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WISDOM OF
BUDDHIST
TALES

Philosophical exercises

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Chapter 1 The man wounded by the arrow

? Should we try to know everything?

THERE WAS A MONK WHO WOULD THINK A LOT AND MEDITATE ON THE FOURTEEN DIFFICULT QUESTIONS SUCH AS "IS THE SELF ETERNAL OR TEMPORAL?", "IS THE WORLD FINITE OR INFINITE?", "ARE WE REALLY WISE WHILE ALIVE OR ONLY AFTER DEATH?" ETC. BUT HE COULD NOT PENETRATE SATISFACTORILY THESE PROBLEMS AND WAS BECOMING IMPATIENT WITH THEM.

ONE MORNING, TAKING HIS HABIT AND ALMS BOWL, HE WENT TO THE BUDDHA AND TOLD HIM:

- IF YOU CAN EXPLAIN THESE FOURTEEN DIFFICULT QUESTIONS TO ME AND SATISFY MY INTELLIGENCE, I WILL REMAIN YOUR DISCIPLE. IF YOU CANNOT EXPLAIN THEM TO ME, I WILL SEEK ANOTHER WAY.

THE BLESSED ONE ANSWERED HIM:

- IN THE BEGINNING, DID WE AGREE THAT IF I WOULD EXPLAIN THE FOURTEEN DIFFICULT QUESTIONS TO YOU, YOU WOULD BE MY DISCIPLE?

THE MONK REPLIED THAT THEY HAD NOT. THE BUDDHA CONTINUED:

- THEN HOW CAN YOU SAY TODAY THAT IF I DON'T EXPLAIN THEM TO YOU, YOU WILL NO LONGER BE MY DISCIPLE? AND DON'T YOU SEE THAT IT IS FOR THE MEN WHO ARE AFFLICTED BY OLD AGE, SICKNESS AND DEATH THAT I PREACH THE LAW, IN ORDER TO SAVE THEM? THESE FOURTEEN DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ARE SUBJECTS OF DISPUTE; THEY DO NOT BENEFIT THE LAW AND ARE ONLY VAIN DISCUSSIONS. WHY ARE YOU ASKING ME THESE QUESTIONS? ANYWAY, IF I WAS ANSWERING YOU, YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND. MOREOVER, MAD AS YOU ARE, HAVING ARRIVED AT THE TIME OF YOUR DEATH, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO FREE YOURSELF FROM BIRTH, OLD AGE, SICKNESS, AND DEATH ITSELF!

AS THE MONK DID NOT ANSWER, HE CONTINUED:

- LET ME TELL YOU A STORY.

A MAN WAS STRUCK BY A POISONED ARROW. A DOCTOR WAS CALLED IN. BUT WHEN THE DOCTOR ARRIVED, THE WOUNDED MAN CHALLENGED HIM: "I WON'T ALLOW YOU TO REMOVE THE ARROW UNTIL I KNOW YOUR CLAN, YOUR NAME, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR VILLAGE, YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER, AND YOUR AGE. FURTHERMORE, I WANT TO LEARN FROM WHICH MOUNTAIN THE ARROW COMES FROM, WHAT IS THE NATURE OF ITS WOOD AND FEATHERS, WHO MADE THE ARROWHEAD, AND WHAT IS THE METAL OF THE ARROWHEAD. THEN I WANT TO KNOW IF THE BOW IS MADE OF MOUNTAIN WOOD OR ANIMAL HORN. ALSO, I WANT TO KNOW WHERE THE REMEDY COMES FROM AND WHAT ITS NAME IS. AFTER I HAVE LEARNED ALL THESE THINGS, I WILL ALLOW YOU TO EXTRACT THE ARROW AND APPLY THE MEDICINE".

THE BUDDHA ASKED THE MONK:

- WILL THIS MAN BE ABLE TO KNOW ALL THESE THINGS AND ONLY THEN, LET THE ARROW BE REMOVED?

- OF COURSE NOT! ANSWERED THE MONK. IF HE HAD WAITED UNTIL HE KNEW EVERYTHING, HE WOULD HAVE DIED BEFORE THE OPERATION.

- YOU ARE LIKE HIM, SAID THE AWAKENED ONE, THE ARROW OF FALSE VIEWS, COATED WITH THE POISON OF LUST AND PRIDE, HAS PIERCED YOUR MIND. I WANT TO TEAR THIS ARROW FROM YOU, TO YOU WHO ARE MY DISCIPLE. BUT YOU REFUSE TO LET ME TAKE IT FROM

YOU, YOU WANT TO FIND OUT WHETHER THE "I" IS ETERNAL OR TEMPORAL, THE FINITE OR INFINITE WORLD, AND WHAT ELSE! YOU WILL NOT FIND WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR, BUT YOU WILL LOSE WISDOM. YOU WILL DIE LIKE AN ANIMAL AND BE THROWN INTO DARKNESS.

1.1 Impatience

The monk expresses his impatience: he wants to accumulate knowledge, to satisfy his curiosity, to not remain in uncertainty. But he is so full of rightness that he almost makes threats to the Buddha. Yet, if patience is a matter of reason, impatience is irrational. Unpleasant sensation, it is pain; it makes coercion and waiting difficult; its excess reveals an uneducated, infantile and compulsive personality. That is why the story calls this man a madman.

The name "patience" finds its root in the Latin word *pati*, which means to suffer, from which also derives the terms "patient": one who is sick, and "passion": strong emotional and undergone attraction. Patience is therefore not an easy virtue. On the one hand, it indicates an ability to bear with self-denial the difficulties, troubles, irritations, disappointments and other annoyances that life brings us every day. On the other hand, it indicates the ability to sustain a continuous effort, to persist in a task or a project despite obstacles. In comparison, the first sense is passive, the second is active, but they both refer to a certain fortitude.

Patience is a necessity, both for thinking, as Descartes recommends, which warns us against haste, and for taking the right action, which presupposes calm and prudence. Unfortunately, the human being is a greedy being who too often wants much and more, generally immediately. He can hardly bear frustration. Like all virtues, patience requires a work on oneself, which initially implies suffering. "Patience and the fullness of time do more than force or fury," says La Fontaine. Yet, time is both a condition and an obstacle to any achievement. Like any limit or rule of the game, it represents a challenge: it is a question of learning how to manage it, by accepting and transforming it.

Patience is mainly a problem in the midst of boredom and pain, not in moments of pleasure and interest. Therefore, we find two ways to work on patience: on the one hand, through effort and coercion, by struggling with ourselves, and on the other hand, through our ability to enjoy the present moment, learning to enjoy tranquillity, without the fear of boredom. But this is not easy, because we live in a world of permanent demands, where we dread any challenge to our "natural" feverishness.

1.2 Knowledge

As we have seen, our hero wants to know. He wants to accumulate knowledge, to satisfy his curiosity and to be reassured about the issues that trouble him. Although knowledge is a term that generally takes on a positive connotation, in the history of philosophy we periodically find criticism of this activity, this form of desire or concern.

The positive connotation of knowledge is due to several factors. He who knows is intelligent - which is one of the most valued qualities of the human being - and can influence others and the world. Knowledge makes the person important, if only because others need him or her, or because he or she is comparatively "stronger": it is therefore a factor of ambition and social success. Knowledge is useful, since it allows us to get what we want, to solve problems, to

act more efficiently, etc. It is also reassuring, since uncertainty worries us, we feel the need to control things. So, what are the criticisms of this knowledge that seems so wonderful? First of all, it is limitless and never fulfilled. It therefore engenders obsession and unhappiness, even despair. The classic example of Dr Faust is the archetypal representation of it. He has read "everything", he knows "everything", and yet he finds himself frustrated, to the point where he is ready to sell his soul to the devil to get out of this slump, in order to find freedom and happiness. Knowledge, like wealth or power, provokes a kind of inextinguishable thirst from which springs a need for primitive accumulation that leads to its own loss. The second problem is the uselessness of knowledge, which is found especially in the field of theoretical knowledge, but also in those people who store up a lot of useless details, an activity that is ultimately anxiety-provoking.

Mental space is thus limited by the obsessive dimension of the mind. Certainly, knowledge is power, but it can also be terribly paralyzing by its heaviness.

The third problem is that of the confusion between the essential and the secondary, the accidental as Aristotle calls it. He who wants to know at all costs no longer knows how to distinguish quantity from quality, the superficial from the substantial, he lacks critical thinking, he is fascinated by detail, by ignorance or by coquetry. The fourth problem is the danger of voyeurism, or unhealthy curiosity, in which the coveted object of knowledge in fact engenders a corruption of the soul, both because one seeks it and because one finds it. It can only satisfy immediate pleasure like any other addiction. Finally, the fifth problem is the inability to accept life as it is. A kind of uncontrolled impulse of control and explanation invades the soul which no longer knows how to enjoy the present moment. As for the hero of our story, we recognize several of these problems in him: a great sense of insecurity about his ignorance, a loss of critical perspective as the Buddha shows him, since he does not care about the essential or usefulness of knowledge, and an inability to accept the uncertainty of his own existence, so many faults or vices that lead him away from a concern for truth. According to the analogy of the story, he will die before his questions have been answered, when he should have been concerned with true, effective and substantial knowledge.

Science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul, Montaigne tells us. Without knowing oneself, knowledge is illusory, Socrates tells us. I may have all the science of the mysteries, but if I lack love, I am nothing, says St Paul. The Buddha is not the only one to criticize vain knowledge.

1.3 The law (dharma)

The law is a fundamental principle of Buddhist thinking. It is also referred to as the Wheel of Law, or the law of conditionality. It is said that the Buddha, sitting under the bodhi (awakening or intelligence) tree, saw the truth of the world: everything is change, everything is process, in the material world as well as in the psychic or other world. Nothing is eternal, everything is moving, everything is therefore conditioned. This absence of permanence applies to every being as to every non-being, if there is indeed an opposition. Everything appears, everything disappears, according to the context, according to the conditions. Nevertheless, this does not mean that arbitrariness and acausality reign; chance is not what drives change. There is a principle of sufficient reason, as Leibniz calls it, where phenomena depend on the conditions

that generate them: phenomena condition others, in a natural way, and not transcendental or miraculous.

The Buddha therefore perceives not only the truth of change, but also the law of conditionality, a fundamental principle of Buddhism. He sees it both in a pictorial form: the Wheel, huge, as vast as the cosmos, constantly rotating, embracing the totality of conditioned existence, and in a conceptual form: the law of conditionality. The more the mind is awakened, the more it penetrates this principle.

It should be made clear that all this does not engender an implacable fatalism, for there are two forms or orders of conditionality, the opposite of each other, which operate in the universe and thus in human life. On the one hand the cyclic or reactive order, on the other hand the spiral or progressive order. In the first operates a causal process of phenomena of generation and destruction, such as the birth and death of beings and things, as well as actions and reactions between pairs of opposing factors, physical or psychological, such as pleasure and pain, happiness and misery, loss and gain. In the second operates a gradual, reflexive progression of increase or improvement. The opposites combine and feed off each other rather than simply opposing or annihilating each other. Hence the possibility of experiencing happiness, joy, bliss or ecstasy.

The Awakened One invites our hero to be interested in this profound truth, in this law, rather than in secondary questions which are only "subjects of dispute and vain discussions." So many idle reflections that he will not care about when the time of death comes, because they chain him up instead of freeing him.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why does the monk blackmail the Buddha?
- Why does the Buddha call the monk mad?
- Why does the Buddha tell the monk that he "will die like an animal"?
- Does the man really want to heal?
- Why are the monk's questions difficult?
- Does the monk behave like a true disciple?
- Why does the monk want answers to his questions?
- What is the monk's problem, according to the Buddha?
- Why does the monk think the Buddha can answer the questions?

Reflection

- ★ Is it possible to answer difficult questions satisfactorily?
- ★ Is the human being an unsatisfied animal?
- ★ Is patience a virtue?
- ★ Should we try to know everything?
- ★ Can knowledge be vain?
- ★ Why do we want answers to all our questions?

- ★ Does knowledge necessarily lead to happiness?
- ★ Why is uncertainty painful for us?
- ★ Can we really be satisfied?
- ★ Why do we need to know?
- ★ Is knowledge the most important human value out of all?

Chapter 2 Mokelu the stupid

? Should we share knowledge?

FIVE HUNDRED MONKS WERE LIVING IN A TEMPLE LOCATED ABOUT TEN KILOMETRES FROM THE CITY. ONE OF THEM, WHO WAS OLDER, CALLED MOKELU, WAS KNOWN FOR HIS STUPIDITY. NO MATTER HOW HARD THEY TRIED TO TEACH HIM SOMETHING, HE WOULD NEVER UNDERSTAND. HE COULD NOT EVEN RECITE A SINGLE PROVERB. THE OTHERS WOULD LOOK DOWN ON HIM. NO ONE LIKED TO BE WITH HIM, MOKELU WAS VERY LONELY.

ONE DAY, THE KING INVITED THE MONKS TO HIS PALACE FOR A RECEPTION. MOKELU, ASHAMED OF HIS STUPIDITY, WAS AFRAID TO JOIN THE GATHERING AND DID NOT GO. BUT AS SOON AS EVERYONE LEFT, HE FELT VERY SAD. HE RESENTED EVERYONE AND HIMSELF. HE FOUND A ROPE AND WENT UNDER A BIG TREE TO END HIS LIFE.

AT THAT MOMENT, THE BUDDHA APPEARED IN FRONT OF HIM AND SCOLDED HIM ROUGHLY:
- MOKELU, INSTEAD OF SERIOUSLY EDUCATING YOURSELF AND DISCOVERING YOUR SHORTCOMINGS, YOU ARE DOING SOMETHING REALLY STUPID.

MOKELU, AMAZED, WAS SPEECHLESS. THE AWAKENED ONE CONTINUED:

- IN YOUR PREVIOUS LIFE, YOU WERE A PRACTICIAN WITH VAST AND DEEP KNOWLEDGE. BUT YOU DIDN'T WANT TO TEACH IT TO OTHERS. YOU WERE ARROGANT AND SCOLDED WHOEVER APPROACHED YOU. THAT IS WHY, AS A RESULT, YOU ARE STUPID IN THIS LIFE. YOU CANNOT BLAME OTHERS FOR THIS. YOU JUST HAVE TO REPENT OF YOUR BAD DEEDS. BESIDES, ENDING YOUR LIFE IS NOT ENDING YOUR CRIMES.

THE LORD'S WORDS TOUCHED MOKELU, HE FELT EVEN MORE STUPID AND ASHAMED. HE KNELT DOWN AND REPENTED OF ALL HIS MISDEEDS. THEN THE BUDDHA PATIENTLY TAUGHT MOKELU THE LAW AND INSPIRED HIS MIND. MOKELU AWAKENED AND HIS WISDOM WAS ENLIGHTENED. THE ENLIGHTENED ONE KNEW THAT MOKELU WAS AWAKENED AND COMMANDED HIM TO JOIN THE KING'S GATHERING TO TEACH THE LAW TO THE PEOPLE PRESENT. HE ADDED:

- YOU HAD FIVE HUNDRED DISCIPLES IN YOUR FORMER LIFE. THEY ARE THE ONES IN THE KING'S PALACE. THEN, GO THERE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE BECAUSE THEY ARE WAITING FOR YOUR GUIDANCE.

AFTER BIDDING FAREWELL TO BUDDHA, MOKELU ARRIVED AT THE PALACE. THE FEAST WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN. MOKELU SAW AN EMPTY SEAT ON THE STAGE. HE SETTLED THERE WITHOUT ANY HESITATION. WHEN THEY SAW HIS BEHAVIOUR, EVERYONE THOUGHT THAT MOKELU HAD GONE MAD. BUT NO ONE SAID A WORD, ESPECIALLY NOT IN FRONT OF THE KING.

ONCE THE MEAL WAS OVER, WITHOUT ANY FEAR, MOKELU STOOD UP AND SOLEMNLY BEGAN TO TEACH THE LAW TO THE FIVE HUNDRED MONKS AND ALL THOSE PRESENT AT THE GATHERING, IN A SOFT AND TOUCHING VOICE. EVERYONE ADMIRER HIM. BUT THE FIVE HUNDRED MONKS ALSO FELT SHAME. THEY HAD THOUGHT THAT MOKELU WAS STUPID. IN REALITY, HE WAS AN AWAKENED BEING, BUT HE DID NOT KNOW IT EITHER.

2.1 Stupidity

Mokelu is reputed stupid, there lies his drama. Stupid comes from stupor, which indicates a profound astonishment, a state in which the intellectual faculties seem to be paralyzed, making any sensible action impossible. Thus, the stupid, struck by stupor, has a clumsy and burdensome mind. He is either dumb, moron, absurd or senseless. The stupid person is slow, at least regarding mental processes. By extension, things - words, actions or objects - are said to be stupid, when they are meaningless, useless, when they resist action, when their presence or existence is annoying or even a nuisance. Therefore, it should not be surprising if what is considered stupid is put aside. It takes a great deal of patience or self-sacrifice to interact with stupidity. If it is something, you do not want it. If it is a person, it is only out of sacrifice, respect for human dignity, or love that one will relate to that person.

It is therefore not surprising if Mokelu can learn or understand nothing, or so little, and if everyone looks down on him and no one likes to be in his company. Of course, we can be surprised by the lack of compassion of all these monks, but the story wants above all to make us live the drama of the stupid person. For human being, the difference is disturbing. The stupid person, in her inability to reach the expected common level, is considered as a kind of handicapped person. And the one who cannot do as the group does causes certain uneasiness, an impression of ugliness or disgust invades the others, who de facto reject him or her. It is therefore not surprising if Mokelu, aware of this rejection and of his own stupidity, does not accompany the others to the court. And, of course, everyone easily accommodates his absence.

This is the experience of loneliness that Mokelu must live to better understand the error of his former life, a karmic fault that he is now atoning for. He pays for this hierarchical and contemptuous vision that he used to maintain, typical of many intellectuals, where the one who "knows" lacks compassion and patience, looking at others from the height of his superb. So, we can think that he is finally learning empathy to escape his own stupidity.

2.2 Teaching

Teaching is at the heart of the Buddhist path, as it is about coming out of ignorance to become "enlightened". It is about instructing, giving information and precepts to someone who is ignorant, about warning, training and informing. Through these lessons, it is also a question of educating him, that is to say, of developing his moral and intellectual faculties.

As we can see from these definitions, this practice is a difficult task, because it is complex. Nevertheless, it is a duty on the part of the one who holds the information. It is a kind of implicit moral obligation in relation to knowledge, which is not designed for retention, as is often the case. Except for special reasons founded in reason, it is reprehensible to not educate others. Knowledge must be vivifying and vivified, that is, it must be operational and transmitted. This is all the more the case in a community whose goal is the mutual education of each and every one. Thus, the more knowledgeable a person is, the more ethically obliged he is to divulge his knowledge.

Two factors oppose this natural teaching function. The first is the fact that "Knowing is being able", as the saying goes. Power of manipulation, superiority, detention, so many reasons to give oneself importance. The second is the fact that to truly teach requires patience, empathy

and compassion. If only because not everyone has the same capacity of learning: some are slow or obtuse, or even voluntarily resist learning. Therefore, the teacher must take it upon himself and be generous so as not to become irritated or remain aloof. He can easily either abstain from teaching, or teach in a formal and distant way, without really caring about others, as is often the case.

This is what seems to have happened with Mokelu in his previous life. He had a "vast and deep knowledge" of Buddhist practice, which is not a secondary knowledge since it allows everyone to lead a life worthy of the name and to spare themselves unnecessary suffering. However, he was a "very arrogant" master who "scolded the others". That is to say, he was not very generous, he expressed his irritation with the difficulties of others, abusing his power, scorning those who had problems. This "false" teaching, which was nevertheless quite common among "scholars", was to be his only retribution for becoming visibly "stupid" - which he was already doing anyway by behaving as he did - so that he could really become aware of his behaviour. Thus, this episode of life taught him to teach.

2.3 Shame

For Sartre, shame is provoked by the discovery of oneself through the other: it is seeing oneself in the eyes of others. "I just made a clumsy or vulgar gesture... Someone was there and saw me. Suddenly I realize how vulgar my gesture is and I am ashamed." In other words, being ashamed is an awareness. In this sense, if Mokelu is ashamed in his new life, there is progress, for two reasons. The first one is that others are now present to him, they become an integral part of his existence. He sees himself by the yardstick of universality, he has a more real vision of his being and his functioning. The second is that he realizes his own stupidity, which was not visible to him in his previous life, but which was no less real.

Pride here is a pretension that necessarily implies contempt, since it is a question of comparing oneself: putting down one's neighbour and being smug go hand in hand. The conclusion or implication that is imposed, as with any excess, is precisely its opposite: a feeling of nothingness or shame invades the soul of the proud at the first opportunity.

This is why Mokelu, arrogant and impatient in his first life, therefore unable to teach, is punished in the second, without understanding what happens to him. As so often when we suffer from our shortcomings or mistakes, we do not understand the link or the causal relationship. In this case, the Buddha is the one who has to explain it to him, once our hero, a poor victim of himself, reaches the bottom of the abyss. He feels so stupid, miserable worm, ashamed even of his shame, that he is ready to kill himself, a gesture of impotence and rage if there is one. Following the advice of the Awakened One, all that remains is for him to repent and learn from his mistakes. From then on, he is no longer ashamed of himself, but simply of his faults, which he knows can be repaired once they have been recognized. Then shame - and pride -, as a feeling of illegitimacy of his being, can no longer reach him. He then ceases to be stupid, he can progress in wisdom and knowledge.

Certainly, shame is one of the conditions of man's moral nature: it is based on the experience of evil within oneself, in the face of an ideal. But it is also one of those sad passions that Spinoza denounces, which weakens our power to be. It indicates a rejection of one's person and nature, a fear of existing, a lack of love or self-respect, an exacerbated concern for appearances.

 A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN
Comprehension

- Why does Mokelu not understand anything?
- Why do the monks reject Mokelu?
- Is Mokelu a mirror for the other monks?
- Is Mokelu right to be ashamed of his stupidity?
- Why is Mokelu angry with everyone and himself?
- Does Mokelu really want to commit suicide?
- Why does Buddha scold Mokelu?
- Why does Buddha want Mokelu to repent for his mistakes?
- Why do the monks say nothing when Mokelu sits on the dais?
- What does Mokelu have to understand in the end?

Reflection

- ☆ Why cannot we stand stupidity?
- ☆ Why are we ashamed of being stupid?
- ☆ Are we all stupid?
- ☆ Why do we not like people different from us?
- ☆ Is everyone free to decide their own life and death?
- ☆ Do we have to share our knowledge with others?
- ☆ Should we always repent of our "bad" actions?
- ☆ Is it possible to accept ourselves as we are, without regret or judgment?
- ☆ Is the one who knows superior to others?

Chapter 3 Glints in the jar

? Is identity an illusion?

THE SON OF A NOTABLE HAD JUST MARRIED; THE TWO SPOUSES LOVED AND ESTEEMED EACH OTHER VERY MUCH. THE HUSBAND SAID TO HIS WIFE: "GO TO THE KITCHEN AND TAKE SOME WINE FROM THE JAR THAT YOU WILL BRING SO THAT WE CAN TOAST." THE WIFE WENT IN AND OPENED THE JAR. THE WOMAN WENT IN AND OPENED THE JAR AND SHE SAW A GLINT OF HERSELF IN THE JAR AND THOUGHT THAT THERE WAS ANOTHER WOMAN THERE. SHE WAS VERY ANGRY AND RETURNED TO HER HUSBAND: "YOU ALREADY HAD A WIFE, BUT YOU HID HER IN THE JAR AND THEN CAME TO ASK ME TO MARRY YOU." THE HUSBAND HIMSELF CAME TO THE KITCHEN TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON. HE OPENED THE AMPHORA AND SAW HIS OWN IMAGE. HE WENT BACK TO HIS WIFE AND BECAME ANGRY WITH HER, ACCUSING HER OF HIDING A MAN IN THE AMPHORA. THEY WERE BOTH ANGRY WITH EACH OTHER, EACH OF THEM CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE RIGHT.

IN THE MEANTIME, A BRAHMIN CAME TO VISIT THE COUPLE. HE ASKED WHAT THE CAUSE OF THE ARGUMENT WAS, AND THEN WENT TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON: HE TOO SAW HIS OWN IMAGE. HE GREW IRRITATED WITH THE SON OF THE NOTABLE WHO, HE THOUGHT, HAD HIDDEN ONE OF HIS FRIENDS IN THE AMPHORA AND THEN PRETENDED TO QUARREL WITH HIS WIFE. HE IMMEDIATELY LEFT. LATER, A NUN TO WHOM THE NOBLEMAN MADE OFFERINGS CAME AND WAS INFORMED OF THEIR QUARREL. SHE WANTED TO FIND OUT FOR HERSELF, WAS SURPRISED TO SEE A NUN IN THE JAR, AND WITHDREW VERY ANGRY AS WELL.

A WISE MAN WHO WAS PASSING BY, CURIOUS ABOUT THE STORY, WANTED TO LOOK, BUT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WAS A SIMPLE GLINT. HE SIGHED: "THE MEN OF THIS WORLD, IGNORANT AND STUPID, TAKE THE EMPTINESS FOR REALITY." SO, HE CALLED THE HUSBAND AND WIFE TO COME AND WATCH TOGETHER. HE SAID: "I WILL BRING OUT FOR YOU THE PEOPLE IN THE JAR. "HE THEN TOOK A LARGE STONE AND BROKE THE JAR. WHEN THE WINE HAD FLOWED OUT, THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT. IMMEDIATELY, THE INTELLIGENCE OF THESE TWO PEOPLE UNRAVELLED; THEY UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY HAD BEEN DEALING WITH A VULGAR GLINT OF THEMSELVES, AND EACH OF THEM FELT CONFUSED.

3.1 Projection

The different characters in the story, as they look into the liquid in the jar, look at themselves, and yet they do not seem to see each other. This phenomenon, quite common, is called projection. It is the fact of looking at the other or something else, of seeing oneself there, without however recognizing oneself. That is to say, without seeing that one sees himself, without realizing that it is his own glint. This is a specific case of subjectivity, particularly excessive. This one consists in projecting one's being, one's way of being, on the objects and beings that surround us. Instead of perceiving the external reality, we project on it our knowledge, our desires, our fears, our hopes, etc., without being aware of it. Subjectivity is blind, insofar as we are not aware of our own myopia or blindness. Projection is a specific case, particularly intense, in that we see our own person in others or in the things we observe. The world then becomes a kind of mirror, the expression of our exacerbated egocentrism. This phenomenon is very common in anyone with whom we have a strong relationship.

A typical example that commonly expresses this phenomenon of projection is the classic "If I was you..." or "In your place...". Anthropomorphism, which consists in attributing human qualities to animals, God or objects, even in metaphorical form, is another example of it.

Fear is also very susceptible to projection: we fear from others precisely what we would be able to do to them, without admitting it to ourselves. As in the present story, where the characters see themselves in the jar without realizing it, we see ourselves in others without being aware of it. Of course, this can be seen as a kind of empathy or sympathy with reality, as a natural tendency to see ourselves everywhere in the world and particularly in others. But it can also be seen as the expression of an excessive egocentrism, an excessive thirst to exist, or an anguish that makes us constantly seek confirmation of our presence in the world.

