

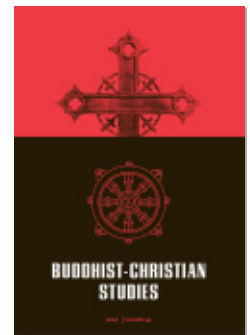


PROJECT MUSE®

Dwelling at the Heart of Holiness: Locating the Buddha-Land and the Place of God

Dr. Stephanie Cloete

Buddhist-Christian Studies, Volume 40, 2020, pp. 201-216 (Article)



Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/bcs.2020.0011>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/775603>

Dwelling at the Heart of Holiness: Locating the Buddha-Land and the Place of God

Dr. Stephanie Cloete
Independent Scholar-Practitioner

ABSTRACT

The relationship between vision and holy place is explored in this paper with particular reference to the development of human potential through spiritual practice. Some of the obstacles that impede such development are considered, and a comparison between a Buddhist and a Christian approach is here presented. It draws on material found in the early Buddhist work by Upatissa Thera, the *Vimuttimagga* as it is frequently titled, and the writings of the Christian Evagrius of Pontus, one of the Desert Fathers. In both an analysis is to be found of certain characteristics, passions, or emotions, which condition human behavior, resulting in patterns of interfacing with the world that may not be conducive to receptivity to spiritual “sight.” These having been “diagnosed,” remedies are suggested. Practical methods are given for the cultivation of opposing traits, virtues in some Christian terminology, and for working to free the mind and heart from unhelpful conditioning. Common ground is manifest both in the recognition of certain problems encountered by those undertaking a spiritual path and in the solutions offered. The way can be opened up for the radiant light of the mind to function unobscured. The nature of this change in consciousness and its outcome as regards accessibility to holy space within the Buddhist and Christian imaginaires is also investigated. At this point there is divergence as final goals do differ in important ways. However, evidence suggests that within both the Buddhist and Christian traditions, a connection between internal and external experience of awakening to sacred space has been acknowledged. In conclusion, the potential usefulness of such perception and those who cultivate it is highlighted.

KEYWORDS: Sacred space, heart, mind, love, spiritual practice, conditioning, luminosity, stillness

“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts” begins Psalm 84 in the Authorized King James Version of the Bible.¹ Today, the translation probably most often used is “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.”² “Amiable” nowadays more usually describes a person and is associated with friendliness or friendship, which is a noble form of love; men have laid down their lives in its name. There are

many kinds of love, and the Greeks had a word for them, as C. S. Lewis for one has amply demonstrated.³ The importance of love has always been recognized in the Christian tradition. Vilma Seelaus OCD, writing about humankind's presence in the universe, quotes a sixty-two-year-old businessman who discovered through a near-death experience that "we are connected with all things and if we send love along those connections, we will be happy."⁴ The adjective "lovely" also includes the connotations of beauty and delight. Here is something not only beautiful and delightful but also worthy of the finest kind of love. "Tabernacle" carries the association of movement from one place to another, the Jews carried the tent that was the dwelling place of Yahweh with them through the desert and used it as a temple.

Early Buddhism stressed the essentially pure nature of the mind. "Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant" the Buddha is quoted as having said,⁵ and he went on to explain that it can only manifest this radiance when it is not obscured by passing defilements. There will be mind development in the wise, noble disciple who understands this. After the death of founder Shakyamuni Buddha, as Buddhism grew and spread to other countries, this basic assertion shaped notions of sacred space, both internal and external. The *Tathagatagarbha* teaching, developed in Mahāyāna sutras, expounded the presence of a seed or embryo, a potential within each individual to manifest enlightenment or Buddha nature. The term *ceṭiya* (Skt. *caitya*), "that which is worthy to be gazed upon," originally referring to the homes of earth spirits and most often trees, came to mean a meditation grove or pilgrimage center.⁶ By extension, the place where someone recites, studies or teaches a *dharmaparyāya* (discourse on dharma) becomes a place where the Teacher dwells.⁷ Here too can be found an opportunity for mobility in the constitution of a sacred place. The Buddha field or *ṣeṭra*, sometimes described as a field of merit, is the pure land attained by one who reaches perfect enlightenment (*anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi*). Perhaps the most well known is *Sukhāvatī*, that of Amitabha Buddha.⁸

