghosa's account of the *jhānas* it is necessary first to remember the *abhidhamma* description of consciousness. This may be compared to one type of colour television screen in which the picture is actually built up by the activation of tiny dots of different colours one after another. Similarly, our conscious experience in which we appear simultaneously to see, hear, remember, feel, think, know is in fact to a large extent a construct. Most of these activities are not simultaneous but successive. They appear simultaneous only because we cannot discriminate them properly, just as we are not aware of the dots on the television screen as successive, but experience them as simultaneous.

So when Buddhaghosa declares that in *jhāna* absorption it is possible for the mind to remain for long periods with the semblance *nimitta* as its object, this is equivalent to saying that there is no articulated thought, no sense perception, no remembering the past and no awareness in the ordinary sense. The mind remains aware of the pure concept that is its object and is alert, lucid and qualitatively superior to ordinary consciousness. For Buddhists this is the consciousness of the Brahma gods.

It is quite clear that there is much similarity between that type of consciousness and St Teresa's Prayer of Union. Both are ecstatic trances involving immobility of the body and the suppression of many of the ordinary mental activities. Both are characterized by peace and joy. Both are also in a slightly ambiguous position in relation to the larger path: the Prayer of Union is really only a kind of short cut and not the direct route which is the union of the will with that of God, while *jhāna* is sometimes portrayed as a side-track in relation to the more direct development of insight. Many more similarities could be elaborated. One might perhaps sum up by saying that *jhāna* is certainly what St Teresa would call union, but whether she would call it union with God is perhaps another matter. For Buddhaghosa the Prayer of Union would perhaps be acceptable as a form of *jhāna*, but probably not as *lokunara* or transcendent *jhāna*.

In the third section of the *Vism* when he comes to describe how *paññā* is developed, Buddhaghosa introduces a new image. Taking the canonical division of the path into seven purifications (*visuddhi*), he describes the first two stages, purification of *sīla* and of mind, which are equivalent to the subject matter of the first two sections of the *Vism*, as the root of a plant or tree.

The traditional formulae of the Buddhist teaching such as the faculties, the four noble truths and dependent origination then constitute the soil in which the plant can grow. The body of the plant is made up of the five remaining purifications as stages in the development of insight. Possibly one reason for the image is to indicate that as the body of the plant grows up, so also the root will develop. This is certainly so for *sīla* which

improves as the higher stages of insight are developed and we may assume that equally *samādhi* will advance. It may therefore be no accident that the fifth purification involves a number of *jhāna*-like factors.

Beginning his account of wisdom, Buddhaghosa is careful to define the wisdom with which he is concerned as ‘insight knowledge connected with skilful consciousness’. After giving a numerical analysis of different kinds of wisdom in the same way as for the first two sections of the *Vism* he goes on to treat the doctrinal analyses which constitute the soil, mentioned above, in considerable detail. But we shall turn to the description of the actual development of insight.

It begins with the purification of view which is defined as seeing mental and physical phenomena exactly as they are and hence equivalent to insight knowledge which comprehends to a certain degree the First Noble Truth. The fourth purification, the one accomplished by crossing over doubt, is defined as comprehending the conditions which give rise to phenomena and hence as equivalent to understanding the Second Noble Truth. All of this might be expressed in terms of realizing the worthless and relative nature of ordinary existence and ceasing to value it—not merely conceptually but rather as an existential realization and letting go.

The fifth purification due to knowing and seeing what is path (*magga*) and what is not path is explained as equivalent to comprehending and developing the Fourth Noble Truth, i.e. the Eightfold Path. It is achieved by seeing the general characteristics of phenomena of impermanence, suffering and not-self. From this arises what is called young insight (*taruṇa-vipassanā*), equivalent to a direct perception of the constant rise and fall of phenomena. At this point the *Vism* introduces a description of the ten defilements of insight (*Vism* p. 633f.). Most of them are states which appear in themselves desirable: joy, knowledge, tranquility, happiness, mindfulness and equipoise are included in the last. Their danger is that the meditator may be overwhelmed by the intensity of these experiences and imagine that he has already obtained his goal. Only when he is able to distinguish these tempting but illusory states from the true path is the Fifth purification completed and only then can he continue his journey.