3.2 Anger

The various characters in the story become angry, especially the wife and husband, out of jealousy because they feel they have been cheated. This anger is intensified by the anger of the other, each one thinking that he or she is right about the other's mistake. The Brahmin becomes angry because he thinks that the husband is deceitful, disloyal to his wife, showing blatant duplicity: one could say that this man who acts as a wise official is outraged at the immorality of such a husband. As for the nun, it is undoubtedly through misunderstanding of the situation that she is offended: she wonders what this "other" nun is doing.

Beyond the differences in the nature or reasons for the anger, we find a similar point: the anchoring in pain. Anger is that disordered movement of the soul that we undergo when we are painfully aroused against what hurts us or what we think hurts us. This violent effervescence of the mind invades us when we think that what is happening to us is unfair, bad or threatening. We would not be angry if something in us was not already happening, if pain was not already present, at least in endemic form.

We can thus affirm that anger reveals our being. Thus, whoever claims to explain an unfortunate gesture by anger or anger speaks out of bad faith. For he attributes an external cause to what in fact emanates from himself. It is the banal confusion between the efficient cause and the formal or final one, between condition and origin, that makes us speak this way. Therefore, if we cannot bear to be deceived, if we want so much to be right, if immorality scandalizes us, if incomprehension makes us unbearable, this constitutes above all our own fragility. And if we can agree that these different situations pose a real problem, it is something different from giving legitimacy to the anger they might generate. We can consider this to be a deliberate choice: that of taking the side of anger, which is never more than the expression of a feeling of fragility and powerlessness. In the absolute, anger has its *raison d'être*: the instinctive refusal to admit the unacceptable.

3.3 Identity

Identity is what makes us say "I," a singular being who speaks on behalf of himself and his own integrity, and not "he," as if he were someone else or "us," as if we were posing a plurality of subjects or a general process. This is true for the husband, the wife, the Brahmin or the nun. This identity is what makes it possible to say: I have been deceived, I am right, I am morally responsible, I understand or I do not understand, etc. But primarily, it allows us to say: I am, I

exist, and to attribute various predicates, especially positive ones, such as intelligence, wealth, popularity or beauty, or attributes or functions, such as being a scholar, a leader or a doctor.

Because of this identity, there is identification, possession, protection, and therefore fears and hopes. My identity is me, we think and say, rightly or wrongly, without much doubt. Indeed, why should we not be considered simply as part of a whole, be it nature, the universe or humanity? Why not conceive of ourselves as a flow of consciousness, to which many experiences relate, without giving this flow any kind of substantiality? Why not think of these various predicates, attributes or functions of our being as accidents, devoid of any particular status, such as that of our sex or our character? Why not see in what we do or say the consequence of a biological, family or social inheritance? In other words, why take pride or shame in what we are, what we do, what we say? It seems that the various feelings of possession, pride, fear, hope or despair related to our identity create more problems than anything else. Of course, since "we are," let us play the game. I have to play the game with myself for a lifetime. The only problem is that we end up believing too much; we are affected, in every sense of the word, by what Sartre calls the "spirit of seriousness". We believe, strongly, in this image we make. We are ready to make all the sacrifices, all the pains, all the cruelties, to satisfy this tutelary god. For an immediate satisfaction, that of recognition, by fear of being devoid of value, by this compulsive desire to see in others a small flash of admiration or jealousy, in order to protect this lengthily fabricated figure, permanently threatened with dissolution.

3.4 Illusion (māyā)

A hermit passing by cannot take this dispute at face value. The reason may be that it is not "normal" to get angry and argue in a home. There must be some misdeal or misunderstanding. So, he will look at the body of the offence and quickly understand the cause of the problem. He glimpses the illusion that generates such anger and uproar, and wants to show its derisory dimension. When the spirits "take the emptiness for reality", filling the illusion, speech becomes impotent. It is then a question of taking action, of demonstrating in a tangible way, so that reality finally erupts.

By brutally breaking the vase, by violently spreading its contents, illusion is dissolved: the simple optical effect where each person only saw their own phantasms, where each perceived the ghost of their own fears, suddenly vanishes. Where everyone saw something, there is nothing left, only a few pieces of pottery and a big puddle. Reality appears in all its paltriness.

This is what Buddhists call emptiness, which is the bottomless pit of Buddhist thought. It is incompatible both with the notion of an indissoluble individual soul and with the belief in an absolute and eternal principle, or the postulate of an objective and irreducible reality, be it material or something else. It represents the absence of proper nature of all phenomena, conditioned or unconditioned. Vacuity also refers to the absolute: nirvana, the only ultimate reality, is also devoid of any substance. Nevertheless, it can also be considered a relative or conditional vacuity: while affirming the absence of a permanent substratum of phenomena, they are given a nominal and conventional nature, susceptible of knowledge. The great Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna, founder of the Madhyamaka, or "Middle Way", deepens the idea of the "law of mutual production": things, empty of their own nature, are constantly being generated and transformed into a kind of derealized phenomenology, where he establishes that even causal

necessity is illusory. Such a perspective could be qualified as ontological scepticism, as opposed to an objectivist realism, or a nihilism that would deny all reality. This is how the wise man calls "stupid" people who "take the void for reality", demonstrating to them by his destructive gesture the illusion in which they are immersed.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why does the couple quarrel so easily?
- Can we say that the two spouses "were esteeming each other very much"?
- Why do the characters see their glint rather than the wine?
- Why do the Brahmin and the nun get angry?
- Why do the different characters not recognize each other in their glint?
- How does the wise man know that it is a simple glint?
- How did the couple's intelligence "unravel"?
- Why is the couple confused at the end of the story?
- Why is each of the characters convinced that he is right?
- Was it necessary to break the jar in order to raise consciousness?

Reflection

- ☆ Is Descartes right to say: "Good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed"?
- ☆ What prevails in the human being, reason or emotions?
- ☆ What is the main cause of anger?
- ☆ Why do we let appearances deceive us?
- ☆ Why do we get irritated rather than trying to understand?
- ☆ Does love make people susceptible?
- ☆ Can wisdom be a form of violence?
- ☆ What defines reality?
- ☆ Do we know how to recognize ourselves?
- ☆ Do we project ourselves in everything we perceive?

Chapter 4 Kandata and the spider

? Are we responsible for what happens to us?

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A MAN NAMED KANDATA, A COLD-HEARTED CRIMINAL OF RARE CRUELTY. THIEF, SWINDLER, MANIPULATOR, MURDERER, HE HAD FINALLY DIED A VIOLENT DEATH IN HIS TURN. HE FOUND HIMSELF IN THE DARKNESS OF HELL, SOMETIMES ROTTING IN A LAKE OF BLOOD, SOMETIMES WALKING BAREFOOT ON A THORNY MOUNTAIN. AROUND HIM, THE DARKNESS SPREAD TO INFINITY, IN AN OCEAN OF SUFFERING.

HIGHER UP, SOMEWHERE IN THE SKY, A SPIDER SAW HIM. IT WENT TO FIND THE BUDDHA, THE ABSOLUTE BEING OF LIGHT AND AWAKENING, AND SAID TO HIM:

- KANDATA DESERVES TO BE SAVED. BY HIS ONE GOOD DEED, ONE DAY HE SAVED THE TINY INSECT THAT I AM. INSTEAD OF CRUSHING ME, HE LEFT ME ALIVE.

THE AWAKENED ONE DID NOT ANSWER BUT NODDED HIS HEAD. THEN THE LITTLE SPIDER WOVE A LONG THREAD AND LET IT GO DOWN ALONG THE WELL, DEEP INTO THE ABYSS.

KANDATA, BOWING UNDER THE WEIGHT OF PAIN, WAS SUFFERING WITH ALL HIS SOUL, WHEN SUDDENLY, RAISING HIS HEAD, HE SAW A GLEAM. A TINY SPECK OF LIGHT SHONE UP THERE. HE ALSO SAW A THIN SILVER THREAD, GLOWING IN THE DARKNESS. WITH HIS HEART FULL OF HOPE, HE BURST OUT LAUGHING AND EXCLAIMED:

- I FINALLY FOUND A WAY TO GET OUT OF HERE!

HE PULLED ON THE WIRE, WHICH SEEMED STRANGELY STRONG. HE BEGAN TO PULL HIMSELF UP WITH THE STRENGTH OF HIS ARMS, TOWARDS THE LUMINOUS POINT THAT COULD BE SEEN IN THE DISTANCE.

- I'LL MAKE IT, THE BANDIT THOUGHT TO HIMSELF, NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO STOP ME. THIS IS MY CHANCE TO ESCAPE FROM THIS HELL!

HE CLIMBED UP, LITTLE BY LITTLE, ENDURING THE EFFORT WITH DIFFICULTY. BUT THE BRIGHT SPOT STILL SEEMED TOO FAR AWAY TO HIM.

- I WILL MAKE IT! I'LL MAKE IT! HE REPEATED, GNASHING HIS TEETH. FASTER! FASTER! I HAVE TO!

SUDDENLY, HE WAS OVERCOME BY DOUBT.

- HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN CLIMBING? WILL THIS WIRE RESIST MY WEIGHT THROUGHOUT THE CLIMB? WILL I SUCCEED IN GOING ALL THE WAY TO THE END?

HE WAS OVERCOME WITH TERRIBLE ANGUISH AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME, LOOKED DOWN. HE WAS TERRIFIED BY WHAT HE SAW. MANY OTHERS, LIKE HIM ATTRACTED BY THE LIGHT, HAD CLUMPED TOGETHER AND WERE FIGHTING TO CATCH THE THREAD. SOME WERE ALREADY STARTING TO CLIMB. HE CRIED OUT IN FURY:

- I WAS THE FIRST ONE TO SEE IT! STOP, DON'T COME ANY CLOSER, GO BACK DOWN! BUT THE OTHERS, DESPERATE, ENRAGED, HARDLY LISTENED TO HIM. THEIR NUMBERS WERE GROWING. KANDATA HASTENED UP TO CLIMB MORE AND MORE QUICKLY, WHEN HE SUDDENLY REALIZED THAT ANOTHER HAD CAUGHT UP WITH HIM. FURIOUS, FULL OF HATRED, HE KICKED HIM HARD AND KNOCKED HIM BACK TO THE DARKNESS.

- GOOD FOR YOU! HE SHOUTED. THIS WIRE IS MINE!

THE BUDDHA SAW HIS ACTION, HIS HEART FILLED WITH COMPASSION AND SADNESS, BUT HE DID NOT SPEAK.

NEVERTHELESS, THE SPIDER UNDERSTOOD AND CUT THE THREAD STRAIGHT.

4.1 Nature and determination

Kandata seems condemned to himself. "Hunt the natural, it comes back at a gallop", says the French proverb. Thus, no matter what we do, despite all our efforts or all our pretensions, there would be within us a kind of substantial reality, insurmountable and unchangeable: it would be impossible to cheat nor to change. And if we deviate from this existential modality, it is only in a forced, provisional or accidental way. We will always end up returning to our primary and constitutive nature.

Obviously, we can revolt against such an unshakeable or irreversible vision of things. For it leaves little room for free will, for the desire for perfectibility or even for individual responsibility, since things are never what they are. No credit would be given to the personal dimension, to individual initiative, since everything would be given from the outset, be it a biological, hereditary or random determination, a cultural determination, provided by the social context, or a family determination, where our education would take precedence overall. As a criticism of such determinism, we can quote here the famous sentence of Jean-Paul Sartre: "Man is condemned to be free", which is opposed to the traditional essentialist vision, as in Leibniz, for whom "God determined the essence of each man and then let him act freely in conformity with the demands of his essence". For the existentialist philosopher, our actions determine us, because existence precedes the essence, and not the opposite. He develops the concept of the "for-self", which does not mean so much that we get what we hope for, but at least that we determine by ourselves what we want, what he calls the "project", even if it does not succeed. Nevertheless, such a vision, in which man radically determines himself, as opposed to being determined by God, society or the order of the world, is relatively occidental and recent.

4.2 Salvation

Generally speaking, the concept of salvation initially indicates a state of danger, misfortune or suffering from which we might escape. Salvation can be physical, in the sense of preserving health, well-being or life from a potential or actual threat. It can be moral, when facing the danger of corruption and decay. It may be psychological, where there is an imbalance, disorder or pain. Spiritual salvation oscillates between a moral and psychological dimension, around the question of meaning. It can also be of an existential order, insofar as these various aspects affect the totality of our present being, but also because they determine our future existence, or our future existences - especially in a religious context where the particular existence is not confined to the present life.

In this story, the hero is in hell, punished for all the misdeeds he has committed during his life. For a seemingly small good deed - he saved a spider - he has a chance to be saved. Unfortunately, the weight of violence in him prevents him from taking advantage of this opportunity; he will probably remain in hell forever. A hell that, however, is nothing more than the evil within him. Various religions, or philosophies, propose various "last hope". We will speak of an immediate happiness that embodies a kind of eternity. Or we will evoke a de facto eternity, beyond carnal death, or even beyond separate existence, since it is a question of joining the divinity, or of merging into it. In the Christian scheme, much like the Egyptian scheme of weighing on the scales of Osiris, souls are examined at the end of their lives, as if their passage

on earth was a test. If they have lived morally well, they will live forever in happiness, either in paradise or by returning to earth at the end of time. The wicked will be punished in various ways, including suffering in hell. It is therefore a matter of following the precepts of the good, the sacred commandments.

Ancient Judaism had a collective conception of salvation: if the chosen people of Israel fulfil its role in the covenant with their God, then they will live forever in joy and abundance. In the ancient Greek vision, as found in Plato, the individual must remember his heavenly nature, forgotten in the corruption of the body, in order to recover his true identity and return to the origin. Something similar is found in the East, where Hinduism and Buddhism define salvation as the end of the cycle of rebirth, existence being mainly suffering. One escapes samsara to reach nirvana: through awareness, separate existence joins the absolute. This means becoming aware in order to be saved, to awaken, which is much more possible in Buddhism than in Hinduism, which is more fatalistic. For Islam, salvation comes mainly through the recognition of the oneness and omnipotence of Allah, as well as obedience to rituals, the five "pillars" as prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad. The believer will go to Paradise where he will be rewarded with eternal enjoyment. As for the more secular doctrines, salvation - or happiness - is generally confined to the context of a unique existence, limited by immediate bodily existence. It operates mainly through reason, since passions or emotions are generally synonymous with suffering. Not that passions should be ignored or annihilated, but they should be educated by reason. Stoic ataraxy, equanimity or peace of mind, is an example of this, or the morality for Kant who states that happiness is to be earned. Reason can be a path of acceptance of reality, of enjoyment of the moment, or of intellectual and spiritual fulfilment. This salvation can be articulated collectively through, among other things, scientific progress, social justice, political ideals or patriotic union.

4.3 Karma and punishment

Karma is a crucial element of Buddhist philosophy. This concept expresses on the one hand the totality of human activities, under its various expressions: physical, emotional, intellectual, moral, etc., which includes on the other hand what this activity generates: its multiple consequences, objective and subjective, material and psychological, everything that comes from our actions. Karma can therefore be considered as encompassing a good part of human existence, in itself and as causality. Then, undoubtedly in a more preponderant way, this term designates a kind of fundamental moral sanction, positive or negative, intrinsic and immanent to the totality of the existent. Karma is opposed to dharma, in the sense that the latter represents the doctrine of what is necessarily accomplished, the law as what represents the order of the world, its internal mechanics, whereas karma rather indicates a kind of deviance, error or distortion, in particular by a perverse attachment to existence that manifests itself through feelings, thoughts, actions or other psychological or existential subjective tendencies. Perfection or awakening, according to Buddhist philosophy, therefore consists in separating or distancing dharma from karma, which is possible by suppressing at best the manifestations of life, the attachment to things, in particular by taking refuge in contemplation. He who has extinguished all thirst, all activity, all passion, will then triumph over karma: he will no longer have to fear being reborn, he will not be condemned to a new existence. He will have succeeded in emerging

from the circle of transmigration: he will have entered into nirvana. If, on the contrary, he fails to emerge from the process of cause and effect, he will be born again. And his works, actions, thoughts and feelings, actions and feelings, i.e., his karma, will determine the conditions of his new life.

Thus, the past is considered to influence the present and the future, whether physical, moral, existential or social. Karma thus represents a kind of immanent, relatively implacable principle of justice, and through it we will have to account for the totality of the decisions of our present and past lives, through the consequences that these will have on our future life or lives. Each of our deviations from the law will thus naturally be "rewarded" or "expiated". We can correct our former faults by acting in the present: to do so, we must be attentive to our bad tendencies so as not to be overtaken by them. But obviously, despite "his good deed", Kandata has a very heavy karma!

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Did Kandata get what he deserved?
- Why is Kandata so cruel?
- Is Kandata condemned to remain cruel?
- Is Kandata aware of what he is?
- Why does Kandata doubt at some point?
- Is Kandata responsible for what happens to him?
- Is the spider naive?
- Could Buddha guess what was going to happen?
- Why does Buddha accept the proposal of the spider?
- Does Kandata represent the human being in general?

Reflection

- ☆ Is salvation exclusively a religious concept?
- ☆ Does salvation depend on oneself or on an external intervention?
- ☆ Can things be other than what they are?
- ☆ Are we condemned to ourselves?
- ☆ Do we determine our actions or are we determined by them?
- ☆ Does "natural" justice exist?
- ☆ Are there good beings and bad beings?
- ☆ Is morality in contradiction with survival instinct?
- ☆ Can a man be inhuman?
- ☆ Should compassion be without limits?

Chapter 5 You are right too

? Can we be certain of what we say?

THE MASTER HAD JUST FINISHED A COMPLICATED EXPLANATION OF DIFFICULT CONCEPTS. A LONG SILENCE ENSUED. A FEW MONKS VENTURED TO SPEAK, UNSURE OF THEMSELVES, AND THEN SLOWLY GREW BOLDER IN EXPRESSING OPINIONS ABOUT WHAT HAD BEEN SAID, MAINLY SEEKING THE MASTER'S ENDORSEMENT OF WHAT THEY HAD UNDERSTOOD. SINCE THE MASTER WAS SILENT, EACH OF THOSE WHO SPOKE ENDED UP CATEGORICALLY AFFIRMING THE TRUTHFULNESS OF WHAT HE HAD SAID. FINALLY, A LIVELY THEORETICAL DISPUTE BROKE OUT BETWEEN TWO PARTICULARLY STUBBORN AND VERBOSE MONKS.

SINCE NEITHER OF THEM COULD CONVINCE HIS OPPONENT, THEY AGREED TO REFER TO "THE AUTHORITY". THE FIRST MONK EXPLAINED HIS ARGUMENT AND ASKED THE MASTER WHAT HE THOUGHT OF IT.

AFTER A TIME OF HESITATION, THE LATTER ANSWERED LACONICALLY: "INDEED, YOU ARE RIGHT." THE YOUNG MAN WAS DELIGHTED WITH THIS ANSWER, MADE A KNOWING FACE, GLANCED VICTORIOUSLY AT HIS OPPONENT AND WALKED OUT OF THE ROOM. THE SECOND MONK, SOMEWHAT DISTURBED, THEN STARTED A LONG DEMONSTRATION TO EXPLAIN HIS VISION OF THINGS TO THE MASTER. THE MASTER LISTENED PATIENTLY TO HIM UNTIL THE END, HESITATED FOR A MOMENT, AND THEN CONCLUDED IN THE SAME WAY: "YOU ARE RIGHT, OF COURSE." THE MONK, REASSURED, WAS DELIGHTED AND LEFT THE ROOM IMMEDIATELY. A THIRD MONK, WHO HAD FOLLOWED THE WHOLE DISCUSSION WITHOUT SAYING ANYTHING, VERY SURPRISED BY THE TWO SUCCESSIVE AND CONTRADICTORY APPROVALS OF THE MASTER, CHALLENGED HIM: "I DON'T UNDERSTAND, MASTER. THE TWO THESES YOU HAVE HEARD ARE TOTALLY OPPOSED. THEY CANNOT BE TRUE AT THE SAME TIME! HOW CAN YOU TELL THESE TWO MONKS THAT THEY ARE BOTH RIGHT?" THE MASTER LOOKED AT HIM WITH A SMILE, NODDED HIS HEAD, AND SAID, "YOU ARE RIGHT TOO".

5.1 Conjecture

Among the various distinctions he identifies in the modalities of judgment, Kant opposes the assertoric, the apodictic and the problematic. The apodictic is a matter of necessity, it can be proven. The problematic is stated as a mere possibility. The assertoric is an unspecified statement, without a modal term such as "necessarily" or "possibly". Nevertheless, very often, what is stated assertively in the current discourse, without any particular determination, is understood apodictically by its authors, or even their listeners. The discourse is taken categorically, as a universal and unconditional truth, yet it comes under no necessity whatsoever. A closer look at these judgments often reveals that they are in fact dependent on very specific conditions. One can take as a symbolic and practical example of this problem the famous " $2 + 2 = 4$ ", a classical example of certainty, proposition or equation which is only true within the framework of a very specific mathematical basis.

It is for this reason that many philosophers, in the lineage of Plato, consider that most statements are in fact of a problematic nature, that is to say that they represent only hypotheses, conjectures. This is precisely what allows the master of history to affirm one thing and its

opposite. Such a change of perspective is not only a formal and abstract concern, for it is loaded with consequences. The first is on the level of attitude. Just like the first two monks in this story, the desire to have the "last word" easily leads us to the worst excesses, because our image is at stake, and we are sometimes ready to go to terrible extremes to avoid feeling "humiliated". It is for this reason that Montaigne encourages us to take certain oratory precautions or to distance ourselves when we assert something, because claims of certainty push us to the worst situations.

The second consequence is of a more cognitive nature. It consists in always trying to identify the presuppositions or postulates that condition a discourse, to problematize them in order to grasp their limits. Thus, when we disagree with another person, rather than trying to convince them of the validity of our assertions or wanting to show them their error at all costs, we will instead try to establish the differences in foundation or approach that led to this divergence of conclusions, in order to apprehend new intuitions and to advance thinking, in a collaborative manner.

5.2 Logic

The third monk is surprised by the master's speech, which does not seem logical to him because he contradicts himself. Logic is the science or art of reasoning. Thus, is logical a person who reasons well. Or a proposal, a discourse constructed according to the rules of art, which does not transgress its interdictions. Classical logic, whose origin goes back to Aristotle, is based on four basic rules. The principle of identity, which establishes that a thing is what it is, and not something else. The principle of non-contradiction, which prohibits affirming one thing and its opposite in the same way. The principle of the excluded third party, which determines that between two contrary propositions, there is no intermediary. One can also draw from this the idea that between two contrary propositions, in a necessary way, one is true, the other false. And the principle of sufficient reason which asserts that nothing is without reason: everything that is has a reason to be, everything that is not has a reason not to be, whether or not one knows these reasons.

Science - or thinking - has over time concocted other conceptions of logic, such as dialectic or "fuzzy" logic. The first takes up apparently contradictory propositions and bases itself on their contradictions in order to bring out new propositions. The second rejects the principle of bivalence, where one can only answer "yes or no" to include proportions, degrees. But it is no less true that classical logic remains very operative, especially in the articulation of common sense.

Logic, more than particular reasoning, refers to a set of rules and principles ruling the construction of thinking, establishing the possibility of elaborating an argumentation or a demonstration. From this point of view, not only are there not so many different logics, but moreover, most of the time we are not aware of the logic we are using. Either its use is intuitive and very vague, or it is non-existent.

5.3 Dialectic

When the master answers the third monk's objection, "You are right too," we are as surprised as his interlocutor. But contrary to him, we laugh at this apparent joke, because we are not

part of the discussion. If we have to analyse this surprising remark, let us say that it doubly transgresses the logical principle of non-contradiction. On the one hand by tacitly affirming one thing and its opposite, on the other hand by confirming the legitimacy of logic while denying it.

As we mentioned earlier, it is possible to criticize or go beyond classical logic without falling into arbitrariness and nonsense. This is what the art of dialectics, among others, claims, which in a sense disregards the rules of logic, for example by asserting that one thing at a time "is what it is" and "is what it is not". It is not that dialectic ignores logic, quite the contrary, but it pretends to sublimate its rules, to go beyond them, by integrating them into a wider framework. It is not a question of confusing dialectic with a simple rhetorical or unsubstantial production, as various philosophers such as Kant will accuse it.

The dialectical posture presupposes a kind of unity of being or thinking that means that any opposition is ever merely an appearance, a provisional or reduced situation, whether it is a question of going beyond to glimpse a transcendent or more "real" reality. Any antinomy is then the means to reach a more fundamental truth, any antagonism leads or can lead to a realization or accomplishment of the being or the world. Logic is then a tool of common sense that must be relativized. For Hegel, the work of negativity, which questions all evidence of thinking, is the condition of emergence or access to the absolute. For Marx, the contradictory forces at work in history make human progress possible: dialectical materialism. In general, in any dialectical process, it is thus a question of putting into abyss the thinking subject, any postulate or certainty, in order to really implement thinking, to realize the self, to become fully aware of the world or to transform it.

5.4 The Middle Way (Madhyamaka)

One of the key elements of the doctrine preached by the Buddha is called "the Middle Way". One of the preoccupations of this teaching is to propose a practice that tries to escape from outrageous theorizing and argumentative accumulation, in order to ensure above all, the deliverance from existence and the pains that accompany it. Only this salvation interests him. But minds get lost and exhausted in trying to determine the objective truth of things, starting with the reality of the "I", to know whether it exists within itself, or whether it remains identical between its various existences. To these metaphysical questions, the Buddha always offers as an answer a kind of "neither yes nor no", which can be considered a form of agnosticism. In the same way, he refuses both the complacency of the common opinion and the excesses of the ascetics, again proposing a middle way.

Nevertheless, among the disciples of the doctrine, various schools and tendencies have appeared, which interpret the master in different ways. While claiming to solve many problems left in suspense, they engage in great theoretical debates, even polemical. Around the third century, a great thinker, Nagarjuna, sometimes called the second Buddha, appeared who tried to restore the original vigour of Buddhist thought by founding the school of Madhyamika, or "followers of the average opinion".

Above all, Nagarjuna criticizes and denies by absurd the philosophical systems that claim to express the ultimate truth through language. He shows how words imprison both the content and those who are part of it, both cognitively and emotionally. It is based on the one hand

on the idea of the emptiness of things in themselves or of the substance itself, and on the law of mutual production that relativizes all specific existence as a permanent transformation, embedded in a matrix of conditionality, caught in a system of causes and effects. Nagarjuna demonstrates eight fundamental negations grouped into four pairs of opposites. Thus, there is neither cessation nor production of anything, neither annihilation nor eternity, neither unity nor multiplicity, neither coming nor going. From then on, time is only an illusion, as is movement and immobility. Thus, simultaneously, everything that exists at the same time is and is not.

Among the famous quotes from this philosopher that enlighten us about his thought, we find the following two. "If I defended a thesis, then I would fall into logical errors. But I am not defending any thesis, therefore I am not in error. "Everything is fine as it seems, nothing as it seems. Both as it seems and not as it seems." This is precisely the message of the master of this story.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why do the monks want to have the approval of the master?
- Why is the silence of the master interpreted as acquiescence?
- Why does each monk want to convince his opponent?
- Why does the first monk take a knowing face?
- Why does the master tell the two monks that they are both right?
- Does the master lack logic?
- Why does the master smile when answering the third monk?
- Did the master make fun of the monks?
- What does the master want to accomplish?
- Is the third monk different from the first two?

Reflection

- ★ Can one legitimately say, "to each one his own truth"?
- ★ Is certainty a guarantee of truth?
- ★ Is it enough to prove something for it to be true?
- ★ Is it by persuading others that one is right?
- ★ Can one be both right and wrong at the same time?
- ★ Can two opposing theses be true simultaneously?
- ★ Is all discourse problematic?
- ★ Can there be several types of logic?
- ★ Are logic and dialectic opposed?
- ★ Can a proposition be absolutely true?

