

TURNING THE WHEEL OF DHAMMA



TURNING THE WHEEL OF DHAMMA

(Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta)

AJAHN SUCITTO

DHAMMA MOON

Turning the Wheel of Dhamma by Ajahn Sucitto

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Introduction

Turning the Wheel of Dhamma (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*) is a central discourse in the Buddha's teachings. It is the first full teaching that the newly Awakened One gave, and it sets out the four noble truths and the 'Middle Way' – the teaching structure that is the heart of his Way of realization. You can read the discourse in Connected Discourses (Samyutta Nikaya 56).

What follows is a series of paintings that I made between 1981 and 1984 that illustrates this discourse. Each painting is first printed alone, then again along with a translation (in white, sans serif letters) and finally with an explanation of the text and its illustration (in black letters). It is presented in the style of an illuminated manuscript in which the words of the text are embellished or surrounded by figurative elements. The viewer will probably note that the style echoes that of an illuminated Gospel in the tradition of the Celtic Church. The knotwork that is predominant in the earlier pictures of the series, and the uncial script throughout, is borrowed from the art of the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. This is a deliberate gesture of respect to the early monastic

tradition of Britain, made at a time when I was part of a small Sangha of Buddhist monks (bhikkhus) who had recently arrived in Britain and were engaged in establishing Cittaviveka Monastery in Chithurst, West Sussex. In this ancient settlement, it was very clear that despite the many differences between the traditions, we were inheriting the respect and the place in the society previously held by Christian monks. After selling us the house that became the centre of the monastery, its previous owner excitedly reported to his neighbours: ‘The monks are coming, the monks are coming!’ Without knowing a thing about the Buddha’s Dhamma, people knew that these ‘bhikkhus’ would be men of peace and virtue, and that was a good thing. In a conservative part of England, the innate respect for a spiritual life granted acceptance to our odd, oriental-styled Sangha. It feels important to acknowledge that.

One of the differences however between the Celtic manuscripts and this series is that the letters themselves are relatively unadorned. This was so that they remain legible and usable as a means of reciting the text – because the series originated out of a wish to present the sutta in a way that would attract the attention of the bhikkhus and

encourage them to learn to recite it. As the series evolved, this need fell away and what began as an illuminated manuscript turned into a set of paintings.

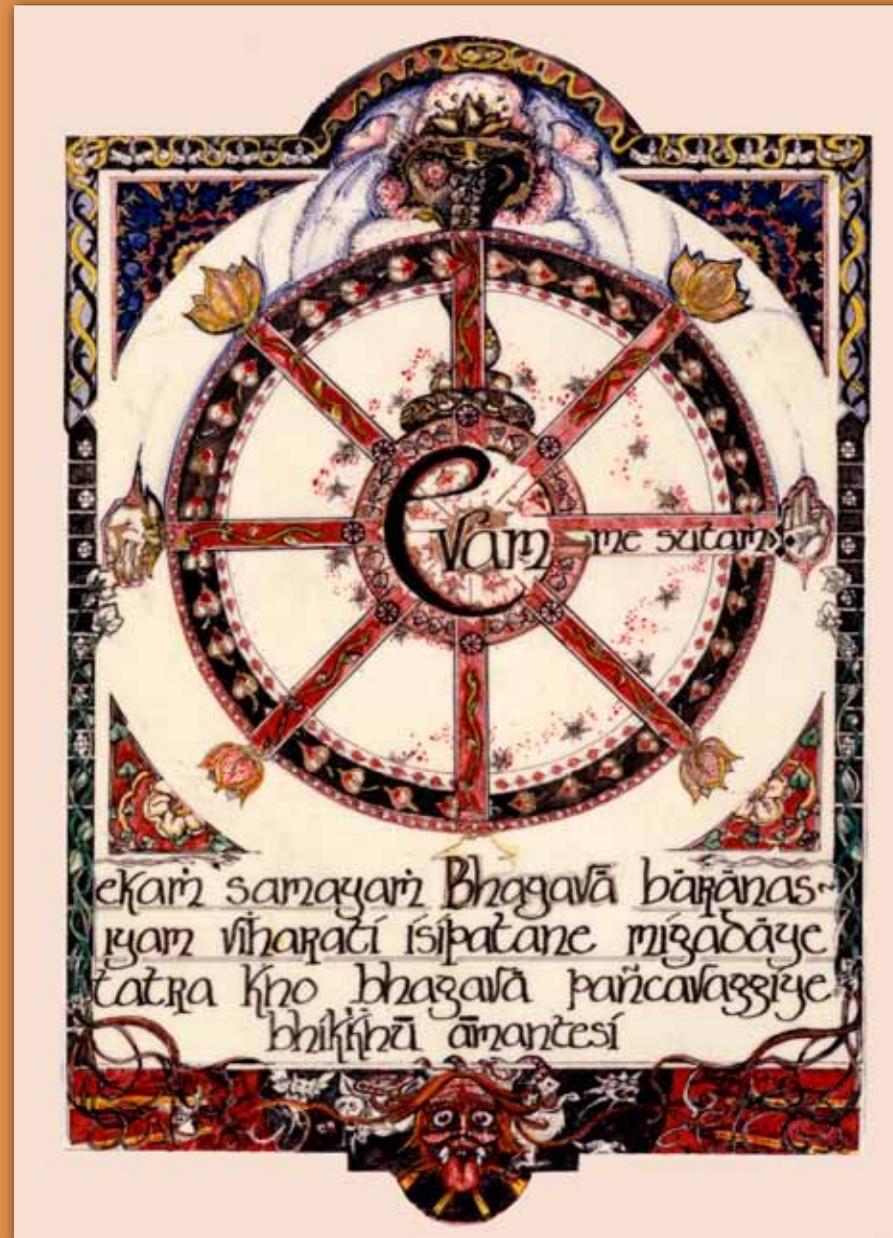
Another reason for this shift is due to changes in my contemplative practice. As a beginner my meditation was technique-oriented, with an emphasis on observing a formal structure (such as counting the breath, and ‘noting’ the momentary movements of mind with a thought). You might say it was ‘left-brain linear.’ Over three years, how I meditated became more a matter of feeling and sensing the mind and working in a more intuitive way. So the early pictures are more a matter of line, whereas the latter are more chromatically attuned. In fact for the celestial realms, what arose first in the mind was the chromatic tone that seemed to represent the atmosphere of the deva-loka that was being referred to.

This sequence later became the source of a book – **The Dawn of the Dhamma** – with an extensive accompanying text. This book (from 1991) is now long out of print, but an HTML file of it can be seen at <http://www.cittaviveka.org/documents/books/dawn/>.

However that book inspired Shambhala Publications to request a revised edition of the text, without illustrations. This became **Turning The Wheel of Truth** (Shambhala 2010). If you are looking for a more thorough explanation of the meaning of the text, you will find it in **Turning The Wheel of Truth**. This CD will be briefer and focus on the paintings themselves.

Finally, what follows is an act of gratitude. When I completed it, I presented the series of paintings to Ven. Ajahn Sumedho as a gesture of my gratitude for his guidance and example as my teacher. Naturally that gratitude extends to the Buddha, to the Sangha that has transmitted this teaching for over two millennia, and to all the people who have supported the opportunity that I have to practise the Dhamma as a bhikkhu. This particular presentation has only occurred through the skills and sensitivities of Gricel Salazar-Lewis, along with suggestions from Nicholas Halliday. To them, and to those people who have sponsored this CD, thanks and appreciation is due.

The Wheel of Dhamma



The Wheel of Dhamma



Thus have I heard: Once, the Blessed One was living at Vāranāsi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana – and he addressed the company of five bhikkhus in this way:

The Wheel of Dhamma

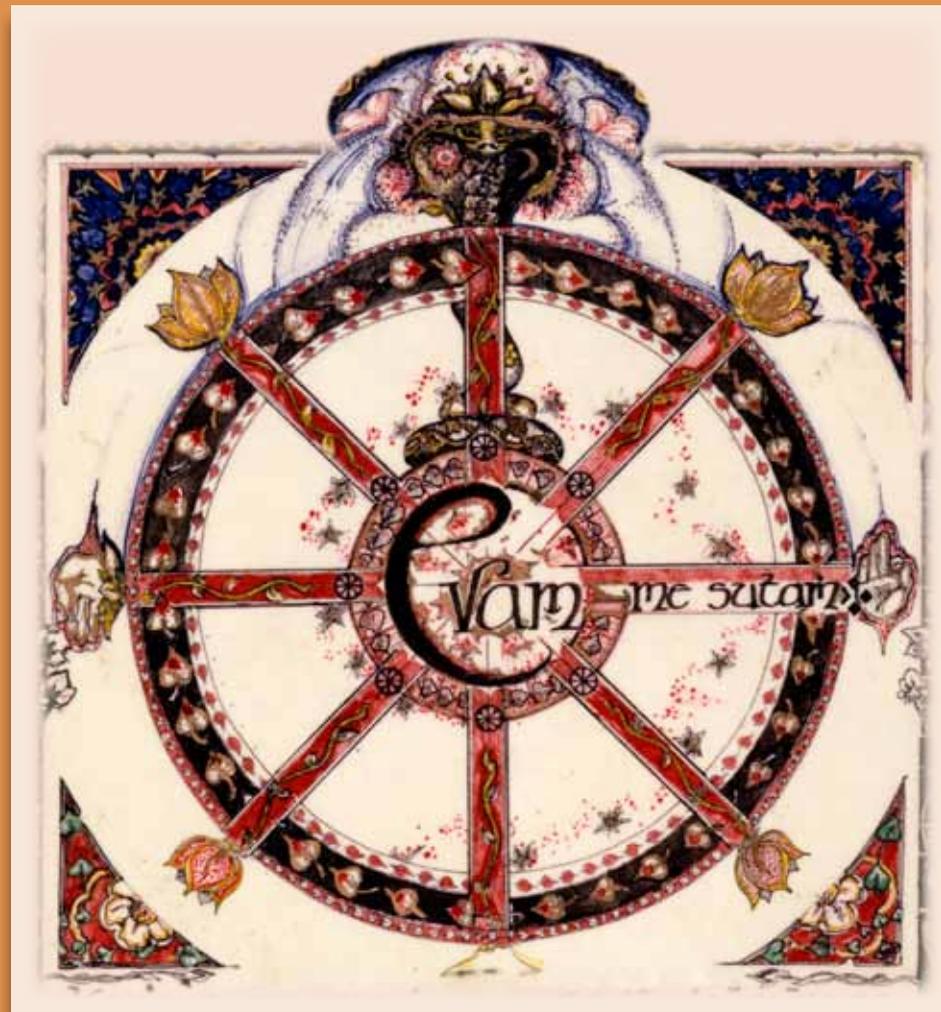
The sutta begins with the acknowledgement that this is an account of an oral transmission. Writing was used in the Buddha's day, but generally for mercantile transactions and accounts. Sacred teachings, on the other hand, were normally transmitted orally: by this means the power of the presence of the speaker is added to the message. In the picture the serpent, the symbol of transformation, is used as an emblem of the potency of what is being imparted.

The Dhamma is often represented by a Wheel, which symbolizes the all-encompassing nature of the teaching (the Cosmos, or a great king's kingdom are also 'Wheels') – and the fact that it leads onwards, is purposeful. The universality of the Dhamma is suggested by the array of heavenly (above) and hellish (below) beings that fill the borders of the illustration.

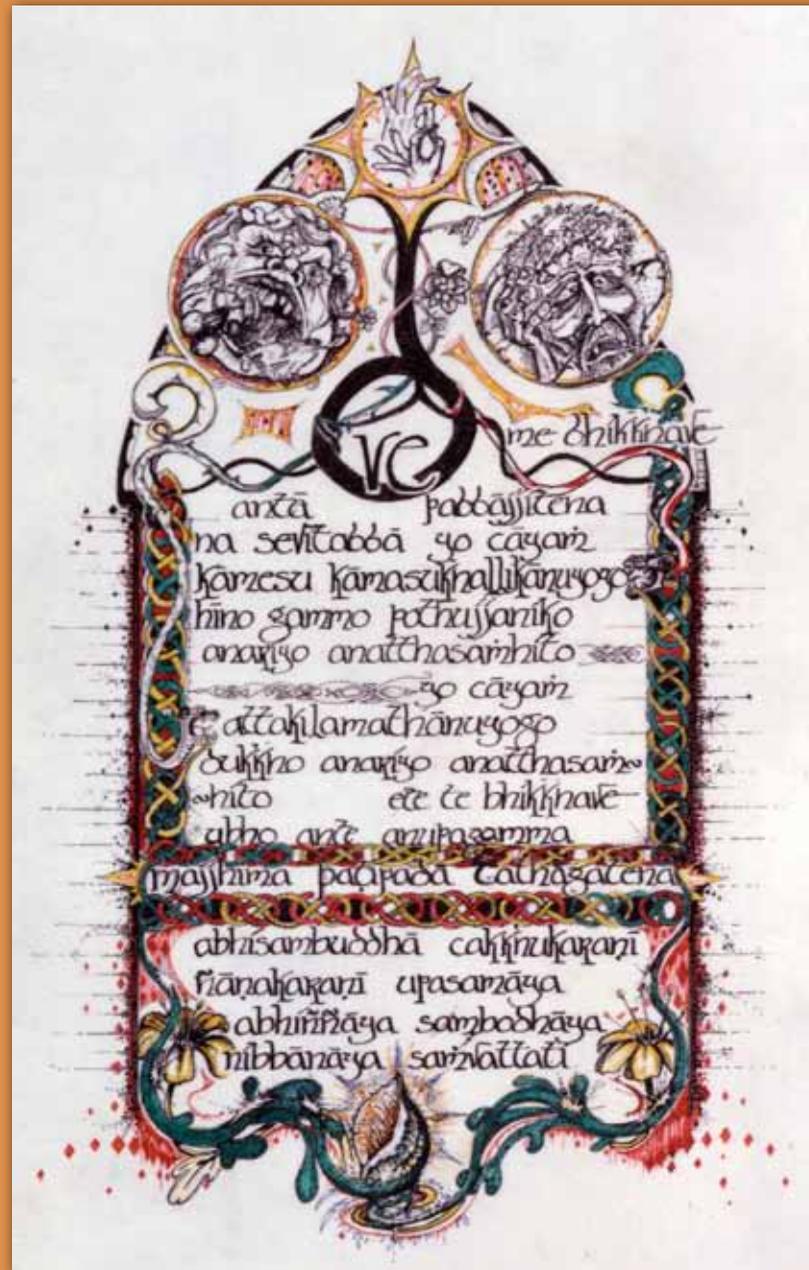
The Wheel of Dhamma



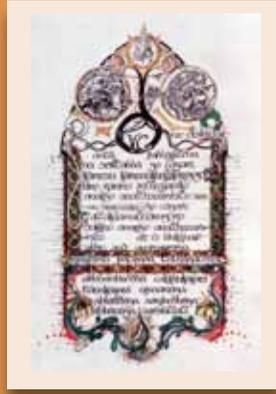
The Wheel of Dhamma



The Two Extremes



The Two Extremes



There are two extremes, bhikkhus, that are not to be followed by one who has Gone Forth. What two? Getting bound to and following sense-pleasure, which is cheap, coarse, worldly, unworthy, and doesn't take you anywhere useful. Then there's getting bound to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy and doesn't take you anywhere useful. Not going along with either of these extremes, a Tathāgata has Awakened to the Middle Way; it leads to seeing, insight, peace, deep knowledge, gnosis and Nibbāna.'

The Two Extremes

The Buddha characteristically begins, not with expounding any view of his own, but by referring to what the listeners themselves were already involved with, and then investigating it in terms of its effects. He summarizes two wrong ways – one, that of sensual indulgence, (which the bhikkhus had already moved away from) and which is portrayed at top left; and the other, the self-mortifying extreme (top right) that they were following.

Both of them, the Buddha declares as '*anattasamhito*' – a word made up of 'not' (*an*) 'goal' or 'meaning' (*attha*) and 'welfare,' 'benefit' (*hito*). Pragmatist that he was, the Buddha's objections to these two ways is not on ideological grounds, but purely on grounds of effect – they don't take you to a place of true and lasting benefit. The hand mudra which expresses the exposition of this sutta is at top centre of the picture, and the conch at the bottom is another symbol for spreading the teachings.

The Two Extremes



The Two Extremes



The Middle Way



The Middle Way



‘And what is this Middle Way that a Tathāgata has Awakened to, that leads to seeing, insight, peace, deep knowledge, gnosis and Nibbāna? It’s the noble eightfold Path, that is: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This is the Middle Way that a Tathāgata has Awakened to.

The Middle Way

In Awakening to the Middle Way, Gotama has become ‘Tathāgata.’ This is the term that the Buddha generally applied to himself. It can mean ‘Thus Gone’ (i.e. out of *samsāra*, birth and death) or ‘Thus Come’ (i.e. fully Awakened, present in the Deathless). This latter meaning also conveys the Buddha’s compassion in coming here into this world for the welfare of humans.

What he has Awakened to is a Way of practice rather than an idea. That’s useful to bear in mind: follow the Way, let how you conceive of the result speak for itself. Here the Buddha touches on what it means to him: ‘seeing...Nibbāna.’ It’s often the case that the Buddha uses a string of words rather than one term; it builds up a range of tones in the listener’s mind, culminating in the word ‘Nibbāna’ – which can be translated as ‘become cooled’ or even ‘blown out.’

To modify any negative connotations that ‘blown out’ may conjure up, I use a series of flowering lotuses to symbolize the Buddha’s eightfold Path. What is blown out are the fires of greed, hatred and delusion. The beautiful remains.