This paper will explore possibilities of mobility and accessibility relating to the pure land of the Buddha and the dwelling place of God⁹ and some options with regard to their location. There may be far-reaching implications, calling into question what the limits, characteristics, and presence of a "holy place" may be. The paper will argue that the Buddha-land and the Kingdom of God,¹⁰ particularly where there is striving toward purified heart and mind and love without conditions, may be glimpsed or experienced as a fruit of spiritual practice and will briefly investigate what kind of "vision" allows for such glimpses, or even longer periods of perception, to occur.

"Bhikkhus, this mind is radiant, but it doesn't show its radiance because passing defilements come and obscure it" the Buddha is said to have stated.¹¹ There are many obstacles to be overcome in revealing the radiant, awakened mind. For the thirteenth-century Buddhist monk Nichiren, as indeed the stories tell us it was for the Buddha seated under the Bodhi tree, there was a battle to be won. Nichiren graphically described for his disciples what would surely happen.

When an ordinary person of the latter age is ready to attain Buddhahood, having realized the essence of all the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime and

understood the heart of the important teaching set forth in *Great Concentration and Insight*, this devil [*Māra*, generally referred to by Nichiren as the devil of the sixth heaven] is greatly surprised. He says to himself, “This is most vexing. If I allow this person to remain in my domain, he not only will free himself from the sufferings of birth and death, but will lead others to enlightenment as well. Moreover, he will take over my realm and change it into a pure land. What shall I do?” The devil king then summons all his underlings from the threefold world of desire, form, and formlessness and tells them: “Each of you now go and harass that votary, according to your respective skills.”¹²

If the devil king is to be resisted in his efforts to prevent the establishment of a pure land, then it is important to understand how he and his underlings will go to work to harass the one who is ready to attain Buddhahood. Buddhists worked intensively on acquiring this knowledge. An early work in the Abhidhammic tradition, the *Vimuttimagga*¹³ listed one hundred and thirty-four defilements in a comprehensive overview. These could be subdivided into smaller groupings with different names describing different aspects or functions, such as the cankers, the clings, the hindrances and such like. For the purposes of the comparison to be undertaken here, the ten fetters and the ten defilements would seem to be the most useful categories, lists are provided below.

The ten defilements (*kilesā*) are mental states that cloud the mind and manifest in unwholesome actions. Teachers also sometimes refer to them as demons.¹⁴ The ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) are seen as the bonds shackling sentient beings to the cycle of lives in which the deeply unsatisfactory *dukkha*, suffering at its most basic, must be endured.

ten defilements	ten fetters
greed (<i>lobba</i>)	sensuous-desire (<i>kāmarāga</i>)
hatred (<i>dosa</i>)	ill will (<i>patigha</i> , <i>vyāpāda</i>)
delusion (<i>moha</i>)	conceit (<i>māna</i>)
conceit (<i>māna</i>)	self-illusion (<i>(sakkāya)diṭṭhī</i>)
views (<i>diṭṭhī</i>)	uncertainty (<i>vicikicchā</i>)
uncertainty (<i>vicikicchā</i>)	attachment to precepts and vows (<i>sīlabbataparāmāsa</i>)
rigidity (<i>thīna</i>)	desire for existence (<i>bhāvarāga</i>)
agitation (<i>uddhacca</i>)	envy (<i>issā</i>)
immodesty (<i>ahirika</i>)	avarice (<i>macchariya</i>)

Greed, hatred, and delusion are the three unwholesome or immoral roots (*akusala-mulā*). They are sometimes also referred to as the three fires. A common contemporary usage is to describe greed, anger, and ignorance as the three poisons. Under the listing of the ten fetters, sensual desire is related to greed and ill will is a part of hatred. Buddhism recognized that one of these states might be dominant, affecting the character and behavior of an individual, and in the *Vimuttimagga* there is a

classification into three basic types, the walker in passion (*rāga*), the walker in hate (*dosa*), and the walker in infatuation (*moha*). Although ignorance (*avijjā*) and delusion (*moha*) are often juxtapositioned in the *Vimuttimaggā*, they are etymologically different words and not to be thought of as simply interchangeable. The deluded “person” is not able to recognize impermanence or indeed any of the three characteristics of existence.¹⁵ Ignorance, however, can be appreciated as a “force” and its operation can be seen, for example, in its fundamental causal function in the twelve links of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). The classification into three types of personality is used throughout the *Vimuttimaggā* when recommending teachings and meditations to be followed.