Chapter 6 Angulimala

? Can we escape our destiny?

THERE WAS A BRAHMIN, ADVISER TO THE KING, WHO HAD A SON. BECAUSE THIS MAN WAS SUPERSTITIOUS, HE CAREFULLY EXAMINED VARIOUS OMENS TO FIND OUT WHAT WOULD BECOME OF HIS HEIR, SO THAT ALL COULD BE DONE IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY. BUT HE LEARNED WITH HORROR THAT HIS OFFSPRING WOULD BECOME VERY VIOLENT. TO PREVENT THIS DISASTER, HE NAMED HIS SON AHIMSAKA, WHICH MEANS INNOCENT. MOREOVER, HE TAUGHT HIM TO BE OBEDIENT AT ALL TIMES, SO AS NOT TO TRANSGRESS THE RULES OF DECORUM. THE CHILD LEARNED RESPECT, HE WAS AN ASSIDUOUS AND BRILLIANT STUDENT, TO THE GREAT SATISFACTION OF HIS PARENTS. WHEN HE WAS OLD ENOUGH TO STUDY, THEY DECIDED TO SEND HIM AWAY TO A REPUTABLE GURU. BEFORE LEAVING, HIS FATHER REMINDED HIM TO OBEY HIS MASTER'S INSTRUCTIONS.

HE LIVED UP TO HIS FAMILY'S EXPECTATIONS, AS HE PROVED TO BE A DISCIPLINED AND HARD-WORKING STUDENT. ALAS, THIS ENDED UP ATTRACTING THE JEALOUSY OF HIS CLASSMATES, WHO SAW HIM AS THE TEACHER'S FAVOURITE. THEY CRITICIZED HIS SCRUPULOUS OBEDIENCE, HIS CONSTANT CONCERN TO MEET THE MASTER'S DESIRES. TO GET REVENGE, THEY LET THE RUMOUR SPREAD THAT AHIMSAKA, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HIS FAMILY'S POSITION, WANTED TO GET RID OF THE GURU AND TAKE HIS PLACE AS SOON AS HE FINISHED HIS STUDIES, AND THAT MOREOVER HE HAD SUCCEEDED IN SEDUCING THE MASTER'S WIFE.

THE TRADITION WAS THAT, TO END HIS STUDIES, EACH STUDENT OFFERED HIS MASTER AN IMPORTANT GIFT, CORRESPONDING TO THE MASTER'S WISH. TO TAKE REVENGE ON THIS "AMBITIOUS" STUDENT, THE GURU DECIDED TO ASK HIM FOR A HORRIBLE TRIBUTE. HE SAID, "YOU WILL KILL A THOUSAND PEOPLE AND BRING ME THEIR RIGHT THUMB. "HE HOPED THAT HIS STUDENT WOULD BE KILLED IN THIS WAY.

THIS ORDER CAUSED A REAL UPROAR IN AHIMSAKA'S MIND, BUT HE HAD BEEN TRAINED TO OBEY, SO HE SET OUT TO ACCOMPLISH THE TASK HE HAD BEEN GIVEN. HE WENT TO LIVE IN THE FOREST, KILLING THOSE WHO PASSED BY, WHETHER MERCHANTS OR PILGRIMS, ENTERING THE VILLAGES WHEN HE DID NOT FIND ANY VICTIM. HE NEVER STOLE THEIR MONEY OR POSSESSIONS, BUT HE STORED THEIR THUMBS IN A CAVE WHERE HE HAD MADE HIS SHELTER. UNFORTUNATELY, ANIMALS ATE THE STORED THUMBS. SO, FROM NOW ON AHIMSAKA DECIDED TO WEAR THE THUMBS OF HIS VICTIMS AS NECKLACES. FROM THIS CAME HIS NEW NAME: ANGULIMALA, WHICH MEANS "NECKLACE OF FINGERS.

THE LOCAL PEOPLE WERE TERRIFIED AND ASKED THE KING FOR HELP TO GET RID OF THIS FEROCIOUS CRIMINAL. THE KING SENT A TROOP TO PURSUE AND KILL HIM. ANGULIMALA'S MOTHER WAS INFORMED OF THIS AND DECIDED TO GO AND WARN HER SON SO THAT HE COULD RUN AWAY. WHEN ANGULIMALA SAW THE OLD WOMAN ARRIVE, HE DID NOT RECOGNIZE HER. BY THE TIME SHE ARRIVED, HE HAD GROWN TO 999 INCHES AND WAS ONLY ONE INCH SHORT. AT THAT VERY MOMENT, THE BUDDHA, WHO WAS PASSING BY, DECIDED TO INTERVENE DESPITE THE VILLAGERS' WARNINGS. FORTUNATELY, BECAUSE ANGULIMALA DECIDED TO KILL THE LORD RATHER THAN HIS MOTHER, WHICH WOULD HAVE MEANT A THOUSAND YEARS OF HELL FOR HIM FOR MATRICIDE.

OF COURSE, HE COULD NEVER CATCH UP WITH THE BUDDHA, WHO WAS MOVING FASTER THAN HIM, ALTHOUGH HE WALKED CALMLY. SURPRISED, THE CRIMINAL ASKED THE BLESSED

TO STOP, WHO REPLIED: "I'VE ALREADY STOPPED, IT'S UP TO YOU TO STOP. "I DON'T UNDERSTAND," REPLIED THE DESPERATE MAN. THE AWAKENED ONE THEN EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD TOTALLY STOPPED HURTING LIVING BEINGS, WHILE ANGULIMALA, ON THE CONTRARY, WAS DESTROYING THEM. ANGULIMALA WAS SHOCKED AND IMMEDIATELY REALIZED WHAT HE WAS DOING, REPENTED AND DECIDED TO BECOME A MONK. A LITTLE LATER, WHEN THE KING ARRIVED, HE LEARNED OF THE CRIMINAL'S CONVERSION, SO HE GREETED HIM LIKE THE OTHER MONKS AND EVEN MADE A DONATION TO HIM.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE NEW LIFE OF THE CONVERT WAS NOT ALWAYS EASY. SOME PEASANTS WERE STILL VERY ANGRY WITH HIM ABOUT HIS PAST, SO HE WAS BRUTALIZED WHEN HE CAME TO BEG FOR ALMS. "THIS IS THE RESULT OF YOUR OLD LIFE, THE FRUITS OF YOUR KARMA, FROM WHICH YOU CANNOT ESCAPE. THINK OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU LATER," THE AWAKENED ONE REPLIED TO CONSOLE HIM, "YOU JUST HAVE TO BE PATIENT, PRACTICE EQUANIMITY, AND FOLLOW THE DHARMA." AND THAT IS HOW ANGULIMALA BECAME A HOLY MAN.

6.1 Obedience

Angulimala's father believes that in order to save his son from his violent destiny, it is necessary to educate him on the principle of obedience. Angulimala is indeed a good pupil, as we can see throughout this story. But obedience becomes a problem the day his teacher, manipulated by his students and his own weaknesses, decides to act badly out of revenge. Obedience, which until then had protected Angulimala from his tragic fatality, becomes on the contrary the agent. Obedience is defined as the abandonment of one's own will or desire to submit to the observance of rules or the will of an external authority. The fact of being obedient thus implies to develop listening and the respect of the established order, in the form of one or more specific persons, or in the more abstract form of precepts. Obviously, obedience is constitutive of what is called education. It is a factor of civilization, insofar as the observance of rules authorizes life in society, which would otherwise be a jungle where the law of the strongest and the total absence of trust would reign. Like any parent, this is what the Brahmin says about his son: this "innocent" will become violent if he is not taught rules and obedience. Nevertheless, there are sometimes dilemmas such as who or what rules are obeyed, what is the hierarchy or priority of rules, etc. The Brahmin is not a parent. It is therefore a matter of using one's own judgment, in order to understand rules and people, to critically analyse the orders given, and to make judgments accordingly. Here lies the paradox of obedience, which every educator faces: it is necessary both to teach how to accept and to respect, but also to teach how to refuse by encouraging autonomy of judgment. It is this capacity to rebel that Angulimala did not learn, as he is "condemned" to do evil since it was ordered by the authority in place. It is the discovery of a new authority or a more fundamental law, that of Buddha, that will allow him to be saved.

This story attempts to teach that the foundation of Buddhist morality is not obedience to the will of a master, but the fruit of deeds, which result in reward or punishment. Morality aims only at happiness in this life and in future existences, or to a higher degree, deliverance. The Buddha therefore enjoins his disciples not to fall in the trap of obedience. It is the sequence of actions which is determining and not humility.

6.2 Fatality

A parallel can be drawn between the story of Angulimala and the one of Oedipus. In the latter, the father keeps his son away from the court because he learns that when he grows up, he will have to kill his father and marry his mother. This decision was the very condition of the hero's fate, because unaware of his parents' identity, he was able to fulfil his destiny. In the story of Angulimala, the father teaches his son obedience to save him from his violent predestination, and it is through this obedience that the son becomes a criminal. In both cases, it is the recurring theme of fatality - for which there is no such thing as free will - and any attempt to thwart it usually only precipitates its fulfilment. Fatality and the philosophical attitude that accompanies it may seem somewhat outdated to the contemporary reader, at a time when the concept of freedom is much more fashionable. Even aging and death, while remaining inevitable limits, are pushed back or pretend to be pushed back by advances in science and technology. Everything related to *fatum* seems to be from another age. If we can still accept the idea of destiny in its positive aspects, fatality is a form of admission of powerlessness, a kind of psychological or existential defeat. Therefore, one generally forbids oneself to be fatalistic.

However, one can find a certain interest in fatalism, even a form of wisdom. Let us try for a moment to make an apology for it. Above all, fatalism is restful, it offers the soul a certain tranquillity, as opposed to the very popular "stress", a fashion linked precisely to the desire for omnipotence.

Fatalism simplifies our existence, since it is a matter of trusting reality without wondering too much. Everything that happens is part of the order of things, and therefore can only be good and well, in its cause and effects. If there is evil, it is only an indispensable condition for good. It is comforting, since our miserable existence is taken care of by infinitely superior instances, and it guarantees us supreme justice. We live in the best of all possible worlds, where there is nothing to complain about, not even great misery, an attitude that can be observed in some parts of the world: all things simply have their *raison d'être*. Is fatalism really pessimistic? The question remains open.

6.3 Pessimism

The story of Angulimala may seem terrible, violent and therefore pessimistic. Pessimism is an attitude of the mind which consists in considering things from the wrong side: hard, unhappy, painful, etc. For the pessimist, everything is bad, the future is bleak, he always expects the worst. Nevertheless, for Angulimala, salvation is still possible, thanks to Buddha's compassion.

One can nevertheless wonder if Buddhism proposes a pessimistic vision of reality. One will answer that yes, by the rejection of the world that it offers us. The description of existence as suffering, as a principle of painful and violent causality goes in this direction. It corresponds to what Thomas Mann calls "the worst of all imaginable worlds", in response to Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds". The world has little meaning in the Buddhist vision: it is even a question of making the question of meaning disappear. It engenders a disgust of action, it provokes a vertigo of the absurd, it promotes a negation of the desire to live, only the asceticism of contemplation and meditation can save us. Schopenhauer, defender of Buddhism, summarizes it as an exit from the spiral of desire that makes us oscillate between the suffering of lack and

that of boredom. This can be described as a pessimistic resignation, only compensated by turning back on oneself.

To this, Buddhists respond that they are not pessimists, but only realists. This is the classic argument for any "negative" view of the world, cynical, sceptical, fatalistic or whatever. Moreover, since salvation is possible through enlightenment, the struggle exists, the struggle with oneself, one's desires and fears: there would be hope. It is true that the emergence of Buddhism within the tragic cultural framework of Hinduism appears to be a hope for salvation. For if the world is terrible, it is only Maya - illusion - and through conversion it is possible to interrupt the infernal and painful cycle of rebirths, a much more difficult perspective, if not impossible, in the much more fatalistic Hinduist scheme. Through awakening, through a life of compassion and detachment, free of passions, greed and violence, it is possible to stop the suffering in this life, and at the end of life to extract oneself totally from the existential hell. Even Angulimala can be saved, thanks to Buddha! Nevertheless, one can wonder what such a world is all about. One can also ask the question to Christianity, which ultimately presents existence as a test of our soul, although this last religion tries to give meaning to the world, as proof of divine goodness, whereas Buddhism sees a kind of perversion in the world.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why does the Brahmin teach obedience to his son?
- Why do the other students want to take revenge on Ahimsaka?
- Why does the guru believe the rumours?
- Could Ahimsaka not obey his master?
- Could Ahimsaka's father have avoided what was going to happen to his son?
- Why can Angulimala not catch the Buddha?
- Why did Angulimala decide to kill the Buddha rather than his mother?
- Why doesn't the king have his army kill Angulimala?
- Why does the Buddha advise Angulimala to follow the Dharma?
- Why do the peasants brutalize Angulimala?

Reflection

- ★ Can we change the order of the world?
- ★ Do we all have a destiny?
- ★ Is obedience a virtue?
- ★ Should children be taught disobedience?
- ★ How difficult is it to become autonomous?
- ★ Should we do what we want or accept the rules?
- ★ Do our actions always have consequences?
- ★ Do our actions always have a raison of being?
- ★ Is fatality a belief or a reality?
- ★ Is it more serious to kill your mother than any other person?

Chapter 7 The quarrel

? Is the other a threat?

TWO TRIBES, EACH BELONGING TO A DIFFERENT KINGDOM, WERE LIVING PEACEFULLY ON EACH SIDE OF A RIVER. IN THE PAST, THEY HAD COLLABORATED TO BUILD A DAM TO IRRIGATE THEIR FIELDS. BUT DURING A PARTICULARLY HOT AND DRY SUMMER, THE RIVER'S FLOW DIMINISHED ENORMOUSLY, TO THE POINT WHERE SANDBANKS APPEARED IN ITS COURSE, SOMETHING THAT HAD NEVER HAPPENED BEFORE IN LIVING MEMORY. ON BOTH SIDES, THE PEASANTS WERE WORRIED ABOUT THEIR PLANTATIONS BECAUSE THE LACK OF WATER THREATENED THEIR CROPS. BECAUSE OF THIS SHORTAGE, THE TWO TRIBES BEGAN TO SEE EACH OTHER IN COMPETITION AND LOOKED AT EACH OTHER WITH AN ANXIOUS AND THREATENING LOOK AS THE WATER FLOW DIMINISHED. THEY THREW JEERS AT EACH OTHER, THEN INSULTS, AND THEN CAME TO BLOWS. THE RUMOUR OF THIS QUARREL REACHED THE EARS OF BOTH KINGS. EACH ONE CONSULTED HIS GENERALS, AND BOTH DECIDED TO GO TO WAR FOR THE HONOUR OF THEIR OWN PEOPLE.

THE BUDDHA WHO WAS TRAVELING NEARBY FELT THAT VIOLENCE WAS THREATENING AND WENT TO THE SCENE OF THE QUARREL. ONCE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE TWO ARMIES, HE INQUIRED ABOUT THE CAUSE OF THE CONFLICT. EACH OF THE TWO KINGS EXPLAINED HIM THAT THE OTHERS HAD STARTED BY INSULTING AND ATTACKING THEM. THE BUDDHA THEN ASKED WHAT THE INITIAL CAUSE OF THESE INSULTS AND AGGRESSIONS WAS, THEY DID NOT KNOW HOW TO ANSWER. THEY ASKED THE GENERALS, BUT THE GENERALS DID NOT KNOW EITHER, AS THEY WERE TOO BUSY WITH THEIR BATTLE PLAN. IN THE END, THE PEASANTS WERE BROUGHT IN AND EXPLAINED THE ORIGIN OF THE DRAMA, DENOUNCING THEIR OPPONENTS AS THE CAUSE OF THE CONFLICT.

THE BUDDHA FINALLY ASKED THEM:

- WHAT IS MORE PRECIOUS, WATER OR HUMAN LIFE?
- HUMAN LIFE, OF COURSE, THEY ALL ANSWERED IN CHORUS.
- SO, ISN'T IT POINTLESS TO KILL PEOPLE FOR WATER? AND WORSE, WHAT ABOUT KILLING WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING WHY? LET ME TELL YOU A STORY. ONE DAY, A HURRICANE HIT THE FOREST. THE TREES THAT HAD GROWN CLOSE TOGETHER AND WHOSE BRANCHES INTERTWINED WITH EACH OTHER BORE THE BRUTALITY OF THE STORM. A TREE THAT HAD GROWN ALONE, SEPARATED FROM THE OTHERS, WAS UPROOTED AND PERISHED. IT IS UP TO YOU TO SEE IF YOU WANT TO SURVIVE... AND THE BUDDHA WALKED AWAY.

7.1 Savagery and civilization

The inhabitants of the two shores used to live in harmony, until the day they felt threatened. The drought, which reduced the water supply, made them fear the worst: they saw famine and poverty. From then on, the "others", those on the other side of the river, were seen as a competition, a threat. This story reveals a profound truth: when human beings feel in danger, they are transformed, they can dehumanize themselves and behave like animals.

The degree of danger is not perceived in the same way by everyone: everything depends on what one can accept to lose. This is the case for everyone, where an exacerbated lust often mixes indistinctly with an alleged necessity: greed and emotional outburst that accompanies it

are identical.

Of course, the greater the loss - or risk of loss - the greater the likelihood of anger or aggression. Suddenly, an almost normal, civil interlocutor becomes a thick bully. Basic social codes are transgressed. On a broader level, one could say that civilization is threatened by savagery. Therefore, thinkers, philosophers, moralists, politicians, prophets, sages and others have always been concerned about this problem. In general, they have tried to establish codes limiting the possibilities of overflowing behaviour. They tried to prevent such regressions. Thus, the concept of law, regulating the life of the city, which appeared for example in archaic form in Mesopotamia with the Code of Hammurabi, eighteen centuries before Christ, represented a great advance for humanity, because it undoubtedly inspired future codes. In another form, a few centuries later, we find the Tables of the Law attributed to Moses, of a more moral and religious nature. In the different cases, it was a question of regulating human behaviour, so as not to abandon man to his primary state, in which he was always susceptible to being or falling back into. This is what this story teaches, when the Buddha recalls such fundamental rules as "united we stand" or "human life is more sacred than any material object". Beyond the specific belief, it is about the civilizing mission of thought.

7.2 Violence and non-violence

Violence is a brutal force applied against someone, a sustained or extreme physical or moral constraint. In general, it carries a rather negative connotation. Is it illegitimate? Even the law authorizes violence, for example, in self-defence, when our integrity feels threatened. War, another canonical form, is still well accepted by a large majority.

Of course, the most classical form of legitimization of violence is the transfer of responsibility to others. This is what we observe in this story. Sartre denounced the fact that violence is always justified as "counter-violence". The other typical argument is that of nature, where violence is observed: for the protection of the territory, for food, for reproduction, etc. This argument, however, forgets to mention that violence is committed by some species, while others do not practice it at all, or very little. Nevertheless, is it a question of finding objective reasons for violence, should we note that it is inscribed in our being? And if it is inscribed, is it in a biological way, therefore indelible, or in a cultural way, therefore modifiable? Various activities, whether sporting, artistic, recreational or social, precisely claim to channel or sublimate this violence that inhabits us, such as the emergence of the Olympic Games in Greek Antiquity. It would even be a vector of individual and collective progress, as a modality of emulation. Violence would then be assimilated to the concept of power, as Nietzsche does. And on the positive side, we should also mention the idea of "struggling", which means fighting with oneself for an ideal or a moral obligation, a gesture that implies a kind of transgression, in the face of one's own integrity, at the risk of excess. Buddhist monks immolating themselves by fire are a good example of this.

Buddhist morality teaches the practice of non-violence and peace. This principle of non-violence is called from the Indian name of ahimsa, which literally means not to harm or damage. This applies to all living beings, which of course must not be killed. This practice comes from Indian culture, made famous in contemporary times by Gandhi. This concept has become so popular that the UN has decreed the period 2001 - 2010 "International Decade for a Culture of

Peace and Non-Violence in favour of the Children of the World". Non-violence is not passivity or resignation. Gandhi specifies that non-violence does not consist in refraining from any real struggle in the face of evil: "Where there is only the choice between cowardice and violence, one must decide for the violent solution." Buddhism takes a more radical stance on this issue, since personal salvation remains a priority. Nevertheless, various wars punctuate the history of this religion, whether in Burma, Tibet, or Sri Lanka, at various periods. It can nevertheless be argued that there is always a gap between the realism of practice and the ideality of theory. Too many "legitimate" justifications seem in fact to impose violence: to restore justice, to defend the weak and oppressed, to gain respect, to protect oneself, etc. How could we witness the unspeakable without our moral instincts reacting violently? The unspeakable for the peasants of this story is called famine and poverty.

7.3 Ignorance

Among the "Four Noble Truths" which constitute the essence of the Buddhist path, the second relates to the origin of pain. It denounces primarily what one could call "thirst", i.e., the desire for enjoyment, the desire for existence or annihilation, which one could also call attachment, whatever its object: person, idea or thing. However, this thirst is inseparable from ignorance, more precisely from that of reality as revealed by the Buddha. This thirst and this ignorance engender the "three roots of evil": lust, as greed and desire to possess more than others, hatred for people or things, and error, which themselves give rise to vices, passions, misguided opinions. This ignorance is also sometimes referred to as indifference - since not knowing something is being indifferent to it - and is also part of the "twelve interdependent bonds" that make up the cycle of rebirth. In particular, it is ignorance of the law of cause and effect, as well as emptiness, and it is this that generates karma, the negative result of past actions. This ignorance is the main obstacle of the "Noble Eightfold Path" corresponding to the right path of Dharma: right understanding, right thinking, right speech, right action, right existence, right effort, right attention, right concentration.

This is why Buddhism pretends sometimes to be a philosophy and not a religion, because knowledge or the practice of thinking constitutes the heart of its activity. Although one can retort that it is about a knowledge or a thinking related to a determined doctrine: Buddha's one. Nevertheless, one can claim, as in the present story, that such knowledge is founded in reason. Because if one examines the "errors" one by one committed by the characters, they are those which one observes in everyday life, and which any wisdom or common sense could criticize. The first is that the peasants, who until then used to live in harmony, driven by their fear of running out of food, get carried away in an uncontrolled manner and aggravate their situation by a useless and harmful conflict. The second is that the leaders of each country are getting ridiculously carried away and go to war to save their honour, without even trying to understand what is going on, causing irreversible damage to their people. The third is the oblivion of the principle that in adversity united we stand. The fourth is the confusion of priorities in existential and moral choices, neglecting that human life has more value than any material object. It is undeniable that these forms of ignorance are as common as they are debatable, because they lead us to deplorable decisions.

 A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN
Comprehension

- Why do the two tribes end up fighting?
- Do the two tribes really know what they are fighting about?
- Why do kings go to war?
- Do the kings in this story behave like kings?
- Does human life take a back seat in this story?
- Why do the two tribes blame each other?
- Why does the Buddha put the two tribes back to their own responsibility?
- Are circumstances the real cause of the war?
- Why does the Buddha feel the violence that threatens?
- What is the main message of the Buddha in this story?

Reflection

- ☆ Is human life the most precious good of all?
- ☆ Why do we often blame others for our problems?
- ☆ Why are others a threat?
- ☆ Do we all have the same idea of necessity?
- ☆ Is non-violence also a form of violence?
- ☆ Is non-violence always an appropriate strategy?
- ☆ Should unity always be a priority?
- ☆ Is the human being prone to savagery?
- ☆ Can it be said that ignorance is the main cause of our problems?
- ☆ Are we generally confused about our priorities?

Chapter 8 The monk who was a goldsmith

? Can we master our emotions?

A MONK CONSULTED HIS MASTER FOR A TOPIC FOR MEDITATION.

- CERTAINLY, REPLIED HIS MASTER, OBSERVE THE IMPURE THOUGHTS THAT ARISE IN YOUR MIND. IF YOU PERCEIVE THEM WELL, YOU WILL EVENTUALLY SEE THE TRUTH.

THE MONK THANKED HIM AND SAID THAT HE WOULD DO HIS BEST. HE WENT UNDER A TREE AND SAT DOWN IN A MEDITATION POSITION. VARIOUS NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AROSE: POSSESSION, GREED, STUBBORNNESS, PRIDE...

BUT AFTER A WHILE, HE STOPPED, NOT BEING ABLE TO STAND THE EXERCISE ANYMORE. HE HAD NEVER REALIZED HOW FULL OF IMPURITIES HIS MIND WAS. HE CONCLUDED THAT HE WAS NOT WORTHY TO BE A MONK.

WHEN THE MASTER SAW HIM RETURNING, HE ASKED HIM HOW HIS MEDITATION WAS GOING. HE REPLIED THAT HE HAD SO MUCH ANGER AND JEALOUSY IN HIM THAT HE THOUGHT HE WOULD BE UNABLE TO CHANGE THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS, AND THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO ABANDON HIS CAREER AS A MONK.

SORRY, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO, THE MASTER SUGGESTED THAT THE MONK MEET THE BUDDHA, WHO WAS NOT FAR AWAY. THE BUDDHA, VERY PERCEPTIVE, ASKED THE MONK IF HE WAS A GOLDSMITH BEFORE TAKING THE ROBE. THE OTHER, SURPRISED, ANSWERED AFFIRMATIVELY. THE AWAKENED ONE THEN TOOK THE MASTER ASIDE AND EXPLAINED HIM THAT THE MONK WAS UNABLE TO OBSERVE HIS IMPURE THOUGHTS BECAUSE, HAVING WORKED FOR SO LONG WITH GOLD, A VERY PURE METAL, MAKING BEAUTIFUL OBJECTS, HE COULD ONLY LOOK AT BEAUTIFUL THINGS. SO, HE HAD TO FIND HIM ANOTHER OBJECT OF MEDITATION, SOMETHING MORE PLEASING TO HIM. THEN HE CAME BACK TO THE MONK AND TOLD HIM TO RELAX AND LOOK AT A LOTUS BUD FLOATING IN THE POND IN FRONT OF HIM.

- BUT SHOULDN'T I MEDITATE INSTEAD? EXCLAIMED THE MONK.

- "THAT'S YOUR MEDITATION!" ANSWERED THE AWAKENED ONE.

THE MONK WAS SURPRISED. HOWEVER, HE THOUGHT IT WAS BETTER TO LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF THE BUDDHA, THE COMPASSIONATE BEING. ESPECIALLY SINCE HE LIKED THE PLACE ENOUGH, AND THE IDEA WAS PLEASANT. AND HE PUT HIMSELF IN POSITION AT THE WATER'S EDGE.