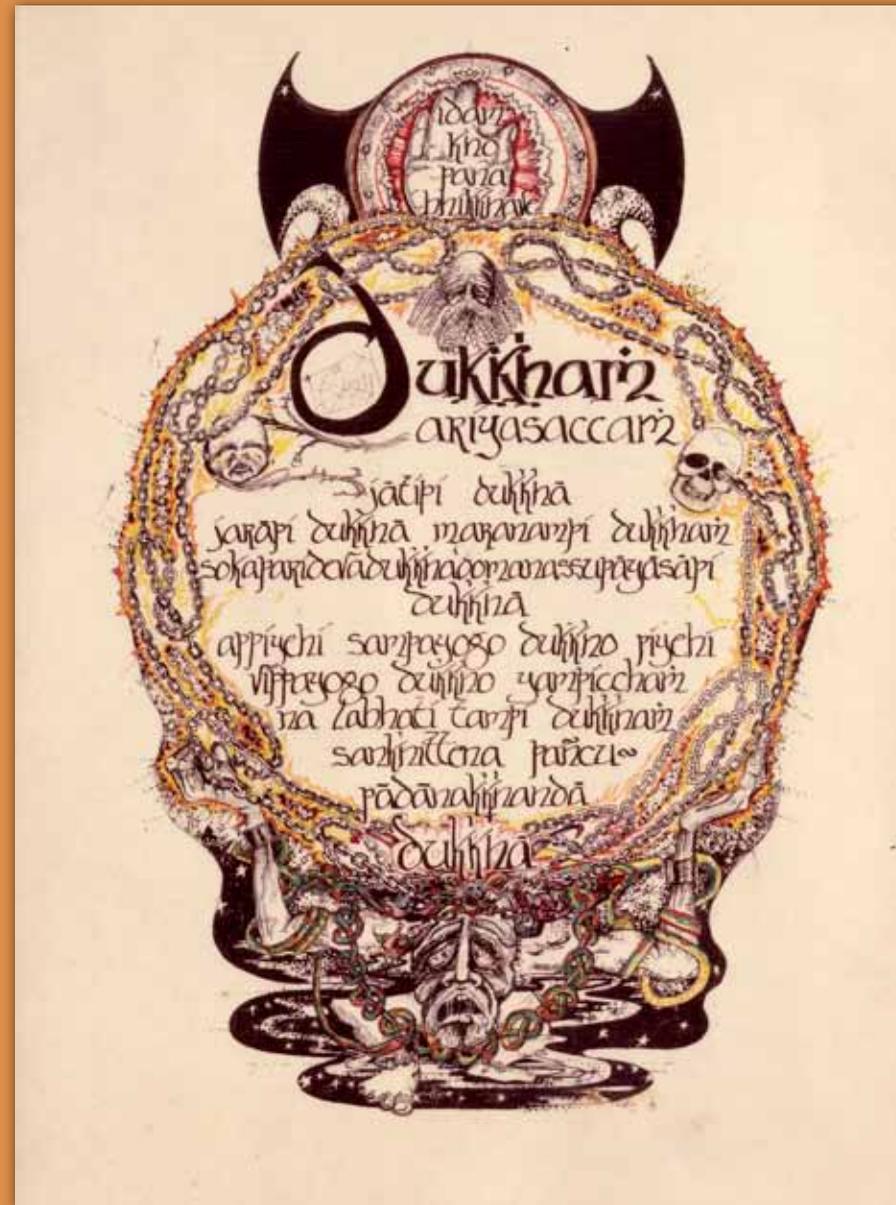
The Middle Way



The Middle Way



Holding on is Suffering



Holding on is Suffering



‘Bhikkhus, there is a noble truth with regards to suffering. Birth is difficult; ageing is hard; dying is painful. Sorrow, grieving, pain, anguish and despair are all painful. Being stuck with what you don’t like is stressful, being separated from what you do like is stressful; not getting what you want is stressful. In brief the five aggregates that are affected by clinging bring no satisfaction.

Holding on is Suffering

Rather than go into the nature of Nibbāna, the Buddha turns to what the Way takes us out of: suffering, trouble, pain, stress, unsatisfactoriness – and a range of other experiences that are summarized by the Pāli word ‘*dukkha*.’ So he’s pointing at our direct experience. We may speculate over Nibbāna, but what we know and are all profoundly affected by is *dukkha*. With birth comes the potential for hunger, fear, separation from the loved and the inevitability of sickness and death.

That ageing, death and pain carry *dukkha* is clear enough. The ‘five aggregates’ are the psychological constructors of experience, basically through the co-arising of **form** – an object – and **consciousness** – the action that ‘internalizes’ that object. Now there are material objects, but the experience of form occurs dependent on consciousness, and then the internalizing process takes over with the other three aggregates – there is a **feeling**, and an impression (or **perception** – a brief labelling of what has been felt), and an **activity**, a tremble in the mind in response.

Holding on is Suffering

In this way we're engaged in a flow of experience that we can neither derive satisfaction from nor get out of. This response sets off a chain reaction of reflexes, reactions and responses – being moved, making assumptions, thinking, speculating, planning, defending, and trying to cover it all up. All these are 'activities' (*sankhāra*). Consequently, habitual emotions arise: 'uncertain,' 'ashamed,' 'appreciated' etc.. As the picture points out, it gets heavy – and yet we still hold onto this process. Why?

Maybe it's because until the eye of Truth opens, we don't see anything else. So right here is Unknowing, the source of suffering. Yet, the way to Knowing comes through contemplating and responding to *dukkha*. This then is when *dukkha* becomes a 'noble truth.'

Holding on is Suffering



Holding on is Suffering



The Mind on Fire



The Mind on Fire



‘Bhikkhus, there is a noble truth concerning the arising of suffering: it arises with craving, a thirst for more that’s bound up with relish and passion and is always running here and there. That is: thirst for sense-input, thirst to be something, thirst to not be something.

The Mind on Fire

Like a skilled physician, the Buddha then indicates that this state of *dukkha* isn't absolute and set in stone. It has a cause. The good news is that it's not what you are; the uncomfortable bit is that it's caused by what most of us seem to do a lot of the time – run here and there chasing pleasure and fleeing from discomfort (*kāmatanhā*); or try to be somebody solid and complete (*bhavatanhā*); or try to get away from or wipe out aspects of how we seem to be (*vibhavatanhā*).

These are the three armed creatures in the centre of the picture, all stabbing away at the mind. However, having looked into this himself, the physician states that all this running around and stabbing isn't done by somebody, it's caused by different forms of *tanhā* – thirst or craving. Thirst isn't a person, it's a condition, a disease. Thus it can be remedied.

The Mind on Fire



The Mind on Fire

The picture shows a detailed map of the run-around. It's called 'Dependent Arising,' meaning that the various factors that are depicted in the twelve loops arise dependent on others. It's a dynamic process – so, when one or two factors of the weave stop arising, the chain can be broken. The two factors that hold it all together are Unknowing (*avijjā*) and craving. You could even take it down to one factor – Unknowing – but craving creates such a spin that in practical terms you have to cut off a lot of craving to get clear enough to dispel Unknowing.

Anyway, to be brief, the first linked loop in the picture contains the blind man, which symbolizes **Unknowing**. The second loop is around **activities** (the hammer) which keep **consciousness** (monkey) running in and out creating the experience of a form 'out there' and a knower or 'name' (feeling, perception, and further activities – as in the aggregates) 'in here.' String the first four loops together and you have 'when there is Unknowing, activities program consciousness to generate subjectively configured objects, or **name and form**.'

The Mind on Fire



The Mind on Fire

That's the subtle foundational piece of dependent arising. From there on it's relatively straightforward: the experience of name and form is continually fed by the **six sense bases**, arrows that point into the mind and touch or stab us. Their activity gives rise to the experience of contact; **contact** (the light bulb lighting up) gives rise to **feeling** (the arrow striking the eye) and **craving** to have or get away from that feeling is a likely result.

Right here is a possible break in the chain, because if you develop meditation, it's possible to experience feeling just as feeling and let it be.

However if there is craving, it sets up the intention to **grab and hold onto** what one craves. (And as the picture of the fraying rope suggests, what one holds onto isn't at all secure.) This generates the program of **becoming**, for which I've borrowed the figure of Sisyphus from Greek mythology. His story is one of being trapped in a Hell where he has to push a boulder up a hill.

The Mind on Fire



The Mind on Fire

As it nears the top, it slips away and rolls down hill. And then the process begins again. That's becoming: we train, we work hard, we're about to get to that state of fulfillment, maybe on pay-day, or when the project is finished, or when we retire, but then...oops, something trips up. Maybe there's just a *little* more to do; or maybe what we've done could use some improvements, or maybe by the time we're finished, we've lost interest, so we try to become something else.

Based on one's temporary success or failure in gaining and becoming (in terms of status, identity, and personal history) a sense of self takes birth. This **birth** in this life or the next will always end in **decline and death** – psychological or physical.

That's quite a run-around, isn't it? Fortunately it can be seen as caused, and so like the complex program on a computer, it can be switched off if you can find out where the button is...That's why the arising of suffering, if handled correctly, is another noble truth.

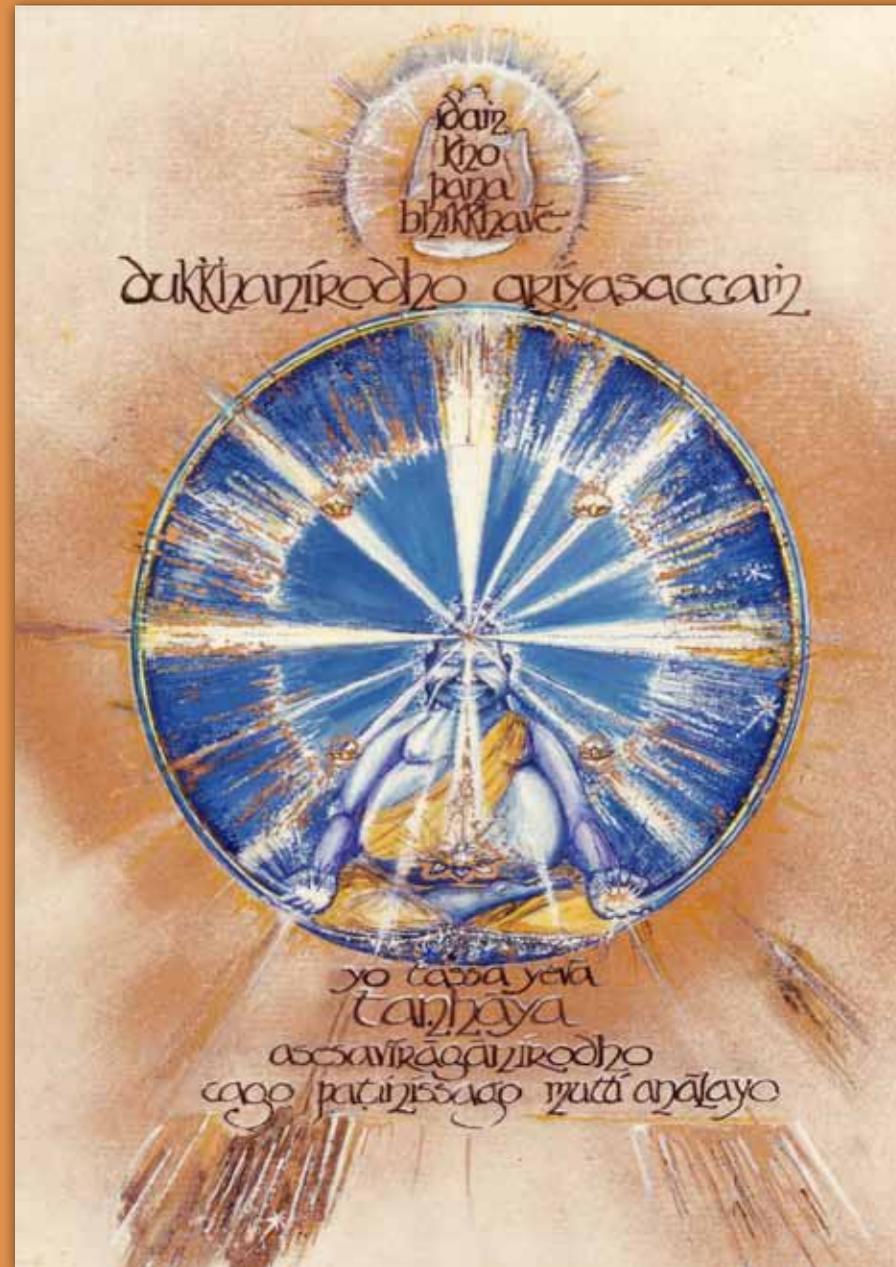
The Mind on Fire



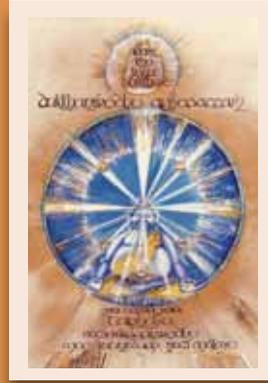
The Mind on Fire



Letting Go



Letting Go



'Bhikkhus, there is a noble truth about the cessation of suffering. It is the complete fading away and cessation of this craving; its abandonment and relinquishment; getting free from and being independent of it.

Letting Go

Here's the button, the way out of the loops. The disease can be cured through the fading out of thirst; through making a choice not to act upon it. Subsequently the mind can be aligned to the experience of non-craving. The moments of non-craving don't strike us with the same intensity as the moments of craving, so attention has to be cultivated. This is through a way of living that prioritizes generosity, morality and renunciation, and puts craving to one side.

In this way, the mind is trained, its 'eye' is cleared and the fire in the heart goes out. That's why the Buddha uses the word 'Nibbāna' to describe where his Way leads to. And the Buddha also uses the word 'Deathless' to indicate that the extinction of greed, hatred and delusion isn't an annihilation, but a release into something wonderful.

The figure in this picture is indicating release. It's a symbol – you don't have to put on that much weight for liberation. Actually, it refers to a story of an enlightened monk who looked like the Buddha, and was in fact so handsome that he was attracting the wrong kind of attention from some of his female disciples.

Letting Go



Letting Go

So through his magical powers (or maybe gorging on junk food) he made his body grow bloated and unattractive.

Well, who knows. But what the story points to is that release means letting go of self-image, because the notion of self supports selfish and self-conscious attitudes. It's shot through with holding on to anxieties and grandiosity, control and nonchalance, style and image. At the root of it is the thirsty sense of me being inadequate and needing to get something. Thus in this painting, the centre-piece is a figure of letting go. Do you think that Enlightened beings have to be elegant?

Also you'll notice that the intertwined complexity of the previous pictures has disappeared. This ceasing of suffering is a shift towards simplicity. And when energy isn't tying itself in knots, it is cool and radiant. Enough said.

Letting Go



The Great Way



The Great Way



'Bhikkhus, there is a noble truth of the Way leading to the cessation of suffering. It is the noble eightfold Path: namely, right view, right attitude, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

The Great Way

Rather than advocating a technique or expounding an Ultimate Truth, the Buddha sketches out a way of living. This way is based on right view, the perspective that sees ethics and causality as central – that what we do through body, speech or mind is of paramount importance. In spiritual terms it's the only thing that counts. Any idea of what you are is a sidetrack. You can be rich or poor, an athlete or handicapped, but what counts is view; then attitude (of kindness, gentleness and non-grasping); then how you follow that through with speech and action; and finally how you settle down and assess it all. The Way covers how we relate to others and the world around us; it walks us through the world. It also brings the mind behind our actions into the unified settled state called '*samādhi*' (concentration). We learn how to sit deep and still. Through these modalities, with a unified and undistracted mind, Unknowing is cleared and our inner 'eye' wakes up.

The Great Way

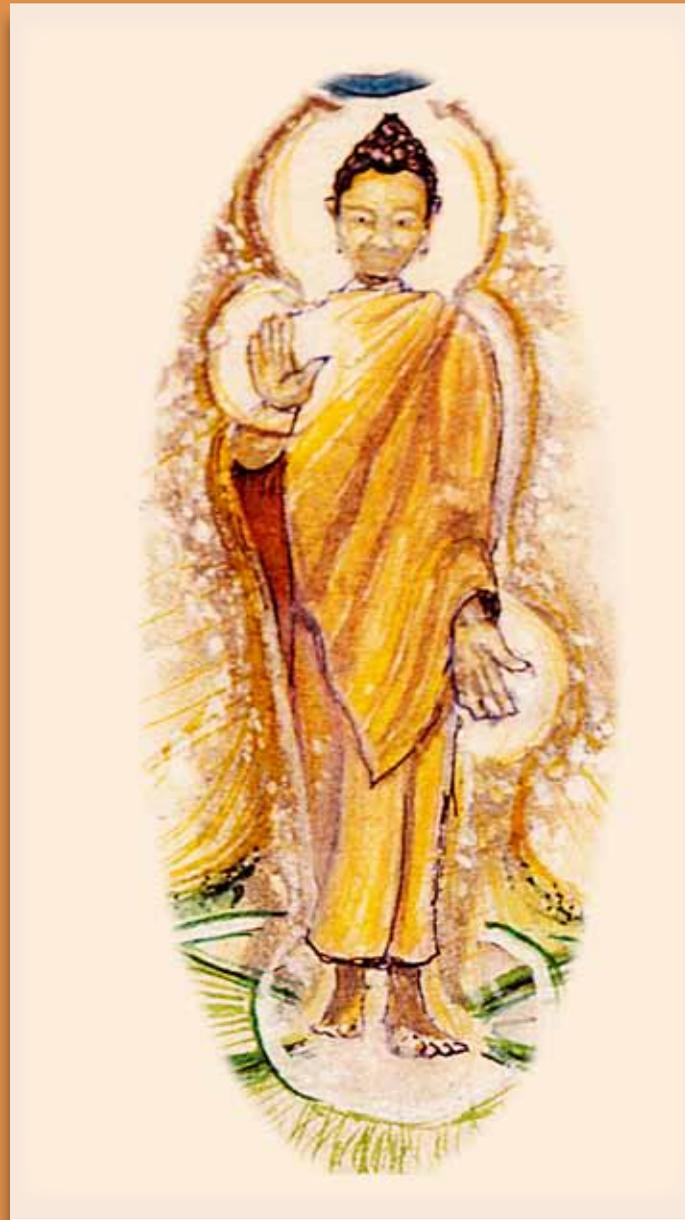


The Great Way

In this picture the interweave represents the interconnecting factors of the eightfold Path. Each flower represents a different Path factor – down at the bottom for example there are (going clockwise) right action as the raised hand, right livelihood as a hand extended to help (it also looks like it's soliciting money – perhaps this wasn't such a good image!); then we have the sword of right mindfulness which really gets to the point and cuts through the proliferation and waffle of the mind. I hope the other images make sense to you when you reflect on them.

