

“How to become Enlightened with Mandala Practice” by Dr Tadeusz Skorupski

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Summarised by Sheelagh James

Introducing his topic Dr Skorupski admitted that he would not be speaking specifically on how to become enlightened, by using mandala, nor speaking exclusively on mandala as it was too complex! Instead he would give a description of enlightenment in three stages, reflecting the three stages of Buddhist history, and drawing on the teachings of Buddha and his successors on enlightenment.



Firstly one needs a very good body and mind [he likened this to the basis for any attainment such as becoming a Formula One racing driver, but for the purpose of attaining enlightenment three eons was the time needed to perfect the body and mind! However he assured us that in the Buddhist Tantras a short cut was revealed allowing us to attain enlightenment in a single lifetime. Secondly one needs to have some knowledge of the Buddhist texts and Thirdly to have a path to follow

Dr Skorupski returned to the theme of the short cut to enlightenment explaining that Buddha had defined consciousness and taught that

- 1] the mind is luminous by nature, but can be defiled
- 2] living beings are contaminated or cleansed by contamination or cleansing of the mind
- 3] to purify the mind we should avoid all evil and do good deeds

The speaker explained that consciousness was identified with luminosity and also the mystical experience, and that Buddhism taught that there were two types of consciousness; cognitive, which experiences the external world, and latent, which is pre-programmed within us.

Early Buddhism tended to emphasise the cognitive consciousness getting defiled by entanglement in the world. Texts describe this consciousness as a particle within the heart, a small lump of blood in an aperture, and it could be luminous or not [if defiled] and even different colours according to temperament /degree of wisdom of the individual. Defilement was caused by greed, hatred, and delusion, but could be cleansed in the mystical fire of wisdom. Thus in early Buddhism the attainment of Nirvana/enlightenment was by purifying the mind in a process of detachment and becoming free from Karma. It was also believed that at the moment of death consciousness dissolved.

In later Mahayana Buddhism, while the focus was still on consciousness, it was held that evil and purity as such did not exist but were merely mental constructs and the focus was much more on the innate luminosity of consciousness, in itself pure and only appearing defiled because it can penetrate everything. Ultimate reality was said to be that which is without mental activity!

The practices recommended for achieving enlightenment were

- 1] to have awareness of enlightenment [understanding the basic latent consciousness to be already enlightened and luminous]
- 2] to train the cognitive consciousness to have the Buddha attributes, especially compassion.
- 3] after attaining enlightenment to then teach the path to other sentient beings [i.e. to teach the Buddhist 6 perfections, the 10 Bodhisattva stages etc.]

The path is described in the Buddhist Tantras and commentaries and includes the use of Mantra.

In returning to the theme of how to become enlightened, Dr Skorupski suggested Buddhism recommends one begin by accepting the Tantras but in order to get the perfected body and mind three eons could be by-passed by the Tantric practice taught by Buddha to his monks.

Firstly one had to envisage the mind as a lunar disc [luminous] The speaker reminded us of the schema of energy channels within the body and that consciousness was believed to reside in the heart. Then understand

that the body has parallels with the Universe [the microcosm reflects the macrocosm] and assert that “I am Buddha” [this is deity yoga or devatayoga] and envisage a Cosmic Buddha body within your own body [iconography is useful to help envisage the Buddha body] then progress to the assertion “I am you” and in mind assume the pose of the Buddha and perform the acts of the Buddha, as if teaching all sentient beings, but one also has to say to oneself “As a Buddha I do not exist” and empty oneself into the luminosity and selflessness.

It is at this point that envisaging Mandalas are useful; the Mandala is a diagram of a palace or an ideal Universe, a perfected world. In daily life what we think we see and what we actually see are different; the former being a world constructed in our conscious mind and veiled in ignorance [avidya]. A Mandala is also a construct but of an ideal world with Buddhas reflecting different aspects of enlightenment awareness. The elements of the Cosmos [fire, water, earth, air and the ether] are also depicted in Mandalas and we can transform the world in our consciousness.

One may also have the opportunity of enlightenment at the moment of dying, when the three levels of conscious understanding [objective, subjective, and subliminal] fuse together in a burst of enlightenment. The Tibetan Book of the Dead refers to this in the four stages of existence---1] the light phase, 2] the moment of death, 3] the moment of birth, and 4] the intermediate state.

Buddhism teaches that there are two kinds of death; coarse death [clinical], and conscious death, and as consciousness disengages from using the body and the senses there are four stages of what the speaker called the beautiful journey of subtle dissolution; 1] vision of white full moonlight, reflection of the external world 2] vision of sunrise or sunset, with emptiness as subjectivity is lost. 3] The vision of black-edged night in which there is no I, no you, no other world. 4] the primordial luminosity of consciousness, or Buddha state, and if one has the capacity to stay in this state one achieves enlightenment and moksha [liberation], but if there is a bad karmic residue then the stages reverse and during this time there are visions of Buddhas both wrathful and peaceful within Mandalas, and at this point a return to the luminosity and enlightenment may be possible or one continues the cycle of death and rebirth.

Summary by Sheelagh James