Evagrius of Pontus was a classically educated fourth-century Christian who retired to live a semi-eremitical life in the Egyptian desert south of Alexandria. For centuries his name was hardly known in the Christian West because, as a follower of Origen, he was condemned for heresy in the sixth century by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. The Eastern Church nevertheless continued to revere him as a saint.¹⁶ Initially it was John Cassian, who had been his student, who transmitted the thought of Evagrius to the West. It was not directly attributed to him. Some of his writings were saved, passed on particularly in monasteries, under different names such as that of Nilus of Ancyra (d.c.430). It was as Nilus, for example, that Evagrius appeared in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, for many years. In the twentieth century, much work has been done in the West to reassemble the corpus of his work and to rehabilitate him. A major element of his work was to list what he called the eight thoughts (*logismoi*).¹⁷ Evagrius identified these thoughts as the main obstacles holding the seeking monk back from achieving union with the Trinity. The *logismoi* of Evagrius represented not only particular mental events but also more general tendencies and could be used by demons to cause havoc in the mind of the religious practitioner. For each *logismos* there is a corresponding demon, specializing in its use.¹⁸ Hence, so interrelated were the demon and the mental state for Evagrius that sometimes they can be difficult for the reader to disentangle.

eight thoughts

gluttony (*gastromargia*)

fornication (*porneia*)

avarice (*philargyria*)

anger (*orgē*)

sadness (*lupē*)

sloth (*acedia*)

vainglory (*kenodoxia*)

pride (*huperēphania*)

It can be seen that there are significant correspondences between the items listed under the headings ten fetters and ten defilements and the eight thoughts identified by Evagrius. He too narrowed down his analysis of eight thoughts to three that he regarded as fundamental. They were gluttony, avarice, and vainglory. This reduction was based on Satan’s temptation of Jesus after he had spent forty days fasting in the

wilderness, as described in Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13. Nevertheless, Evagrius also acknowledged the great and potentially destructive power of anger.

Evagrius saw the thoughts as all interconnected. Thus:

For example, it is not possible to fall into the hands of the spirit of fornication, unless one has fallen under the influence of gluttony; nor is it possible to trouble the irascible part, unless one is fighting for food or wealth or esteem. And it is not possible to escape the demon of sadness, if one is deprived of all these things, or is unable to attain them. Nor will one escape pride, the first offspring of the devil, if one has not banished avarice, the root of all evils (1 Tim. 6:10), since, according to the wise Solomon, “poverty makes a person humble” (Prov. 10:4)¹⁹. To put it briefly, no one can fall into a demon’s power, unless he has first been wounded by those in the front line.²⁰

Angela Tilby has identified Evagrius as the first Christian thinker to analyze the psychology of sin.

The problem of sin is deeper than a disorder of the will. Evagrius shows us that it lies in the very instincts, which enable us to survive What needs to be altered in us lies very deep, beyond the reach of words, concepts, and memory.²¹

Evagrius, along with the other Desert Fathers, believed that an ascetic lifestyle could bring about change in the human being. He did not deny the role of grace, and he was very aware of the dangers of vainglory and pride and hence of the need to be careful about becoming arrogant regarding spiritual attainment. However, he set out a system of practical means by which the monk could work toward a purification of heart and mind, opening the door to selfless love and the contemplative life of the gnostic appreciating the workings of God in the universe. Evagrius was much valued as a teacher in his lifetime, and particularly for his *discretion*,²² his understanding of the human heart. The glossary to the English translation of the *Philokalia*²³ describes the “heart” (*kardia*) as not simply the physical organ but the spiritual center of man’s being, man as made in the image of God, his deepest and truest self, or the inner shrine, to be entered only through sacrifice and death, in which the mystery of the union between the divine and the human is consummated.²⁴ Because of this understanding, Evagrius was highly skilled at spiritual direction; he could offer guidance to the struggling monk as to how to effect transformation in what to many seemed to be unreachable depths of the human spirit.