In this picture, the living and dynamic nature of the Path is demonstrated by the Buddha walking. The hand gesture combines generosity (the left down-pointing hand) and protection/blessing (the right hand). One who carries such capacity one is indeed rightly walking the Dhamma in the world.

The Great Way



The Gate of Suffering



The Gate of Suffering



“There is this noble truth with regards to suffering”: in this way, bhikkhus, vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light arose in me about things not heard before. “This noble truth with regards to suffering is to be thoroughly understood”: in this way, bhikkhus, vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light arose in me about things not heard before. “This noble truth with regards to suffering has been thoroughly understood”: in this way, bhikkhus, vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light arose in me about things not heard before.

The Gate of Suffering

Having presented these four noble truths, the Buddha then describes the process by which they are noble; that is, how they offer realization. This process is of three parts: the truth, the reality, is named; then how it is to be approached is specified; then the result of following that approach is given. In terms of the truth of suffering, the Buddha has the striking insight that *dukkha* is to be thoroughly understood. Not avoided or explained, but *thoroughly understood*.

The insight, wisdom and clarity that arise are that suffering doesn't fundamentally get in the way of peace and fulfillment, but is the gateway to those ends. The radical nature of this realization is that it turns attention back to how the mind operates when it doesn't get what it likes and can't get away from what it doesn't like. It highlights the craving that seems natural but is the cause of a suffering that we can abolish. Such an insight encourages us to meet our suffering rather than wallow in it or distract ourselves.

The Gate of Suffering

It is a remarkably agile shift for a human being to make – the ‘leap of faith’ that means that we can investigate our problems, and thereby grow wiser.

In this picture, the frame is intensely twisted again, and woven around two serpents – the black symbolizes Unknowing and the red one symbolizes craving. Around the bare impersonal skull run the links of dependent arising, which act as a fence between the human and the radiant field of mind from which he/she is thereby barred.

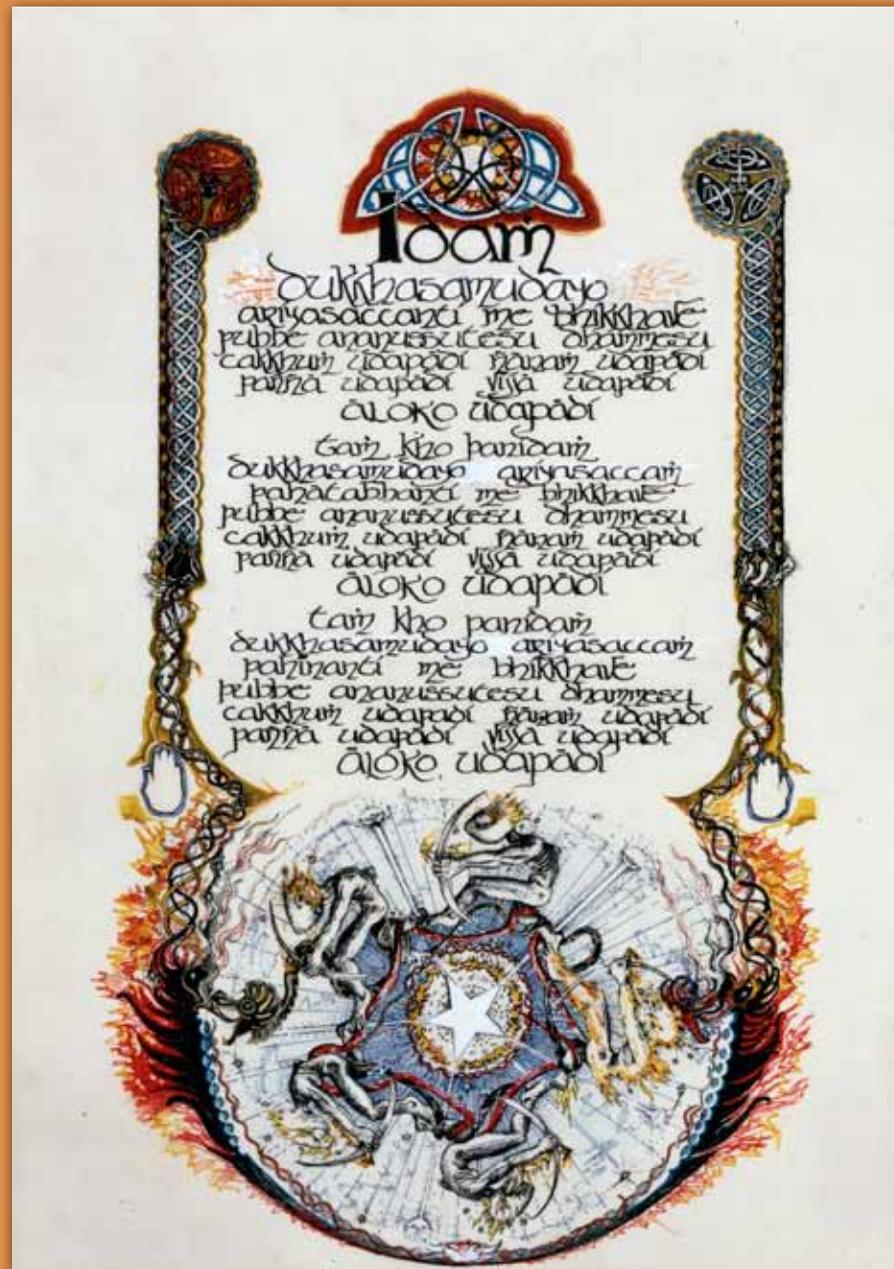
The Gate of Suffering



The Gate of Suffering



Missing (and Getting to) the Point



Missing (and Getting to) the Point



“There is this noble truth concerning the arising of suffering”: in this way, bhikkhus, vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light arose in me about things not heard before. “This noble truth of the arising of suffering is that it is to be abandoned...” “This noble truth of the arising of suffering is that it has been abandoned”: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light that arose in me about things not heard before.

Missing (and Getting to) the Point

The Buddha's realization process didn't stop with acknowledging the stress, but also revealed that there was a kind of suffering that arises in the way the mind operates. This *dukkha* is not mortality or pain, but the suffering and stress that the mind creates out of identifying with and holding onto feeling, perception and the other aggregates. However, because these aggregates are conditioned structures that are changeable, they can't provide security or satisfaction; so that instinct to hold onto them in order to be something or have something doesn't work. So the Buddha realized that the holding on is born of Unknowing and the craving to have something or to be something in terms of form, feeling, perception and the rest.

Missing (and Getting to) the Point

This craving transfers into the senses that, as in this picture, go running around shooting their arrows in order to hit the target of happiness – but in so doing, miss the point. What they are running around, their primary awareness, is already bright and perfect, but occluded by the twin serpents of Unknowing and craving (which in the picture are wrapped around the feet of each sense base). The direction therefore needs to change: to wake up to the fact that what we try to hold onto passes, and that as such, this craving is bound to bring unsatisfactory results.

The hint that to even realize that suffering has a cause is a step towards Awakening is made by the flower peeking through the central knot at the top.

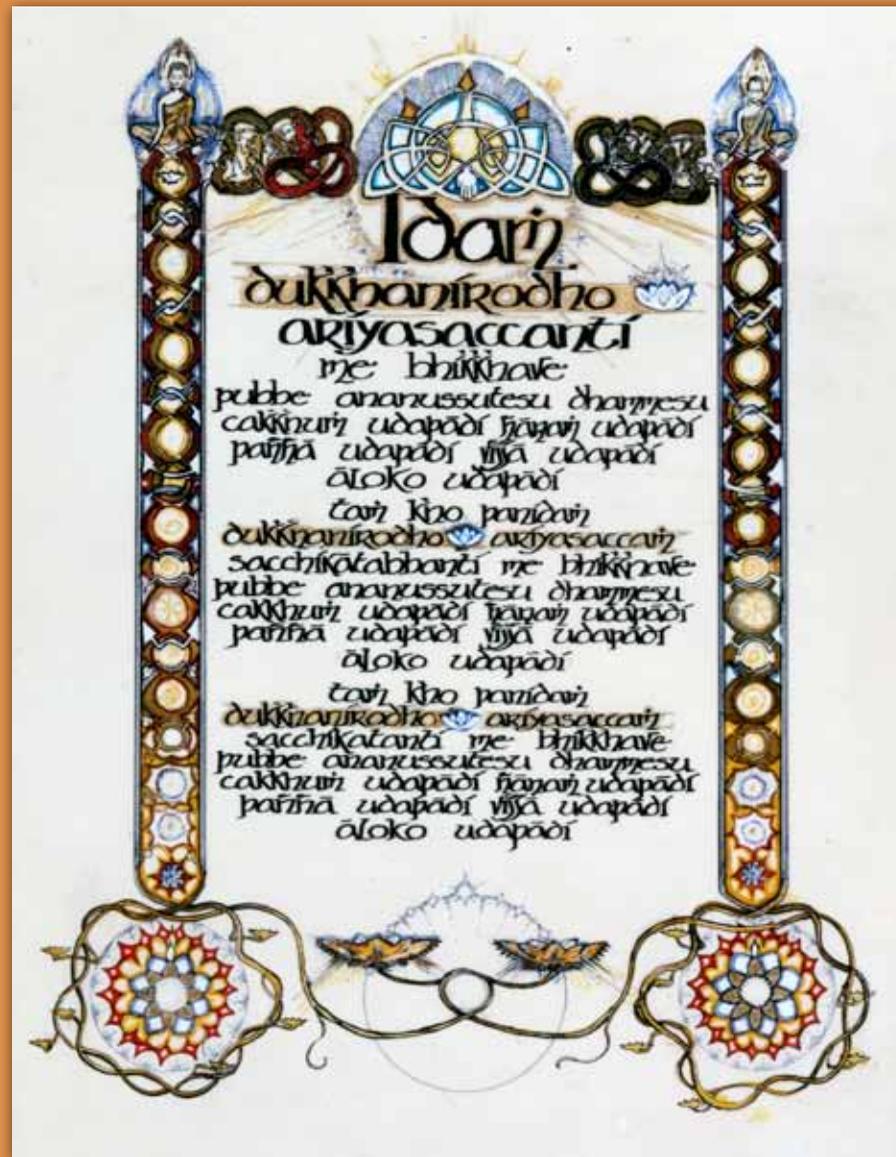
Missing (and Getting to) the Point



Missing (and Getting to) the Point



The Release of Awareness



The Release of Awareness



“There is this noble truth about the cessation of suffering”: in this way, bhikkhus, vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light arose in me about things not heard before. “This noble truth about the cessation of suffering is to be realized. . .” “This noble truth about the cessation of suffering has been realized’: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light that arose in me about things not heard before.

The Release of Awareness

And what's the solution to the previous problem? Let go; loosen the holding on, go in towards the open centre.

In this picture the knotwork has begun to loosen up and radiant forms start to manifest within its loops. So it is with Dhamma practice: the complexities of our minds, with their personal loops and tangles, become less intense and less convincing the more we refer them to the property of awareness. Our minds can still handle the complexities of language and concepts, but being human becomes straightforward: Do good, refrain from doing evil, purify the mind. It's lighter and more graceful that way.

The Release of Awareness



The Release of Awareness

In this respect, it's important to recognize that the mind has two fundamental properties: the energetic, affective and creative property, and the property of awareness. Awareness is like a mirror. It's always there, but generally our habit is not to refer to it, but rather to react and respond to the images that appear in the mind. Reacting and responding are attributes of the energetic property. This property generates natural and necessary functions, but, because the mind responds not just to images derived from sight, sound and the other senses but also to its memories, inclinations, anxieties and hopes, it gets very busy. So Unknowing and craving add more complexities, basically by operating through the changing focus of self-interest and self-image. Responses that have to take self-image into account get twisted and blurred, and so the mind's functioning locks into reactions, habits and fixed views. Then we find ourselves struggling to block out what we can't manage. That blocking out, through distraction, suppression or fixed views, is another energetic function. All this takes us away from clear awareness.

The Release of Awareness

Therefore a vital feature of Dhamma practice is to stop adding to or referring to habits, views and reactions and instead bring these energetic phenomena into the mirror of non-reactive awareness. This is meditation, or more specifically, the practice of mindfulness – staying steadily attentive – and full awareness – the function of referring what we are mindful of to awareness. As we do this, the energies tend to relax and the wisdom of full awareness gleans an understanding of release. This understanding is called ‘realization.’

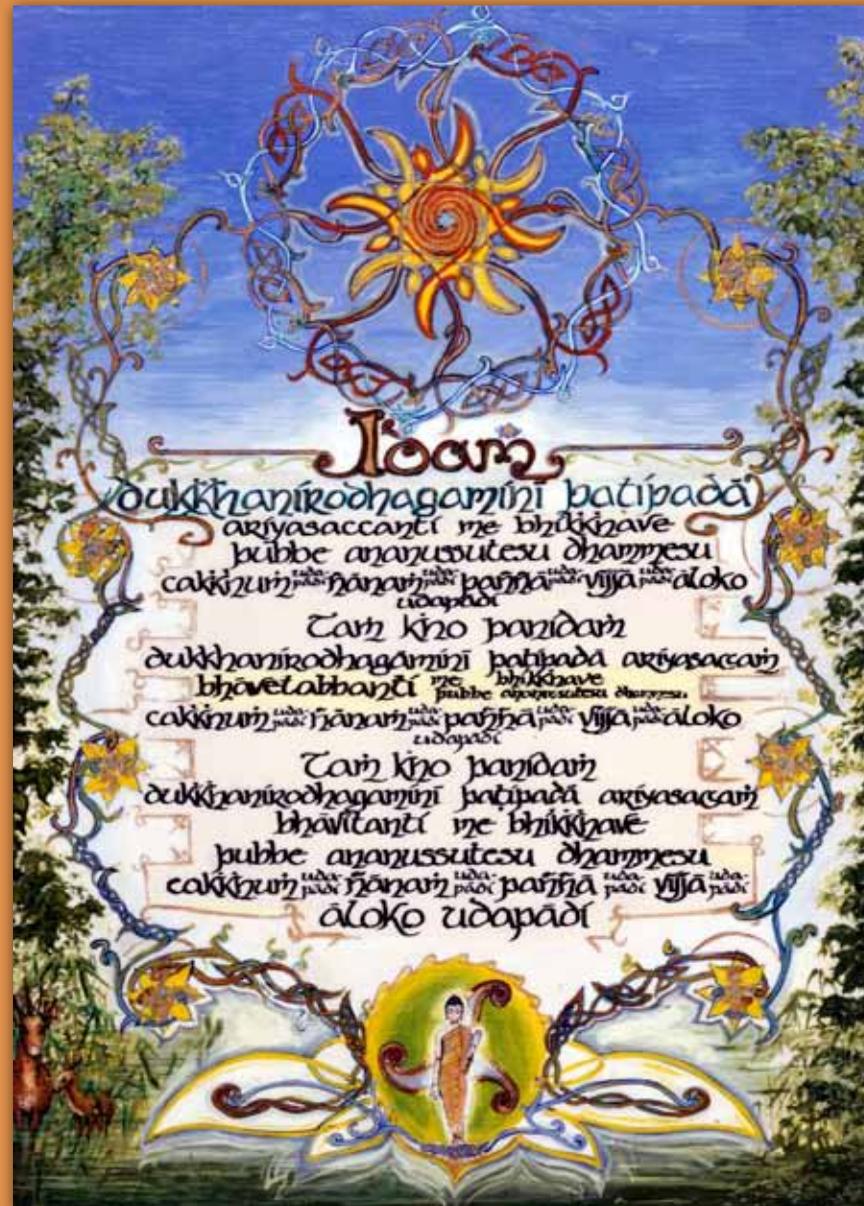
The Release of Awareness



The Release of Awareness



True Cultivation



True Cultivation



“There is this noble truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering. . .” “This noble truth of the Path is to be cultivated. . .” “This noble truth of the Path has been cultivated”: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light that arose in me about things not heard before.

True Cultivation

As you notice, the phrase ‘vision, insight, wisdom, gnosis and light’ is repeated for every one of the twelve stages of the realization process. The Buddha keeps referring to the same sense of clarity at all times. It’s as if that clarity of awareness underlies, and is revealed by, every stage. And yet the full flowering of that awareness, which disbands the tendencies to hunger and hold on, comes around through cultivation. It has to grow and be nurtured, not through belief or intellectual knowledge, but through meeting and investigating suffering.

This clear awareness is not something that you grab hold of; it’s not an object of the mind, but a shift in how the mind operates. It’s when the mind is no longer under the power of Unknowing, craving, and holding on. In one sense, this awareness is very ordinary, not full of ecstatic feelings or interesting images. But through this we live in the world without worldly ways.