This may all seem far from St Teresa’s account of the Sixth Mansions. Yet a great deal of it is concerned with the problems of recognizing the exact nature of particular experiences. St Teresa gives very precise descriptions in order to differentiate between locutions, visions and raptures derived from God, those originating in the imagination and those coming from the devil. While one may not agree with her cosmology it would be foolish to dispute the accuracy of her perceptions or the genuineness of her experience. Her account is very detailed. No less than eighty of the 206 pages of the standard Spanish edition are taken up with the Sixth Mansions.

To summarize it in brief, these Mansions begin with severe trials, both internal and external. The soul has been wounded with love for the Spouse

and seeks more opportunity of being alone, trying so far as is possible, to someone in its state, to remove everything which can disturb it in this solitude' (T p. 99). But 'these very trials make it fly still higher' (T p. 107). The result is an awakening of the soul arising in various ways. One of these ways is by means of locutions which St Teresa discusses at length. In due course God confirms the Spiritual Betrothal by bestowing raptures. These may involve imaginary or intellectual visions or an experience of the flight of the soul. Sometimes the occurrence of raptures becomes very frequent and they cannot be avoided even in public. An uncontrollable jubilation may occur. 'It may last for a whole day and the soul goes about like one who has drunk a great deal, but not so much as to be deprived of his senses' (T p. 143). And not as someone in a state of hysterical excitement which St Teresa is also able to distinguish clearly. But such experiences also greatly increase the sense of sorrow for sin. Both intellectual and imaginary visions of the presence of Jesus may occur. Various truths may be revealed. It may be seen how this world 'is all lying and falsehood and as such cannot endure' (T p. 171). 'It is a very great truth that we have no good thing in ourselves, but only misery and nothingness; and anyone who fails to understand this is walking in falsehood' (ibid.). Finally she describes a kind of spiritual dying which precedes entry to the Seventh Mansion,

Only a little of this could be paralleled from the Vism, but probably nearly all could be found somewhere in the Buddhist tradition. By way of example let me cite a passage written by a contemporary meditation master: 'As for external *nimittas* which come and go, one may or may not know whether a *nimitta* is external or arises from oneself. But when one has become skilled with internal *nimittas* which arise from oneself, one will be able to know which are external *nimittas*. External *nimittas* are associated with many different happenings of people, animals, *pretas*, *bhūtas*, the son of a *deva*, a *devatā*, Indra or Brahma, any of which may at that time be associated with one's *samādhi*, even as one talks to a guest who comes on a visit.'⁸

The Vism continues with the sixth purification and gives a full account of the eight contemplation knowledges which represent the stage of strong insight (*balava-vipassanā*). Buddhaghosa explains the first seven knowledges with a simile. A man fishing with a net reaches into it and takes hold of a snake. Thinking it to be a fish, he is delighted. This is a figure for our delighting in *samsāra*. When he sees the three marks on the head of the poisonous snake, his delight changes to fear. This represents the first two contemplation knowledges which comprehend the three signs of impermanence, suffering and not-self and lead to our realizing that *samsāra* is a fearful place. Realizing the danger the man experiences revulsion towards the snake in his hand and feels a strong desire to be free from it. Similarly the meditator knowing the danger in compounded things experiences revulsion for them and arouses a strong desire for liberation.

The fisherman seeks to get free and unwraps the coils from his arm starting with the tail. This corresponds to the contemplations on emptiness (*suññatā*) which characterize the seventh contemplation knowledge. Finally the fisherman swings the snake two or three times around his head in order to weaken it and throws it away from him. He then scrambles back up on to dry land and stands looking back at the way he had come and thinking 'I am freed from a great snake'.

A modern master writes: 'Of the nine aspects [of insight knowledge]... not all of them occur to all aspirants. Even their occurrence does not necessarily take place in that order. Any one of the seven may take place, to be followed immediately by the eighth and the ninth.'⁹ It is not clear how far Buddhaghosa would agree with this, but the difference is perhaps fairly typical of the kind of variation one finds between the practice tradition and the theoretical literature.

The eighth contemplation, knowledge, is portrayed as a stage in which no further effort is required and equipoise is well established. It is perhaps worth mentioning that at this point the meditator can only wait for the right conditions to occur for the break-through to the supramundane. Buddhaghosa illustrates it with the simile of the land-finding crow which may be carried on board ship. If there is land in sight it will go towards it. If not, it will remain on board. Likewise if this knowledge sees *nibbāna*, the sphere of peace, it will abandon the whole process of conditioned things and leap forth to *nibbāna*. If not, it will continue with conditioned things as its object. One might note that this is the kind of psychological situation in which a theist would have recourse to notions of grace or supernatural favour. The Buddhist of course interprets it in terms of the accumulation of *pāramī* and the law of relational conditions. St Teresa's Sixth Mansions and the account given by Buddhaghosa of the sixth purification have at least this much in common: both describe an acute rejection of ordinary worldly life in order to make a further extraordinary leap.