A LITTLE LATER IN THE DAY, HE SAW THE BUD OPEN AND WAS ECSTATIC ABOUT THE BEAUTIFUL FLOWER THAT WAS BLOOMING. HE THOUGHT HE COULD CONTEMPLATE SUCH A SUBLIME THING ALL HIS LIFE. BUT IN THE EVENING THE PETALS OF THE FLOWER FELL ONE AFTER THE OTHER. DISAPPOINTED, THE MONK WONDERED THAT SUCH BEAUTY COULD FADE AWAY SO QUICKLY. AND CONTINUING HIS REFLECTION, HE THOUGHT THAT IF A BEAUTY LIKE THE LOTUS COULD NOT LAST, PERHAPS THE IMPURE THOUGHTS OF HIS MIND, LESS PERFECT, WOULD DISAPPEAR EVEN MORE QUICKLY. SO, HE DECIDED TO OBSERVE HIS BAD THOUGHTS AGAIN: IF HE WOULD ONLY OBSERVE THEM, WITHOUT GETTING TROUBLED, HE WOULD SEE WHAT COULD HAPPEN. HE CONTEMPLATED HIS ANGER, FRUSTRATION AND IMPATIENCE, BUT DECIDED TO REMAIN CALM. HE THEN SAW THEM FADE AWAY, AND UNDERSTOOD THAT ALL THINGS FLUCTUATE, THAT NOTHING LASTS FOREVER. WHEN HE DISCOVERED THE IMPERMANENCE OF THINGS, HE WENT TO ECSTASIES TO SEE THAT HIS MIND COULD BECOME AS PURE AS THE GOLD HE USED TO WORK WITH. HE GREETED THE FLOWER THAT HAD SHOWN HIM

THIS TRUTH AND THANKED THE BUDDHA FOR HIS GREAT WISDOM.

8.1 Emotions

Emotions are intense feelings that usually have a physical manifestation. The most common are love, hate, fear, joy, sadness, anger, disappointment, shame, envy and surprise. They are almost instinctive reactions, although they can be thought about and educated, which can be done unconsciously or voluntarily. They relate to our character and our way of being, or even express the subject that we are. Some are more instinctive, others more cultural, the latter being more easily modified. Emotions and their expression can be perceived positively or negatively. On the positive side, they are seen as a faculty of adaptation and survival of the living organism: they move us. Two examples are the fear of danger and love as a reproductive force: they motivate us to act in relation to an external stimulus. Others have a more moral function, such as shame and anger. Some psychological theses claim that they represent the inescapable and fundamental reality of the subject, face to an artificial and illusory reason. On the negative side, one will criticize their tendency to excess, the lack of self-control which they represent, and the obstacle which they constitute for reason. Many philosophers criticized them for this. In particular Spinoza tried to show that what he called sad passions deprive the subject of his power of being, diminish it. As the term indicates, passions, another term for emotions, are undergone and incite a form of passivity, while reason is active and embodies a form of freedom. It is not so much a matter of annihilating passions, which would be neither possible nor desirable, but of making reason operate in order to regulate our subjectivity.

It is a similar principle that we find nowadays in the concept of emotional intelligence, which has its origin in Anglo-Saxon developmental psychology, in particular in Howard Gardner, designer of multiple intelligences, and Daniel Goleman. In summary, there are three levels: identifying emotions, which implies seeing and naming them; analysing them, which implies grasping their origin and dynamics; and sublimating them, which implies controlling and transforming them. One can easily find links between Buddhist thinking and the theses we have just outlined. The fact of distancing oneself from one's own emotions, of contemplating them as external objects obviously appeals to reason. This is what the monk in this story has to do, and this is what is problematic for him, especially his "sad passions". So, the Buddha invites him to meditate peacefully, in order to allow this inner transformation. The main difference between Buddhist thought and the Western tradition lies mainly in the fact that the first is about annihilating all emotions, since these attach us to existence and to the world. While the second is mainly concerned with balance and freedom, the world and existence having their own legitimacy. But both, Western reason and Buddhist reason, can be found on many paths, as far as the treatment of emotions is concerned.

8.2 Beauty

Beauty is one of the transcendental concepts, along with Truth and Goodness, probably the most difficult to define, because it necessarily refers to a form of subjectivity. This led Kant to say that "beauty is what pleases universally and without concept", which is why its definition is difficult, since it refers to simple personal taste. For Hegel, on the contrary, beauty and

truth are one and the same thing, beauty being defined as the sensitive manifestation of the idea, an integral part of the quest for the absolute. In fact, various "objective" criteria have appeared according to times and places. Harmony, highly prized in ancient Greece, is a good example, expressed as through symmetry, measure, or regularity of proportions, whether in nature or in art. For Plotinus, life is beautiful before any form of art. For centuries, beautiful art was that which remained faithful to nature or to the model it was supposed to represent. This principally changed in the nineteenth century. Thus, Baudelaire, one of the initiators of the principle of "art for art's sake", claims that the beautiful is above all the bizarre: it must surprise us. Plato or Schiller, although great supporters of "beauty", denounce certain forms of it for their corrupting effects on the soul.

In Buddhism, no great or at least substantial importance is given to beauty or to aesthetics. This has a simple reason: beauty engenders an emotion, an attachment, which it is precisely a matter of repudiation. The beauty of the marvellous lotus is also illusory. We find many traces in Buddhist art of the concern for beauty naturally inhabiting the human soul. But it seems that this art has above all a function of edification, of exhortation to the Buddha's teachings, to the respect of all creatures. It presents important concepts such as the Wheel of Dharma, the law, or the bodhi, the tree of enlightenment, or the lotus, which represents the purity of the Buddha, for the beauty of its flower and its immaculate nature, to which not even water can adhere. It is precisely this symbol that we find in the present story.

Buddhist works of art can depict episodes from Gautama's life, when representative art, especially in relation to the Buddha, was not prohibited. A common art form is the stupa, a kind of funerary monument with no accessible interior space. It often represents in symbolic form the stages of the progression towards enlightenment. Thus, it is a spiritual rather than an aesthetic concern. Moreover, the absence of artistic personality or subjectivity characterizes Buddhist art: the literature is impersonal, the style rather formal, etc.

A very specific and revealing art form of the Buddhist mind is the mandala. Generally speaking, it is a round form, painted or sculpted, representing the universe in a rather abstract way. These representations are quite complex and serve as a support for meditation. The crucial aspect of the practice of the mandala, especially in Tibet, consists in elaborating it at length, accompanying many complex rituals, and then quickly destroying it, in order to remind us of the impermanence of things. It is this experience that we find in the present story.

8.3 Nirvana

The third of the "Four Noble Truths" is the cessation of suffering, which leads us to nirvana, which can be defined as a "state of absence" or absolute deliverance. Etymologically, the term means the extinction of a flame by the breath. It is indeed about extinguishing desire and pain, suppressing any form of attachment to ideas, beings, things, etc. Nevertheless, there are various ways to reach nirvana. This is what we discover in this story, where what the master proposes to his disciple is impossible to him, to the point that he wants to abandon the practice of meditation. The Buddha, a compassionate being, must explain to the somewhat rigid teacher that he must know his student in order to take charge of his specificity and difficulties.

He who succeeds in dominating his passions and his errors can reach nirvana down on earth. This is what we see with the hero of this story, who on the one hand contemplates the sublime of

the lotus flower, and then grasps the impermanence of things, which allows him to contemplate himself, with all his faults, his errors and his own impermanence, in a detached way. Only a monk can thus reach nirvana, the layman being necessarily too attached to the things of existence. If the layman respects the Buddhist principles (the "three jewels": the Buddha, his law and the community), he will be able nevertheless to decrease the number of his rebirths. But the monk who reaches nirvana will return only once in this world, except if his perfection enables him to reach a higher world. The terrestrial nirvana is inferior to the one reached after death, called "unconditional nirvana". Nirvana corresponds to the true nature of things, which is unconditional, of direct access, devoid of all plurality, undifferentiated, indeterminate, ineffable, calm. It is an absolute truth, but contrary to the absolute of the Hindu religion, it does not exist in itself: it is a state of mind, some knowledge. It is therefore not a question of annihilating the "self", but of realizing the absence of "self". Nirvana is the consciousness or the mode of existence of the adept when he becomes totally indifferent in his relation to things, to their birth and their cessation, or even the abandonment of any conscious idea. Nirvana is opposed to samsara, the Wheel of Existence, although Nagarjuna, true to his posture of "neither nor" criticizes this, asserting that the "bonded" and the "delivered" are undifferentiated, though different. Only the Bodhisattva, a kind of saint, is beyond nirvana: after his death, he enters a special extinction, called unstable, which allows him to remain for eternity in relation to existing beings, whom he has vowed to save by returning to life.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- What are the "impure thoughts" that arise in our mind?
- Why does the master advise the monk to observe his "impure thoughts"?
- Why does the monk no longer manage to meditate?
- What prevents the master from solving the problem of his student?
- Why does the Buddha ask the monk to contemplate a lotus bud?
- Does the Buddha trust the monk?
- What distinguishes the master and the Buddha?
- How is the monk reconciled with himself?
- Why is it a flower that showed the truth to the monk?
- What is the purpose of meditation?

Reflection

- ★ Can we see the truth?
- ★ Is the awareness of a brutal nature?
- ★ Is it difficult to see our defects?
- ★ Does knowing oneself depend on others or on us?
- ★ Why would it be easier to look at something beautiful than something ugly?
- ★ Is beauty ephemeral?
- ★ Is everything that exists ephemeral?

- ★ Is it necessary to purify one's mind?
- ★ Can we master our emotions?
- ★ What distinguishes a good emotion from a bad one?

Chapter 9 The three seeds of mustard

? Is death an integral part of life?

A LONG TIME AGO THERE WAS A POOR WOMAN. SHE HAS GROWN UP IN A SMALL VILLAGE AND HER FAMILY DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF MONEY. WHILE SHE WAS STILL VERY YOUNG, SHE WAS AUTOMATICALLY MARRIED AND WENT TO LIVE WITH HER HUSBAND'S FAMILY, IN THE CITY, FAR FROM HOME. IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR HER TO ADAPT TO THIS NEW EXISTENCE. SHE DID NOT GET ALONG WELL WITH HER IN-LAWS, WHO CRITICIZED HER CONSTANTLY. SHE HAD A LOT OF WORK, FROM MORNING TO EVENING. SHE MISSED HER OWN FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AS WELL AS THE FARM AND THE ANIMALS.

WHEN HER LITTLE BOY WAS BORN, SHE RECEIVED A LITTLE MORE RESPECT AND HER LIFE IMPROVED. EVERYBODY LOVED HER BABY, THEY FOUND HIM ADORABLE. AND SHE LOVED HIM SO MUCH. UNFORTUNATELY, HER HUSBAND DIED SHORTLY AFTER THE BIRTH. SHE COMFORTED HERSELF BY SAYING TO HERSELF THAT SHE STILL HAD HER LITTLE BOY. BUT WHEN HE WAS JUST ONE YEAR OLD, THE CHILD BECAME SICK AND DIED TOO.

THE YOUNG WOMAN FOUND HERSELF SO UNHAPPY THAT SHE WOULD NOT ADMIT THE DEATH OF HER BABY. SHE TOLD HERSELF THAT HE MUST HAVE JUST BEEN WEAKENED BY THE FEVER. SO, SHE DECIDED TO LOOK FOR A MEDICINE THAT COULD CURE HIM. SHE ASKED EVERYONE SHE KNEW IF THEY HAD SUCH A CURE, SHOWING THEM HER DEAD CHILD, AND SOON SHE WAS CONSIDERED INSANE. EVERYONE AVOIDED HER AND DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY: NO ONE DARED TO CONFRONT HER WITH REALITY.

- I HAVE TO PREPARE THE MEAL, SO GO ASK THE SHOPKEEPER! SAID A NEIGHBOUR.

- "I'M PREPARING AN ORDER, GO SEE THE DOCTOR!" ANSWERED THE SHOPKEEPER.

- "I'M SORRY, BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY MEDICINE FOR YOUR CHILD", CONFESSED THE DOCTOR.

THEN HE REMEMBERED THAT THE BUDDHA WAS NOT FAR AWAY.

- WHY DON'T YOU GO AND ASK THE BUDDHA: HE IS WISE AND GENEROUS!

THE YOUNG WOMAN DID NOT KNOW THE BUDDHA, BUT IN DESPAIR, SHE WAS READY TO TRY ANYTHING.

THE BUDDHA WAS SITTING IN THE SHADE OF A TREE WHEN THE YOUNG WOMAN CAME RUNNING. HE IMMEDIATELY DETECTED HIS DISMAY.

- HOW CAN I HELP YOU, MY FRIEND?

- "MY CHILD IS SERIOUSLY ILL. I'VE BEEN LOOKING EVERYWHERE FOR A CURE, BUT NOBODY COULD HELP ME".

SHE SAW THE GAZE OF THE BUDDHA ON HER CHILD, AND SHE IMploRED HIM:

- PLEASE DON'T TELL ME THAT HE IS DEAD. ALL HE NEEDS IS A MEDICINE TO CURE HIM.

THE BUDDHA MEDITATED.

- IF YOU WANT A REMEDY FOR YOUR SON, YOU NEED THREE MUSTARD SEEDS. GO AND KNOCK AT THE DOORS TO GET THEM AND BRING THEM TO ME. BUT THERE IS ONE IMPORTANT CONDITION: THE THREE MUSTARD SEEDS MUST BE VERY GOOD AND COME ONLY FROM A HOUSE WHERE NO ONE HAS EVER DIED.

- I'M GOING RIGHT NOW! SHE EXCLAIMED.

AT THE FIRST HOUSE, SHE KNOCKED AT THE DOOR. A YOUNG WOMAN OPENED IT.

- DO YOU HAVE THREE MUSTARD SEEDS TO MAKE A REMEDY FOR MY CHILD?

THE YOUNG WOMAN RETURNED WITH THE THREE SEEDS, SMILING. BUT THE MOTHER RE-

MEMBERED THE WORDS OF THE BUDDHA.

- I ALMOST FORGOT, DID SOMEONE DIE IN THIS HOME?

- AH, YES! A FEW MONTHS AGO, MY GRANDMOTHER, SHE WAS VERY OLD.

THE MOTHER'S FACE SADDENED, AND SHE LEFT.

IN FRONT OF THE NEXT HOUSE SAT AN OLD MAN.

- WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?

- DO YOU HAVE THREE MUSTARD SEEDS TO MAKE A MEDICINE FOR MY SICK CHILD?

SLOWLY, THE OLD MAN GOT UP, WALKED INTO THE HOUSE, THEN RETURNED WITH THE SEEDS.

AGAIN SHE REMEMBERED.

- DID SOMEONE DIE IN THIS HOUSE?

- ALAS, MY DAUGHTER LEFT US LAST YEAR, LEAVING BEHIND TWO OF HER ORPHAN CHILDREN. SHE CONTINUED TO GO DOOR TO DOOR, BUT THE PROBLEM WAS ALWAYS THE SAME. ALL HAD LOST A LOVED ONE, THIS YEAR OR BEFORE. SHE STILL DID NOT HAVE HER THREE MUSTARD SEEDS, BUT SHE WAS BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND.

THE NEXT DAY, SHE RETURNED TO THE BUDDHA, WHO WAS WAITING FOR HER. SHE WAS NOT CARRYING THE LITTLE BUNDLE ANYMORE. HER FACE WAS NOW CALMER.

- DID YOU MANAGE TO FIND THE MUSTARD SEEDS? ASKED THE AWAKENED ONE.

- "NO. BUT I UNDERSTAND NOW THAT EVERYONE LOSES BEINGS THAT HE OR SHE LOVES. ALSO, I LAID MY BABY DOWN TO REST. I AM STILL SAD, BUT MY HEART IS IN PEACE. I HAVE COME TO THANK YOU.

9.1 Death

On her way through the story, the young woman discovers both the banality of death, the principle of finitude, and its problematic nature. Like birth, death is one of the specific characteristics of living beings. But the definition of this mortiferous principle poses various problems: some are related to life in general, others are more specifically human. For example, we speak of the birth and death of stars, although these are not biological in nature, a terminology whose validity can be questioned, but which nevertheless has its meaning. Similarly, when we consider that the entire universe is a living being: is it mortal or immortal? Then, some cells are declared immortal because they can generate an unlimited number of daughter cells, which is generally the case for unicellular organisms that reproduce by bipartition. All this is to show that death is not a given. On the symbolic level, humans are the only animals that bury their dead, or burn them, end of life ceremonies that are supposed to grant a form of eternity to the person or their soul. On the religious level, we find the resurrection of bodies at the end of the times, the return to the original fire, the passage to the afterlife, the metempsychosis, which are all concepts that allow to relativize or annihilate death.

A few other secular principles allow this as well. Continuation through biological reproduction or the spiritual or cultural legacy. The cult of remembrance that perpetuates a person through subsequent generations. Artistic production, through a work, fame, through collective memory. As well as the identification with humanity, which allows us to think that every life inevitably leaves indelible traces within the species. Or as well the existential principle that frees man from death, affirming that it does not affect him in any way, since once dead, he no

longer exists. So many ways to free oneself from death. Buddhism, by stating the idea that existence is ignorance and illusion, is one of the "solutions" that are proposed to us to calm down our pain and practice mourning.

9.2 Cessation of suffering (nirodha)

The "Third Noble Truth" is called "nirodha", or cessation of suffering. Literally, this term indicates an action that stops something and holds it back, keeping it under its dominion without destroying or suppressing it. Thus, the pain does not disappear, but remains under control. It is an emancipation, a liberation that takes place mainly through the extinction of "thirst", i.e., the annihilation of desire, simply by giving it up. The extinction of desire means suppressing in itself the attachment to all aspects of existence: the cessation of acts, of consciousness, of the "I". This is the path of nirvana, which is not a place, but a state of mind. But in order to achieve this cessation of conscious ideation, to free oneself from karma, one must practice meditation.

From the very beginning, we realize that the existence of the heroine of this story is difficult. Life is pain, through deprivation and greed, Buddhism tells us. She is poor, which means that her body suffers from a lack of basic necessities. In addition, she must be anxious, because the future is very uncertain. Then, still very young, she is sent to live as a wife with an older man: she is far from home, she is mistreated, both physically and morally.

Finally comes a moment of respite: she gives birth to a child. This event is important for various reasons. On the one hand, giving birth gives meaning to her life. Because if she is still suffering, she can always project herself into this child, hoping that he will have a better life, as many parents do. He is, in a way, her second chance. Moreover, she finds there the "great love", unconditional, a source of intense happiness, which she seems to have never known. He is her child, she is his mother, they love each other. But this respite from suffering does not last long, like everything else in this world of fluctuations. On the one hand, her husband dies, which indicates a form of insecurity. Then her child dies, her reason for living, the essence of her existence: how could she accept it? She reaches the highest point of human reality: her misfortune drives her crazy, but she clings to it. This shows us how necessary the Buddha's message is. Life is suffering, it is about getting free from it. But by following the Buddha's instructions, by going from door to door, she will in fact begin to meditate on death: accepting its banality, which will gradually ease her suffering.

9.3 Reality

The young widow and grieving mother finds herself alone in her drama: misfortune drives others away, out of a sense of powerlessness. What should we do with this mother, so sad that she goes mad? No one wants to share such a drama: everyone already has enough suffering with themselves and their loved ones.

Fortunately, she still has the Buddha. He can see her madness, her denial of reality. How to make her accept that things are not what she would like, and cannot be? Compassionate, the Awakened One understands that words would be useless: she would not be able to hear them. For those who are in the throes of pain, two things are necessary. On the one hand time, its healing effect that leaves the necessary space for reason to do its work. On the other

hand, personal experience, the only one capable of true teaching. In reality, one only learns by oneself. We distrust others who are not us and who do not understand us. And just as with food, we have to digest it by ourselves. The Awakened One does not perform miracles, he cannot solve problems for his disciples, he can only show them the way; he teaches them to deliver themselves as he delivered himself.

Reality is a hard dish to digest. But the Blessed is a good pedagogue. Since the grieving mother wants to keep hope at all costs - she could not accept to live without it - he lets her discover on her own that the condition of this hope is in fact impossible, slowly, by the effect of repetition. She thus discovers that her evil is fundamentally banal. This alleviates her pain and makes her understand its inevitable dimension. Thus, reason does its work, passions and pain are attenuated, without disappearing, which is the meaning of *nirodha*. She is sad, but calmer: she is now able to think. This is only the beginning, she still has to discover the absurdity of her sadness, since existence is illusory. But at least she is on her way, she has reconciled herself somewhat with reality, wisdom becomes possible.

The principle of reality is undoubtedly the most difficult thing to admit, because in human nature there is a desire to be of an infinite nature, which makes him act, but which also causes his wishful thinking: perfection, fullness, happiness, the immediate satisfaction of desires, the immortality of oneself or of others, or love, are all hopes that are always disappointed.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why is the young woman's life improving at the birth of his child?
- Why is it easier for the young woman to accept the death of her husband than that of her child?
- Why is the grieving young woman avoided?
- Why does the doctor send the young woman to visit the Buddha?
- Why does the young woman ask Buddha not to tell her that her son is dead?
- Does the young woman know that her child is dead?
- What is the meaning of Buddha's "strategy"?
- Does the Buddha give the young woman hope?
- Why does the young woman forget the Buddha's recommendation every time?
- Did the young woman stop suffering at the end of history?

Reflection

- ☆ Is the death of a child more painful than the death of an adult?
- ☆ Should we periodically think about death?
- ☆ Is death the end of everything?
- ☆ Why is it difficult to accept the death of a loved one?
- ☆ Do we always have to accept reality?
- ☆ Can we be at peace and sad at the same time?

- ★ Is life itself a tragedy?
- ★ What is more terrible, life or death?
- ★ Can we learn to die?
- ★ Should we accept death or fight it?

Chapter 10 The five wise men

? Is knowledge primarily a theory or a practice?

AT THE KING'S COURT USED TO LIVE TWO ANIMALS, A DOG AND A GOAT. EACH OF THEM, ON A DAILY BASIS, STRUGGLED TO FIND THEIR OWN PITTANCE. THE DOG PREFERRED THE KITCHEN, WHERE HE TRIED TO PILFER A PIECE OF MEAT HERE AND THERE. UNFORTUNATELY, THE COOKS WOULD CHASE HIM AWAY AS SOON AS THEY WOULD SEE HIM. THE GOAT, FOR HER PART, WOULD RATHER GO TO THE STABLES WHERE THE ELEPHANTS LIVED TO LOOK FOR GRASS OR HAY. UNFORTUNATELY, THE GROOMS WOULD WELCOME THE GOAT WITH BATONS. ONE DAY, THE TWO ANIMALS MET. EACH AGREED THAT THE OTHER WAS IN A VERY PITIFUL STATE, AND THEY TOLD EACH OTHER ABOUT THEIR MUTUAL MISERY. THEN THE DOG HAD AN IDEA AND PROPOSED TO THE GOAT A MUTUAL AID PACT. HE WOULD FETCH FOOD FOR THE GOAT IN THE STABLES, BECAUSE NO ONE WOULD BE SUSPICIOUS OF HIM, WHILE SHE WOULD GO TO THE KITCHEN WITHOUT ANYONE WORRYING ABOUT HER PRESENCE. ONCE THEY AGREED, THEY WENT THEIR SEPARATE WAYS, AND EVERYTHING WENT AS PLANNED. ONE DAY, WHILE THE KING WAS OUT FOR A WALK, HE NOTICED THIS STRANGE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN A DOG AND A GOAT, OF WHICH HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE MEANING. THEN HE UNDERSTOOD THEIR COLLABORATION, WHICH WAS VERY UNUSUAL. AMAZED, HE SAW THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TEST THE FIVE WISE MEN WHO WOULD SERVE AS HIS ADVISERS. HE SUMMONED THEM AND ASKED THEM TO EXPLAIN HOW THESE TWO ANIMALS HAD BEEN ABLE TO ESTABLISH SUCH A COMMUNITY AND THREATENED THEM WITH LOSING THEIR JOBS IF THEY DID NOT SUCCEED.

THE FIVE WISE MEN LEFT VERY WORRIED, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO DO. THE YOUNGEST, STILL AN APPRENTICE, OFFERED TO GO AND OBSERVE THE TWO ANIMALS, THE OLDER ONES REPLIED THAT IT WAS OBVIOUS. THERE, THEY SAW THAT THE TWO ANIMALS LIVED IN FRIENDSHIP. BUT WHEN THEY CAME CLOSER, THE DOG BARKED, AND THE GOAT SHOWED ITS HORNS. THEY RAN AWAY, AND ONCE THEY WERE AT A SAFE DISTANCE, THE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE SAGE OFFERED TO CONSULT A BOOK ON ANIMALS IN THE LIBRARY, WHICH HE THOUGHT WAS MUCH LESS DANGEROUS.

THE YOUNG MAN, FOR HIS PART, PREFERRED TO INVESTIGATE WHAT THE KING WAS USED TO DO, TO FIND OUT WHERE HE GOT SUCH AN IDEA. HE LEARNED THAT EVERY AFTERNOON HE WOULD OBSERVE THE AREA AROUND HIS TERRACE. THE WISE YOUNG MAN WENT TO THE TERRACE AND SAW THAT FROM THERE, THE TWO ANIMALS COULD BE OBSERVED VERY WELL. HE THEN UNDERSTOOD WHAT IT WAS ABOUT.

THE WISE MEN WHO SEARCHED IN THE BOOKS DID NOT FIND ANYTHING THAT COULD ENLIGHTEN THEM. THEY QUESTIONED THEIR YOUNG COLLEAGUE TO SEE IF HE HAD FOUND ANYTHING. HE WANTED TO HELP THEM BUT AT THE SAME TIME HE WANTED TO PLAY A TRICK ON THEM. SO, HE WROTE A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE ON A PIECE OF PAPER AND GAVE IT TO THE ELDERS. AS ONE OF THEM COMPLAINED THAT HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND ANYTHING, HE ANSWERED THAT IT WAS THE ONLY ANSWER HE COULD GIVE HIM, AND THAT, FOR LACK OF ANYTHING BETTER, HE SHOULD READ IT TO THE KING THE NEXT DAY. WHILE GRUMBLING, THE WISE MEN WITHDREW.

THE NEXT MORNING, WHEN THE KING SUMMONED THEM, THE WISEST OF THE WISE MEN TOOK AN INSPIRED LOOK AND RECITED THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE HE HAD LEARNED BY HEART.

"STABLE AND KITCHEN BOTH GET BEATEN.

LIVING WITH EACH OTHER, BOTH EAT THEIR FILL." - I HOPE YOU UNDERSTAND, THE WISE SCHOLAR SAID POMPOUSLY TO THE KING.

- "BRAVO, REPLIED THE KING, YOU HAVE SOLVED THE PROBLEM".

BUT THE QUEEN WHO HAD BEEN LISTENING INTERVENED TO SAY THAT SHE HAD UNDERSTOOD NOTHING.

THE WISE SCHOLAR WAS QUITE EMBARRASSED. BUT THE YOUNG APPRENTICE EXPLAINED WHAT WAS GOING ON. THE WISE SCHOLAR, VERY SURPRISED, ADDED THAT HE COULD NOT HAVE EXPLAINED THINGS BETTER. AND THE KING CONCLUDED THAT THE WISE MEN COULD KEEP THEIR WORK BECAUSE THEY WERE QUITE COMPETENT.

10.1 The community

One of the "three jewels" of Buddhism, along with the Buddha and the Dharma, is the Sangha, the community and friendship between those seeking enlightenment. In a specific way, this refers to those who practice Buddhism, but in a broader way, there is an imperative to act for the good of others. Now the first steps of this Sangha address the question of offerings to one another. A capacity for generosity that involves giving up the desire for possession and caring for others.

This is precisely what touches the king in this story, when he observes the relationship between these two animals. And this is what distinguishes them from the wise men. To help each other, the goat and the dog must act in a way that is unnatural. On the one hand because they decide to help each other, when naturally they would rather be in conflict. Secondly because they have to pursue an initial goal that does not correspond to them at all: to get grass for the dog, meat for the goat. In order to do so, they have to give up their "identity" and their instinctive behaviour.