True Cultivation

That is, the world flows through the mind and doesn't evoke irritation, desire or sorrow. Rather than respond with suffering, the mind brings forth patience, kindness, serenity and many other strengths. Life can flow naturally and evoke an empathic response. So a mind that has left worldliness behind is a blessing to the world.

Here the loops follow each other like steps in a dance, and freely interact with the natural world.

True Cultivation



True Cultivation



The Host of Māra

yāvakiṭṭaṇca me bhikkhava
imāsu caḍḍu ariyasaccesu
cīvanūparivattarī dādasakkararī
yathābhūtarī
ñāṇadassanarī na sūlūsuḍḍharī
āhosi



neva tāvāharī bhikkhava
sadevake loka samārake sabrahmāke
sasanānabrāhmanīyā paḍāya
sadevanānussāya
anuttararī sammāsambodhīm
abhisambuddho paccanñāsīrī

The Host of Māra



‘As long, bhikkhus, as these four noble truths in their twelve aspects were not seen by me; not seen with the purest insight as they are, then I didn’t teach the world – with its devas, māras and brahmas, its samanas and brahmins, its monarchs and ordinary folk – that I had fully realized complete Awakening.

The Host of Māra

The Buddha then declares why he is a Tathāgata – he has directly gone through the myriad forms of confused energies that Unknowing and craving bring up. Again, Unknowing and craving are symbolized by black and red serpents, which here frame the central cameo. They act as a barrier between the Buddha in the centre and the four noble truths – which occupy each corner of the square, *dukkha* – a skull – at top left and the other three truths following on in the motifs at each corner as you go clockwise. An eye opening to the fire of craving is the second, an eye of realization is the third, and a wheel represents the fourth.

Within this frame the Buddha-to-be is being confronted by a crowd of figures which represent ‘the Host of Māra.’ The Host of Māra is an example of how the Buddha, and Buddhist literature, represented psychological forces in cosmological or graphic terms. Māra is the demon that binds the mind to mortality; and he always manifests a multitude of forms to carry out this job.

The Host of Māra



The Host of Māra

At the bottom is the pig, which represents delusion; up on the left is the cockerel, which represents greed; and over the top and snaking down the right side, is the serpent of hatred. However, they are not seen clearly because the pig also carries books of learning that can distract the mind from direct knowing. The musician riding the cockerel gets the mind too excited to notice that it is being carried away; and the serpent carries the figure of religious righteousness whose ranting about the manifest sinfulness of the world conceals its lack of compassion.

Also in the picture are more personal forms that the Buddha had to keep in perspective – images of his sorrowing parents, his wife and his child. Until he had realized freedom, he had vowed to stay away; on gaining Enlightenment, they were amongst the first to whom he would bring his gift of Dhamma. The other future recipients, his five spiritual colleagues are here rejecting him for going soft on the ascetic ideal. ‘You’re finished, Gotama,’ is what they’re saying. These of course were the first to whom he gave the Dhamma.

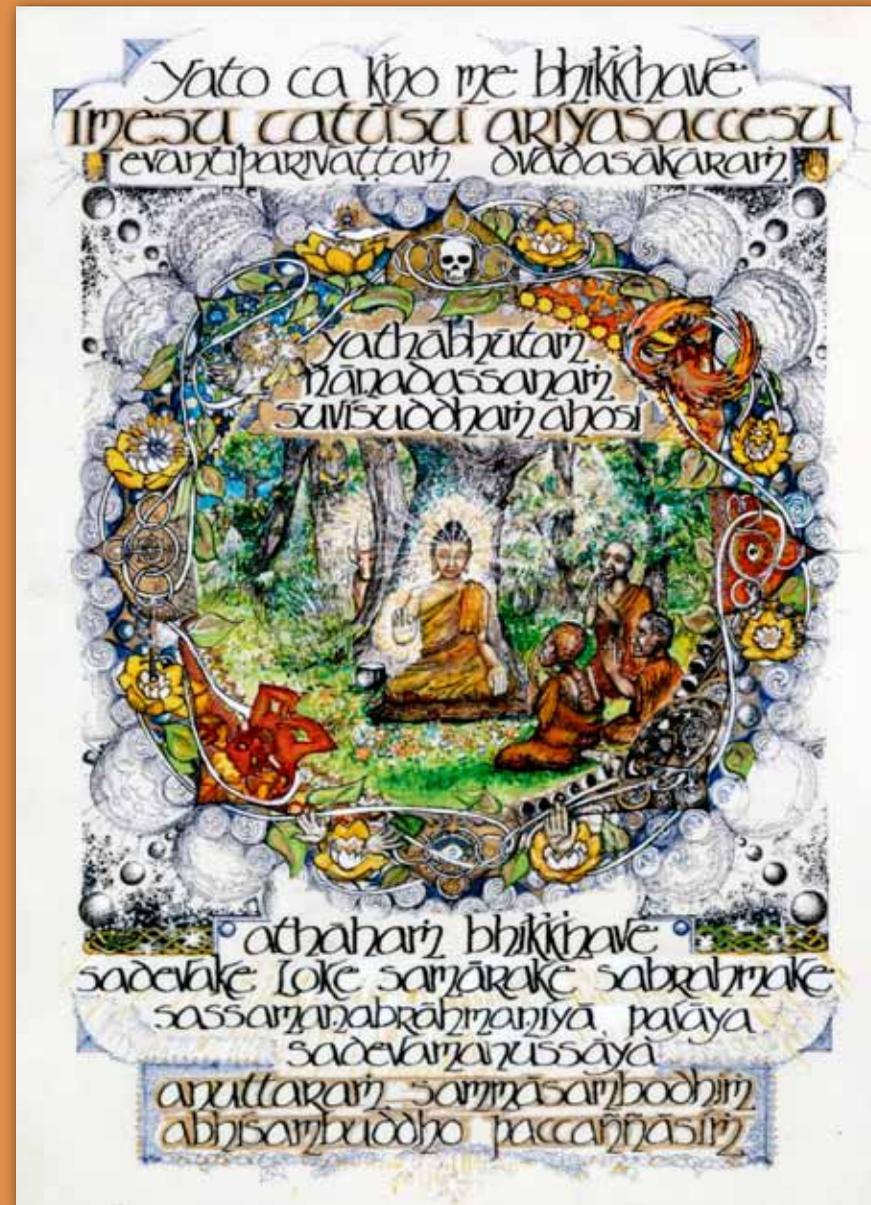
The Host of Māra

All these forces that tempt, deject and distract the mind make up the fog that the Buddha had to see through. So it is: nowhere else but in our mundane mind with its struggles are the great powers that hobble our Awakening. The way to overcoming the Host is shown by the Buddha sitting peacefully in their midst, not reacting and not identifying with the show, nor with being something else. It takes some doing – just listen to all those voices muttering in your head!

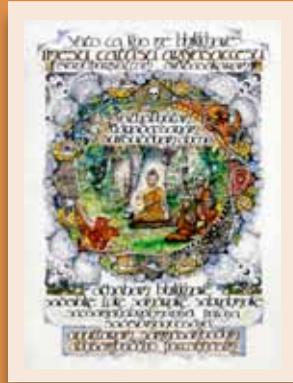
The Host of Māra



Teacher of God and Humans



Teacher of God and Humans



‘But, bhikkhus, as soon as these four noble truths in their twelve aspects were seen by me; seen with the purest insight as they are, then I taught the world—with its devas, māras and brahmas, its samanas and brahmins, its monarchs and ordinary folk—that I had fully realized complete Awakening.

Teacher of God and Humans

Now, there is a dramatic transformation. The serpents of Unknowing and craving have dissolved and the frame around the scene is a looping thread. The cardinal points of the frame carry images of the four noble truths as before. The loops weave around eight lotuses which represent the factors of the Path. They also loop around four beings who represent the four elements that are the basis of all ma-terial form: an angel (air), a *garuda*-bird (fire), a *naga*-serpent (water) and a *yakkha* or earth-spirit. Frightening or reassuring, the Buddha's dispensation includes it all.

In the scene in the centre, the Buddha hasn't moved, but now his eyes are fully open and he is bringing forth his Dhamma teaching. The Host of Māra has disappeared and instead there is an open and natural space around the Buddha.

Teacher of God and Humans

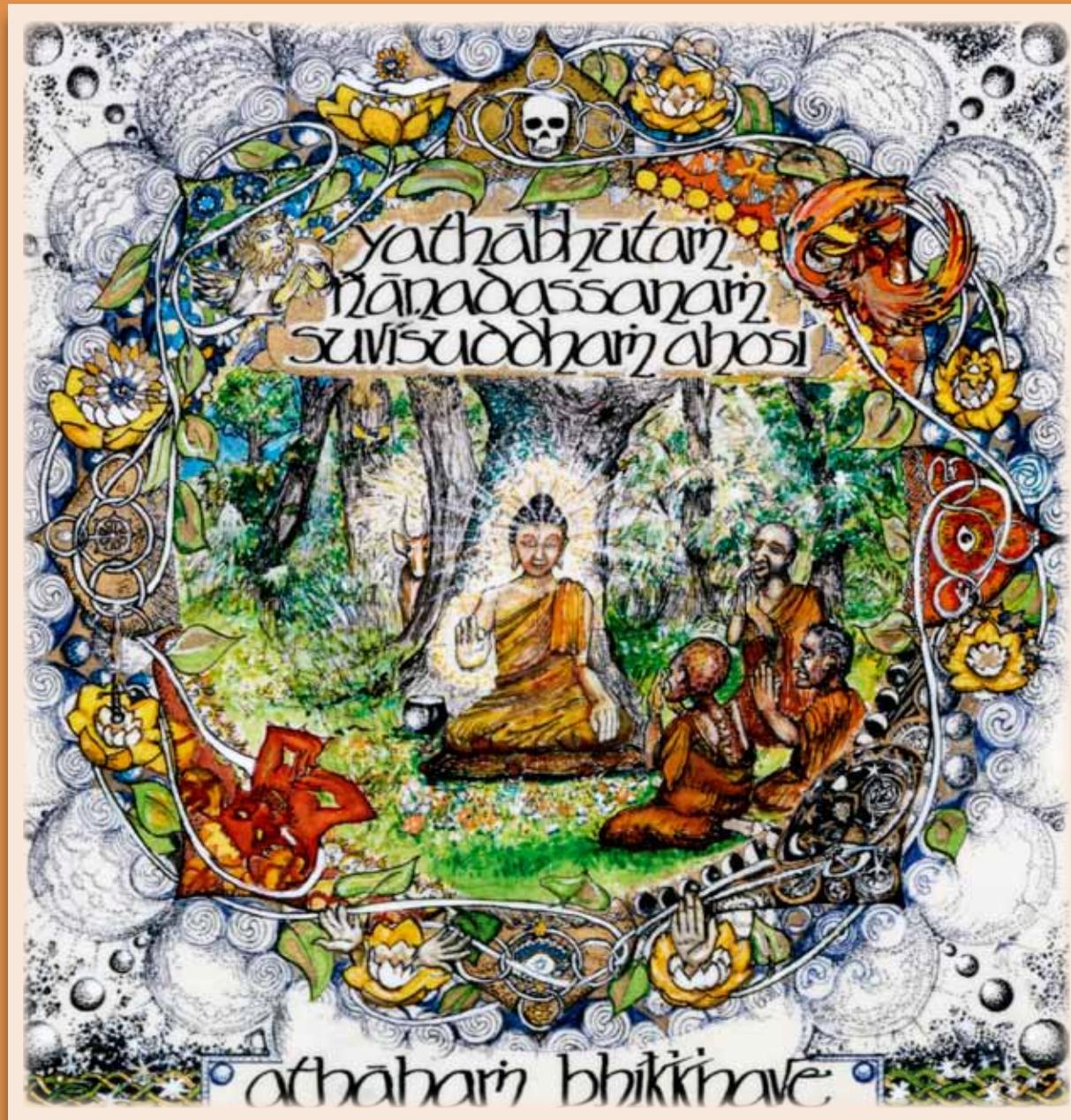


Teacher of God and Humans

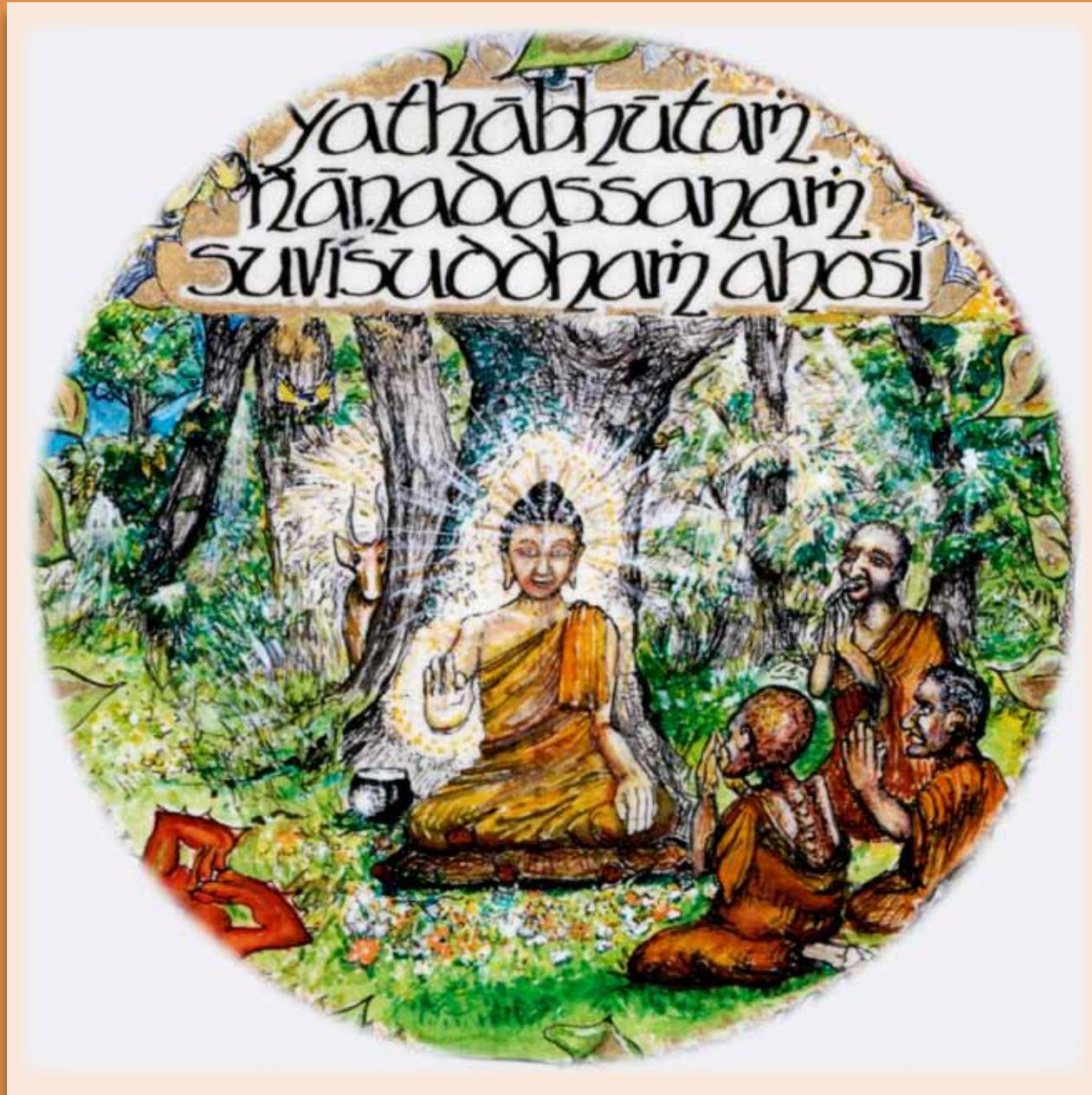
Three of the group of five bhikkhus are respectfully listening to him while the other two have gone to collect alms-food to feed the entire group. World-systems are rolling in all directions and even the deer are drawing close to listen.

What distinguishes a Buddha from other realized beings is that a Buddha's realization doesn't depend on a teacher, but on a huge accumulation of *pāramī* (skills and virtues such as patience, resolve and kindness) over many lifetimes. With Awakening, the radiant power of such *pāramī* attracts beings near and far. A Buddha's energy is palpable, you feel good in his presence.

Teacher of God and Humans



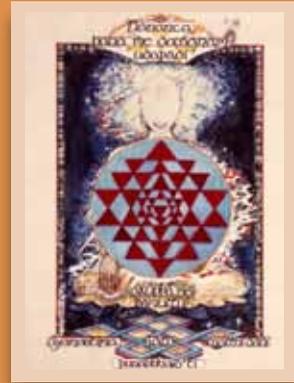
Teacher of God and Humans



Unshakeable Freedom



Unshakeable Freedom



“The knowledge and the vision arose in me: “My release is assured. This is the last birth. There is no further becoming.” ’

Unshakeable Freedom

As the realization of the four noble truths is completed in all its aspects, then the knowledge and vision of freedom arises, and the program of coming into birth is terminated. We may not see a connection between understanding suffering and not getting born again – we may not even consider that there is a future birth. But the link is between holding on (*upādāna*) and the ‘substrate’ (*upadhi*), or basis of holding on. This substrate is the program of identification. This is the program that underpins the way the mind operates: it sees things in terms of ‘mine’ and ‘others’ and thereby fails to relate in a clear and unbiased way. It easily favours and opposes, hangs on and rejects – and so generates suffering. When the origin of that suffering is abandoned, then the favouring and rejecting and any other position-taking ceases, and there is no way that a person can be defined or designated as ‘being this’ or ‘not being that.’ There is no drive to become, find, have, or get rid of anything, so the fuel that propels the mind to take up another set of aggregates runs out.