For St Teresa this brings us to the Seventh Mansions where the soul arrives by means of an intellectual vision in which the Trinity is revealed: 'First of all the spirit becomes enkindled, as it were, by a cloud of the greatest brightness...these three Persons are distinct and yet, by a wonderful kind of knowledge which is given to it, the soul understands as most profound truth that all three Persons are one Substance and one Power and one Knowledge and one God alone; so that what we hold by Faith the soul may be said to grasp by sight, although nothing is seen by the eyes, either of the body or of the soul, for it is no imaginary vision' (T p. 182). Henceforward they are constantly present. The soul 'perceives quite clearly... that They are in the interior of its heart—in the very interior, in some very deep place'. Yet such a person is not entranced: 'In all that belongs to the service of God it is much more alert than before; and, when otherwise occupied, it rests in that happy companionship.' Even on occasions when

this experience is not 'realized so fully', some awareness remains. St Teresa compares it to being with companions in a very bright room when the shutters are closed. Even in the darkness one retains an awareness that the others are present. She also suggests that it is as if the soul is divided into two parts. One part remains undisturbed even when the other is concerned with trials and occupations.

St Teresa appears to distinguish the Seventh Mansion from the Spiritual Marriage itself which takes place at a later point. She writes: 'When granting this favour for the first time, His Majesty desires to reveal Himself to the soul through an imaginary vision of His most sacred Humanity' (T p. 185). She points out that this will take different forms for different people. It seems, however, that the more normal form of the Spiritual Marriage is an intellectual vision more subtle than the previous ones in which 'the Lord appears in this centre of the soul'. This is much more central, interior and stable. The difference between the Spiritual Marriage and the Spiritual Betrothal which occurs in the raptures of the Sixth Mansions is the same, says St Teresa, as that between two betrothed persons and 'two who cannot be separated any more'. For her then the Spiritual Marriage is not a mere union in which two things have been brought together but could be again separated. 'In this other favour of the Lord it is not so: the soul always remains with its God in that centre' (T p. 187). Again: 'It is like rain falling from the heavens into a river or spring; there is nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate the water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens.' She also gives as similes a tiny streamlet entering the sea and light entering a room through two large windows and becoming one inside it. 'It is here that the little butterfly of which we have spoken dies, and with the greatest joy, because Christ is now its life.' All this is perhaps best summed up when she declares: 'It is quite certain that, when we empty ourselves of all that is creature and detach ourselves from it for the love of God, that same Lord will fill us with Himself.' (T p. 188-99)

It is very interesting to find that Buddhaghosa's Seventh purification is also an experiential realization of fundamental doctrine, in this case the Four Noble Truths. At the moment when the path of stream-entry, or one of the higher paths, is aroused a number of things are accomplished: defilements are abandoned, some temporarily others permanently, conditioned things are relinquished as objects supporting the mind, *nibbāna* becomes the object of consciousness, the thirty-seven states connected with awakening become fixed (*vāsanā*) in the personal continuity and the Four Noble Truths are comprehended by a single knowledge. This amounts in a sense to the last achievement. 'By making cessation its object, path knowledge reaches, sees and pierces the Four Noble Truths' (Vism p. 690).

This is a highly sophisticated understanding of the objects of the four truths: With respect to the first truth one knows: '*dukkha* is the conditioned'; the second: 'arising is the cause of the conditioned'; the third:

'cessation is the unconditioned'; and the fourth: 'path is the means to the unconditioned'. Each of these knowledges performs a particular function. The first truth is to be comprehended, the second abandoned, the third realized and the fourth developed. According to Buddhaghosa a single path of knowledge accomplishes all these four functions in a single moment. 'Just as a lamp performs four functions simultaneously in a single moment—it burns the wick, dispels darkness, makes light appear and uses up the oil.' This is really quite a startling statement in *abhidhamma* terms and ought really to imply that the conditioned and the unconditioned are the same thing, although of course Buddhaghosa does not draw this conclusion. What it certainly does indicate is a state in which a knowledge arises which is permanently impressed in the mind and involves an awareness of the nature of the phenomenal world, abandonment of mental defilements, direct experience of the unconditioned and the structuring of consciousness in terms of the factors of the path and of awakening, etc. This is potentially accessible at all times.