It is here that an important reason for choosing Evagrius for comparison with Upatissa may be found. One might say that in his way Evagrius appreciated that volition is conditioned and that the ability to recognize and understand the nature of this conditioning is of great value. One can develop the capacity to delve deeper in order to bring about a change in how one experiences, and responds to, life events. Evagrius was optimistic that it could be done.

Both Evagrius and Upatissa, healers of a practical bent, offered diagnosis and remedies. To take the example of anger, which both considered to be an obstacle to prayer

and meditation, they wrote extensively on how to recognize manifestations of anger and where it was ingrained in a person's character as well as giving advice on how to combat it. Overcoming the dominance of anger had many beneficial consequences, not only of considerable significance for the aspirant meditator or contemplative, although this was their particular concern. In the *Vimuttimaggā* anger is described as an "obstacle to progress in concentration."²⁵ Evagrius gives a telling image, "those who store up hurts and resentments in themselves and think they can pray are like people who draw water into a jar full of holes."²⁶

Although the formulation and practices of the antidote to anger should not be conflated as identical, a touching point between the two traditions seems evident. The walker in hate, recommends the *Vimuttimaggā*, should practice the four immeasurables, the *brahmanivāras*, also sometimes translated as the divine abidings, because these help overcome hatred.²⁷ The first of these is *mettā*, loving kindness. Its beauty as a practice and its importance as a form of *bhāvanā* (cultivation of purity of being) have been widely acknowledged by Buddhist practitioners and endorsed by the Buddha in the *suttas*.

Bhikkhus, if for just the time of a finger snap a bhikkhu attends to a mind of loving-kindness [*mettācittam*], he is called a bhikkhu who is not devoid of jhāna, who acts upon the teaching of the Teacher, who responds to his advice, and who does not eat the country's almsfood in vain. How much more, then, those who cultivate it!²⁸

The other three immeasurables are compassion, (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Together they cover a wide spectrum including aspects of, and approaches to, love. Many pages in the *Vimuttimaggā* are devoted to how to achieve these mental states, within the framework of Buddhist meditation practice.

The Christian approach propounded by Evagrius uses the opposition of vices and virtues, although it must be remembered that Evagrius was thinking in terms of his analysis of the *logismoi* and his teachings for monks rather than of vices in the sense the word came to be used later. Gabriel Bunge has explained that in the case of anger, the opposing virtue is Christian love [*agapē*]: "which manifests itself as forbearance, patience and the like; but for Evagrius above all as 'meekness' [*praotēs*]."²⁹ Meekness seems in some quarters to have gained somewhat of a pejorative connotation these days, perhaps that is one reason why the word *praotēs* is now often translated as "gentleness." This is a formidable virtue to gain, Evagrius states that while the "irascible man will be terrified; the gentle man will be without fear."³⁰

Agapē is often described as unconditional love. Evagrius distinguished between the monk in the early stages of his practice, primarily engaged in gaining an understanding of the workings of the passions and difficult thoughts and learning to resist temptations, and the more advanced practitioner, whose concern was more with the contemplation of God.³¹ The attainment achieved through *praktiké* is *apatheia*, the conquest of the passions, sometimes described as a state of passionlessness. This is not, however, a numbness or loss of feeling³² as it is rather the gateway to *agapē*,

the love leading the way to knowledge.³³ As the vision of the contemplative is purified and sharpened, an incorporeal world is discovered. He sees that his immaterial mind is perfectly adapted for knowledge of the immaterial God.³⁴