In this picture, you’ll see that the Buddha has no face, but does have a clearly drawn hand.

Unshakeable Freedom

This is a way of representing the non-identification of the Buddha, which yet allows a full capacity to act. Being clear of personal bias, anxiety, and the need to develop or protect self-image frees up responsive potential. Accordingly, the Buddha taught for forty-five years after his Awakening, giving his last teachings on his death-bed. This is the selfless activity of an Awakened One.

The frame around the central image is filled with faces, representing the many previous lives that Gotama's substrate evolved before it was unravelled by his Awakening. The mechanics of 'further birth' might be a mystery to us, but the idea that the program rolls on as it's been doing throughout my life – seems reasonable to me. The bodily program goes on from parent to child. Why should the mental program stop at death? Why should it just pop up out of nowhere at birth? As for the mechanics of it – well it seems as feasible as sending emails.

The image at the heart of this painting is 'Sri Yantra.' It is a symbol of non-duality and the union of masculine and feminine energies. I use it here to represent the non-positional totality of the Buddha. And because I like the image.

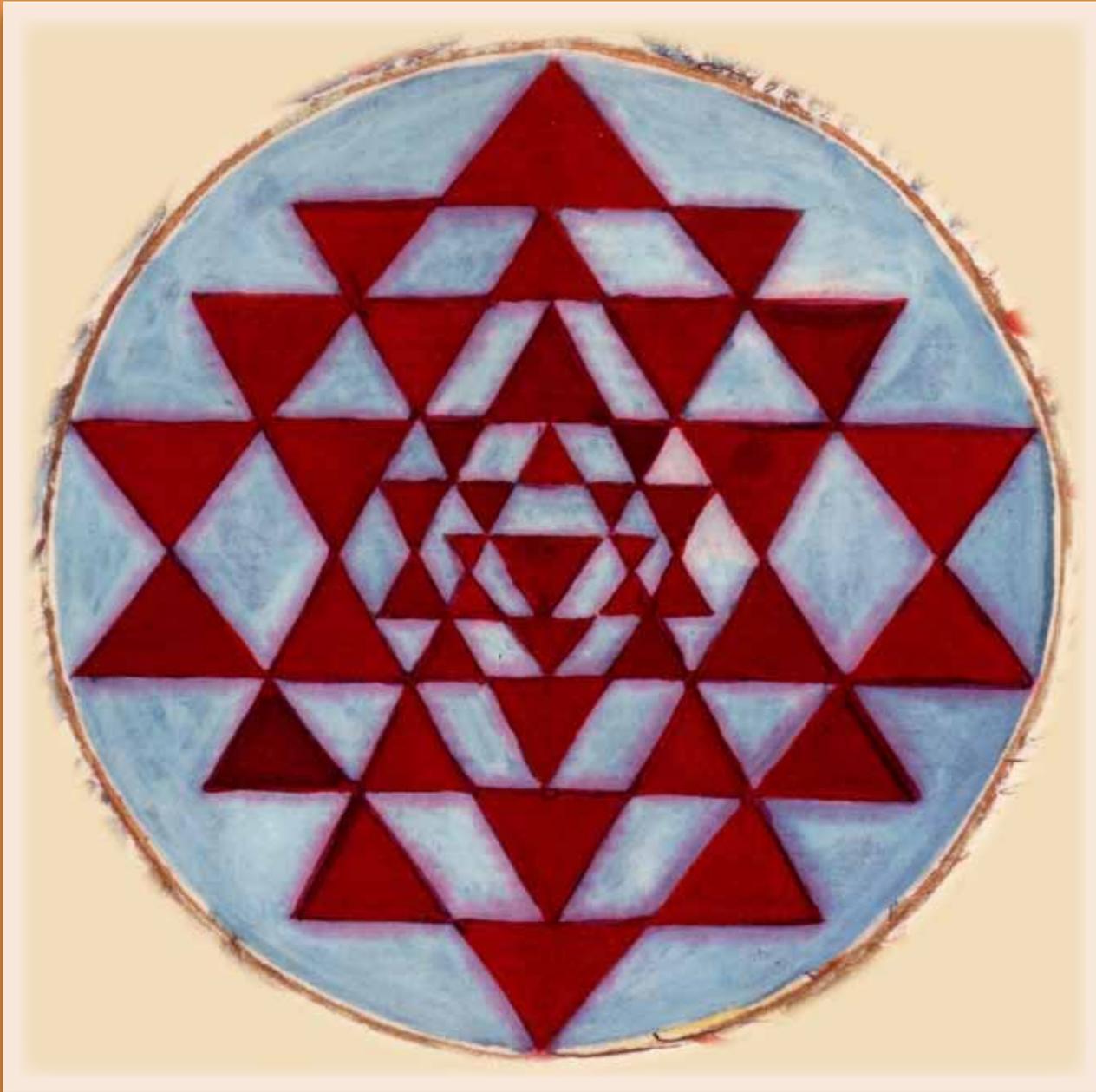
Unshakeable Freedom



Unshakeable Freedom



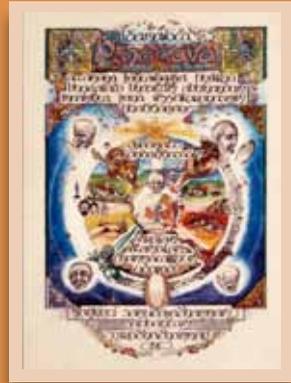
Unshakeable Freedom



The Vision of Dhamma



The Vision of Dhamma



This is what the Blessed One said – and the company of five bhikkhus were gladdened and approved of his words. And while this discourse was being delivered, the untarnished and clear vision of Dhamma arose in the Venerable Kondañña: ‘Whatever has the nature to arise, all that ceases.’

The Vision of Dhamma

For most of the group, the four who are at the four corners of this central image, the Buddha's words meet with approval. But for Kondañña, here placed in the centre of the painting, there is something more profound – a personal and direct realization of the effect of the four noble truths. Following the discourse closely and deeply, Kondañña experiences a release from holding on. He is at the centre of the multi-faceted Cosmos with its titans (at 2 o'clock on the Wheel) animals (at 3) demons (at 4), hungry ghosts (at 7) and heavenly beings (at 10). This is the realm of existence in Time (which is alluded to by the representations of the seasons in the four corners of the main picture). The Wheel itself is a symbol of both the Cosmos and the Dhamma (as in the first picture), systems that encompass all our experience. Here, the Wheel covers this experience of Cosmos is mapped out as 'The Six Realms of Existence.' As is often the case in Buddhist cosmology, the map is not fantasy or superstition: it presents real experiences and mind-sets that human beings get into, and get lost in.

The Vision of Dhamma



The Vision of Dhamma

The top two panes show the two celestial realms of happiness (as represented by a heavenly musician or *gandhabba*) and power (as represented by a titan or *asura*) – experiences that flood humans with energy and make them feel ‘on top of the world.’ These two realms are often in conflict, because they both occupy Mount Meru, the centre of the world (or the central focus of ordinary human consciousness) which is based on happiness and power. The titans live at the bottom of the mountain, and are consequently jealous of the heavenly beings (called *deva* or *devatā*) who control the peak. Translate that into social order based on privilege and competition, and you’ll see the relevance. Maybe if they could share things out...but those devas don’t trust the troublesome asuras, and those asuras are so angry about how unfair it all is that they’re taking direct action. One feels that if they changed positions the problem would be the same. Actually, it’s the wrong mountain to build one’s world on. That’s why Kondañña has left it.

Just below centre on the right hand side is the lowest realm, which is Hell, or the experience of being burned up with hatred or greed. You get there through committing acts of violence and other forms of abuse.

The Vision of Dhamma



The Vision of Dhamma

Just notice what it's like to feel angry or vindictive – for whatever reason (the mind can always justify it).

Notice that intense burning feeling, or the hard 'I don't give a damn!' What would it be like to feel like that for a long time? That's Hell – and, as acting in such ways leaves habitual trends in the mind, those trends (not the actions themselves) and their results remain in the mind unless we cultivate kindness and compassion to clear them out. Even guilt and resentment are hellish – in Buddhist cosmology, there are freezing gloomy Hells as well as fiery ones. So compassion and forgiveness is needed in these cases too. Don't take the knocks of life so personally – we all get hurt and left out from time to time – instead learn how to retain your inner freedom through forgiveness of yourself and others. Then pick up the right actions that restore you to a shared humanity. That's the recommendation of the wise – otherwise you're going to be burning, or locked out of warm feeling, for a long time.

The Vision of Dhamma

Opposite the Hell realm is the dry and bleak world of feeling insatiably needy and inadequate. This is the hungry ghost realm. The story of hungry ghosts (*peta*) is that they have huge bellies but tiny mouths. It's said that you go there when you die if you've been mean and niggardly; but I think we align ourselves to that place with that nagging sense of 'I'm not good enough.' Some people make deep commitments to that desert of inadequacy with drugs and addictions that are supposed to fill the gap, but in fact only starve the spirit.

In the pane above the hungry ghost realm is the secular human realm, a place which is concerned with property, wages and belonging to society. Perhaps, when you consider that no one ever feels at peace and replete in this scenario, this is the strangest realm of them all. Don't these beings recognize that they can die at any moment, and that nothing that they have worked hard for and worried over will go with them? And yet, because it is so subject to change, this realm has a Buddha standing right beside it. Every time another dream bursts, there's a chance to see things clearly.

The Vision of Dhamma

And this is what Kondañña is doing. He sees all the realms; in fact, like us, he's probably visited them all from time to time. He's not caught up in them, he doesn't deny their existence, and he's not absorbed in some other realm. He is contemplating the arising and passing of them on the Wheel of Existence. The habits of affirming or rejecting what comes up in the mind, and of establishing a position with regards to any state of existence – all this ceases. Therefore, what arises is allowed to arise without comment or reaction – so it passes in peace. Moreover, when the mind doesn't hold any phenomenon, it doesn't create an internal impression of any phenomenon. In other words, as things aren't internalized and held onto they melt as they arise. So the mind isn't moved. This realization – of the nature of phenomena and of an unmoving awareness – is the first level of Enlightenment, called 'stream-entry.'

The Vision of Dhamma

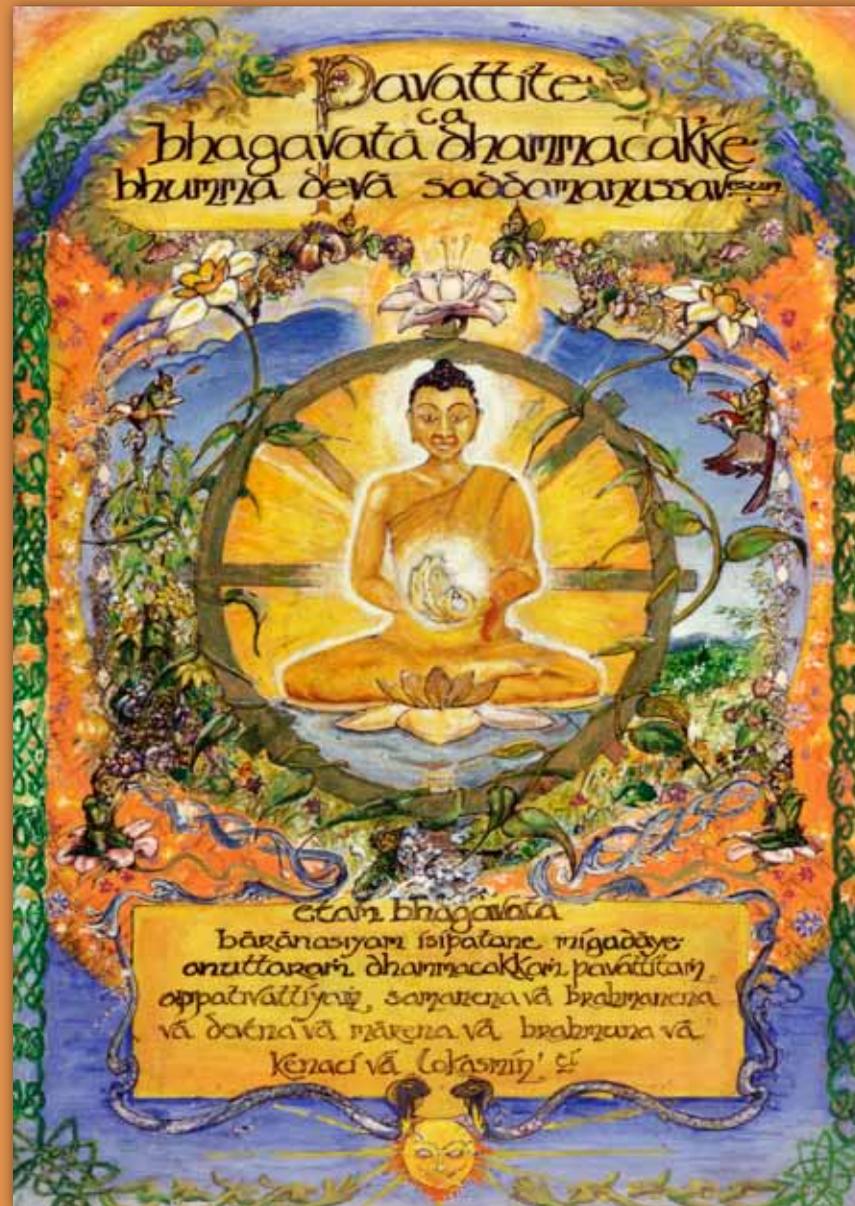
So there's more to come? Yes; perhaps what needs to be released is the sense of being that unmoving awareness, a duality that retains a subtle aspect of self-view.

Notice that Venerable Kondañña's realization doesn't mention the four noble truths; his understanding is not an intellectual grasp of the terms that the Buddha's using, but the effect of putting the teachings into practice.

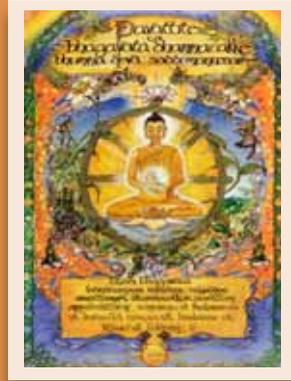
The Vision of Dhamma



Natural Harmony



Natural Harmony

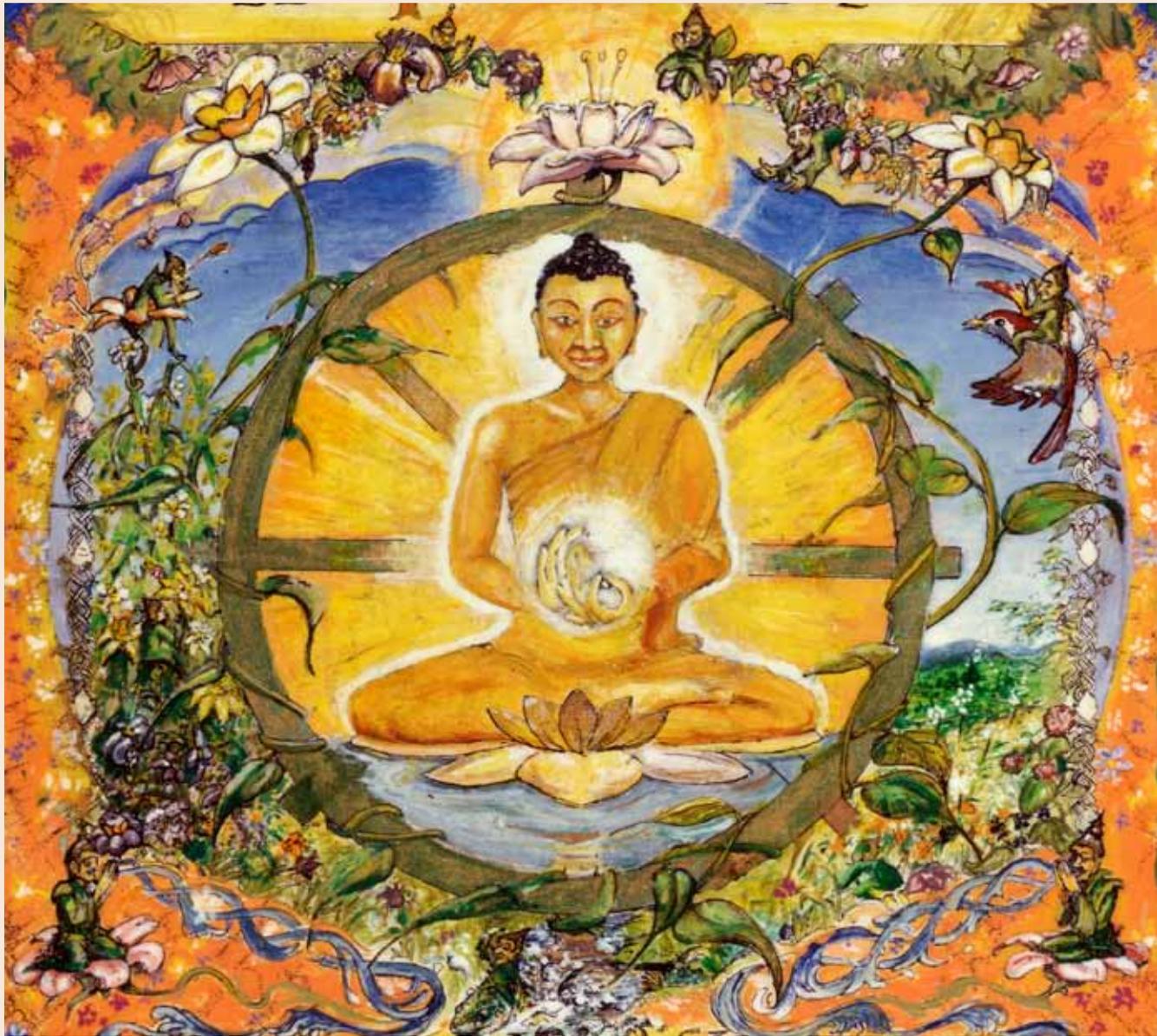


When the Wheel of Dhamma had been set rolling by the Blessed One, the devas of the earth raised the cry: 'At Vāranāsi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the incomparable Wheel of Dhamma has been set rolling by the Blessed One – and it can't be stopped by any samana, or brahmin, or deva, or māra, or brahma, or anyone whomsoever in the world.'