The wise men in this story are very much different. The king, who knows them well, threatens them with dismissal if they do not solve the problem. This means that they are motivated not by the search for truth, but by material goods or status. This is indeed what concerns them, with the exception of the youngest one. Moreover, we can see that they are rather vain and pretentious. Lying does not scare them: they do not hesitate to repeat things they do not understand in order to get what they want. Yet they are supposed to be wise.

The story therefore shows the difference in attitude between the proud scientists and the animals, who are simpler, more natural and therefore more generous. But also, according to the Buddhist pattern, they are less attached to social obligations. The simple fact of surviving by pilfering their food seems at this point to be a kind of ironic counterpoint to the formal rules of society, where the erudite liars seem beyond reproach, while those who steal in order to survive are outcasts. For the latter seem to have a better sense of social relations than the "good people", full of good conscience. Among other things, because the principle of "property" and its sacred dimension, the main source of injustice, in opposition to sharing, represent a major obstacle to human fulfilment.

10.2 Theory and practice

Buddhism is above all a practice, not a book-based knowledge. It is therefore critical of the theoretical debates and the incessant ratiocinations of scholars, which the Buddha warns against. He calls them "full of opinions, desert of opinions, swarming with opinions". Although in its history Buddhism has not been exempt from theoretical debates, as already shown by the multiplicity of schools and sects, which do not get along with each other. The great Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna tackled these various quarrels, about the reality of the world and the self, or about its eternity, and many other points, both by taking them on board and by showing the limits of the various possible positions.

The story of the "Five wise men" shows us scholars who complicate their lives by "reflecting", instead of going to see what is going on, as the youngest of them proposes. It is no accident if it is the youngest who is the most lucid and open. The point is to show how knowledge can be a perversion or an absence of thought.

One may be surprised to notice that Buddhism, concerned with reality, has promoted scientific progress very little in its history, and rather the opposite. This situation can be attributed precisely to a kind of anti-intellectualism linked to the idea of derealization of the world. If everything is illusory, there is no point in understanding the order of the world! And because of this, Buddhism can be criticized as constituting, in spite of everything, a vast intellectual speculation based on a very specific and determined dogma, without promoting in this sense radical critical or experimental thinking. This religion would in fact propose a practice that would help us to live psychologically, dealing with the problem of suffering, especially for those who have a tragic vision of their existence. But it would represent a dense and blind theory regarding the objective reality of the world and its transformation: it would render man powerless.

10.3 Ethics

An important aspect of the lesson that the king wants to give to the five wise men by observing the behaviour of the animals is the ethical question. That is, how to behave in the world. Among the eight paths of the "Noble Eightfold Path" there are three that seem to address this issue: right speech (third), right action (fourth), and right livelihood (fifth). This ethical conduct is based on a broad concept of universal love and compassion for all living beings, primarily human and animal, which is the basis of the Buddha's teaching. These principles are addressed to everyone, monks and the lay people, without distinction. The main aim is to promote respect for all beings, as well as non-violence and peace.

According to the dharma, the crucial concept is "conditionality" or "conditioned co-production". Thus, in order to exist, phenomena and beings depend on many conditions, and according to this principle of causality, their modifications entail consequences. Yet we ourselves form part of the conditions that determine our experience, and the consequences of our actions generate our future experiences as well as those of the people around us. We are therefore intimately linked to our environment and to other living beings. Hence the importance of ethics, having an almost ontological value, since our actions, and even our ideas and emotions, determine what is and what will be. This is why we will modify our actions according to the harmful or beneficial consequences they entail for ourselves and others. And since it is not enough to have

good intentions, we need to meditate in order to clarify the mind and to not be mistaken.

In Buddhist ethics, material well-being is not ignored, but it cannot be regarded as an end in itself. It is only the means to a higher and nobler end, because a minimum of material conditions is necessary to enable spiritual progress. Poverty can only engender immorality and delinquency, so economic and social conditions must be improved. Moreover, a number of injunctions are set forth concerning leaders: liberality, generosity and charity; a high moral character; primacy of the good of the people; honesty and integrity; friendliness and affability; austerity in habits; absence of hatred, bad intentions and enmity; non-violence; patience, forgiveness, tolerance, understanding; non-opposition, non-obstruction to the popular will.

We also find these ethical principles in the formation of Boddhisattvas, a kind of saint, one of the most sublime states that a human being can attain. They must practice to perfection the exercise of the ten virtues such as wisdom, giving or generosity, patience, renunciation, morality, energy, skill in the means of salvation and meditation.

Nevertheless, some ethical principles seem paradoxical. Such is the case with charity. It is not so much a question of loving one's neighbour, but rather of not hating him. It is a question of being benevolent, but without attaching oneself to other beings, since this would be condemning oneself to suffer. Helping others would be incompatible with the quietude considered to be the supreme good: to move away from the tumult of the world to lead a life of contemplation. Moreover, when one invests oneself in helping the needy, one confirms for oneself, and no doubt for oneself, the illusory attachment to individual existence. Helping others provides only ephemeral compensation: true "salvation" comes through absolute renunciation, which easily falls into a kind of indifferentism. At the same time, vigilance, energy, ardour, patience and constancy in self-control are required, as well as a rather severe morality, and at the same time total renunciation. Of course, perhaps here lies the challenge, in this coincidence of opposites so dear to Nagarjuna.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- What is surprising about the behaviour of the two animals?
- Why does the king decide to test his advisers?
- Why does the king use threats with his advisers?
- Why does the oldest of the wise men suggest consulting a book rather than observing the animals?
- Are the wise men really wise?
- Why is it the youngest who proposes to go and observe the two animals?
- Why does the youngest investigate the king?
- Why does the youngest decide to teach the other wise men a lesson?
- What does the queen represent in this story?
- Did the king make a mistake in his final judgment?

Reflection

- ☆ Is it necessary to be friends to help each other?

- ★ Is friendship based on usefulness?
- ★ Does threat represent sometimes a good strategy?
- ★ What can a test be used for?
- ★ Why is it difficult to understand what is simple?
- ★ Are there many forms of wisdom?
- ★ Is knowledge always concerned with truth?
- ★ Is knowledge an end in itself or a means?
- ★ Does knowledge have many sources?
- ★ Can knowledge be a form of corruption?

? Why do we always want something and not nothing?

WHEN THE BODHISATTVA, THE AWAKENED ONE, HAD BECOME A HOLY MAN, HE WENT TO THE HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS WHERE FIVE HUNDRED MONKS FOLLOWED HIM, BECOMING HIS DISCIPLES. HE HAD ACQUIRED SUPERNATURAL POWERS: HE COULD FLY IN THE AIR AND UNDERSTAND PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS WITHOUT THEM BEING EXPRESSED. HIS IMMENSE POWERS IMPRESSED HIS FIVE HUNDRED DISCIPLES.

DURING THE RAINY SEASON, HIS ASSISTANT WENT WITH TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MONKS TO THE SURROUNDING VILLAGES TO FIND SEEDS, SALT AND OTHER NECESSITIES. THIS WAS AT A TIME WHEN THE MASTER WAS ABOUT TO DIE. THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MONKS WHO REMAINED WITH HIM WERE WELL AWARE OF THIS. SO, THEY DECIDED TO ASK HIM A GREAT QUESTION: "O MOST HOLY MAN, IN YOUR LONG LIFE OF COMPASSION AND MEDITATION, WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT?" THE BODHISATTVA, WHO WAS ABOUT TO DIE, HAD GREAT DIFFICULTY SPEAKING, AND HE UTTERED ONE WORD: "NOTHING".

THEN HE LEFT FOR PARADISE.

THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY DISCIPLES WERE EXPECTING SOME FANTASTIC WORD, SOME MAGICAL POWER. SO, THEY WERE VERY DISAPPOINTED. THEY SAID TO EACH OTHER: "AFTER A LONG LIFE OF PRACTICE, COMPASSION AND MEDITATION, OUR POOR MASTER HAS ACCOMPLISHED 'NOTHING' GREAT." THEY CAME TO CONSIDER THAT HE HAD MISSED HIS LIFE, SO THEY BURNED HIS BODY WITHOUT ANY SPECIAL CEREMONY, WITHOUT HOMAGE OR EVEN RESPECT.

WHEN THE ASSISTANT CAME BACK WITH HIS TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MONKS, HE IMMEDIATELY ASKED:

- WHERE IS THE HOLY MAN?
- HE IS DEAD, THE OTHERS ANSWERED.
- DID YOU ASK HIM FOR HIS GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT?
- OF COURSE, WE DID.
- AND WHAT DID HE ANSWER?
- HE SAID THAT HE HAD ACCOMPLISHED "NOTHING". SO, WE DIDN'T HAVE A CEREMONY FOR HIS FUNERAL.

THE DEPUTY, DUMBFOUNDED, CONTAINED HIS ANGER.

- MY BROTHERS, YOU HAVE NOT UNDERSTOOD THE MEANING OF THE MASTER'S WORDS. HE WAS SAYING THAT HE HAD ACCOMPLISHED THE GREAT KNOWLEDGE OF "NOTHING". HE REALIZED THAT THE NAMES OF THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY ARE. THERE IS WHAT THERE IS WITHOUT IT BEING CALLED "THIS THING HERE" OR "THAT THING THERE". THERE IS NO "THING", THERE IS NOTHING.

BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH THE ASSISTANT EXPLAINED THE GREAT MASTER'S WONDERFUL ACHIEVEMENT, THE MONKS STILL DID NOT UNDERSTAND. MEANWHILE, FROM HIS PARADISE, THE ENLIGHTENED ONE HEARD THAT THE WORDS OF HIS FORMER ASSISTANT WERE NOT ACCEPTED. THEN HE REAPPEARED ON EARTH, FLOATING IN THE AIR ABOVE HIS FORMER MONASTERY. HE PRAISED THE WORDS AND WISDOM OF THE ASSISTANT SAYING, "HE WHO HEARS THE TRUTH AND UNDERSTANDS IT WITHOUT THINKING IS FAR BETTER THAN A HUNDRED FOOLS WHO SPEND A HUNDRED YEARS THINKING AND THINKING AND THINKING

THEREON HE DISAPPEARED.

11.1 Visible and invisible

One can understand the disappointment of the monks. They want to see the visible, they want to grasp the graspable, but the Buddha only offers them the invisible, the impalpable, even the unspeakable. But the human being wants to be sure, and for that he must see. Curiously, the eyes serve as an alibi. But perhaps sometimes it is better not to see. Let us think here of the wisdom of the "three monkeys", a theme of Buddhist origin, who neither see, nor hear, nor speak. Certainly, this seems to contradict the present story, but these "contradictions" are typical of the Buddhist spirit.

The senses are deceptive because they only perceive the immediate, only reason can perceive the truth that transcends these appearances. But reason, by the same process, must also perceive its own illusions. This is how dialectics invites us to return to the subject itself: the one who thinks must become an object for his own thinking. He must therefore put himself in abysm, problematize and dialectize himself, in a way he must de-realize himself, in order to "see". As Foucault proposes, if the role of science is to make the invisible visible, the role of philosophy is to make the invisible visible.

Even more radical than idealism, Buddhist thought invites us to think of nothing. We find something similar in the mystics, in the Greek fathers of the Church, in apophatic thinkers. The latter favour the "negative" approach, a reasoning that proceeds by negation, by determining what things are not, or by abstraction, by removing all specificity or concreteness. In particular when it is a question of determining the "nature" of God, which is a kind of absence of nature. Absolute being is non-being, could one say with them. "God himself does not know what he is because he is not something," wrote John Scotus Erigenes. Every representation of the absolute, image or concept, is unmasked in its inadequacy to define what is without limits. The simple affirmation of the existence of God becomes impossible. We are approaching Buddha's "nothing".

11.2 Expectation and disappointment

The monks are disappointed: they do not know how to "appreciate" nothing. The human being, through the immense possibilities of his thinking, can meditate on the infinite, even the unthinkable. The problem is that it is the same for his will, whose extent exceeds even his understanding, as Descartes points out. Man does not hesitate to measure himself against the infinite: he sometimes takes himself for God, compares himself to him or challenges him, as many myths describe him. The concrete way in which this arises is in the opposition between what we are and what we would like to be, or what we claim to be. Or between the reality of the world and what we want it to be. The human being, *imago viva dei* (living image of God), as it was said in the Renaissance, like God acts on the world, modifies, creates, or destroys it, one might add. To do this, he understands, projects, invents, manufactures: he modifies reality.

On a more existential level, we generally want to "be someone". That is to say, we want to distinguish ourselves, we want to be special. This is expressed by ambition. Everything is

good for existing or over-existing. Facing these unbridled or foolish hopes, one cannot avoid disappointment. Whether we hope for something from ourselves, the world or others, there will always be many expectations that will not be fulfilled. We are caught in a vice, in a deadlock, what Americans call the double bind. On the one hand a desire, a will that allows us to accomplish great things, an ambition that motivates us, dreams that make us act, and on the other hand the reality that imposes itself, brutal and blind, that frustrates many of our desires or makes our projects impossible. So, we cannot avoid disappointment, like the monks in this story who expect "great things" and for this reason followed the Buddha.

Unless we resort to some form of wisdom. Buddhism proposes us to abandon any form of greed or will, which can only make us miserable, understanding that everything is illusion. Christianity proposes that we only do things that are good in themselves, so by doing good we will be in agreement with ourselves and the divine law, without worrying about the consequences. The Stoics, like Epictetus, suggest that we distinguish what depends on us, on which we can act, what does not depend on us, that we simply have to accept. Accepting "nothing" is a real challenge.

11.3 Vacuity (sūnyatā)

The monks expected something great from the master, but they got "nothing". In their minds, this means that they got nothing. Without realizing that this "nothing" is the most important, the absolute, the unconditional, the most "enormous" thing that the Awakened One could accomplish and bequeath to them. This "nothing" is the "emptiness" which is the foundation, the absolute presence, the substantial absence, which makes everything that exists totally illusory.

Vacuity, sunyata nirvana in Sanskrit, is one of the fundamental concepts of Buddhism, although it is already found in Hinduism, with some differences in its articulation. Differences are also found in this regard between Buddhist schools. Generally speaking, this emptiness indicates the "objective" reality of things, but also a practice, since it is a spiritual experience. It applies to "objective" things, which have no being in themselves, and to "subjectivity", which is just as much a facticity. As a result, we are in non-duality: there is no longer any substantial difference between subject and object, between what is thought and the one who thinks. Only a superficial difference of form remains. It is in this sense that it is as much a metaphysics, or an epistemology, as it is a practice.

The concept of emptiness is inseparably linked to that of interdependence. To illustrate this connection, let us quote Nagarjuna's famous stanza: "Since there is nothing that is not dependent, there is nothing that is not empty". Emptiness indicates the absence of being in itself of beings and things, i.e., the non-existence of any essence. It means that nothing has a fixed and unchangeable character, because everything is only a phenomenon: everything depends on everything, by a system of cause and effect, by a principle of conditionality. Things and beings are articulated and exist only in a relation, and not in themselves. Everything appears and disappears by a kind of pact of illusion, on a background of emptiness, this substantial "nothing". And language is a production of codes even more vain than the phenomena it evokes. This is why we can dialectically affirm something as much as its opposite. Not because we can say "anything", because it is still a question of finding the sequence, the reason, that engenders

these processes, even though it would be just as illusory as what it engenders. The mind must neither cling nor hypostasize, but float through the senses, the reversals of meaning and even through nonsense.

 A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why do Bodhisattva powers impress monks?
- Why does the Bodhisattva answer "nothing" to the monks' question?
- Why are the monks disappointed by the master's answer?
- Are the monks right to be disappointed?
- What do the monks expect from their master?
- Why do monks deprive the Bodhisattva of a funeral?
- Why does the deputy hold back his anger?
- Why do the monks not understand the words of the deputy?
- Can it be assumed that the monks understood the words of Buddha?
- What is the meaning of "nothing"?

Reflection

- ★ How can we understand someone without talking to them?
- ★ Why is nothing a problem for us?
- ★ Should we try to accomplish something during our lives?
- ★ Is it possible to expect nothing from others?
- ★ Why do we want to be reassured?
- ★ Can we think "nothing"?
- ★ Is meditation thinking?
- ★ Can Truth be taught?
- ★ Is the essence of things elusive?
- ★ Why do we find it difficult to bear the fact that things escape us?

Chapter 12 The man who was called Bad

? What is the reality of a name?

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A FAMOUS MASTER SURROUNDED BY MANY STUDENTS WHO STUDIED SACRED WRITINGS WITH HIM. HOWEVER, ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES HAD BEEN NAMED "BAD" BY HIS PARENTS. HE WAS UNHAPPY ABOUT HIS NAME AND WAS THINKING, "WHEN THEY SAY, 'COME BAD', 'GO BAD', 'DO THIS BAD', IT IS NOT PRETTY OR PLEASANT, NEITHER FOR ME NOR FOR OTHERS, IT IS UNSIGHTLY AND IT MUST BRING ME BAD LUCK". SO, ONE DAY HE WENT TO SEE HIS MASTER AND ASKED HIM TO GIVE HIM A MORE PLEASANT NAME THAT WOULD BRING GOOD LUCK RATHER THAN BAD LUCK. THE MASTER REPLIED:

- ALL RIGHT, MY SON. GO WHEREVER YOU WANT IN THE WORLD AND FIND A HAPPIER NAME. WHEN YOU WILL COME BACK, I WILL OFFICIALLY BAPTIZE YOU WITH YOUR NEW NAME.

SO BAD LEFT THE MONASTERY AND ARRIVED IN TOWN. A MAN HAS JUST DIED, AND BAD ASKED WHAT HIS NAME WAS. HE WAS TOLD:

"HIS NAME WAS ALIVE." - ALIVE IS THEREFORE DEAD!" EXCLAIMED BAD.

THE PEOPLE REPLIED, "WHETHER HIS NAME IS ALIVE OR WHETHER HIS NAME IS DEAD, HE MUST DIE ANYWAY. A NAME IS ONLY A WORD YOU USE TO RECOGNIZE SOMEONE, AND NOTHING ELSE. ONLY AN IDIOT WOULDN'T KNOW THAT." BAD CONTINUED ON HIS WAY AND HE SAW A TERRIBLE SCENE. A YOUNG GIRL WAS BEING BRUTALLY TREATED BY A MAN IN THE STREET. HE ASKED THE ONLOOKERS WHY NO ONE INTERVENED. HE WAS TOLD:

- SHE IS A SLAVE FOR DEBT AND WILL REMAIN SO UNTIL SHE HAS PAID HER DEBT IN FULL.

- WHAT'S HER NAME?

- RICH, HE WAS TOLD.

- HER NAME IS RICH? AND SHE HAS NO MONEY!" WONDERED BAD.

- WHETHER HER NAME IS RICH OR POOR DOESN'T MATTER. A NAME IS ONLY A WORD WE USE TO RECOGNIZE SOMEONE, AND NOTHING ELSE. ONLY AN IDIOT WOULDN'T KNOW THAT.

PERPLEXED, BAD BEGAN TO LOSE INTEREST IN CHANGING HIS NAME. AS HE LEFT TOWN, ON THE ROAD, HE MET A MAN WHO SEEMED LOST. HE ASKED HIM WHAT HIS NAME WAS.

- MY NAME IS GUIDE.

- YOU MEAN EVEN SOMEONE NAMED GUIDE CAN GET LOST?

- WHETHER MY NAME IS GUIDE, STRANGER OR LOST, I CAN'T FIND MY WAY ANYWAY. A NAME IS ONLY A WORD THAT YOU USE TO RECOGNIZE SOMEONE, AND NOTHING ELSE. ONLY AN IDIOT WOULD NOT KNOW THAT, THE MAN REPLIED.

BADLY RECONCILED WITH HIS NAME, HE RETURNED TO THE MONASTERY. THE MASTER ASKED HIM, "HOW ARE YOU, MY SON? HAVE YOU FOUND A GOOD NAME?" THE MONK REPLIED, "MASTER, THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES ALIVE OR DEAD BOTH DIE, RICH AND POOR CAN BOTH BE WITHOUT MONEY, GUIDE AND STRANGER CAN BE LOST. NOW, I KNOW THAT A NAME IS ONLY A WORD THAT IS USED TO RECOGNIZE A PERSON. THE NAME IS NOT THE CAUSE OF THINGS, ONLY THE DEEDS MAKE THEM BE. SO, I AM SATISFIED WITH MY NAME. THERE IS NO REASON TO CHANGE IT."

12.1 Naming

We all have at least one name; anonymity is impossible, or suspect. Today, the most classic pattern is the first name, which corresponds to a specific person, chosen more or less arbitrarily by the parents at birth, and a surname, which indicates the family to which we belong. These surnames replace - and this is where their origin often resides - the first name of the father or patronymic, the name of a function, or the name of a place. Thus, the fact of naming can represent the identity of the person, the family identity, the religious or cultural identity, the way of being of the person, etc. In many cultures, naming is part of a particular ceremony, such as baptism, or initiation, which is sometimes used to give a new name to a person.

From this, it can be understood that the act of naming, the attribution of a name, is not insignificant. Even when the first name is granted at birth, or even before, without knowing the child yet, the parents place their hopes, their fears, their desires there, so many feelings which will undoubtedly weigh in the future of this new-born child. Thereafter, this name will tend to carry an emotional charge, positive or negative, since it is formally part of the identity. Depending on the case, some will wish to modify or change it, others on the contrary will protect it, or even sacralise it. One only has to look at how many people correct the simple pronunciation of their name when it is not articulated to their liking. One then realizes that the name does not have a purely utilitarian value - to know to whom or from whom one is speaking - but that it is imbued with a symbolic charge. Naming someone, giving them a name would be equivalent to nominating them, to giving them a status. The current trivialization of the pseudonym, traditionally reserved for artists or writers, is an interesting phenomenon: it serves both to hide one's "true" identity and to express who one wants to be. We can then ask ourselves which name is precisely the "real" one, the legal one or the pseudonym. Thus, the hero of this story, who initially attributes a qualifying value to his name, ends up perceiving it as a simple formal tool of recognition.

12.2 Language

One of the crucial problems concerning the nature of language is the relationship between words and reality. Is there a "natural" correspondence between speech and things, or is the relationship totally arbitrary? The common temptation invites us to think indiscriminately about name and object. When we see an apple, it is difficult not to think of the word "apple", and when we do, it is difficult not to think of an "apple". We can call this position "realistic", insofar as we give credit to the combination of sensitive experience and reason, which allows us to access the fundamental principles that order and frame the world. These structures would exist, and we would have access to them, objectively. It is precisely this type of thinking that Kant opposes, distinguishing between the noumenon, "the thing in itself," and the phenomenon, the manifestation.

Nominalists, following in the footsteps of William of Ockham, criticize such a vision of things as illusory when it accords an objective reality to our concepts. Proof of this are abstract qualities, such as equality or length, which certainly do not exist in themselves. According to them, our concepts are abusively projected onto the world. In Ancient India, a certain linguistic realism prevailed. Vedic culture maintained a somewhat sacred view of language. There was

even a mention of an idyllic primordial state of humanity in which words were not distinguished from things at all: separation came later, as a kind of fall. Thus, nothing was due to chance. In opposition to this, Buddhism, anxious to denounce the illusion of the world, of things and of thought, attacks ambient realism, which is what the story of Bad is about. According to this philosophy, it is the combination of our perceptions and language itself that makes us believe in the permanence of things, that makes us think that there is being.

In fact, the "things" of our experience are only names, they are empty of any other reality. This vision will moreover influence later Hinduism. Nagarjuna in particular addresses this problem: he tries to show the difficulties caused by such a vision of things. For example, when one says "the potter is making a jug" to describe a situation, it is meaningless, since the jug does not yet exist when the potter is making it. In his usual style, he asks, "Since this thing does not exist, what happens?" Nothing can happen that already exists, and what does not yet exist does not happen either. Nevertheless, some other Buddhist schools thought differently, such as the Sarvastivada school, where it was claimed that past and future things exist because the effect pre-exists in the cause. So, it is all a question of code and paradigm.

12.3 Self (ātman) and non-self (anātman)

The non-self is called "an-atman", a negation of the Hindu concept of "atman", which is the eternal "I" or "self". In its various metamorphoses, the atman takes on specific forms, but these different lives are linked together by a principle of causality, or karma. This is how the identity that makes us exist is constituted. Thus, the non-self is above all an experience, whose primary condition is to know the self well, without which it would not be possible to work on it and criticize it. The first thing we observe, in relation to the self, is that it is a source of worry, as is the case with Bad. He fears about his name, with the consequences for his state of mind, his reputation, his future, etc. This shows already the fragility of identity, the uncertainty of the self, if the simple fact of naming it, a simple sound, affects its beneficiary so much. As we have seen it, the denomination worries us, because it is an integral part of the constitution of the self.

In a general way, therefore, we feel the permanent need to affirm and reaffirm our self, in relation to the obstacles and problems that we encounter. Whether it is our name, our age, our gender, our nationality, our family, our place of origin, our titles, our talents, our status, our social function or other, we care about them, we put them forward, or we hide them. Unless we invent an identity, which is becoming more and more common with electronic avatars. But even without technology, from the beginning, when we talk about ourselves, our adventures or our memories, we always find a lot of mythification in the story. And we end up believing what we say, so many stories that "enrich" the "me" we spend our lives making up. Thus, we seek praise and abhor criticism, an addiction that is the source of many conflicts.

The Buddha asks us to renounce all those attachments that lock up our mind: possession, in all senses of the word, our identity, our opinions, our emotions, our fears and our desires. It is a question of emptying ourselves of this alleged reality, which obscures our glance and loses us. To do this, we must put at a distance everything that constitutes this identity, realizing the impermanence of things, that is to say, their absence of reality. Their ephemeral nature deprives them of all substance. It is also necessary to concentrate, through meditation, in order

to see how these phenomena are conditioned, how they are the very opposite of freedom. It is a question of experiencing emptiness. But this depersonalization requires training and patience. Nevertheless, serenity is at this price. Just as the stingy one must give up the love of money to find tranquillity, we must give up the attachment to our identity in order to no longer suffer.

 A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why can't Bad bear his name?
- Is it his name or himself that Bad does not accept?
- Is Bad is superstitious?
- Why does the master accept Bad's request?
- Why does the master propose to Bad to travel?
- Is it realistic to think that a name is "only a word we use to recognize someone"?
- Is Bad indeed an idiot, as the story suggests?
- Why does Bad lose interest in changing his name?
- Why is the name not "the cause of things"?
- Is Bad satisfied with his name, or indifferent?

Reflection

- ☆ Can a name really be neutral?
- ☆ Does our name indicate who we are?
- ☆ Is it legitimate or not to be attached to our name?
- ☆ Are we free to determine who we are?
- ☆ Do words have power?
- ☆ Does language determine reality?
- ☆ Is there such a thing as bad luck?
- ☆ Is there an objective reality in itself?
- ☆ Should we choose our own name as we wish?
- ☆ Why do we need to assert ourselves so badly?

Chapter 13 Rain and sunshine

? Does our happiness depend on us?