Earlier I used the expression “love without conditions.” A recently published paper by John Makransky draws on the Buddhist understanding of conditioned response to our perception of, and way of responding to, other people, offering a practical approach to how unconditional love may be achieved. Our minds, from their conditioning, tend to label everyone in reductive ways, whereas it would be useful to eliminate this tendency. In the Buddhist traditions from which Makransky draws, the basis of unconditional worth and potential in persons is called “primordial awareness,” “Buddha nature,” the “deep nature mind,” or “obscured suchness.” Makransky writes: “. . . in the moment that we confront others out of anger, even supposedly righteous anger, we tend not to sense their deep dignity and human potential beyond the single, reified image that our anger has made of them. And to declare our anger ‘righteous’ does nothing to correct that error.”³⁵

Meekness, or gentleness, is associated with humility as Evagrius indicates: “Conversion and humility have set the soul up; compassion and gentleness have made it firm.”³⁶ *Ad Monachos*, from which this comes, is a series of short encapsulations of thought addressed to monks. They are intended for meditation over a period of time and are typical of the way Evagrius taught. They encourage the monk, or aspirant toward gnosis, to ponder deeply and in doing so to examine the workings of mind and heart. Evagrius also composed a book of biblical extracts for use in difficult situations, and his presentation of what these might be reveals his profound understanding of the errant nature of the mind and resulting problems that might trouble the brothers. Based on the eight thoughts it is divided into eight books. *Antirrhetikos*, translated by David Brakke as *Talking Back*, a monastic handbook for combating demons, became one of the most popular books among ascetics of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine East.

In his Prologue to *Antirrhetikos*, Evagrius distinguished between a monastic man and a monastic intellect. The monastic man is one who “has departed from the sin that consists of deeds and action,” while the monastic intellect “has departed from the sin that arises from the thoughts that are in our intellect and . . . at the time of prayer sees the light of the Holy Trinity.”³⁷ This then is an intellect where the fruits of the spiritual practice are manifest and one of them is an ability to experience the light of the mind, sometimes called luminosity. Light illuminates, it enables one to see more clearly, but visionaries also speak of “seeing” light. Evagrius was greatly intrigued by the phenomenon and, with his friend Ammonius, undertook a journey to see John, the seer of Thebes. They asked him “whether it is the nature of the intellect to be luminous and thus it pours forth the light from itself or whether it [the light] appears from something else outside and illumines it [the intellect].” John answered that no human being can explain it and that the intellect cannot be set free from the enemies trying to destroy it and illumined in prayer except by the grace of God.³⁸

Light is an image for knowledge very frequently found in the writings of Evagrius.³⁹ When the goal of passionlessness (*apatheia*) is attained and the way to love

and knowledge is opened, the mind begins to see its own proper light.⁴⁰ In *Ad Monachos* 107, which is the point in the work where various levels of knowledge begin to be introduced,⁴¹ there is a wonderful image of light. The pure mind will come to shine like the morning star in heaven.⁴²

It is also possible, wrote Evagrius, to see “the mind appear similar to sapphire or to the color of the sky.”⁴³ Again this will not happen unless the practitioner has reached passionlessness (*apatheia*), or to speak of it another way as he did in *On Thoughts* 39, without having “put off the old self.”⁴⁴ Evagrius developed this image of light in *Skemmata* 4 where he wrote that the “state of the mind is an intellectual peak, comparable in color to the sky.” There comes onto it “at the time of prayer, the light of the holy Trinity.”⁴⁵ In *On Thoughts* 39, Evagrius further explained that when the mind sees “its own state in the time of prayer resembling sapphire or the colour of heaven; this state scripture calls the place of God that was seen by the elders on Mount Sinai.”⁴⁶ This is a reference to the great theophany described in Exodus 24:9–11 where Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders climbed Mount Sinai. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament that Evagrius used, the elders are described as having seen “the place of God,” where there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone.⁴⁷ Yet for the contemplative this is an interior experience. Evagrius, in his reading of Psalm 75 (Septuagint),⁴⁸ explained in *Skemmata* 25 that we have learned from David that the “place of God” is the rational soul, and his dwelling (is) the illuminated mind.⁴⁹

It was not only because of illumination that spiritual vision was possible. The notion, which continues to this day, that just as the body has five senses, so too the intellect has five spiritual senses, was not unfamiliar to the classically educated Evagrius. “And just as the bodily organ of sight perceives material things directly, so too does the spiritual organ of sight lay bare to the intellect the intelligible things as they are (ψιλος).”⁵⁰