Natural Harmony

Now we get a view of how the effect of the Dhamma radiates throughout the world-system. As in all cultures, the many forms in which consciousness manifest is explained in cosmological terms – that is, in terms of spirits and deities. In Buddhism the unfortunate non-humans are either demons (*māra*) hungry ghosts, or titans (*asuras*) as well as animals. The benevolent non-humans are either devas or brahmas. These *brahmas*, like the devas, are celestials who exist in domains that are more refined than the normal level of much of human life, with the brahmas occupying the non-sensual levels of the conscious cosmos. The lower orders of devas, being less sublime, cluster around Mount Meru, as we've seen. All these celestials can attune to the events in human consciousness, and are especially delighted by events of spiritual portentous, such as the arising of a Buddha. So the manifestation of Dhamma, a Buddha's revelation, is a source of considerable interest and rejoicing for these beings.

Natural Harmony



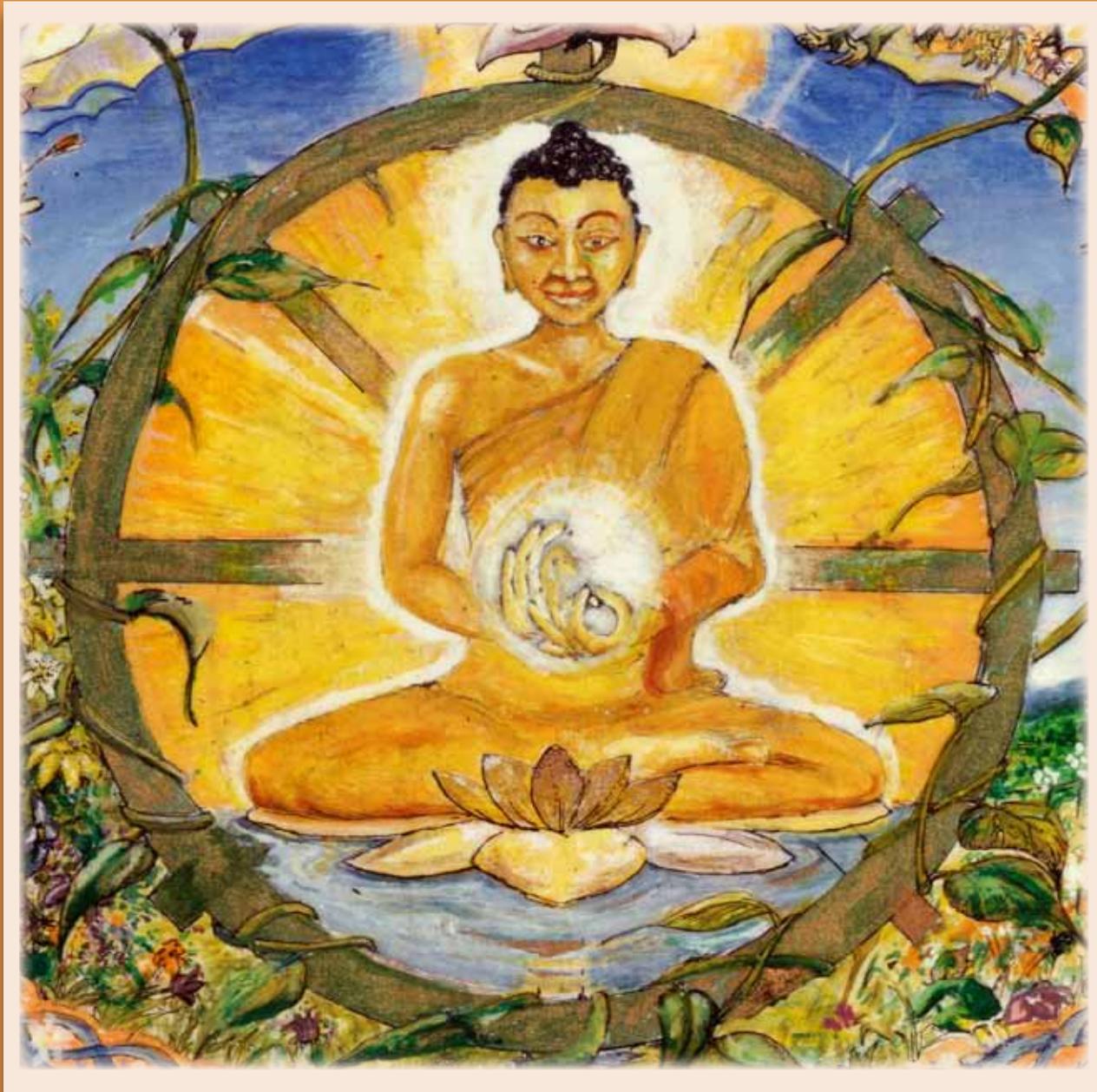
Natural Harmony

First of all, the Earth devas, those nearest to planetary existence, pick up the news. They are excited, perhaps, because the Dhamma, with its emphasis on living simply and without violence, is of benefit to natural harmony. This proves to be the case: for example, the advent of Buddhism in India turned the society against animal sacrifice. Green politics fit well with Dhamma. So the Earth devas see the Buddha in these terms. Here is fitting in with the natural world, with his hands in the *mudra* that represents the turning of the Wheel of the Law, the *Dhammacakkappavattana mudra*.

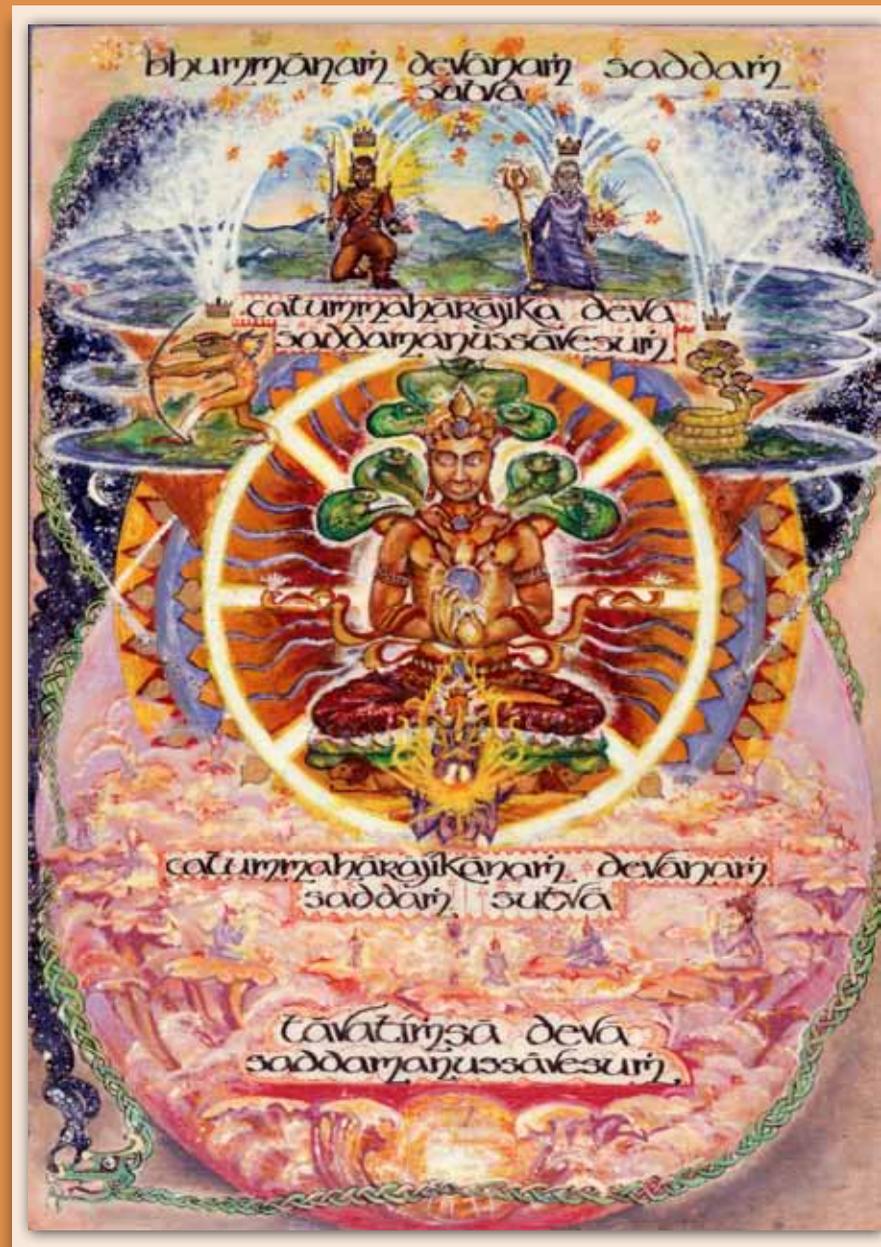
Natural Harmony



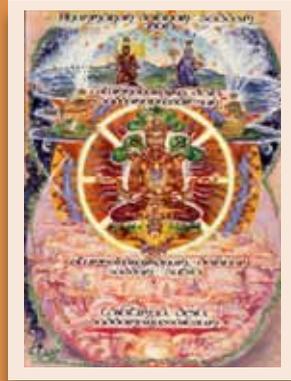
Natural Harmony



Guardians of the World



Guardians of the World



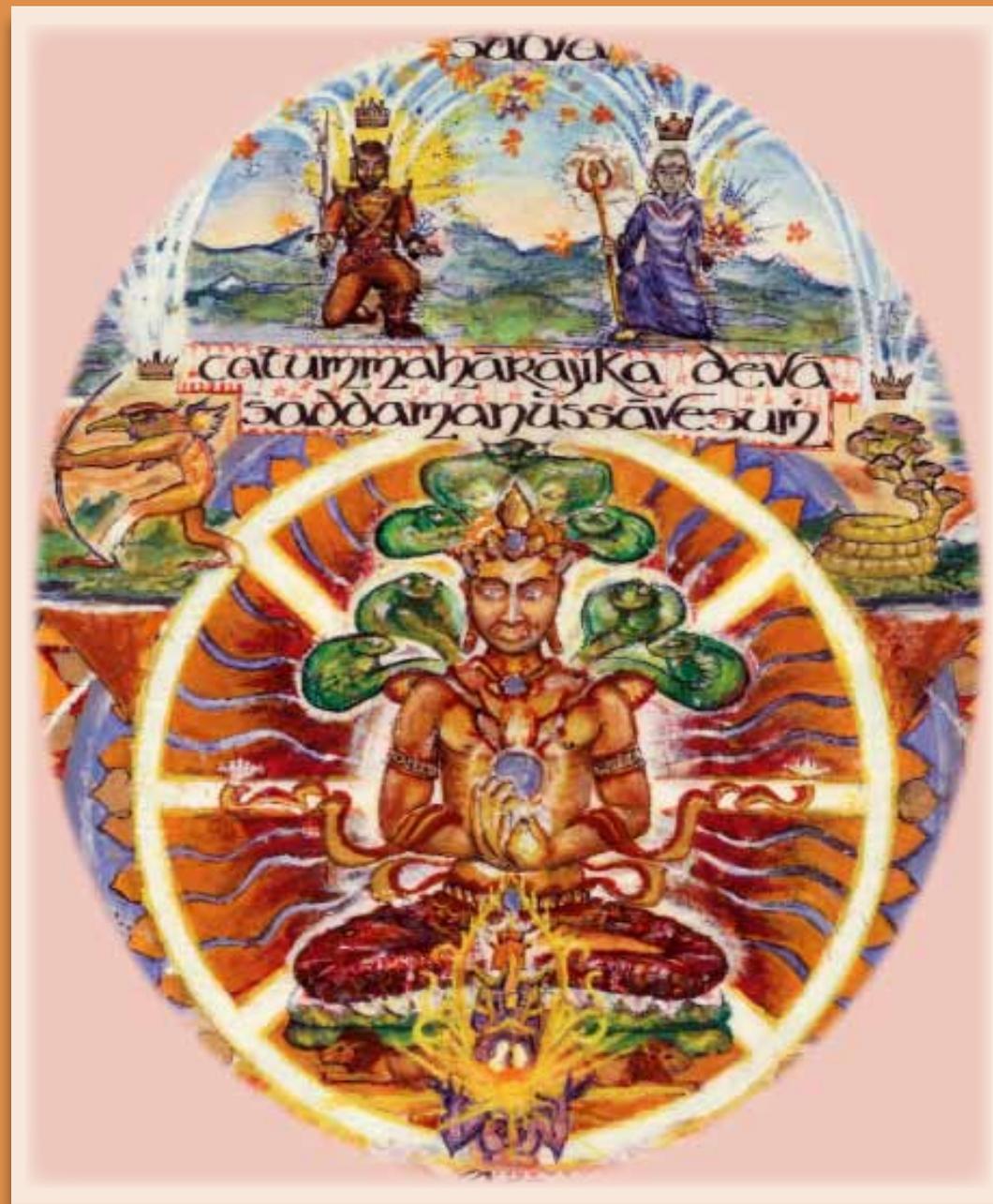
When they heard what the Earth devas had said, the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings cried out with one voice: ‘At Vāranāsi . . .’ And when they heard the cry of the devas of the realm of the Four Great Kings, then the devas of the realm of the Thirty-Three cried out with one voice . . .

Guardians of the World

The message that the Dhamma has been proclaimed travels up the celestial hierarchy to the realm of the Four Great Kings who are on guard in the upper half of the picture. These four, with their respective companies, are the guardians of the world, so they're based around Mt. Meru and participate in the struggles there. Of these, Vessavāna (also called Kuvera) 'the one who hears everything,' guards the northern direction. The East is guarded by Dhatarattha, ('he who looks after the nations'), the South by Virūlhaka, ('he who supervises increase') and the West by Virūpakka, ('he who is all-seeing'). They take on various forms, such as a naga king, or a great *yakkha*, as the painting depicts.

Now it may be the case that you scoff at all this cosmological stuff. But then people scoffed at global warming; that's what happens when the Earth and its natural order aren't respected. However you want to conceive it, custodianship of the planet and its resources is a pressing issue, and we'd better internalize and start manifesting in more kingly ways. The Four Great Kings at least make an effort – although clearly they haven't been that successful.

Guardians of the World



Guardians of the World

It's much the same with the realm of the Thirty-Three devas which occupies most of the picture. This realm is a place of moral concern for the world. These devas are the ones who live at the top of Mount Meru, the world mountain, the central pivot of the cosmos. Indra is the king of these gods who keep the world on an upright axis. However as we've seen, in so doing, they are frequently at war with the titans who live at the foot of the mountain. What all this implies is a moral and judicial authority, which became the model of Buddhist kingship, and tries to act according to principles of justice. At this level of understanding the cosmos, the Buddha himself is seen as with all the regalia of a Dhamma king, and in the centre of this picture Indra, supported by a yakkha, is offering him his respects. However this realm of kingly power, for all its laudable concern, is concerned with the struggle to hold it all together. And with that view, one can easily forget 'Whatever has the characteristic to arise, all that ceases,' and so the Dhamma wheel itself isn't in strong focus.