THERE WAS A WOMAN WHO CRIED ALL THE TIME. NOT A DAY PASSED WITHOUT HER CRYING REPEATEDLY. SHE WAS LIVING ALONE, HER TWO DAUGHTERS WERE MARRIED. THE FIRST HAD MARRIED AN UMBRELLA SELLER AND THE SECOND A NOODLE SELLER. ON SUNNY DAYS, THE WOMAN WOULD LAMENT, "ALAS, IT IS SO BEAUTIFUL! WITH THIS SUNSHINE, WHO IS GOING TO BUY UMBRELLAS? AND WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE STORE WILL BE CLOSED?" WHEN IT WAS RAINING, SHE WOULD LAMENT FOR HER YOUNGEST DAUGHTER. "ALAS! WITH THIS RAIN, WITHOUT SUNSHINE, HOW WILL THEY DRY THE NOODLES? THERE WILL BE NOTHING TO SELL. WHAT WILL WE DO THEN?" HER THOUGHTS ALWAYS SADDENED HER. SHE COULD NOT STOP CRYING. SO, THE OLD WOMAN LIVED IN DISMAY EVERY DAY. RAIN OR SHINE, SHE ALWAYS FOUND SOMETHING TO COMPLAIN ABOUT. HER NEIGHBOURS DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH HER, AND AS A JOKE THEY HAD ENDED UP CALLING HER "THE WEEPER".

A MONK WOULD LIVE NEARBY. HE WONDERED WHY THIS WOMAN WAS ALWAYS CRYING AND ASKED HER ONE DAY. WHEN THE MONK HEARD HER EXPLANATIONS, HE REPLIED KINDLY, "MADAM, YOU NEED NOT WORRY LIKE THAT. IF YOU WANT, I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TO BE HAPPY, AND YOU WILL NOT HAVE TO COMPLAIN ANYMORE. "THE WEEPING WOMAN WAS DELIGHTED WITH THIS PROPOSAL. SHE ASKED THE MONK TO SHOW HER IMMEDIATELY WHAT TO DO. HE REPLIED, "IT'S VERY SIMPLE. YOU JUST NEED TO CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE. ON SUNNY DAYS, DON'T THINK OF YOUR OLDER DAUGHTER WHO CAN'T SELL UMBRELLAS, BUT THINK OF YOUR YOUNGER DAUGHTER WHO CAN DRY HER NOODLES AND SELL THEM. ON RAINY DAYS, THINK OF YOUR ELDEST DAUGHTER'S UMBRELLA STORE, WHICH WILL DO GOOD BUSINESS." THE OLD WOMAN'S FACE LIT UP. SHE HASTENED TO FOLLOW THE MONK'S ADVICE AND WAS NO LONGER SEEN CRYING. NOBODY COULD RECOGNIZE HER. FROM THAT MOMENT ON, SHE WAS KNOWN AS "THE SMILING WOMAN".

13.1 Wisdom (prajñā)

The Eightfold Path or Noble Path is in Buddhism the path that leads to the cessation of suffering, as well as to total deliverance. This path has eight members grouped in three parts - the triple path - which should not be followed sequentially, but simultaneously: wisdom, ethics and meditation. The first step is wisdom (prajñā): it consists of a direct vision of reality, and in particular of the three characteristics of existence. Impermanence (anitya), which establishes that everything - being or phenomenon - is limited in time and is therefore destined to disappear. Dissatisfaction or suffering (dukkha) which establishes that everything is unsatisfactory, that nothing can bring us real happiness, that there is nothing we can totally rely on. Impersonality (anatta) which establishes that every entity is devoid of in-self, that there is no proper substance, and therefore nothing can be controlled; everything that exists is only an aggregation of conditioned phenomena, subject to dissolution.

In its practice, prajñā, the great perfect wisdom, has two parts. On the one hand, the vision - or understanding - of reality that is just a perfect consciousness because the mind does not allow itself to be distracted. On the other hand, the right thinking - or discernment -

that is, free of greed, hatred and ignorance, centred on the ultimate reality. At the same time cognitive capacity and know-how, prajña constitutes a direct vision of reality, not obscured by the veil of ignorance. It is a transcendental wisdom, because it lies beyond a singular thinking attached to the individual self, it allows us to grasp the inner reality of things. It is deepened in degrees: firstly, the wisdom obtained by hearing the masters or reading texts, then that acquired through personal reflection, rational examination, intellectual analysis, and finally the wisdom obtained through personal experience and the development of the mind. It is, of course, a matter of privileging personal activity rather than formal teaching, where knowledge comes from the outside. As practice proceeds, the mind comes to see its own mistakes, mainly subjective reactions and attachment, in order to achieve objectivity. It allows us to grasp the intimacy of phenomena in their particularity and context, but also in a unitary consciousness, by perceiving things in relation to an ultimate reality. In accepting a change of perspective, the "weeper" is undoubtedly at the first stage of the process.

13.2 Freedom

The experiment that the heroine of the story makes, on the wise advice of the monk, is in a way the experience of freedom. She lives in drama and pain, and by simply looking away she finally encounters happiness. As simple as this transformation is, it is generally difficult to apply but easy to neglect or forget. Thus, Plato puts the principle of reminiscence at the heart of philosophizing: we know, but we must search within ourselves and remember this knowledge.

The freedom described here refers to several philosophical conceptions. On the one hand to Stoic wisdom, as expressed by Epictetus, which proposes to accept what does not depend on us and to modify what depends on us. "The free man is the one to whom everything happens according to his will, to whom no one can hinder." But to do so, he must know how to direct his will. Wisdom therefore consists in distinguishing one from the other, and in working on what is indeed within our power.

According to Descartes, by discovering what is "true and good", the woman becomes able to pose an adequate judgment, source of freedom. She decides to give her deliberate consent to her way of seeing things, rather than to undergo it.

From Spinoza's point of view, the monk invites the woman to become aware of the reality of the world and of herself: by problematizing her attitude, by amplifying her vision of the world, one increases her power of being. She perceives the causes of what moves her. Her choice becomes deliberate because it is based on reason, instead of depending on her fears. Moreover, she is no longer immersed in sad and debilitating passions, she finally knows joy, empowering and liberating.

For Kant, she becomes her own law, she becomes autonomous, since she chooses the principles according to which she will think and act. Moreover, by following the monk's advice, she agrees to change her way of thinking into a principle that can be extended to everyone.

For Sartre, through the encounter with the monk, the woman passes from the status of "being in oneself" to "being for oneself". That is to say, she becomes aware of herself, she understands what determines her. From then on, she can freely engage in a way of being chosen with full knowledge of the facts, even if it is a question of another determinism. She chooses her life rather than attributing its causes to circumstances, lamenting her fate and thus

justifying her own misery.

13.3 Happiness

Happiness is theoretically what each of us is looking for. The pursuit of happiness, whether individual or collective, is even claimed as a right in some constitutions or founding political texts. Nevertheless, the essential problem with such a principle is that happiness does not mean the same thing for each of us, or even for a society and each of the individuals that compose it.

In any case, happiness is acquired in principle through the satisfaction of a will, an aspiration. It will therefore depend on one or the other. However, happiness suffers from a ruthless paradox. In principle, it pursues a given object and feels *de facto* in want: it is frustrated if it does not obtain it. But it can be just as frustrated if it does get it, for the good reason that it has nothing left to pursue once the expectation is fulfilled. So, it is a matter of finding a new object to search for, and that quest can end up being boring.

On the other hand, when one possesses the object of his desire, happiness is burdened by the fear of loss which sometimes takes over the present happiness. Then, we periodically notice the force of unhappiness by the fact that the slightest disappointment in our existence makes us forget all the rest of our pleasures. So much so that some philosophers recommend abandoning the pursuit of happiness as its secret.

Let us examine what constitutes happiness and unhappiness for the heroine of our story. On the one hand, she is concerned with materiality: she is preoccupied with economic matters, with financial survival. On the other hand, she cares about her children, more than she cares about herself. In this sense, she seeks happiness by proxy, through others. Finally, she cares about the future, more than about the present or the past. These different choices are not conscious. But it is not on these different points that the monk decides to make her think, but only by looking at the problem from a different perspective, by reversing the direction of the gaze, to make herself happy rather than unhappy.

Worry seems to be what gives meaning to her life, a very common phenomenon. But we can say that the monk, through his advices, invites her to become aware of herself, to observe her own gaze. This woman seems to lack nothing, she could be happy. So, the monk preferred to show her a different way of looking at the future. Without doubt this is an easier strategy of "consolation", a path to happiness more accessible to the fragile soul.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why does the woman cry?
- Is the woman right to complain?
- Why does the woman only see the negative side of things?
- Is the woman projecting her own misfortune onto her daughters?
- Does the woman take pleasure in her own unhappiness?
- Does the woman accept the reality of the world?
- Why does the woman find herself delighted with the monk's proposal?
- Did the woman need the monk to change her perspective?

- What does the woman learn by following the monk's advice?
- What was the monk's intention in offering his advice to the woman?

Reflection

- ☆ Why do we like to complain?
- ☆ Should we get out of the complaint?
- ☆ What is the main cause of unhappiness?
- ☆ Why is it difficult to be happy?
- ☆ Does our happiness depend on ourselves?
- ☆ Is it a good decision to see mainly the positive side of things?
- ☆ Can we show someone how to be happy?
- ☆ Is it possible to change the way we think?
- ☆ Does the way we look at things determine the reality of things?
- ☆ What is supreme wisdom?

Chapter 14 The man who wanted to be holy

? Must we suffer in order to realize ourselves?

LONG AGO, THE ENLIGHTENED ONE LIVED IN A WORLD WHERE MOST RELIGIONS WERE IDENTICAL. THEY USED TO TEACH THAT THE WAY TO ELIMINATE SUFFERING FROM THE MIND WAS TO MAKE THE BODY SUFFER IN ITS PLACE. STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM, MOST PEOPLE THOUGHT THAT THE SAINTLIEST OF THE SAINTS WERE THOSE WHO TORTURED THEIR BODIES THE MOST. SINCE EVERYONE SEEMED TO AGREE WITH THIS, THE BODDHISATTVA DECIDED TO FIND OUT FOR HIMSELF IF THIS WAS TRUE.

HE STOPPED LIVING LIKE AN ORDINARY PERSON AND BECAME A HOLY MAN, ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOMS OF HIS TIMES. THIS MEANS THAT HE GAVE UP EVERYTHING, EVEN HIS CLOTHES. HE WENT NAKED, HIS BODY COVERED ONLY WITH DUST AND DIRT. IN ORDER NOT TO BE SPOILED BY THE TASTE OF GOOD FOOD, HE FORCED HIMSELF TO EAT DISGUSTING THINGS: DIRT, ASHES, URINE, COW DUNG, ETC.

TO CONCENTRATE BETTER WITHOUT BEING INTERRUPTED BY ANYONE, HE WENT TO LIVE IN THE MOST DANGEROUS PART OF THE FOREST. WHEN HE WOULD SEE A HUMAN BEING, HE WOULD RUN AWAY LIKE A FRIGHTENED HARE. DURING THE WINTER, HE SPENT HIS DAYS UNDER THE TREES, AND HIS NIGHTS IN THE OPEN AIR. THUS, DURING THE DAY, HE WAS SOAKED BY THE COLD WATER THAT FLOWED ALONG THE ICE CUBES THAT HUNG FROM THE BRANCHES. AT NIGHT, HE WAS COVERED BY FALLING SNOW. IN THIS WAY, HE WOULD MAKE HIS BODY SUFFER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. IN THE SUMMER, HE WOULD SPEND HIS DAYS IN THE OPEN AIR, TO BE BURNED BY THE SUN'S RAYS. AT NIGHT, HE WOULD SETTLE UNDER THE TREES, SO THAT HE WOULD NOT BE COOLED BY THE DRAFTS. THIS WAY HE COULD SUFFER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE FROM THE HEAT.

THIS IS HOW HE FOUGHT WITH HIMSELF, TRYING TO BRING PEACE TO HIS MIND. HE WAS SO DETERMINED THAT HE LIVED HIS WHOLE LIFE IN THIS WAY. BUT, AS HE WAS ABOUT TO DIE, HE HAD A VISION OF HIMSELF, LIVING IN A HELLISH WORLD IN HIS LATER LIFE, SUFFERING AS HE SUFFERED ON EARTH, OR MORE. THIS VISION COMPLETELY DUMBFUNDED HIM. INSTANTLY HE KNEW THAT ALL THE WAYS HE HAD TORTURED HIS BODY WERE TOTALLY USELESS, EVEN PERVERSE. IN REALITY, THEY HAD NEVER BROUGHT HIM PEACE OF MIND. IMMEDIATELY, HE ABANDONED HIS FALSE PRESUMPTIONS AND UNDERSTOOD THE TRUTH. ON THAT BASIS, HE DIED, AND RETURNED TO A HEAVENLY WORLD.

14.1 Awakening (bodhi)

"Buddha" means the "Awakened One". Bodhi is a Sanskrit term meaning intelligence, perfect knowledge or revelation. In Buddhism, it refers to deliverance, enlightenment, or the state of awakening of a person freed from samsara, the cycle of rebirth and the whirlwind of passions. It is thus a question of following this path in order to awaken oneself. It is also called the "middle path" because it avoids the two extremes of pursuing happiness in dependence on the pleasure of the senses on the one hand, and on the other hand, pursuing liberation in the practice of asceticism and mortification. Having experienced these two extremes, the Buddha discovered the Noble path "which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to calm, deep vision and nirvana".

The doctrine speaks of the three veils, thus identified. The first: the journey through the four stages of meditation, embracing the worlds and their becoming. The second: contemplating one's inner lives and the infinite existences of others. The third: to grasp the law that makes the cycle of births and rebirths possible, the law known as the "twelve productions in mutual dependence". One discovers the necessary conditions to stop this cycle, in order to free oneself from it. He then possesses the Four Noble Truths, he has become "Buddha". This may seem somewhat esoteric to the uninitiated reader, but in a more concrete way, here are the various factors considered to be producers of awakening: attention, investigation and research into the various doctrinal problems, the energy to work with determination until the goal is reached, joy, relaxation of body and mind, concentration, and finally equanimity, that is, the ability to face, without being disturbed by it, all the vicissitudes of life. Thus, in awakening, man and the world become one.

We can see that this is knowledge, understanding of oneself and the world, and not supernatural powers. For the Buddha attributes what he is and what he does, all that he acquires and accomplishes, to the sole effort and the sole human intelligence, humanity representing the supreme condition. Humanity is its own master, its own judge. But to be free, he must be responsible and free himself from all servitude by his work and his own intelligence. This teaching aims to lead man to security, peace, happiness, understanding of nirvana, that state of suppression of thirst and pain, a state of absence and absolute deliverance. This is what in this story the Buddha finally discovers, escaping from hell.

Buddhism would not be a tragic philosophy: it claims to be realistic. Tranquillity is seen as a factor of awakening. There would be no sin in itself: the roots of all evil are ignorance, false views and doubt. As long as there is doubt, perplexity or uncertainty, no progress is possible. Awakening is therefore a clear and liberating vision of reality, where nothing distinguishes the individual from the world he inhabits.

14.2 Body and mind

The story poses from the outset an opposition between the mind and the body: the Bodhisattva decided to make his body suffer in order to eliminate the suffering of the mind. We see the conflicting dimension between these two dimensions of being. This opposition is not a kind of anthropological invariant, it has not always been postulated, even in the Western tradition. The soul was often a vague concept, attributable to everything that exists, as in animism. The word soul corresponds to the Latine word *anima*, indicating what is the source of movement, while the body, material, would be rather passive. This distinction often implies a criticism of the body. For example, Plato's idea of the "soul as the tomb of the body". The myth is that the soul, a spark that escaped from the divine fire and fell into the mud - the materiality of the body - becomes a human individual. As a result, the soul has forgotten its divine nature, which it must recall, thanks to philosophy, in order to free itself from its prison. Hence the idea that "to philosophize is to learn how to die", physically and psychically, by "abandoning" the body so that the spirit can "live".

The corporeity doubly indicates the remoteness from the divine: both by the separation of the spark and by the negation of its own nature. Thus, man is inclined to follow the desires of the body while forgetting his soul: he prefers the corruptible - what is born, changes and perishes

- to the eternal - unchanging. It is this perverse dimension that will have to be educated, with all the difficulty of practicing this cognitive and emotional growth. This scheme is very much inspired by Indian culture. One can also find in Plato the idea that according to the life one leads, the soul will come back to earth in another form, in conformity with the actions taken in the preceding life. The Egyptian scheme proposes a weighing of souls after death, presided over by Osiris, where the individual's heart should not be heavier than a feather of the goddess Maat, who embodies cosmic balance or harmony, which includes the principles of truth, justice and morality, protecting the world from chaos. If the dead person satisfies these conditions, she will be called to reside in the divine order, if not, he will be thrown into the mouth of a monster. Here again we see that spiritual and moral principles, the prerogative of the spirit or soul, determine the value of the subject for all eternity.

In the Christian scheme, the human being will be judged according to the morality of his actions, of which the soul is again the guarantee. The body represents pleasure, ease, sensitive and immediate gratification, as opposed to the effort and the will that must follow the divine plan, even if difficult to achieve. It is true that the history of Christianity shows us somewhat different or opposite paths, depending on the times and places. Thus, sensual pleasure will be more or less integrated to the religious vision, or completely rejected, as can be seen in the diversity of the relationship to aesthetics, in architecture or iconography. The suffering of the body is often represented, like the passion of the Christ, as the royal way for the salvation of the soul. Hinduism postulates the existence of the soul, called Atma, a parcel of energy that animates the body, seat of consciousness, which can be oriented towards the conditioned, the material, or towards the unconditioned, the immaterial. In the first case, it condemns itself to live again in many existences, each one more painful than the other, and it is very difficult to escape this infernal fate. Buddhism wanted to save man from this fatal fate by denying the idea of the soul, endowed with an existence just as fake as that of the body, thus conditioned and mortal. There is in fact only the mind, in its intellectual and emotional function, phenomenon and non-substance, although some Buddhist traditions include the soul as the condition of the process of successive lives, samsara.

14.3 Suffering (dukkha)

The concept of suffering dukkha is very important in Buddhist philosophy. It is precisely because of this painful dimension, constitutive of the existence, that it is a question of delivering oneself. Thus, there is no question of suffering in order to be saved, which constitutes one of the first experiences of the historical Buddha, reported in this story, thus rejecting the Hindu schema. Nevertheless, to resist the worldly temptations, those of the body or the spirit, implies an effort, therefore a pain, at least temporary, since one deprives oneself of satisfaction. This is the paradox of this arduous path.

In a very general way, suffering is an experience of pain that indicates a problem, physical or mental - or a threat of a problem - for the individual. It is not only undergone, but we participate - willingly or unwillingly - in determining its nature or degree.

We can approach the problem of suffering - like pleasure - from different perspectives: aesthetic, moral, psychological and cognitive. In the aesthetic perspective, pain is a priori not pleasant, unless we succeed in combining it with pleasure. To do so, it must be wanted: either

by getting used to it, or by deliberately dosing it. On the moral or ethical level, suffering often finds its value as a sign of effort, of will, of obedience to precepts, i.e., as a renunciation of the ease of immediate pleasure. Many religious doctrines incite to this sacrifice in the name of a divine or other authority. Pain then becomes a guarantee of salvation by merit, especially for after death, but also for the present by providing the satisfaction of a clear conscience. It is this quest for "sanctity" that we see in the present story that generates a fascination for pain. Suffering is also a deserved punishment for transgressing the "good". On the psychological level, suffering does not have a good press. The world is ugly and depressing, when we should be happy. Nevertheless, concepts such as resilience tend to show that suffering can be taken as a challenge, or even an achievement. Cognitively, suffering is an interesting indicator of what is problematic, which alerts us to what threatens the integrity of our being. We can find meaning in it as an existential necessity, constitutive of the real.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why should we make our body suffer?
- Why would a person want to be a saint?
- Does the Boddhisattva have confidence in himself?
- Does the Boddhisattva take pleasure in suffering?
- What are the different ways of suffering that the Boddhisattva invents?
- Did the Boddhisattva manage to bring peace to his mind?
- Is the Boddhisattva perverse?
- Why does the Boddhisattva change his attitude?
- Was the Boddhisattva's life an absurdity?
- What does salvation depend on?

Reflection

- ★ How does the saint differ from an ordinary person?
- ★ Should faith have limits?
- ★ In what way could excess be good?
- ★ Should one go beyond the limits of his body?
- ★ Can suffering be a form of complacency?
- ★ Is it necessary to suffer in order to stop suffering?
- ★ Can we find meaning in suffering?
- ★ Can one do what he wants with his own body?
- ★ Why is there conflict between body and mind?
- ★ Does truth always need time?

Chapter 15 The band of drunkards

? Is common sense common?

IN THIS STORY, THE ENLIGHTENED ONE, BORN INTO A WEALTHY FAMILY, WAS THE RICHEST MAN IN HIS TOWN AND ADVISOR TO THE KING. IN THE SAME CITY THERE WAS A BAND OF DRUNKARDS. THEY SPENT THEIR TIME LOOKING FOR EXPEDIENTS TO FIND ALCOHOL AND GET DRUNK.

ONE DAY, WHEN THEY RAN OUT OF MONEY, AS THEY OFTEN DID, THEY HAD THE IDEA OF ROBBING THE RICHEST MAN IN TOWN, WITHOUT REALIZING WHO HE WAS. THEY DECIDED TO CONCOCT A SPECIAL DRINK, CONTAINING A POWERFUL SLEEPING PILL. THEN THEY SET UP A KIND OF SMALL IMPROVISED BAR ALONG THE MAIN STREET LEADING TO THE PALACE. SO, WHEN THEIR "VICTIM" PASSED BY, ONE OF THE DRUNKARDS CALLED HIM OUT.

- HONOURABLE SIR, WHY NOT START YOUR DAY OFF RIGHT HAVING A DRINK WITH US? THE FIRST DRINK IS ON THE HOUSE, THEY ADDED, AS THEY POURED THEIR "SPECIAL" COCKTAIL INTO A CUP.

OF COURSE, THE ENLIGHTENED ONE DID NOT DRINK ANY KIND OF ALCOHOL. HOWEVER, HE WONDERED WHY THESE DRUNKARDS WERE SO GENEROUS THAT DAY. IT WAS NOT THEIR STYLE, IT MUST HAVE BEEN A BAD TRICK. SO HE DECIDED TO TEACH THEM A LESSON. HE REPLIED:

- IT WOULD BE A SERIOUS MISTAKE TO APPEAR IN FRONT OF THE KING IN A STATE OF DRUNKENNESS, OR EVEN WITH THE SLIGHTEST TRACE OF ALCOHOL IN MY BREATH. SO BE KIND AND WAIT FOR ME THERE, AND I WILL SEE YOU TONIGHT WHEN I RETURN FROM THE PALACE.

THE DRUNKARDS WERE DISAPPOINTED TO BE UNABLE TO CARRY OUT THEIR MISDEED. NEVERTHELESS, FOR NO OTHER SOLUTION, THEY DECIDED TO WAIT. LATER, THE MAN RETURNED TO THE MAKESHIFT BAR. THE DRUNKARDS CALLED HIM OUT IMMEDIATELY.

- HONOURABLE SIR, WHY DON'T YOU CELEBRATE YOUR VISIT TO THE KING?

LET US OFFER YOU A DRINK, AS PROMISED.

THE MAN LOOKED SUSPICIOUSLY AT THE BOTTLE AND THE GLASS.

- I DON'T TRUST YOU, THIS BOTTLE IS STILL AS FULL AS IT WAS THIS MORNING. IF YOUR LIQUOR WAS SO GOOD, YOU WOULD HAVE ALREADY ENJOYED IT YOURSELF. I DON'T EVEN THINK THERE WOULD BE ANY LEFT AT ALL. YOU REALLY TAKE ME FOR AN IDIOT.

AND THE MAN CONTINUED ON HIS WAY, WHILE THE BAND OF DRUNKARDS, DISAPPOINTED, RETURNED TO THEIR SORDID SCHEMES.

15.1 Dependency

Drunkenness is obviously a form of addiction, as there are so many. Some are easily recognized as problematic, such as gambling or drugs, while others are less ostensible. It should also be noted that practically all human activity can take an addictive form.

Yet what is clear in all of this is that one of the main effects of addiction is its action on the emotional level, in particular through the combination of two effects: numbness and excitement. In general, any addiction responds to pain, lack, anguish, chronic dissatisfaction. However, what is expected from addiction is both to create pleasure and satisfaction, and to

alleviate the unpleasant feeling generated by any pain. Generally, with abuse, the satisfaction dimension tends to disappear unless the "dose" is increased. A new pain, or the threat of it, linked to the possible or actual interruption of the addictive practice, has been grafted onto the system. And there is an amplification of the emotional and cognitive instability.

The main pain experienced by the soul generally revolves around the feeling of nullity or nothingness which is expressed by boredom, self-deprecation, loss of meaning. The subject criticizes himself and the criticisms coming from others are unbearable for him. In the same way, he finds it difficult to make up his mind or make a commitment, and is always disappointed in himself and in the world. Since reality is so unsatisfactory as to be unbearable, but cannot be changed, it is then a question of modifying its perception or ignoring it in order to create another. We therefore create a kind of artificial stimulation.

Depending on the nature of the excitement, it will last more or less over time, but the limits are never far from it. One of the options then remains to anchor oneself in the new pain, as it is unconsciously considered less horrible than the original one. It is better to suffer from alcoholism than from a feeling of nothingness! Probably because the former seems better defined and more certain than the latter, it seems to be easier to manage. Similarly, it is better to suffer from not being loved than to take the risk of loving. By being "the object" of another, the subject has nothing else to do but suffer and suffer, and the victim, suffering, has good conscience.

The last point on addiction, as shown by the example of the drunkards in this story, the person intoxicated by any addiction generally tends to want to draw others into his own slump. Here lies the now overused meaning of the term sharing or exchange. Probably to feel less alone in the addiction, but also because people who do not "suffer" do not remind others too vividly of their own suffering, which in the "comfort" of sharing will seem "normal" to them, a simple habit, a way of being. Attracting others into one's reality is then part of the process of numbness sought. No wonder that the drunkards' strategy to rob the rich man is to invite him to drink.

15.2 Detachment (nekkhamma)

Buddhist philosophy warns us about the "three poisons" that pervert the mind. Greed, or thirst, anger, or aversion, ignorance, or indifference. The middle path proposed by the Buddha therefore suggests that we should not be swept away by passion, lust, or rejection, but neither should we fall into the inhumanity of apathy and insensitivity. It is in this sense that most translators of the term "nekkhamma" prefer to render the idea by non-attachment rather than detachment, because compassion, which remains one of the key attributes of the Buddha, would be opposed to the idea of a radical position.

The nekkhamma is the right attitude par excellence, because the enemy is possession. The first form is saying "this is mine": whether it is a material good, a relationship, an opinion, a pleasure, knowledge, power or status, it leads us down the path of pain. On the one hand because we are afraid of losing this possession, we seek to protect it and we distrust others, on the other hand because in general, very naturally, we want more, we are insatiable, because this possession is paradoxically gratifying and tiring. Therefore, we must not want anything, not claim to possess anything, while at the same time maintaining a feeling of eternity.

The other form of possession is to say "this is me", which is even more meaningful, more intimate, since it is about possessing oneself. We feel even more threatened, and we must redouble our efforts to defend ourselves, hence the susceptibility that makes us constantly fear the judgment of others. This possession operates on the one hand on the attributes of the "I": all those qualities that we like to attribute to ourselves in order to distinguish us from others. But also, the simple idea that there is an "I", whether in the immediate, during our present existence, or in the concept of soul, firmly established, for other lives or for eternity. Again, this identification generates a certain posture that makes us fear or hope, which causes tension and pain. Hence hatred for others, mistrust or resentment, rather than compassion.