Isaac the Syrian (c.613–c.700) is also known as Isaac of Nineveh because he was briefly bishop of Nineveh. However, he preferred to live a life of asceticism, seclusion, and study. After five months as bishop he retired to the wilderness of Mount Matout, a refuge for anchorites, and lived there in solitude for many years. Some of his writings, in which the influence of Evagrius can be seen, also feature in the *Philokalia*. Isaac pursued the goal of *theoria*, the contemplation that the practitioner who has passed on from *apatheia* may enjoy, with an intensity of devotion. He wrote about his experiences, giving descriptions such as: “by means of that interior eye which is called spiritual contemplation (*te'orya d-rub*), which consists in a mode of vision provided by grace, then the moment he becomes aware of one of these mysteries, his heart is at once rendered serene with a kind of wonder.”⁵¹

Although Isaac was always careful to fully acknowledge the role of grace in moving the intellect, he also took into consideration the importance of efforts toward purification. In Homily Twenty-Two, when writing about visions of the angels he clarified: “When the soul is purified and has been accounted worthy of beholding her fellow servants, the vision of them is not received with these physical eyes.”⁵² This is because the angels are not corporeal and so cannot be seen “without the soul’s

faculty of vision, which is true *theoria*.” Isaac continued: “A man cannot receive this veracious vision without the second purification of the intellect.”⁵³ In the next paragraph, however, he returned to the possibility of the angels manifesting themselves through a vision involving the senses to provide comfort and encouragement for the simple.

In the short passage that follows “On That Which During Prayer Occurs Within Stillness,”⁵⁴ Isaac again did not rule out the taste of such things given to beginners through grace. Yet if a man perseveres in the discipline of stillness “with all simplicity, diligently caring for the purity of his monastic labour, and if his way of life is worthy,” he will experience the sweetness of silent prayer, and “to those who are but a little trained in the mysteries of stillness [noetic] perception is given in both their prayer and their liturgy.”⁵⁵ Isaac is an example of the monk who strives always to remain in humility, no matter how much progress he has made toward divine gnosis.

While many people may still speak of angels, or even believe in them or sense their presence, they do not inhabit the world nowadays in quite the same way they may have done for early and medieval Christians. Yet for many there remains a sense of things unseen with the physical eye, but nonetheless somehow perceived. In a book first published in 1902 that remains a classic, the philosopher and psychologist William James applied the theories and vocabulary of Freud and Jung to religious matters. Approaching the topic of mysticism he wrote that: “our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.” These may be discontinuous with ordinary consciousness but “they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map.”⁵⁶

Ian Baker quoted from this passage in his book *The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple*, published in 2000. The book is not academic, as Jakob Winkler points out in his review of it, but is a superbly illustrated record of a great Tibetan treasure.⁵⁷ Behind the Dalai Lamas' Potala palace, the construction of which was initiated by the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1645, there is a lake. On an island in that lake is a small temple and on the top floor is a room of remarkable murals, which for many years existed purely for the use of the Dalai Lamas in their meditation practice. Immediately before quoting James, Baker wrote: “The Lukhang murals directly introduce the transformed perception and heightened levels of awareness at the heart of the Tibetan vision of art.”⁵⁸ In the Buddhist view of art all icons are ultimately reflections of a deeper indwelling truth. The Lukhang murals draw from contemporary Chinese sources as well as from earlier Indo-Nepalese styles to form a new aesthetic vocabulary. They herald the insights of the nineteenth-century visionary Eliphas Lévi that imagination is the illuminator of reality, rendering it “*diaphane*” or “transparent.”⁵⁹ The murals depict not only Buddhas, but also ordinary men and women inspired by a path to spiritual freedom.