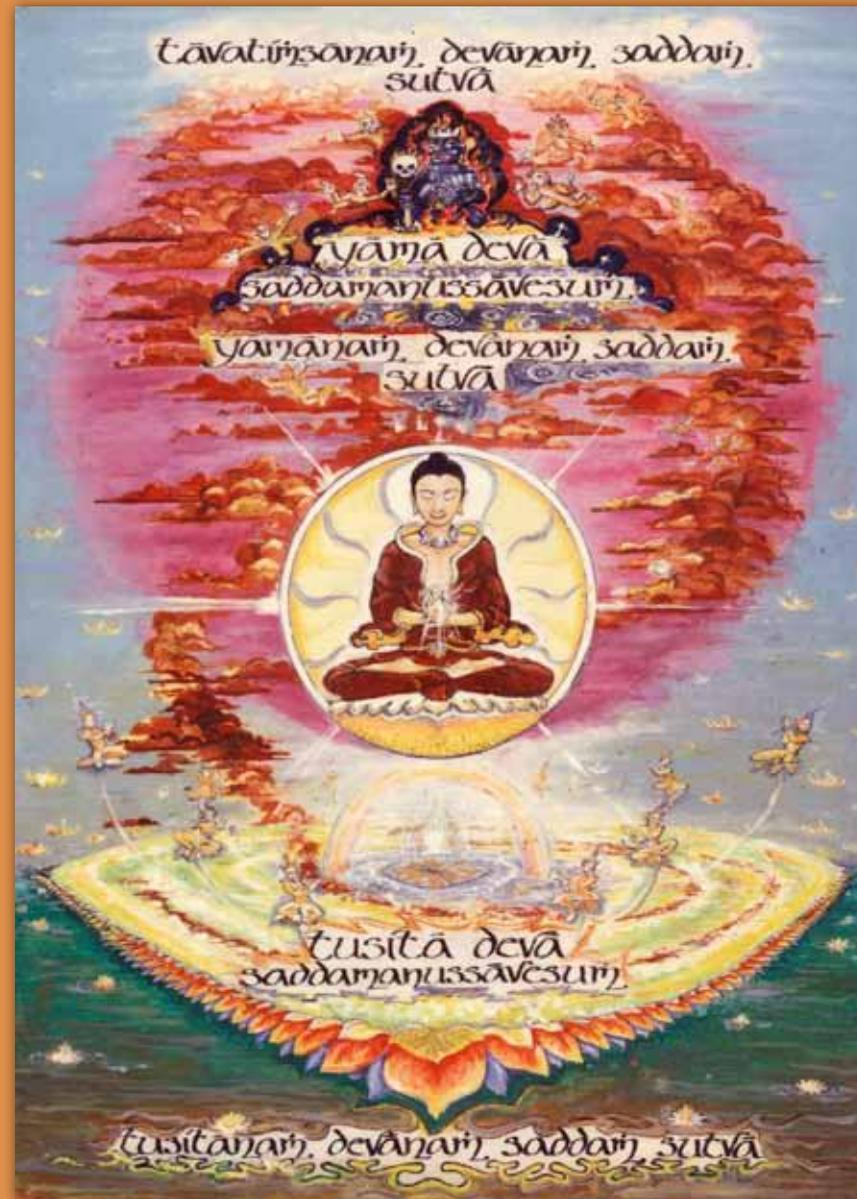
Guardians of the World



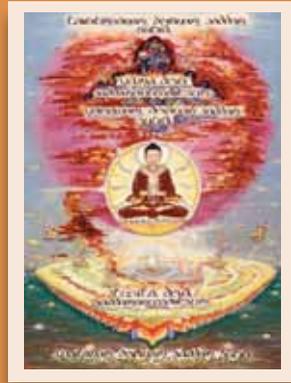
Guardians of the World

Moreover, it's all wrapped up in Time, to represent which I've borrowed the figure of Ouroboros, the self-consuming world serpent of Greek mythology. Ouroboros represents the cycle of death and rebirth. He's framing the picture, wrapped around these heavens to indicate that even these long-lived devas are bound to birth and death – and whatever good or bad they've effected goes with them to a future birth. So this realm is not the place of release that the Buddha revealed.

Celestial Bliss



Celestial Bliss



When they heard the cry of the Thirty-Three devas, the Yāma devas cried out with one voice . . . When they heard the cry of the Yāma devas, the Tusita devas cried out with one voice . . . When they heard the cry of the Tusita devas,

Celestial Bliss

At the next level up, and further, the Dhamma wheel has faded even more. Here we're at a level of peace and joy, the realms of the Yāma and the Tusita devas. They've left the Mountain behind. At top centre, the Yāma devas are clustering around Yama, Judge of the Dead. Despite the similarity (in Roman typography) of Yāma to Yama, the two are not related, and to be truthful, Yama's only there because I overlooked this distinction when I composed the painting. Anyway, at this level, death and even change are remote concerns. These devas are said to live for millions of years; a recognition of the time distortion that can occur in states of deep calm. With all that going for you, you could very well assume you could cock a snook at Death.

At the Tusita level, all is very blissful; this is where the next Buddha, Metteyya, is supposed to be dwelling, waiting until the Dhamma has been completely forgotten before he descends to the human realm to set it turning again.

Celestial Bliss



Celestial Bliss



Celestial Bliss

He is the small white figure depicted beneath the central Buddha-image, floating above the lotus and surmounted by a bow of light. So this realm is one of great vision and inspiration. As before, these devas see the Buddha in their own terms. Here is configured in terms of his peaceful contemplative abiding. However, at this level the vision of the Dhamma isn't so clear; partly because it's about a way out of suffering – and suffering isn't so evident when you're in bliss and inspired. Until it ends, of course! That's when, if you're humble enough to learn the lesson, the truth that 'All that is of the nature to arise is of the nature to cease' allows you a dispassionate perspective. It's not that we shouldn't experience bliss – but detachment from it, seeing it as a state and not some personal nature that you get puffed up about, allows you to be peaceful whether it's there or not. That's the liberating effect of wisdom. However, although this is a liberating experience, 'detachment from bliss' doesn't carry much in terms of inspirational idealism. So at this level of the conscious cosmos, it's difficult to grasp.

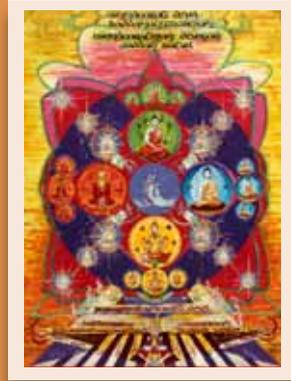
Celestial Bliss



Creative Delight



Creative Delight



the Nimmānaratī devas cried out with one voice...When they heard the cry of the Nimmānaratī devas, the Paranimmitavasavattī devas cried out with one voice . . . When they heard the cry of the Paranimmitavasavattī devas,

Creative Delight

The next two deva realms are of psychic potency. The Nimmānarati devas have the power to make manifest whatever their minds wish. And the Paranimmitavasavattī devas are those who can have the Nimmānarati devas produce things for them.

The main element of this picture is of the legendary twenty-eight Buddhas who according to certain texts (such as *Buddhavamsa*) include the current Buddha and twenty-seven predecessors. In this picture they are grouped in terms of five Buddha images – four full-bodied ones around a central fifth who is represented by the Dhammacakka mudra (which occurs throughout this series). So this is an example of the power of the imagination to create multiple forms based on one theme – Buddhahood.

The five main Buddha-forms are *dhyāni* Buddhas, that is ‘meditation Buddhas’ that in the Vajrayana Buddhism of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan are images that are used to contemplate and relate to as aspects of the indescribable Buddha-nature. A Tathāgata is one who, although many things can be said about how he acts, is ultimately beyond definition.

Creative Delight



Creative Delight

So these *dhyāni* Buddhas carry definable aspects of Buddha-energy that a practitioner can meditate on. From the top and proceeding clockwise, we have Amoghasiddhi (fearless and unstoppable) the Buddha of the Northern direction; Akshobya, (imperturbable) the Buddha of the East; Ratnasambhava, (the jewel-become) the Buddha of the South and Amitabha/Amida (limitless light) the Buddha of the West. The central Buddha (who is often hidden) is Vairocana – the radiant. They are all depicted with their signature colours and mudras. Amoghasiddhi represents the undaunted activity of an Awakened One, Akshobya the imperturbable mirror-like awareness, Ratnasambhava the plenitude and generosity, and Amitabha the ceaseless reaching out in compassion for others. Vairocana turns the Wheel of the Dhamma.

Clearly these Buddhas are accessed through devotion and firmed up in meditation. So here the theme is of the refined mental delight and sacred celebration that can uplift and guide the heart. Yet here I've added a warning to the practitioner: images have the power to take over the mind and eventually mask its purity.

Creative Delight



Creative Delight

The proper consummation of such devotional practices is to see that all images are empty – including all the images that aversion, fascination and delusion implant in our minds. Mystical experience (and making paintings) can get one so fascinated by the fashioning of the door that one forgets to turn the handle and pass through.

In this painting, the vision of the Dhamma, which would show these devas that refined mental delight also is of the nature to arise and pass, has faded from view. Instead there are myriads of images of the Buddha and although the *mudra* (hand pose) that represents the Buddha teaching the four noble truths is still apparent, at this level, rather than realizing those truths, we're just producing wonderful images of the Dhamma. (There's a message for me in there.)

To emphasize the point, the Paranimmitavasavattī realm has two monarchs – Vasavatti, a being of great splendor and beauty, and Māra, the deceiver who tries to keep beings mesmerized by phenomena. Tellingly enough, Vasavatti

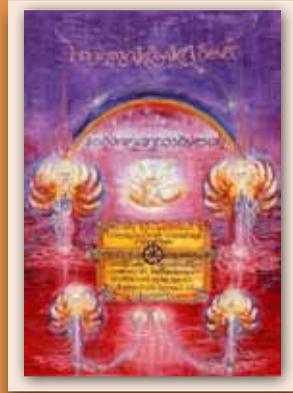
Creative Delight



Sublime Space



Sublime Space



the devas of the retinue of the Brahma deities took up the cry: ‘At Vāranāsi, in the Deer Park at Isipatana, the incomparable Wheel of Dhamma has been set rolling by the Blessed One – and it can’t be stopped by any samana, or brahmin, or deva, or māra, or brahma, or anyone whomsoever in the world.’

Sublime Space

The news about the Dhamma then reaches the highest level of the deva realms, where these deities accompany the higher gods. Whereas devas have radiant and diaphanous bodies, and hence some attachment to sensuality, brahmas are non-sensual and bound up with the more subtle energies of mind. Accordingly, at this level, phenomena are refined and not subject to rapid or violent change. A sense of vast luminous space prevails, whose dependence on mental energetic input is not apparent. So there's little recognition that this too is subject to change. Hence although there is a resonance with the stability and release of the Dhamma, the deep meaning of it doesn't strike home. The mudra representing the act of teaching is still there, but the Wheel of the Dhamma – of what is being taught by a Buddha – is completely gone.

Now I don't want to malign these deva realms. One accesses them through good deeds, generosity, morality and deep absorption. They are benevolent and happy states. It's just that they're all prone to inflation and grandiosity. Their virtue, happiness and beauty are not seen as being of the nature to arise and cease dependent on causes and conditions. The problematic sense of me and mine remains.

Sublime Space



Sublime Space

These beings get attached to their rarified existence, and yet their time in these realms is finite – when the effects of their good kamma wear out, down they go. You’ve probably seen a few spiritual teachers go this way. It’s a common problem for anyone who receives positive attention and acclaim. They have to watch out and not take all this positive feedback as an image of their true self. Because to be seen as wonderful is something that we long for – to be unified in our social environment in a positive way, instead of being liked by some, disliked by some and not known by most. Actually that rather dysfunctional state of affairs is closer to the way that the Buddha was regarded in his time! But the Buddha didn’t depend on or seek acclaim, nor did he get knocked down or run away from disapproval. He saw all that for the agitation that it is. The point then that these good devas haven’t realized (yet) is that all these conditioned phenomena depend on the input of one’s own mind or that of others – and all that arises and passes away.

Sublime Space

These celestials then appear in the Buddhist Canon as good but Unenlightened beings, and placing them in that way was one of the many ways in which the Buddha took the old religious order of external forces and tweaked it to give primacy to human potential. The truly sacred world mountain then is not Mount Meru, where there is conflict over supremacy, but the upright and stable awareness of the human being. Hence the axis mundi is shifted out of cosmology and sacred geography and into psychology and here-and-now presence. That's a shift that offers and requires our full responsibility.

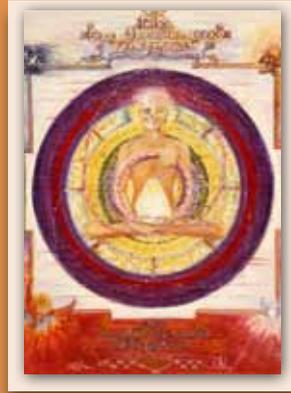
Sublime Space



The End of the World is Nigh



The End of the World is Nigh



*So in that instant, at that very moment, the word travelled up to the realm
of the high divinities.*

The End of the World is Nigh

As I've suggested, all of this world system can be experienced within the consciousness that is based on the human body. Heavens and Hells are all within us. In this picture, the body is portrayed as the centre-piece, but also symbolized in the frame by emblems that denote the four elements – earth, air, fire and water – that make up the direct experience of the body. Mindfulness of this very body, if fully developed, leads to the refinement of mental consciousness called 'absorption' (*jhāna*), a *samādhi* experience that is equivalent to these higher deva and brahma realms. However because the happy state is conjoined with mindfulness and reflective awareness, it's grounded. Hence the most significant track for the Dhamma Wheel to roll down, that of the wisdom that 'all that arises is subject to cessation,' is accessible in *jhāna*. In fact you do need some good concentration to really get that message in depth – otherwise it's just an idea.

The End of the World is Nigh

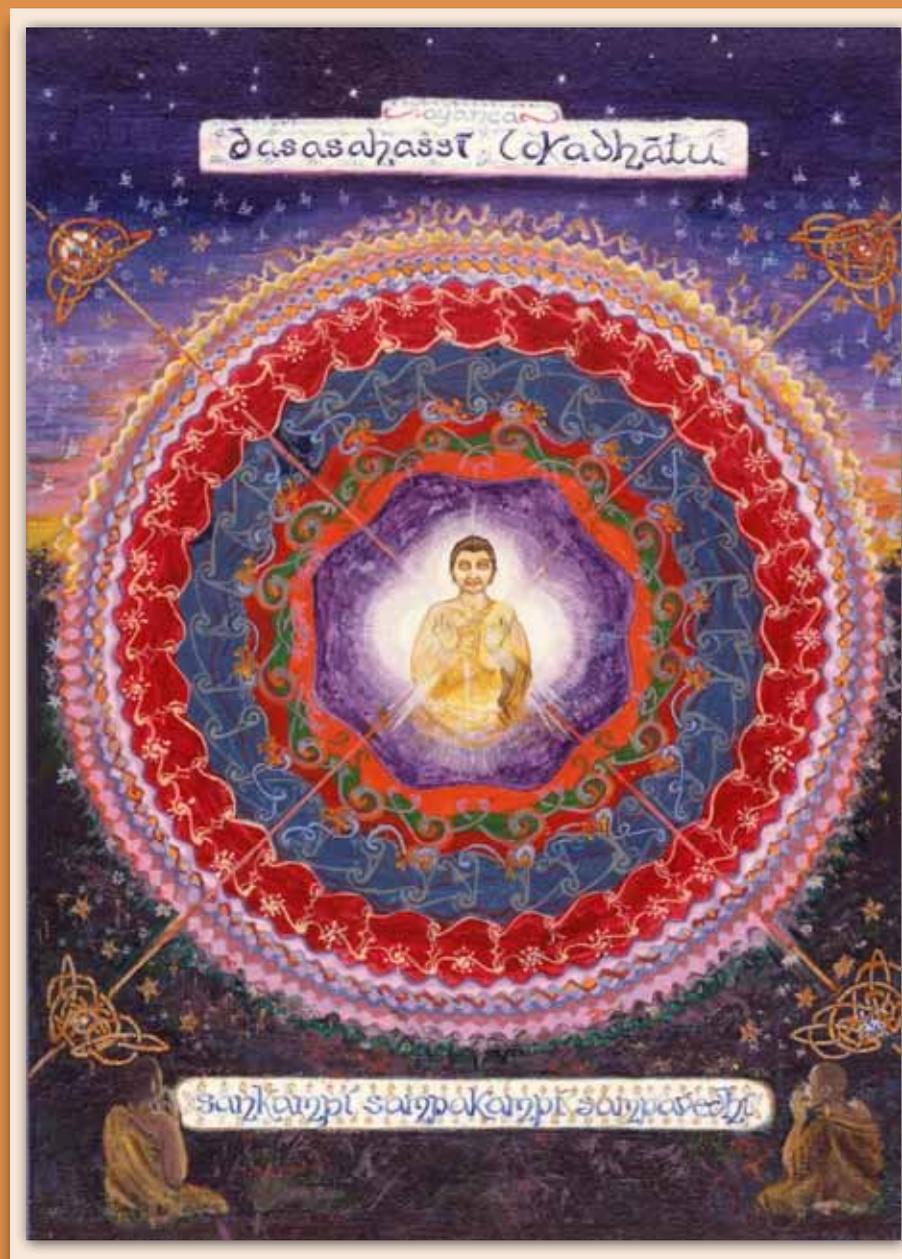
As the Buddha said: ‘in this fathom-long body, with its perceptions and mind-consciousness is the cosmos – its arising and its ceasing – and the path leading to that ceasing.’ (S.2.26)*. This is liberation, not annihilation. So although the end of the world is nigh, that’s good news!

**Samyutta Nikāya – Connected Discourses*

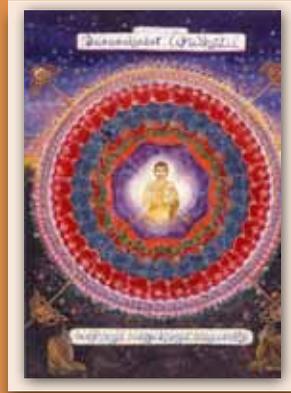
The End of the World is Nigh



The Big Shake-Up



The Big Shake-Up



This ten-thousandfold world system trembled and shook and resounded,

The Big Shake-Up

Everything gets shaken up by the Dhamma. What is fundamentally shaken by Dhamma-realization is the notion that any of this is solid and not dependent on conditions. All manifestation is actually a dynamic process of the aggregates interacting. In the painting, the aggregates are represented by concentric rings, all vibrating and made brilliantly clear by the Buddha's vision. They are in alignment, but the Buddha sees them in the light of the four noble truths; an insight that highlights their changeable and conditioned nature.

So – there can't be an experience of form without a consciousness that registers it, nor can that form be cognized or described without perception and feeling. They are conditioned to arise mutually and thus create an appearance of solidity. The only aggregate that can penetrate this apparent solidity is that energy which also binds the others: 'activities.' That is, through the careful adjustment of two aspects of activity – attention and intention, the mind can shift how it attends and how it responds. Thus, in meditation, when these two activities are governed by mindfulness and full awareness, they refer any form, feeling, perception or intention to the mirror of mental awareness.

The Big Shake-Up

And what does that mirror 'see'? – all that arises is of the nature to cease. It sees that phenomena appear solid merely because perception registers them as so. When we refer to direct awareness rather than our store of perceptions, the perception of change is established. And what is changeable cannot be a support for a lasting and overseeing self. To really get that, and to experience a release from the sense of self, is quite a shake-up.