Attachment or possession is the cause of our suffering, because we give a reality to these "objects" of possession, even if it is the "I", the thinking subject himself. Therefore, we must accept, in order to see reality, to de-realize these objects of lust or fear. And we must realize that they are produced by a phenomenon of mutual conditioning, itself devoid of any proper reality. Our gaze must therefore be directed to the unconditioned, the foundation of all reality. But here again lies the trap: we must not give substance to this unconditioned, it would still be falling into the chain of possession. By believing that we are reaching nirvana, we would be moving away from it.

Thus the drunkards in this story symbolize the human in general: they are possessed - they are alienated; they live by expedients and in fact, anxious, are always in search of some "novelty" to survive, some victim to rob. They are possessed, as if by a demon: by their own desire to possess. And since they do not find their happiness there, they resort to artificial paradises, which can provide them with "nirvana". An illusion that can never last, and these men know it. Their disillusionment or despair can only lead them from bad to worse, to the point of attacking the Bodhisattva, without even realizing it. He is the "richest" man in the city, precisely because he desires nothing and possesses nothing. But the poor bastards are not aware of the inanity of their enterprise.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why do drunkards think they can fool the rich man?
- Do drunkards know why they drink?
- Why do drunkards use such a ploy to steal from the man?
- Do alcoholics think they are convincing?
- How do these alcoholics view themselves?
- Would alcoholics want to drag the rich man down with them?
- What are the main differences between the rich man and drunkards?
- Do drunkards show common sense?
- What is the main mistake drunkards make?
- Are these drunkards doomed to be disappointed?

Reflection

- ☆ Does an alcoholic always remain an alcoholic?

- ★ Why do we develop an addiction?
- ★ Why is an addiction a problem?
- ★ Do our addictions necessarily make us unhappy?
- ★ Can we not be addicted to anything?
- ★ Is the human being a being of permanent withdrawal?
- ★ Is common sense an adequate criterion for judgment?
- ★ Is common sense the best thing shared in the world, as Descartes says?
- ★ Is detachment necessarily a virtue?
- ★ Can dependence be beneficial or legitimate?

Chapter 16 The persevering quail

? Is perseverance always rewarded?

A QUAIL USED TO LIVE IN A LARGE FOREST. ONE UNFORTUNATE DAY, DURING A THUNDERSTORM, LIGHTNING STRUCK A NEARBY TREE, WHICH BEGAN TO BURN. SOON THE FLAMES SPREAD TO OTHER TREES. THE LITTLE QUAIL GOT WORRIED. SHE THOUGHT THAT IF THE FIRE CONTINUED, MANY ANIMALS IN THE FOREST WOULD BE KILLED. SHE CONCLUDED THAT SHE HAD TO DO SOMETHING, URGENTLY. UNFORTUNATELY, SHE FELT HELPLESS. FOR LACK OF A BETTER IDEA, SHE DECIDED TO FLY TO THE NEARBY RIVER, SOAK IN THE WATER, AND DRIP OVER THE FIRE TO DULL THE FLAMES. OF COURSE, SHE SOON REALIZED THAT HER EFFORTS WERE NOT VERY SUCCESSFUL, AS THE FIRE GREW LARGER AND LARGER. BUT SHE COULDN'T STOP HERSELF FROM CONTINUING: SOMETHING INSIDE HER FORCED HER TO PERSEVERE, TO GO BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THE RIVER AND THE FIRE, TO BRING BACK A FEW DROPS OF WATER EACH TIME.

FROM THE SKY, THE GODS WERE CONTEMPLATING THE SCENE.

- WHAT A RIDICULOUS BIRD, SAID ONE OF THEM! THIS MISERABLE LITTLE QUAIL REALLY BELIEVES THAT SHE CAN PUT OUT THE FIRE BY HERSELF!

A GODDESS ADDED:

- SHE'LL NEVER MAKE IT! SHE SHOULD GIVE UP. TOO BAD FOR HER IF SHE GETS BURNED.

BUT A THIRD, RATHER TOUCHED, ANNOUNCED:

- I AM GOING TO TELL HER TO STOP, AND ADVISE HER TO SAVE HERSELF INSTEAD, BECAUSE SHE WILL EXHAUST HERSELF AND RISK BEING CAUGHT IN THE FIRE.

THEREUPON, THE GOD TRANSFORMED HIMSELF INTO AN EAGLE TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE HAD ANNOUNCED.

HE LOOKED FOR A LONG TIME FOR THE QUAIL, INVISIBLE SO MUCH THE SMOKE WAS DENSE.

WHEN HE FOUND HER, HE WANTED TO SPEAK TO HER, BUT SHE DID NOT LISTEN TO HIM.

- I DO NOT HAVE TIME TO SPEAK TO YOU, YOU SEE WELL THAT I AM BUSY.

THE EAGLE ANSWERED HER:

- YOU ARE NOT GOING TO PUT OUT THE FIRE LIKE THAT. ESCAPE! RUN AWAY WHILE YOU STILL CAN!

BUT THE LITTLE QUAIL DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW.

- IF YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING, I DON'T NEED YOUR ADVICE, BUT YOUR HELP TO PUT OUT THE FIRE. EITHER YOU HELP ME, OR YOU CAN LEAVE.

SO, THE EAGLE LEFT THE QUAIL TO HER FATE, ADMIRING HER DETERMINATION.

WHEN THEY HEARD WHAT HAD HAPPENED, THE GODS CONFERRED AND FINALLY AGREED THAT THEY HAD TO HELP SUCH A BRAVE AND DETERMINED LITTLE CREATURE. SO, THEY DECIDED TO MAKE THE RAIN FALL, A DENSE AND POWERFUL RAIN. TORRENTS OF WATER FELL ON THE FOREST, AND AFTER A FEW HOURS THE FIRE WAS EXTINGUISHED.

THE LITTLE QUAIL WAS VERY HAPPY ABOUT THIS AND CONCLUDED THAT HER EFFORTS HAD NOT BEEN IN VAIN. MOREOVER, THE GODS DECIDED TO REWARD HER FOR HER GENEROSITY, COURAGE AND PERSEVERANCE. SINCE THAT TIME, QUAILS HAVE HAD AN EGRET ON THEIR HEAD, WHICH IS A KIND OF SMALL CROWN.

16.1 Effort and will

Will is a crucial concept in Buddhist philosophy. Its primary effort is to tackle sensuality, ill will and cruelty. It can have a personal or altruistic purpose. In the first case, it is about acquiring knowledge, that is to say, deliverance from error, from ignorance, by attaining serenity. In the second case, it is related to compassion. Realizing that beings have a miserable fate, the will naturally seeks to alleviate their suffering, or even to free them from it. One could say that we find here two different, even contrary, tendencies that the various Buddhist schools will favour more or less. Thus, the little quail, in her efforts to stop the fire and save the animals living in the forest, could be criticized from the first point of view, since she attaches great importance to existence, from both a cognitive and an emotional point of view. In such a perspective, contemplation is opposed to action, whereas the bird will engage in the latter.

Buddhism describes four types of effort: avoidance, preventing unwholesome and false ideas, and not committing evil acts; dominance, rejecting or annihilating harmful impulses such as lust, anger, delusion, etc.; acquisition, bringing forth new wholesome tendencies in oneself in order to acquire the requisite qualities - mindfulness, energy, equanimity, etc.; and perseverance, retaining the requisite qualities of the mind - and perseverance, to maintain the beneficial tendencies, to perfect them.

These efforts lead to knowledge, allow consciousness to take root. Indolence is the main enemy of this wisdom, which must be abolished or prevented. Certain Buddhist texts do not hesitate to speak of "combat" and "warrior". A famous pillar of the emperor Azoka (304-232 B.C.) is inscribed: "I consider the well-being of beings as a goal for which I must fight. "The figure of what remains the greatest Buddhist political leader, "the emperor of emperors", is interesting to note in this context. In particular for his historical role in the establishment of a political Buddhism, where religion is linked to royalty, which is still found today in Thailand. Buddhism is then a doctrine that can serve as a foundation for political unity. This conception implies that morality must reign in justice and in the management of daily affairs. It is such an ideal of action that the little quail embodies.

16.2 Compassion (karuna)

One of the main qualities of the Buddha is compassion. Etymologically, this term means "to suffer with", but it is not so much an emotion as an attitude that leads us to be attentive to the suffering of others. Compassion makes us capable of perceiving or feeling the pain in beings, and we will naturally try to remedy it with a feeling of solidarity: it is therefore an altruistic virtue. It implies a dissolution of the self into the other, which is found for example in the Christian concept of agape, universal love.

In Buddhism, whose aim is to alleviate and eliminate the suffering of animate beings and its causes, compassion plays a leading role as a path to Awakening. Through daily practice, it can be learned and must become "natural".

Compassion is not only an attitude, but also a gift: first the gift of material goods, then the gift of protection, moral or physical, and finally the gift of dharma, which implies already being a "sage". The practice of giving cultivates detachment from one's own possessions and the erasure of one's own person, the basis of all suffering. Moreover, from an Awakening perspective,

the gift does not really exist, it is devoid of its own existence, since there is neither donor nor recipient. It is a simple positive energy that circulates, also devoid of its own existence, but a skilful means to go towards Awakening.

Thus, the compassionate being is empty of selfish desires, hatred, ignorance, vanity, pride, it is pure and gentle, full of universal love, kindness, sympathy, understanding and tolerance. This is why the Bodhisattva postpones his deliverance indefinitely to facilitate the salvation of others. In this, it is superior to the Arhat, an awakened Being, but who, by dint of developing too much wisdom to reach a nirvana of his own to the detriment of compassion, has not yet been totally delivered from the "I".

Nevertheless, the perfect charity required by compassion poses certain problems. For example, the story of Vessantara, a young prince who has vowed to give whatever is asked of him. As regent of the kingdom, he empties the country's treasury completely by his continual giving. He even gives to an enemy prince the battle elephants and a magic jewel assuring the victory to its possessor. The latter attacks the country, plunders it, ravages it, and massacres its inhabitants. Later, Vessantara will give his children as slaves, will abandon his wife and will tear out his eyes to give them to a blind man so that he can see. This is one of many stories in the tradition that forces the reader to question the limits and nature of "perfect charity". Not all stories are as obviously successful as that of the persevering quail.

16.3 **Almightiness**

As sympathetic as this little quail is, we can reproach her for a certain lack of realism, as well for a certain excessiveness. The discrepancy between her intention and her abilities is still quite phenomenal: we can understand that some gods are laughing or pitying her and would voluntarily let her run to her death. She almost deserves to be punished for her pride and pretension. "Nothing too much" was written on the pediment of the temple of Delphi. The gods punish those who do not accept the limits given to them. "The skies always bring down whoever exceeds the measure", wrote Herodotus. Thus, were violently punished Prometheus who provided men with fire by stealing it from the gods, or Orpheus who had revealed the divine mysteries to them. In this perspective, it is a question of knowing one's place, of recognizing the order and hierarchy of the world.

In more modern terms, the principle of reality cannot be ignored without harsh consequences: this is what children are taught. Without divine intervention, the little quail would probably have perished in the flames without having helped anyone. Of course, in many religious settings, she would be a saint, because she helped others by following her "good intentions", acting for the "good" at the risk of her life. Here we find the concept of sacrificing oneself in order to help one's fellow man, honoured in many cultural contexts. This self-sacrifice is considered an ideal, the ultimate act of generosity. But one can oppose this with the proverb that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions". Could the little quail not have acted in a more useful way, such as warning the animals of impending danger? Is survival not the priority? In a sense, the quail does not assume her own existence: she is ready to die to ensure an extra soul. Under the guise of acting for others, as so many mothers do, one is in fact living by proxy, with the best conscience in the world, with the moral certainty of being on the side of "good. Is it really necessary to elevate this self-sacrifice, unreasonable and useless, to the rank

of an ideal regulating existence? Certainly, we are happy to know that her action, supported by divine forces, was crowned with success, both for her and for the animals of the forest. But is it really doing someone a favour to make them believe that they can do whatever they want, just because they think it is "right"? This is the fantasy of omnipotence described in this story, this omnipotence of the infantile mind that believes itself to be endowed with unlimited powers; self-glorification of a subject that attributes to itself a magical power that has an infinite hold on the outside world. The small quail takes herself for a god: in her will of control, she will save the world.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Does the quail think first of others or of herself?
- Did the quail think before acting?
- Is the quail aware of her limitations?
- Why does the quail persevere despite her failure?
- Why do the gods mock the quail?
- Is the quail a challenge to the gods?
- Why does the quail refuse to listen to the eagle?
- Does the eagle have mixed feelings about the quail?
- Why do the gods finally decide to help the quail?
- Does the quail deserve her reward?

Reflection

- ☆ Do we all have a mission to accomplish?
- ☆ Why do we like to feel useful?
- ☆ Do we always have to think before we act?
- ☆ Are we responsible for others?
- ☆ Is it better to change our desires or the world order?
- ☆ Does excessiveness also exist in the good?
- ☆ Is conviction a trap?
- ☆ Can we be right against everyone?
- ☆ What distinguishes courage from temerity?
- ☆ Is perseverance always rewarded in the end?

Chapter 17 The old man and the scorpion

? Does everything that exists has a reason to exist?

WHEN HE FINISHED HIS MEDITATION, THE OLD MAN OPENED HIS EYES. HE SAW A SCORPION STRUGGLING DESPERATELY IN THE WATER. AS THE ANIMAL CAME CLOSER TO WHERE HE WAS, THE OLD MAN REACHED OUT TO RESCUE THE POOR ANIMAL WHO WAS DROWNING. NO SOONER HAD HE TOUCHED THE SCORPION THAN IT STUNG HIM. INSTINCTIVELY, THE OLD MAN WITHDREW HIS HAND. BUT A FEW MOMENTS LATER, ONCE HE HAD REGAINED HIS BALANCE, HE MADE THE SAME GESTURE AND EXTENDED HIS ARM AGAIN TO SAVE THE SCORPION. THIS TIME THE INSECT STUNG HIM SO HARD WITH ITS POISONOUS TAIL THAT THE POOR MAN'S HAND SWELLED AND TURNED PURPLE, WHILE HIS FACE GRIMACED WITH PAIN.

AT THIS MOMENT, A PASSER-BY WHO HAD OBSERVED THE WHOLE SCENE CRIED OUT:

- HEY, YOU STUPID OLD MAN, ARE YOU CRAZY? ONLY A FOOL OR A MADMAN WOULD RISK HIS LIFE FOR SUCH AN UGLY AND EVIL CREATURE. DON'T YOU KNOW THAT YOU COULD KILL YOURSELF TRYING TO SAVE THAT UNGRATEFUL SCORPION? YOU KNEW IT WOULD STING YOU! THE OLD MAN TURNED HIS HEAD. HE LOOKED STRAIGHT INTO THE STRANGER'S EYES AND ANSWERED CALMLY:

- MY FRIEND, IT'S NOT BECAUSE IT IS IN THE SCORPION'S NATURE TO STING THAT I SHOULD CHANGE MY NATURE WHICH IS TO HELP.

17.1 Responsible

The term responsible has its roots in the verb "to respond": to express one's point of view following a query. This is what we find in the expression "to respond for". In Latin, the word *respondere* means "to offer in return". One of the oldest meanings of the word "responsible" in Old French is used to indicate the payment of an annuity: what one owes in exchange for a good one has obtained. Hence, being responsible implies that the success or failure of an action is attributable to us, and that we can be rewarded or blamed for it. Paradoxically, responsibility is combined with freedom, since without being free, we could not be responsible, since the chain of events would not depend on us. To be responsible is to be the cause or the condition of a fact that is an effect. It is to be an author, of facts or of misdeeds, therefore, to be an authority, as legitimate or illegitimate as it may be. This person can nevertheless be considered reliable, since he assumes his acts: one cannot condemn or praise an irresponsible person.

In this story, the witness of the scene suspects the old man of being stupid or crazy to act as he does. He wonders if he is "responsible" or not, risking death in such a reckless way. Because theoretically, according to common sense, our first responsibility is to be the guarantor or the author of our own life, since at any moment we can die. The witness of the story sees this as an obligation, the most fundamental of all. But the old man feels more responsible for his compassion, without worrying about the consequences. Doing good and helping others takes precedence over his own survival: this is his primary responsibility, unlike the witness, for whom the first duty is to himself.

At the same time, the old man seems to deny his own freedom, since he presents this as his "nature". He absolves himself of all responsibility, just as he relieves the scorpion of any

accusation of evil intent. The problem is interesting: do we choose to act as we do, or are we condemned to do so because we are "made" that way? "We are condemned to be free", wrote Sartre, paradoxically. Should we consider the "condemned" perspective of our being, or the "free" part? But if the thief is condemned to steal by his nature as a thief, we can also affirm that the judge is condemned to condemn him, by his nature as a judge. The problem that arises here is to determine whether essence precedes existence, or the reverse. Do our actions compose our existence, or are they only the expression, the reflection, the symptom of what we are, biologically, culturally, psychologically, etc? The witness and the old man do not have here the same vision of the world and of the subject.

17.2 Cause and effect (avirbhava)

The idea of causality is a principle that is most often evoked in the history of thought, both to account for the order of the world and to order our thought processes in a coherent way. Aristotle distinguished between different types of cause: efficient, that which triggers the action; final, that which is the goal of the action; material, that on which the action is performed; formal, the idea or principle that generates the action. The Buddhist schema takes the side of strongly valuing the principle of causality: nothing is due to chance or arbitrariness. Everything is determined by this "physical" principle, a universal, unchanging and all-powerful law, which governs the nature of things. This is what the old man understands very well, for the scorpion and for himself. Unfortunately, humans, blinded by their illusions, those of desire and fear, are unaware of the nature of this law, its operativity and its consequences. This makes them irrational, unreasonable and irresponsible. Nevertheless, they will have to pay the price of this irresponsibility, since nothing is "free". If they knew the nature and power of this law, they would not act in such an inconsistent way, which leads to suffering, emotional overflow, "sad passions", as Spinoza would say.

The main message of Buddha, the one who sees clearly and perfectly the order of things, is precisely about this law that governs the world. This "right" vision is what explains why he acts for the best and teaches the truth. By becoming aware of this principle, we will know how to act appropriately and create lasting happiness for ourselves and others.

Here are some of the principles of Buddhist causality, although they may be common sense. Cause and effect are of the same nature: if we change the nature of the cause, we change the nature of the effect. Effects are always the result of several causes, nothing causes an effect exclusively by itself, because things condition each other. The effect is contained in the cause and vice versa: the difference is in the temporality, in the actualization. Everything is at the same time cause and effect, infinite process of mutual engendering of phenomena, things and beings, which can take more or less time, be more or less visible. The law of causality prevents us from falling into the trap of arbitrariness and chance, as well as into that of superstition and dogma. Above all, it allows us to guide our actions in a rational way. The law of causality allows us to attribute a right value to our actions, because we then adequately evaluate their implications and consequences, thus allowing us to become wise and happy.

17.3 Other

The other is our fellow man, but he is not us, and in this he poses a problem for us. He is the one who is other. We naturally have to deal with him: the similar goes to the similar. Because we act on him, he is the object of our will. Because he is also subject, he obstructs our will, he resists us. For Levinas, the presence of the other is an encounter with the infinite: the thought of what we cannot think; it is a dialogue with a "face" that both begs us and commands us, which is called ethics. Jesus Christ commands us to love this other. The Buddha asks us to have compassion for him.

Man is a social or political animal, says Aristotle. We need the other to exist, to achieve what we want to achieve. In this, the other is the very condition of our existence, of our project, but he is also what prevents us from living, because his project does not necessarily correspond to ours. The other alienates us, but it is what allows us to be and to become. The one who ignores the other, the one who is not challenged by this difference, sometimes ignoble or unbearable, would be a prisoner of himself, folded up on his puny self.

When the other faces us, he challenges us, as in this story. The witness warns the old man about the danger of the scorpion, a dangerous animal: he is crazy not to take care of it. But the old man replies that this danger, this other, will not prevent him from being himself. Moreover, after the first sting, destabilized, the old man has an instinctive self-preservation. He has to "find his balance" before he can get back to the dangerous animal. It is a question of being well "centred" to go towards others. Paradoxical as it may be, the one who does not go towards the other is unbalanced, because it is the other who invites us to be ourselves: by a mirror effect, by the dynamic effect of a test and an awareness. In this tale, the old man meets two "others". The one who threatens him physically, and the one who threatens him morally. The first stings him, the second wants to put doubt in his mind. Both want to prevent him from acting, from fulfilling his own nature, that of a compassionate being.

In general, we do not tolerate that others resist us, that they frustrate our desires and our will, especially when we want something "good" for them. We are so "good"! How can he not see it, not know it? Like the witness of the scene, we lend him bad intentions: the animal is "mean and ungrateful". Nevertheless, perhaps the old man is abusive, with his unwelcome generosity. His insistence may become suspicious. Besides, is it really generosity? Obviously, the scorpion does not want to be saved by him. It would rather die than not sting. But the man insists on expressing his compassion, blindly no doubt, even stupidly. Is he autistic? Does he refuse to see the other as he is? Is he so full of himself that he cannot see reality? It seems that the other cannot present itself otherwise than in the form of a dilemma, of an insoluble and tonic problem.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Can the old man not save the scorpion?
- Is the passer-by's advice legitimate?
- Is the passer-by selfish?
- Is the old man acting for himself or for the scorpion?

- Are the old man and the scorpion alike?
- Is the old man a wise man or a fool?
- Does the old man want something from the scorpion?
- Is the nature of the scorpion senseless?
- Is it possible to help the scorpion?
- Is the old man responsible for the scorpion?

Reflection

- ☆ Why do we want to save others?
- ☆ Is it right or wrong to be selfish?
- ☆ Should we help someone who does not ask for help?
- ☆ Should we help someone who does not want to be helped?
- ☆ Is it human nature to help others?
- ☆ Why do we hurt others?
- ☆ Are there good or evil beings by nature?
- ☆ Does everything that exists have a reason to exist?
- ☆ Are we responsible for everything?
- ☆ Must we necessarily have compassion for others?

Chapter 18 The cracked jar

? Should we accept what we are?

A WATER CARRIER USED TO CARRY OUT HIS HEAVY DAILY TASK WITH THE HELP OF TWO LARGE JARS THAT HE CARRIED SUSPENDED ON A LONG, STRONG BAMBOO POLE PERCHED ON HIS SHOULDERS, ONE ON EACH SIDE. BUT THE TWO JARS, THOUGH OF THE SAME SIZE, WERE NOT QUITE THE SAME. ONE OF THEM, NEWER, WELL-POLISHED, WAS IN PERFECT CONDITION, THE OTHER, OLDER, TARNISHED BY TIME, WAS SOMEWHAT POROUS. THUS, THE FIRST ONE WAS KEEPING ALL ITS PRECIOUS WATER FROM THE WELL TO THE VILLAGE, WHILE THE OTHER ONE WAS LOSING ALMOST HALF OF IT ON THE WAY. THIS PROBLEM HAD BEEN GOING ON FOR QUITE SOME TIME, UNFORTUNATELY THE POOR MAN DID NOT EARN ENOUGH MONEY TO REPLACE THE DEFECTIVE JUG. THIS MADE HIS WORK MORE DIFFICULT, ON THE ONE HAND BECAUSE HE WAS WALKING FOR NOTHING, LOSING TIME AND INCOME, ON THE OTHER HAND BECAUSE IT UNBALANCED HIS BURDEN, MAKING THE TRANSPORT MORE DIFFICULT.

OF COURSE, THE "GOOD" JAR WAS PROUD OF ITSELF, BOTH FOR ITS PERFECT APPEARANCE AND BECAUSE IT MANAGED TO FULFIL ITS FUNCTION FLAWLESSLY. BUT THE POOR, DAMAGED JAR WAS ASHAMED OF ITS IMPERFECTION: IT FELT DEPRESSED, BECAUSE IT THOUGHT IT WAS UGLY AND BECAUSE IT ONLY FULFILLED HALF ITS TASK. FINALLY, TIRED OF ITS CONSTANT FAILURE, IT CALLED OUT THE WATER CARRIER AS HE WAS FILLING IT.

- I FEEL GUILTY, AND I BEG YOU TO EXCUSE ME.

- "WHY? ASKED THE WATER CARRIER, WHAT ARE YOU ASHAMED OF?" - "I DON'T DO WHAT I SHOULD DO, I LOSE HALF OF MY WATER EVERY TRIP, BECAUSE I AM OLD AND WORN OUT. BECAUSE OF ME, YOU MAKE ALL THESE EFFORTS FOR NOTHING AND YOU ARE NOT REWARDED", IT EXPLAINED.

THE WATER CARRIER WAS SURPRISED AND TOUCHED BY THIS CONFESSION. THEN, FULL OF COMPASSION, AFTER THINKING ABOUT IT, HE ANSWERED THE JUG:

- WHILE WE GO BACK HOME, I WOULD LIKE YOU TO LOOK AT THE BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.

AS THE BEARER HAD ASKED IT, ALL ALONG THE WAY, THE OLD JAR LOOKED AND INDEED SAW BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS BATHED IN SUNLIGHT THAT IT HAD NEVER NOTICED. IT WAS THRILLED, BUT AT THE END OF THE JOURNEY, IT STILL FELT SAD BECAUSE IT HAD LOST HALF OF ITS WATER.

SO, THE WATER CARRIER SAID TO IT:

- DID YOU REALIZE THAT THERE WERE ONLY BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS ON ONE SIDE OF THE RIVER, YOURS, AND ALMOST NONE ON THE OTHER SIDE?

- "OH YES, INDEED, REPLIED THE PITCHER, I HADN'T NOTICED".

- "YOU SEE, SINCE I KNEW YOU WERE LOSING WATER, I DECIDED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT. SO, I PLANTED FLOWER SEEDS ON YOUR SIDE OF THE PATH, AND EVERY DAY YOU WATERED THEM WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING IT. THANKS TO YOU, BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS HAVE GROWN WHICH BEAUTIFY THE PATH".

18.1 Perfection

The old jug cannot stand its imperfection and is not the only one in this case. The desire or phantasm of perfection is one of the most common in the human being, at the same time motor of the existence and source of pain. The phenomenon can be explained quite well insofar as the human mind, capable of envisaging, imagining or conceptualizing the infinite, the absolute or perfection, feels a longing for this perspective, however far it may be from its mortal condition. What could be more fascinating than what is devoid of limits, of imperfection, of lack! This is, among other attributes, what we find in the idea of the divine absolute, at the heart of the religious approach. Unfortunately, even if such a vision leads us and motivates us, even makes us progress through the attraction for an ideal, it sends us back to our status of miserable worm.

One of the most frequent symptoms of this obsession is the fear of making mistakes, the fear of error. This fear of wandering that Hegel denounces as the primary error, cause of impotence and ignorance. The fear of error implies in fact a fear of truth, a fear of knowing, and the fear of seeing ourselves as we are. It prevents us from acting because any action entails a risk, it prevents us from judging because we could be wrong, it prevents us from thinking because we are not sure. For if knowledge seems to be acquired and founded in certainty, rightly or wrongly, thinking only functions by hypotheses, accepting within it the permanent possibility of error.

The fear of not losing face, very prevalent in certain cultures, is part of the phantasm of perfection. It is a question of maintaining appearances, at all costs, while rationally knowing that a gross lie is hidden there. The discussion becomes perilous, it is necessary to avoid at all costs that the truth becomes manifest, it is necessary to practice the art of rhetoric and diplomacy: the art of the lie, as intelligent and aesthetic as it is.