The paintings on the western wall of the mural chamber illustrate practices used in the tradition of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection. The methods of Dzogchen “directly reveal the enlightened essence that underlies all experience and perception.” It thus refers “less to a particular path to spiritual liberation than to an already present state

of illumination.”⁶⁰ In this state “the mind directly perceives its indwelling Buddha Nature.”⁶¹ There are restrictions, however, as only the most highly qualified practitioners are considered capable of “Dzogchen’s direct revelation of the all-pervading Buddha Nature, perhaps the most mystical expression of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.”⁶²

The relationship between achieved purification and a sense of completion or realization is present in the canonical Buddhist texts. A fine example is given in the *Samaññaphala Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, where the Buddha describes the fruits of religious practice.

Just as if, Sire, in the midst of the mountains there were a pond, clear as a polished mirror, where a man with good eyesight standing on the bank could see oyster-shells, gravel banks and shoals of fish, on the move or stationary . . . just so, with mind concentrated, purified and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, workable, established and having gained imperturbability, he knows: “Birth is finished, the holy life has been led, done is what had to be done, there is nothing further here.”⁶³

As the Mahāyāna grew there was more emphasis on what one might perhaps call ministry, on the notion of the recurring manifestations of the Bodhisattva, who held back from final entry into Nirvāṇa to save living beings. This close relation between Buddha and Bodhisattva may have contributed to the revealing of Buddha Nature, in keeping with the early Buddhist concept of the mind unsullied by defilements, becoming less distant a goal. And if the Buddha Nature could be experienced, with the presence of the Buddha-field having been established, no great logical leap is needed to affirm the accessibility of the Buddha-land. This is well encapsulated in a classic encounter between Śāriputra and his Master in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*.

Once the disciple Śāriputra asked why his master, the Buddha, “was forced to dwell in this world of ours with its rocky paths, steep cliffs and sharp thorns when other *buddhas* were known to reside in paradise. It was explained to him then that all such impurities were merely the reflections of those impurities still lurking within his own mind and the Buddha, touching the earth with his toe, caused the entire universe to appear more splendid than any heaven, ‘My *ḷeṣetra* [Buddha Land], Śāriputra, is always as pure as this’, he said.”⁶⁴

In the view of the later Vajrayāna school, Martin Boord stated in the same chapter, “the equation of mind and space is axiomatic.” Sacred or holy space “cannot exist in independence of sacred or holy mind.”⁶⁵

B Alan Wallace, who combines a scientific education with the experience of having been a Tibetan Buddhist monk for fourteen years, stated that the discovery of the luminous nature of the mind “is crucial to unveiling the hidden resources of one’s own consciousness on the Buddhist path, much as the discovery of the kingdom of heaven within is central to Christian contemplation.”⁶⁶ There is evidence in the Christian tradition too, for a continuing sense of a connection between internal

and external sacred space. Isaac the Syrian has already been mentioned and he has written very specifically that one should be “zealous to enter the treasury within” and then will see “that which is in heaven.” The former and the latter “are one,” and when entering both will be seen. “The ladder into the Kingdom is hidden within thy soul. Dive into thyself, freed from sin; there thou wilt find steps along which thou canst ascend.”⁶⁷

The unknown author of *Theologia Germanica*, discovered and published in 1516 by Martin Luther, also supported this accessibility of the Kingdom. “. . . when the man neither careth for nor desireth anything but the eternal Good alone, and seeketh not himself nor his own things, but the honour of God only, he is made a partaker of all manner of joy, bliss, peace, rest and consolation, and so the man is henceforth in the kingdom of heaven.”⁶⁸

Seraphim of Sarov, a popular saint of the Russian Orthodox Church, professed as a monk in 1786. He lived alone in the forest for many years as well as spending long periods of solitude in his monastic cell. He admired the works of Isaac the Syrian and Symeon the New Theologian. In a well-known exchange with his disciple Motovilov, he said that the fact that he was a monk and his friend a layman was of no importance because the Lord looks for a heart full of true faith, full of love for God and neighbor, into which to send his Spirit. The “heart of a man is capable of containing the Kingdom of God,” Seraphim declared.⁶⁹