I do not wish to argue that the Trinity and the Four Noble Truths are identical or even that one is a misunderstood form of the other. Both however are statements of the relationship between the ultimate and the temporal. They are therefore functionally similar in the present context. Both also involve reoriented or fundamentally changed outlook and some kind of restructuring of consciousness. With St Teresa's description of the Spiritual Marriage as such we are on less firm ground. Of course, the stream-enterer is the 'breast-born son of the Buddha', 'heir of *dhamma*', he has joined the family (*gotra*) of the Buddhas, and so on. Whether this amounts to anything similar is hard to assess. The difficulty is, however, that St Teresa does not really make clear the distinctive features of this stage.

With the effects of the two, however, we are on firmer ground. In the words of St Teresa, 'there is a forgetfulness of the self which really seems no longer to exist' (T p. 193). The motivation is renewed and there is 'great interior joy and much more peace'. Desire for union is partly replaced by desire to serve the Lord. Fear of death ceases and there is no longer desire for consolations and favours. 'These souls have a marked detachment from everything and a desire to be always either alone or busy with something that is to some soul's advantage.' Love is increased and if negligence occurs, the soul is awakened by God through an impulse from the interior of the soul which awakens the faculties. The soul is 'almost always in tranquility' and 'has an unwavering certainty that it comes from God'.

Compare this with the stream-enterer who is particularly characterized by the absence of the three fetters of *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, often translated as 'personality belief', of adherence to *sīla* and vows as a means to liberation and of doubt. Elaborated, this means that the view of self is removed, attachment to the body given up, ritualism is dropped and certainty arising

from seeing *nibbāna* is always present. Equally defilements in general are reduced and wrong actions of the more serious kind will no longer occur.

Many more detailed comparisons would be possible than are given here. To enumerate them would require a book rather than a paper. What I would wish to argue in this context is that there are between the accounts of St Teresa and Buddhaghosa a whole series of similarities. In particular the models of the path which both of them give run parallel. Each begins with purification, each moves on to states of interiorization, joy and peace, then to trance phenomena, then to rejection of the world combined with non-normal acquisitions of knowledge, and each finishes with a transformatory knowledge which remains permanently accessible. Although there are many differences of detail and a very different context, the general structure is remarkably similar.

NOTES

- 1 See for example S Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, London 1978; and P.G.Moore, 'Recent Studies of Mysticism', *Religion* III, no. 2 (1973), pp. 146–56.
- 2 S I, 13=p. 163; also *Udānavarga* v. 156.
- 3 P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, *Obras de Sta. Teresa de Jesus*, Burgos 1917. vol. IV, pp. 1–210. (= T, i.e. the text of *Interior Castle*.) I have mostly used the expression 'mansions' rather than 'dwelling places' as this is still the most familiar translation of *John XIV*, 2.
- 4 For example, in the above discussion of the advantages of the thirteen *dhutāngas*. It is not explicitly mentioned, but it is certainly part of the force of what Buddhaghosa is saying.
- 5 *The Greatness of the Soul*, tr. J.M.Colleran, London 1950, pp. 98–104. Nevertheless, Augustine does not repudiate this basic structure of the spiritual path when he moves further away from Neoplatonism. Elements of it are reformulated in various of his writings, e.g. *Serm.* 330.3.
- 6 'Buddhist *Jhāna*: Its nature and attainment according to the Pāli sources', *Religion* III (1973), pp. 115–31, esp. p. 120f.
- 7 Phra Mahā Boowa Nānasampanno, *Forest Dhamma*, tr. Bhikkhu Paññāvaddho, Bangkok 1973. p. 11. The excerpt included in Jack Kornfield, *Living Buddhist Masters*, Santa Cruz 1977, p. 169 omits part of this passage.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.
- 9 Phra Acharn Thate Desaransī, *Dhamma in Practice*, tr. Paññābhāsa Bhikkhu & Siri Buddhasukh, Bangkok 1977, p. 88; also p. 40 and p. 255. The list of nine is reached by including *saccānulomikañāna* as the ninth.