Certainly, the desire of perfection, of perfecting oneself, with its dynamics of exigence and emulation, can serve as a motor for our daily action. The dissatisfaction or the suffering in relation to the injustice, the ugliness, the stupidity or the inhumanity, can make us accomplish great and beautiful things. But as always, the obstacle is to know or accept our limits, those of reality, and not to fall into the trap of wanting the impossible, even if it is sometimes achievable. Too often, it is us, our own finitude or mortality that we refuse by being fascinated by perfection. From then on, we cannot stand our own person, nor others, nor the world. We can no longer love anything except this absolute that we are not, that we have the illusion of reaching or possessing. It is so easy to take ourselves for a god and to despise everything, without admitting it to ourselves.

18.2 Dissatisfaction (dukkha)

Among the "Four Noble Truths" at the origin of Buddhism is dukkha, which can be translated as suffering or dissatisfaction. It is based on the fact that everything related to existence is impermanent and is thus unsatisfactory. It is therefore a matter of not desiring that which is conditioned, not relying on it, not considering it as "me", as "mine", or even as a "self". For it is greed and attachment that cause frustration. So, it is with the poor pitcher who identifies itself with its desire to "do well" or to be "right" or "perfect", and from this illusory construction

makes its own pain. Nothing can satisfy us in an ultimate and definitive way. The poor jug has undoubtedly known its "glory hours", where it was admired for the beauty of its finish, because it played its role of container wonderfully. It was satisfied with itself, without noticing the ridiculous side of its being. However, it was only a poor jug. Furthermore, its "perfection" could not be eternal. Now it laments her fate. Not only out of self-centeredness, but also for moral reasons: it makes life more difficult for the miserable water carrier. So, it can have a clear conscience when it complains about its unhappiness and degradation.

According to Buddhist philosophy, such a perspective puts a veil of ignorance over our eyes. Our lack of insight into the primary reality of the unconditioned prevents us from perceiving the reality of the conditioned. Thus, the pitcher, trapped in its misery, does not even see what is happening around it. It ignores the beautiful flowers growing on its side. The poor thing only sees the immediacy of its function, and the disappointment that it feels because its success is not up to its expectations.

By showing it the flowers, by explaining what was happening, the water carrier invites the pitcher to escape from itself: from its desires, its expectations, its hopes and despairs, from what it thinks is its self, its essence or its reality. The contemplation of the flowers and the surprise that one can imagine in the jug are only the occasion of an awareness, or a symbol that reminds it of the evanescence of things and beings. Even if it is to lead further the way that leads to the awakening.

18.3 Control

The concept of control refers to dominating, directing, through careful and rigorous supervision. It is to exercise authority by checking what is happening, by making sure that things are going as "planned". This implies subordinating the course of things to an external force, to an antecedent will, which can be determined by the singular "self", the "I", arbitrary or not, or by a transcendent or tutelary power, such as the law or some authority. To control implies to determine, to limit, to direct, to examine, to inspect, to manage. The one who controls will be satisfied or will have succeeded when the course of events goes in the direction of his expectations or his will. Of course, the latter will be determined a priori as good, legitimate and unquestionable.

In the idea of control, we find both a strong will and a concern for confirmation. It is a question of not accepting the intervention of an "other", different or opposite will; we do not tolerate chance, the randomness of circumstances independent of our will. What escapes the primary will is not trustworthy: the controller is suspicious, that is why he constantly checks what is happening. He has an obsessive behaviour; he is obsessed by everything that escapes or could escape him. He is in favour of order, of control, of regulation, of the authority that must be exercised, of domination. So, it is with our jug. It has a high moral or existential vision of its function, as well as an aesthetic expectation, and it cannot bear that things do not go as they "should be". It constantly observes and verifies this transgression of reality in relation to its expectations, and it finds this unbearable. But it has a good conscience, since it feels guilty; it maintains a moral perspective through this condemnation of itself. We can see through its hot tears and regrets that it feels like a "good girl". Like all those who wish to control, it sees itself on the right side of things, even though its own being hardly satisfies it.

To control is to be able to cause or direct change, or to prevent it, which for the pitcher is rather the case. It does not so much want to rectify as to prevent the deterioration due to time. But it is rather helpless and lamenting: it seems to assume that things can be turned back or that things could have been otherwise. It just cannot accept that time is taking its toll. And like any control freak, it is entranced by her own assumptions about the world order. Tormented, it sees reality only as a betrayal: it becomes blind to it.

Any desire for control being a form of impotence - it is indeed impossible to totally govern anything, be it only one's own being - one can only complain or get angry, which are two facets of the same attitude: the non-acceptance of reality, the refusal of what is other, frustration. One can easily perceive the dimension of fear, tension and anguish that inhabit such a pattern, a common and banal source of anguish. Our life should be a kind of achievement, and any failure of expectations would be unacceptable and unbearable. We should be masters or owners of our being, without realizing that even our desires do not belong to us. Indeed, the poor pitcher takes its role as a pitcher so much to heart that it cannot dispute its validity. Or it has a very limited vision of it, because by watering the flowers at the side of the road, it still plays its role of jug, but in another way. Thus, the principle of control necessarily refers to a limited vision of the world.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Should the water carrier have replaced the older jar?
- Is the new jar right to be proud of itself?
- Does the water carrier keep both jars for the same reasons?
- Is the old jar right to be ashamed?
- Is the old jar's shame associated with the water carrier, or with itself?
- Why did the old jar not see the flowers?
- What do flowers represent in this story?
- Is the old jar well off?
- Should the old jar accept its condition as a jar?
- Is the water carrier a wise man?

Reflection

- ★ Why don't we see the obvious?
- ★ Is it necessary to reconcile with what we are?
- ★ Why do we seek perfection?
- ★ Is it a problem to seek perfection?
- ★ Can one love imperfection?
- ★ Are we responsible for our misfortunes?
- ★ Can one suffer for someone else?
- ★ Do men first seek utility, as Spinoza claims?
- ★ Is shame a legitimate feeling?

★ Why are we locked in ourselves?

Chapter 19 The straw

? Can we trust others?

A MONK LIVED IN A VILLAGE, WHO CALLED HIMSELF AN ASCETIC. BUT HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE VILLAGERS AND THEIR ALMS, AND WAS AN ASCETIC IN NAME ONLY. AS FOR MEDITATION, HE RESERVED IT FOR APPEARANCE, WHEN PEOPLE CAME TO CONSULT HIM. IN FACT, HE HAD NO INTEREST IN IT AND ON TOP OF THAT FOUND THE MEDITATION POSITION VERY UNCOMFORTABLE. ONE DAY A PROMINENT PERSON CAME TO VISIT HIM AND ASKED FOR HIS BLESSING AND HELP. THE MONK GAVE HIM HIS BLESSING AND ASKED HIM WHAT IT WAS ALL ABOUT. THE MAN ANSWERED THAT HE HAD A BAG OF GOLD COINS, AND HE WAS AFRAID THAT THIEVES WOULD COME AND TAKE IT AWAY FROM HIM, BUT HE THOUGHT THAT UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE HOLY MAN HIS TREASURE WOULD BE SAFE. FOR NO ONE WOULD COME TO TAKE MONEY FROM AN ASCETIC.

- OF COURSE, SAID THE MONK, I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DO IT FOR YOU.

AND HE TOOK THE MONEY. BUT HE WAS ALREADY CALCULATING WHAT HE COULD DO WITH THIS "GIFT" BY FLEEING AWAY FROM THE VILLAGE.

- GO IN PEACE, HE SAID TO THE NOTABLE.

BUT HE THOUGHT HE WOULD WAIT A FEW DAYS SO AS NOT TO AROUSE SUSPICION. AND HE BURIED THE BAG OF COINS IN A HOLE AT THE FOOT OF A TREE. A FEW DAYS LATER, IN ORDER TO PREPARE HIS DEPARTURE, HE WENT TO SEE THE NOTABLE AND EXPLAINED TO HIM THAT HE WAS LEAVING ON A TRIP. THEN, THINKING HE WAS VERY CLEVER, HE INVENTED A STRATAGEM SO THAT THE NOTABLE WOULD KEEP TRUSTING HIM AND NOT SUSPECT HIM OF STEALING. HE LEFT THE HOUSE, WENT TO THE FIELDS, TOOK A PIECE OF STRAW, PUT IT IN HIS HAIR AND RETURNED TO THE NOTABLE'S HOME. THE LATTER WAS SURPRISED BY THE MONK'S RETURN. THE LATTER EXPLAINED TO HIM:

- I FOUND A PIECE OF STRAW IN MY HAIR, AND I THOUGHT THAT IT MUST HAVE FALLEN FROM YOUR ROOF WHEN I CAME HERE. SO, I CAME TO GIVE IT BACK TO YOU, BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF TAKING ANYTHING FROM YOU. I DON'T WANT TO TAKE ANYTHING FROM ANYONE ELSE THAT HE HASN'T GIVEN ME VOLUNTARILY.

THE NOTABLE EXCLAIMED, ADMIRING THE SANCTITY OF THIS MONK. BUT HIS YOUNG SON, WHO HAD OBSERVED THE SCENE, DID NOT DRAW THE SAME CONCLUSION. HE SAID TO HIS FATHER:

- FATHER, THOSE WHO ARE TRULY HOLY DO NOT MAKE SUCH A FUSS OVER SUCH A SMALL THING. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THEY ARE HUMBLER AND MORE DISCREET, SO THIS MAN SEEMS VERY WEIRD TO ME. LET'S GO AND SEE WHAT HE IS UP TO, BECAUSE THIS STORY SEEMS VERY STRANGE.

AFTER SOME HESITATION, BUT WORRIED AND SHAKEN BY HIS SON'S ARGUMENTS, THE FATHER AGREED TO FOLLOW HIM. THEY WENT SURREPTITIOUSLY AFTER THE MONK. THEY SAW HIM TAKING THE MONEY OUT OF THE HOLE AT THE FOOT OF THE TREE, PUTTING IT IN HIS BAG AND LEAVING WITH HIS PILGRIM'S STAFF.

- YOU SEE, SAID THE SON TO THE FATHER. HE'S LEAVING WITH YOUR MONEY.

THE FATHER BECAME FURIOUS AND CAUGHT UP WITH THE MONK, CALLING HIM NAMES.

- YOU THIEF, HE SAID, AND LIAR! YOU MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF A PIECE OF STRAW, BUT YOU STEAL MY MONEY. LEAVE THIS VILLAGE AND NEVER COME BACK. YOU SEE, MY SON,

HE ADDED, YOU MUST ALWAYS BEWARE OF THOSE WHO SHOW OFF THEIR HOLINESS. THE SON NODDED AND AGREED.

19.1 Pretension

The ascetic pretends to be what he is not. The terms pretend and pretension come from the Latin *praetendere*, which means "to reach forward; to be situated in front of", which in the figurative sense can take on the meaning of alleging, invoking, pretexting, or claiming. For we realize that it is a question of stating what could or should be, of putting forward what seems not to be. It is at the same time a problem of temporality, that of the future, of claim as to the legitimate state of things, or of restoration of the truth. Thus, an ambitious person, who has big plans, thinks that he deserves better than the immediate reality. He may be criticized as being vain or vainglorious, since he wants to be much more than he is, or to possess much more than he has. At the same time, everyone aspires to be something else than he is, better and more in general, or aims to obtain something that he does not have.

The human being is constituted for a good part of intentions, hopes, diverse enterprises, wills, assertions and allegations, so many desiderata or expectations that participate in determining the real. In this "pretension" hides our identity. The obstacle, the perdition or the illusion begins when our hopes are confused with the actuality, when we take our desires for the reality. The other form of the problem is found in excessiveness, when our expectations are not reasonable, but it is again a question of a discrepancy with reality. These perversions of pretension generally have two main functions. On the one hand, to impress others in order to be admired or to obtain various goods, material or other. On the other hand, to constitute an identity, to please oneself at the risk of complacency. These two aspects feed each other and merge easily. This is why the Socratic injunction of "Know thyself" is one of the most difficult to achieve, for both cognitive and psychological reasons. Generally speaking, human beings hardly know themselves. To become truly conscious, it would be necessary to give up one's own pretensions. The common impression of not being understood by others often refers to the fact that we hold various beliefs about ourselves, which we are convinced are well founded, but for which we hardly get the approval of common sense. For we easily overestimate or underestimate ourselves, a compensation phenomenon linked to fear or insecurity.

If we return to the hero of the story, the so-called ascetic, we may wonder whether he believes in his status as a sage. It is difficult to search the hearts and minds, the Gospels say. No doubt he needs to believe it to make others believe it. Does one have to be truly conscious to lie, or does one also have to lie to oneself? We will leave it to the reader to decide.

19.2 Trust and mistrust

The problem of trust and mistrust plays an important role in social relationships. We always have something to lose that involves others. Thus, the notable in this story holds a bag of gold coins that he is afraid of being robbed. This is where the problem begins: he possesses and holds on to his possession. Presupposing that others are like him, probably rightly so, that humans are greedy and that the end justifies the means, he must be wary. He concludes that he cannot trust himself: he is a prey too tempting, too easy. He must therefore find another

form of protection.

To thwart the "threat", he looks for a stratagem. And it occurs to him to use the "holy man", not because he is holy, but because of the image he projects: no one would suspect that he holds a bag of gold, since he symbolizes bareness. So, he wants to use it to deceive thieves and deceivers. Unfortunately, as in any calculation, the more convoluted it is, the easier it is to make a mistake. Paradoxically, the more he distrusts reality and claims to modify it, the more likely he is to live in illusion. Thus begins the game of hide-and-seek for which the "ascetic" turns out to be an excellent partner, because like the owner, he is immersed in the stratagems of perception. In order to obtain social recognition, to live on public charity, he pretends to meditate and live on little. His plan seems to work. He is even rewarded for it since he is offered an unexpected asset. Nevertheless, he has to make an extra effort of prestidigitation, with the trick of the straw, in order to prevent any suspicion. His trick works wonders with the owner, who only wants to believe him. Unfortunately, the string is too big, at least in the eyes of the one who has nothing to lose: the young man who is not yet perverted by all these convoluted manoeuvres. His eyes are clear, because he is not yet one of those lying, ambitious cunning people who constantly calculate to obtain or protect something. He has nothing to gain, thus he sees well through the tricks of the "ascetic". It is because he is confident that his eyes are not blurred: evil does not inhabit him, he is not credulous, the truth imposes itself on him.

19.3 Meditation

Buddhism proposes quite various conceptions, but one can affirm a certain unanimity on the principle of meditation as a capacity of concentration. To achieve this, different practices have been developed. In general, they aim at transforming the mind, at strengthening and purifying it. One can also induce unusual states of consciousness, allowing one to perceive objects inaccessible to ordinary consciousness, thus developing an increased capacity for intuition. Of course, such work on oneself induces a certain serenity, a necessary preamble to a state of vigilance and reflection, which can be called "perfect attention". It is also a question of stopping the agitation of the mind, the permanent flow of spontaneous ideas, in order to discipline the thinking, so that it concentrates on the voluntarily designated object. It is considered that by suppressing "usual" thoughts we can reach other more fundamental levels of our psyche.

A Tibetan writing defines it as follows: "Meditation is the secret source of the power to abandon ratiocinations along with their seeds. "A common view of meditation is that it is a matter of stopping thinking, but this is rarely the case. It is rather a *mise-en-abyme* of the productions of the thinking and of the fantasies of the imagination, and of seeing oneself thinking. In general, the meditator must seek a solitary or quiet place in order to maximize the conditions of the exercise. This requires ridding oneself of emotions such as lust, anger, excitement, worry, or inertia in order to open one's heart and mind to feelings of love for all living beings. The meditator can then attempt to reach the higher degrees of the meditative state, up to ecstasy, called *Jhâna* or *Dhyâna*. During this process, he gets away from the misleading impressions of the senses, he discards evil things, he can then reason and reflect. Then come inner peace and unity of mind accompanied by enthusiasm and happiness, followed by serenity and clear consciousness. Finally comes a neutral state which represents the ultimate insight of the mind. If it is a matter of going beyond the stage of pain, so is the stage of well-being

in order to reach a state of perfect and pure self-control. In Mahayana, it is not a matter of remaining absorbed in oneself, but of opening oneself to the world: the mind of compassion must grow and envelop the whole world to its very limits. The one who trains himself to develop these tendencies through meditation makes them a habit: these feelings become natural to him. Nevertheless, this is not to fall into a certain exhilaration against which Buddhism warns us. Some people even criticize the idea that these states of mind become "natural", because it seems to them that a deliberate effort of the consciousness remains the condition of a meditation worthy of the name. We can therefore see why the "ascetic" in our story is not a meditator: he only enjoys the appearance of meditation.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why does the monk pretend to be something he is not?
- Is the monk a real monk?
- Why is the notable afraid that thieves will take his money?
- Is the monk clever?
- Why does the notable believe the monk?
- Why does the notable's son not believe the monk?
- Why is the notable shaken by his son's arguments?
- Why does the monk try too hard?
- What does the monk want most of all?
- How are the notable and the monk similar?

Reflection

- ☆ Why do we seek to impress others?
- ☆ Is our own image our idol?
- ☆ How do we decide if what we hear is true or false?
- ☆ Do we like people for who they are or for who they pretend to be?
- ☆ Can we trust appearances?
- ☆ Can we lie to ourselves?
- ☆ Do we need to believe in our own inventions?
- ☆ Is it necessary to instrumentalize others to satisfy our desires?
- ☆ Do we have to respect the image that a person creates for himself?
- ☆ Is social identity only a problem of image?

Chapter 20 Impermanence

? Is the essential urgent?

AN IMPORTANT MAN OF THE CITY, REPUTEDLY WISE, CAME ONE DAY TO ASK A FAMOUS MASTER FOR ADVICE.

- WHAT SHOULD ONE DO TO BE HAPPY?

THE MASTER ANSWERED:

- SIMPLY RECITE THE NAME OF THE BUDDHA SEVERAL TIMES A DAY.

THE OTHER REPLIED:

- INDEED! I WILL DO IT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. BUT THERE ARE ALREADY THREE THINGS I HAVE TO DO THAT I HAVEN'T HAD TIME TO DO YET. FIRST, MY FATHER HAS JUST DIED, AND I HAVE TO ARRANGE FOR HIS BURIAL. SECOND, MY SON STILL HASN'T FOUND A CAREER AND I NEED TO FIND A POSITION FOR HIM. FINALLY, MY DAUGHTER IS STILL SINGLE, AND I HAVE TO FIND HER A HUSBAND. LET ME SOLVE THESE THREE PROBLEMS, AND AS SOON AS IT'S OVER I'LL FOLLOW YOUR ADVICE, BECAUSE I'M SURE YOU'RE RIGHT.

A FEW WEEKS LATER, THIS IMPORTANT MAN WAS STRICKEN WITH A SERIOUS ILLNESS AND SOON DIED. THE MASTER WAS INVITED TO THE CEREMONY WHERE HE WAS ASKED TO SAY A FEW WORDS OF CONDOLENCE:

- THIS IMPORTANT AND RESPECTFUL MAN ASKED ME FOR ADVICE. I RECOMMENDED THAT HE RECITE THE NAME OF THE BLESSED ONE. HE MADE THREE OBJECTIONS TO ME, WITH THREE IMPORTANT OBLIGATIONS THAT HE HAD NOT HONOURED. BUT ALAS! IMPERMANENCE HAS ALREADY TAKEN HIM AWAY. OH EXISTENCE, YOU TREAT US SO BADLY! LISTENING TO THESE EULOGIES TODAY, WHO AMONG US WILL DARE TO SAY THAT THIS RESPONSIBLE MAN WAS NOT A WISE MAN? YET, THOSE WHO ARE DETERMINED TO ESCAPE SUFFERING AND FULFIL THEMSELVES SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY LITTLE MOMENT AND RECITE THE NAME OF THE LORD AT THAT VERY MOMENT, WITHOUT DELAY, NO MATTER HOW LEGITIMATE AND URGENT THE REASON MAY BE. IN THIS WAY THEY WILL AVOID WALKING IN THE UNFORTUNATE FOOTSTEPS OF THOSE WHO HAVE WANDERED BEFORE THEM, PREPARING TO REGRET THEIR DECISIONS FOR THOUSANDS OF AUTUMNS TO COME.

20.1 Duty and obligation

Our existence is punctuated and determined by duties and obligations, like the hero of this story. First of all, we must work in order to survive. Then come the relational obligations. Then come the moral and legal obligations, as well as those related to culture, learning and education. Without realizing it, we build, willy-nilly, a web of obligations that leave us very little freedom. Our schedule slowly becomes saturated, to the point where we may find ourselves lacking time for essential things. Many people spend their lives oscillating between these intertwined constraints and the moments of "rest" when they collapse, unable to do anything but slump mentally.

How many parents feel compelled to concoct this kind of existence for their children. They are barely out of school when they have to do all kinds of activities. They are convinced that they have to "push" his child in order to prepare him for his future. It is as if life is a big contest where you win on merit. Nothing is worse for them than uselessness, emptiness,

nothing, boredom. They think they are preparing their offspring to "win", but without knowing it, they are training them to play the "manic-depressive" game.

They are like those walkers who walk in the forest with a given route in a given time. So, they move on, anxious to finish in time, because other obligations follow: friends are coming for dinner, or there is work to be done. But did they see what was happening in the forest? And above all, did they take the time to think about their existence? Probably not, they have too much to do, they have better things to do. And as some of them admit it, there are things that are better not to reflect upon. Even then, some people prefer not to think about the fact that they prefer not to think about it. It is so painful to ask ourselves if our life is worth living. Or they postpone it: it is not urgent, I have plenty of time to think about my existence another time, when I have the time. Of course, it will never come: we know how not to take it. We like to postulate our own eternity without admitting it to ourselves. "You must meditate for twenty minutes a day", says the master, "and for those who do not have the time, it is better to meditate for an hour a day."

20.2 Conscience

The wise man of this story is unconscious: the essential escapes him. Consciousness is the faculty that allows the human being to know what is happening inside and outside himself. This includes sensory perceptions as well as the intuition of feelings, emotions, ideas, values that animate us. This consciousness, like all knowledge, can be more or less deep or extensive. It can extend into the past or the future, even into eternity, or be fixed on the present. In the same way, it can be oriented towards oneself, towards others or towards the world. It will be considered as objective, or as a simple subjective representation, as intuitive and immediate, or as a more or less conscious and deliberate construction, determined by the experience.

Buddhism proposes a concept of "mindfulness" or "right attention". It is the vigilant awareness of one's own thoughts, emotions, actions and motivations, an essential factor for liberation. "Mindfulness" consists of observing the physical and mental objects that present themselves to our mind, in order to purify its state and functioning. It allows us to step back from our passions and to control the compulsive or usual flow of thoughts. This practice allows to determine the permanence or impermanence of phenomena and to observe how things appear, last and disappear.

The observer remains impassive and "silent" during this process, thus learning detachment and gradually freeing himself from mental conditioning. "Mindfulness" represents the third form of wisdom: the direct vision of the ultimate reality in everything.

20.3 Permanence and impermanence

If all phenomena, events, beings or things are of a conditioned nature, if they are mere effects, symptoms or ephemeral manifestations, is there anything left of an eternal, unconditional and permanent nature? Parmenides postulates the fundamental and logical principle that "the being is, the non-being is not". Being is intelligible, uncreated and timeless, it contains no otherness or contradiction, it is perfectly continuous. In opposition to this, Heraclitus proposes the principle of a universe in perpetual becoming, where everything exists thanks to the opposition of opposites, a dynamic tension that generates reality. As a result, the postulated unity becomes

somewhat indeterminate, even non-existent.

Christianity will propose, among other things, a concept of God as "causa sui": everything that exists is generated and perishes, except God who is eternal because he is his own cause. Nevertheless, various thinkers will graft on the concept of God other attributes or modalities which will thus become also eternal, by the examples, the ideas, which would have existed from all eternity, schema which we already find in Plato. Some, more mystical, not satisfied to pose "God" as a kind of evidence, will problematize its nature, to make it more unseizable, indefinable or unnameable, even devoid of being or existence, because beyond any knowledge or speculation.

This stake, which is found in many intra-religious quarrels, is articulated around the possibility or not for the man to understand the divine and to reach it, including in this problematic the status of the world and in particular of the human. The human soul, although created, also participates in this permanence, but unlike the immutable God, it is subject to becoming.

Indian philosophy offers the concept of atman, which under various forms or at various hierarchical degrees designates variously consciousness, the existing or thinking subject, the singular or universal soul, the universal self, the life principle or vital breath, the absolute and transcendent being, etc. This presupposes the postulation of one or more forms of unity, not subject to generation or destruction. In opposition to such perspectives, Buddhism admits neither atman, nor an unconditioned and imperishable entity that can be called soul, self, God or other eternal concept. Nevertheless, this impermanence, this lacuna, is the "matrix" or perspective from which we must think and live, becoming aware of the absence of the proper nature of phenomena: emptiness or maya. It is this essential dimension that the wise man of this story will have missed: he will continue to pay the price for a long time.

20.4 Transcendence

The term transcend implies a surpassing, the fact of surpassing oneself, of crossing a higher threshold. It can be on the level of knowledge, by reaching a kind of beyond: it is the case of metaphysics, which claims to be a domain beyond materiality. It can be physical or existential, by overstepping qualitatively or quantitatively any limits. Transcendence is that which is situated in a beyond, whatever its nature. In this case, the master invites the "important man" to leave his routine, to be concerned with more fundamental things, to transcend his usual existence, because the simple satisfaction of customary obligations, however pressing or important they may be, cannot provide him with happiness, since this is his concern.

Human beings have always been concerned with "transcendence", whether in a religious, philosophical or other form. Even though we are mortal and finite in nature, we are able to envisage the infinite, which attracts and aspires us. We want to participate in it, if not to melt into it. Through the concepts of totality, plenitude, perfection, immortality, we are animated and shaped by transcendence, often in an intuitive, or quantitative, or illusory way. Thus, the one who loves wealth and dedicates his existence to it, without admitting it, would like to possess all the wealth in the world. The one who wants to postpone death would like to be immortal. He who wants perfection would like to be a god, devoid of lack and error. The one who wants to be loved actually seeks total fusion.

Certainly, the quest for transcendence represents a finality and provides a meaning to our

existence, by engaging in a perspective of accomplishment and realization that is necessary for us. But at the same time, this ideal which animates us is the cause of many sufferings, because even if we prefer to ignore it, we know that this ideal is impossible, or almost: we aspire to something which cannot belong to us, we will only be frustrated and disappointed.

Thus, those who propose or propose a challenge learn to go beyond the immediate, which cannot satisfy us, or only in an ephemeral way, in order to commit themselves to a daring and demanding path, without seeking easy gratification. This is what Buddhism proposes to us, with its practice of detachment.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN AND BROADEN

Comprehension

- Why does an important and wise man consult a famous master?
- Why does the master advise to "recite the name of Buddha several times a day"?
- Why does the man not follow the master's advice?
- Does the important man really know what he wants?
- Why does the important man prefer obligations to happiness?
- Does the important man think he is eternal?
- Does the important man think the master is right?
- Why does the master say, "Oh existence, you treat us so badly"?
- Why does the master say that the important man was wise?
- What does the idea of "taking advantage of every little moment" mean?

Reflection

- ☆ Is the human being contradictory?
- ☆ Is perfect happiness possible?
- ☆ Should we pursue happiness?
- ☆ Why do we burden ourselves with various obligations?
- ☆ Are obligations really choices?
- ☆ Do we find it difficult to think about the finitude of our existence?
- ☆ Do we use others to avoid ourselves?
- ☆ Why do we forget about death?
- ☆ Is life a permanent negation of death?
- ☆ Is it difficult to enjoy the present moment?

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