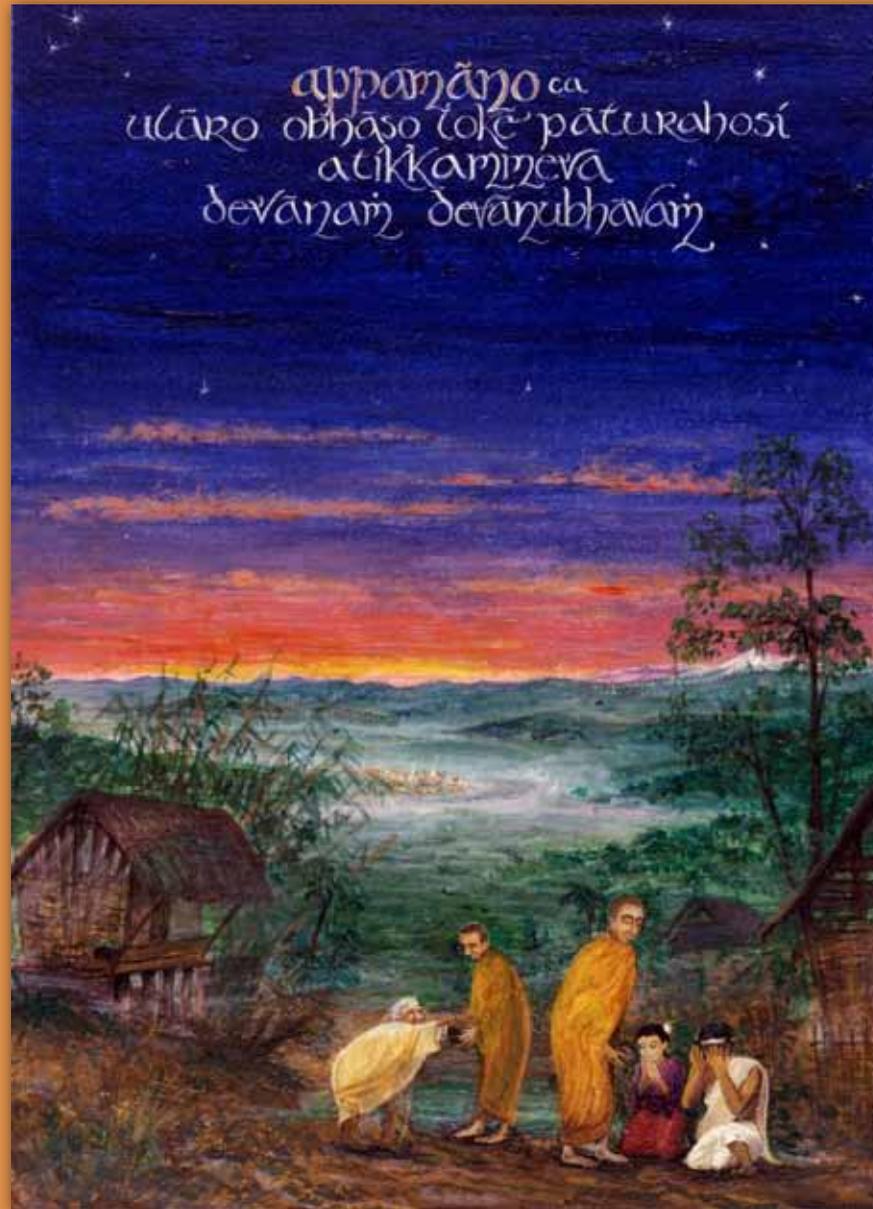
The Big Shake-Up



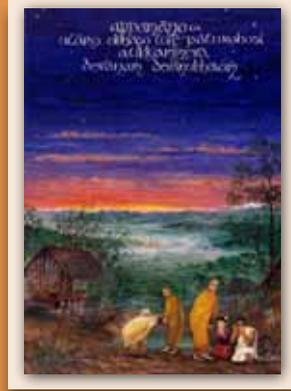
The Big Shake-Up



Human Glory



Human Glory



and a great measureless radiance, surpassing the shining glory of the devas, was made manifest in the world.

Human Glory

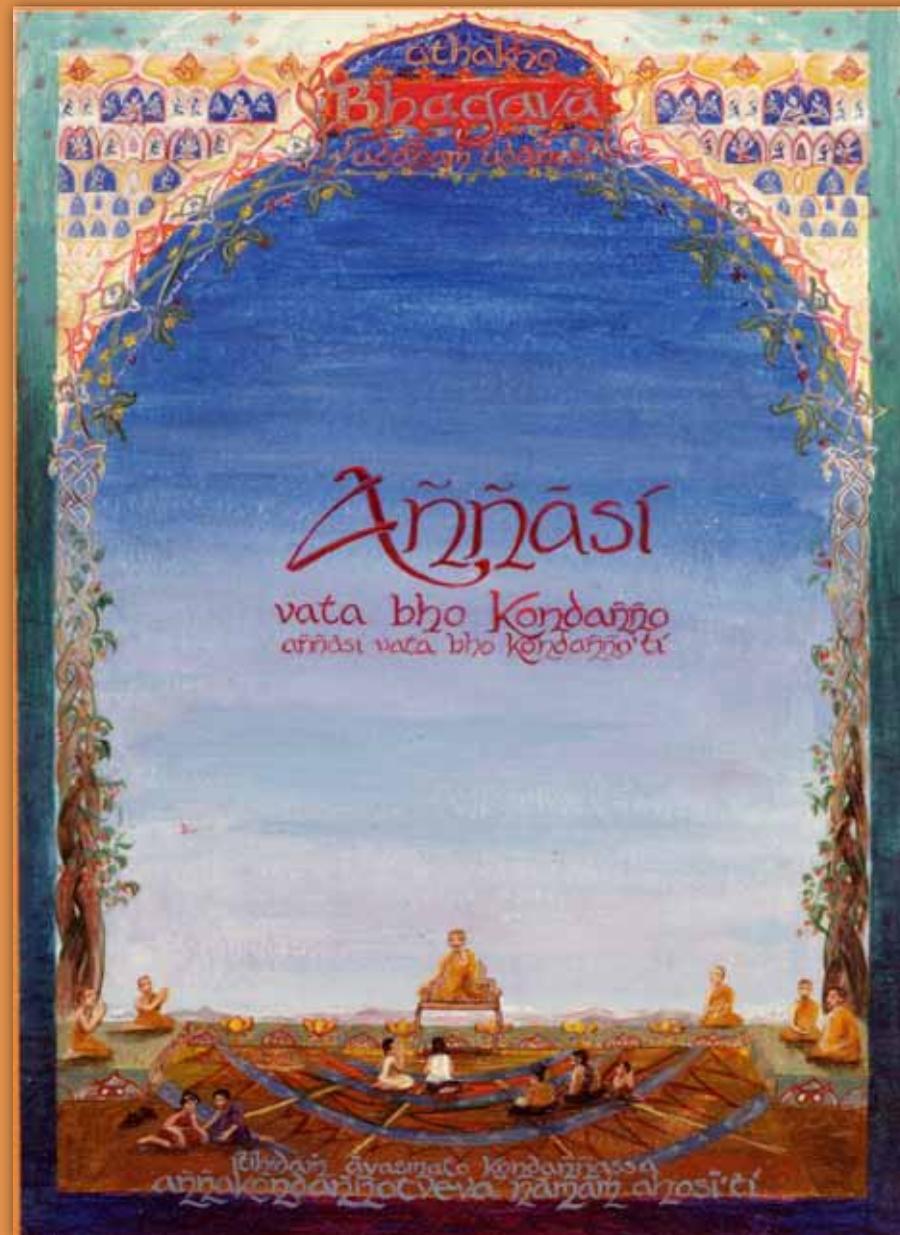
How can there be a radiance that surpasses that of the devas? Well, when there is the peace and insight that realization of Dhamma brings, all kinds of life-transforming shifts can take place. A mind freed from holding on is free from the grip of greed, hatred and delusion. So there is an inner release and joy of being. With that joy, the mind is easily contented in material terms, so the spirit of renunciation infuses one's life. As that freedom also restores a natural sense of empathy with and concern for others, generosity, sharing, compassion and harmlessness also grow. Imagine a world centred around such themes! Compared with this, the shining glory of the devas is just glittering tinsel.

The picture depicts an alms-round in a country that could be India but looks to me rather like rural Thailand, where my perceptions of renunciation, generosity and harmlessness first found a living form.

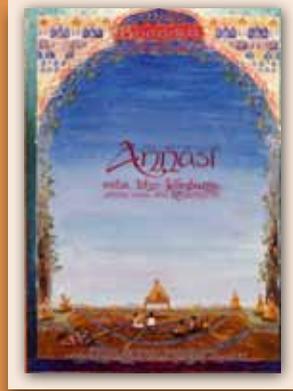
Human Glory



The Realized One



The Realized One



Then the Blessed One uttered the pronouncement: ‘Kondañña has realized! Kondañña has realized.’ And so it was that the name of Venerable Kondañña became ‘Kondañña the Realized.’

The Realized One

The Buddha briefly brings us back to the ground. After the brief tour of a few highlights of the cosmos, and of all the celebrations that are going on, he gives recognition to the insight of Venerable Kondañña, calling him ‘*Aññāsi*’ – the Realized.

In this picture, I used the featureless expanse of the sky to suggest the quality of realization – bright, spacious and clear. It’s everywhere, but people aren’t looking at it – they’re more attracted to things that have more lively and interesting features. Notice, for example, that here Kondañña is depicted as teaching, expounding his realization, and although a couple are interested, and the monks are giving them their attention, the hall is almost empty. ‘Whatever has the characteristic to arise, all that ceases,’ isn’t a crowd-puller. It’s the gateway to freedom, but what gets people focused more readily are the four noble truths – in brief that their suffering can find release. So this is the teaching that Buddhas give.

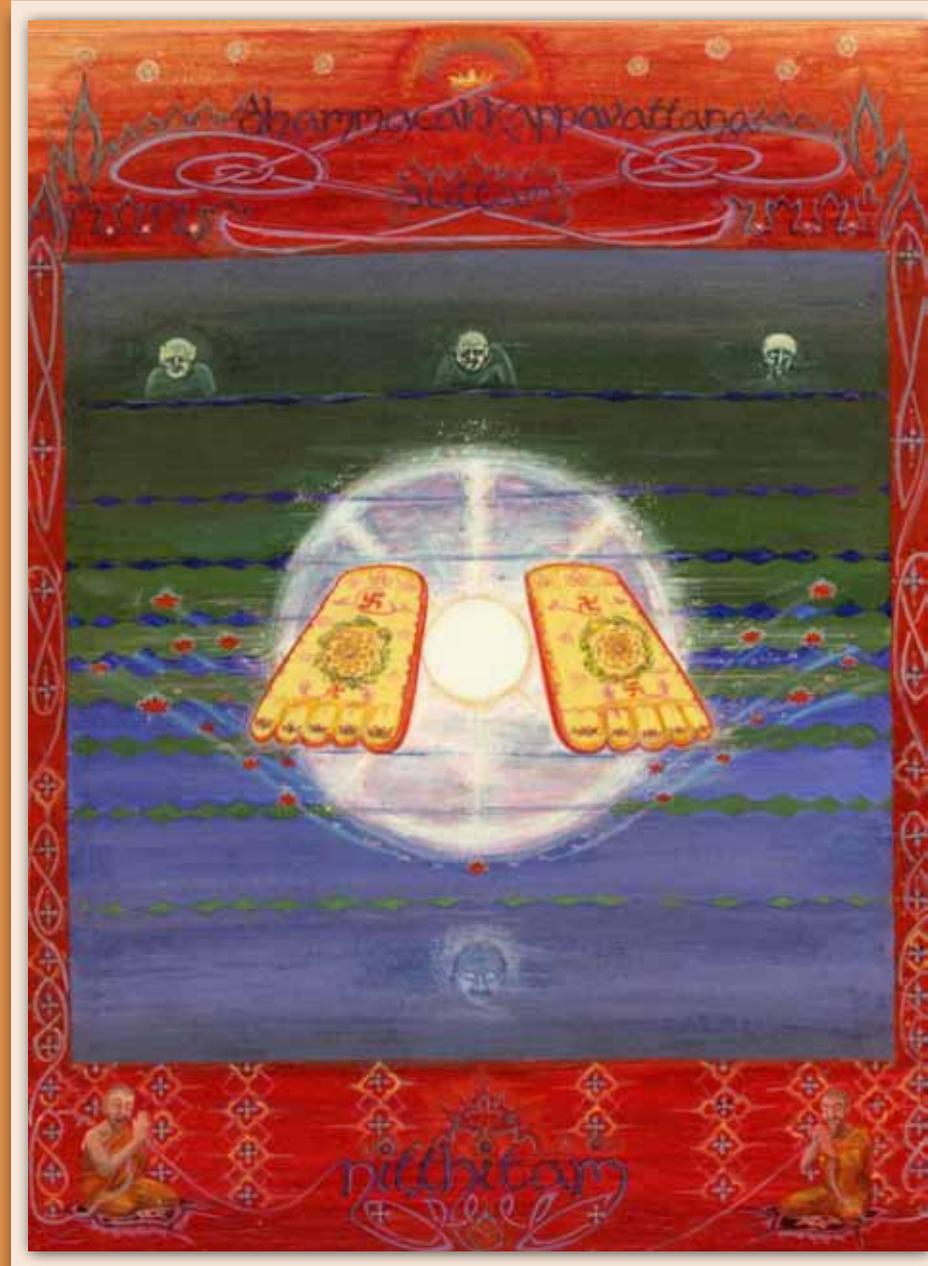
The Realized One



The Realized One



Conclusion and Transmission



Conclusion and Transmission



This concludes the Discourse on Turning The Wheel of Dhamma

Conclusion and Transmission

The conclusion is an encouragement and a blessing.

The central area of the painting contains four faces and a pair of elaborately carved 'feet' issuing from a Dhamma-Wheel. These feet are depictions of carved stone Buddha-footprints, in this case from Amaravati, a site of Buddhist antiquity in southern India. Amaravati means 'Deathless Realm.' The three faces above the Wheel are from left to right, the faces of old age, sickness and death. The face beneath is that of a sage, a contemplative or *samana*.

These four are the 'Heavenly messengers' that a former Buddha, Vipassi, is chronicled as seeing, signs that indicated both the futility of seeking security and happiness based on worldly values, and the possibility for calm and release to be found in the spiritual life. It is a vision that also occurred to Gotama as the spur to his own Awakening. It can serve as a stark incentive for all of us. A daily reflection on the inevitability of ageing, sickness and death and that 'All that is mine, beloved and pleasing, will become otherwise, will become separated from me,' is a standard exercise for practising Buddhists.

Conclusion and Transmission

It's not morbid but realistic – and developed for pragmatic results. If you reflect that you will sicken and age – what kind of friends and associates are you making? Are they people you can rely on? And what values and life-standards are you developing? Those based on the primacy of beauty, health and performance aren't going to get you far when ageing and sickness come your way. And Death isn't the least impressed by your CV, physique or bank account. The reflection on mortality helps you to acknowledge the need to develop spiritual wealth and wise compassionate friends.

It also encourages you to look into your heart and notice if there are any regrets or things that we have to achieve. *Better resolve that now!* Are there any people in there who arouse ill-will? Better resolve that too – because *now is all you have*. It's only now that you can be complete, steady and assured. Thus the Dhamma Wheel is revealed to those who make good use of the mortal state – as we come out of worldly perspectives, the tracks of the Buddha and the Path to the Deathless become clear.

Conclusion and Transmission

A loop winds around the edge of the picture connecting the words ‘dhammacakkappavattana’ to two bhikkhus who are chanting at the lower left and right. This is the way that blessing chants are still given – the thread that is being held links the actions of heart and voice and the presence of the spiritual practitioners to the words that are being recited. In such ceremonies, still performed in Buddhist countries, the thread is often then cut into sections that are tied around the wrists of those who are receiving the blessings.

‘Sutta’ means thread; that is, a string of words that conveys the essence of the Dhamma. The Dhamma, in which this particular sutta plays an important part, has been transmitted by the oral tradition of chanting in groups for over two and a half millennia. So this painting is offered as an acknowledgement of the blessing of an ongoing tradition of Dhamma-transmission. This transmission has been lived out through the aspirations, words and deeds of those who have given their lives to it.

Conclusion and Transmission

The historical significance of this sutta lies also in the fact that it demonstrated that the Buddha's realization was transmittable; and that a group of disciples could arise. It marks the origin of the Dhamma in a verbal form, and the Sangha in a physical form. For this reason it represents a dawn in human capacity, one whose light has not faded yet. Hence this CD is offered in gratitude and as encouragement. As the Buddha famously said when he first came across the Group of Five, before giving this Dhammacakka teaching: 'The doors of the Deathless are open, let those who can listen bring forth their faith.'

Conclusion and Transmission



Conclusion and Transmission



Biography

Ajahn Sucitto was born in London in 1949, and became a bhikkhu in Thailand in 1976. He trained under Ven. Ajahn Sumedho at Cittaviveka and Amaravati Monasteries in the UK before being appointed abbot of Cittaviveka in 1992.

Ajahn Sucitto has taught extensively since 1981, many of his books and articles are available via forestsangha-publications.org, while dharmafeed.org hosts many of his Dhamma talks. This CD presents his only published artwork, a work that was undertaken with no training, but purely to assist the transmission of Dhamma in terms of Western culture. Ajahn's belief is that for Dhamma to take root in a culture, it needs to be established in the imagination of the local society – just as it has been established in the hearts of Asian Buddhists by art and literature. Turning the Wheel of Dhamma is a contribution towards that end.