Whether given by grace to the aspirant novice or the devout layperson, or an esoteric experience for the advanced practitioner, the strand of vision persists in both the Christian and the Buddhist imaginaire. The purpose of this paper is not to attempt to deny or diminish the importance of built and established sacred spaces, jewels of this world. Rather it hopes to open up a view to an aspect of the experience of the holy life that could well be complementary to, and supportive of, the work done in building and maintaining places of refuge and refreshment for the spiritually exhausted. William James concluded that “the unseen region . . . is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world” and “that which produces effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself.”⁷⁰ In an Introduction to the edition of 2002, Eugene Taylor lists some of these observable outcomes or fruits of “truly divine states of mystical consciousness” as tendencies toward a loss of egotistical self-centredness and the promotion of “a life of selfless service toward others.”⁷¹ The opportunities for improved relations, a feature in the Kingdom or the Buddha-land, would seem to be significant. James was working on developing a philosophy of pragmatism, in that vein this paper submits that it would be wise to respect and put to use these positive energies wherever they may manifest.

NOTES

- 1 *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, 687.
- 2 *Common Worship, Daily Prayer*, 773.
- 3 Lewis, *The Four Loves*.
- 4 *The Monastic Way*, 170.

5 *Āṅguttara Nikāya* 1:61 and 62.

6 www.britannica.com/topic/caitya, accessed August 8, 2020.

7 See Gregory Schopen's discussion on the phrase *sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabbūto bhavet* (that spot of earth becomes a shrine/like a shrine/a true shrine) in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India*, 26ff. The main topic of Schopen's paper is the development of the cult of the book in the Mahāyāna; however, he does state: "It should be noted . . . that in all occurrences of our formula it is the *pṛthivīpradeśa* [spot of earth] in itself, and not the book, that becomes *caityabbūta* [a true shrine] and is to be worshipped." There does not have to be an edifice there. In the *Mahāvastu*, the Buddha himself is referred to as a "*cetiya*."

8 "*Sukhāvatī* appears to have come to be thought of as the example *par excellence* of magnificence, loveliness, charm and splendor of place," Schopen, "*Sukhāvatī* as a Generalised Religious Goal in Sanskrit Mahāyāna Sūtra literature," *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India*, 177.

9 I hope it is not too inaccurate to describe the Kingdom of Heaven, particularly when thought of as a dwelling, as a Place of God.

10 While close analysis of the terms (a topic on its own) would reveal differences, for the purposes of this paper, which presents a rather broad discussion, I hope it will be admissible to use Kingdom of Heaven, Kingdom of God, and Place of God interchangeably to indicate the place where there may be expectations that God will be found.

11 *Āṅguttara Nikāya* 1:61.

12 *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. I, Letter to Misawa, 894–895.

13 The Path of Freedom, written by Upatissa Thera. While perhaps most often referred to as the *Vimuttimaggā*, particularly by Pali scholars, to my knowledge, no Pali manuscript has as yet come to light. It is fairly widely acknowledged that the *Vimuttimaggā* may already have been in existence at the time when Buddhaghosa wrote the *Visuddhimaggā*, but the earliest known text is in Chinese, *Jietuo dao lun*, The Treatise on the Path to Liberation. It may originally have been written in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, or Gandhari.

14 See Dhammadharo, Ajaan Lee, "The Demons of Defilement: *Kilesa Mara*."

15 Fundamental to the Buddhist analysis of cognition and understanding of life is the notion of the three characteristics of existence. In a preface to *The Three Basics of Existence*, Nyanaponika Thera explains that these three features, impermanence (*anicca*), "unsatisfactoriness" or dis-ease (*dukkha*) and not self (*anattā*) are common to all conditioned existence: "Existence can be understood only if these three basic facts are comprehended, and this not only logically, but in confrontation with one's own experience."

16 Isaac of Nineveh declared him to be "the greatest of contemplatives". See Bamberger, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, lvii, note 142.

17 As his thought was transmitted in the West, the eight thoughts became known as the Seven Deadly Sins and there was a significant change of emphasis. Through Pope Gregory the Great (c.540–604) the term "seven principal vices" came into the vocabulary of the Church. Associated with the Augustinian theory of sin they became part of the landscape of the medieval mind and were sometimes used as a kind of checklist to be used in confession. This was far from the original purpose of Evagrius in devising the list. It was no longer clear that the aim was to observe the workings of the mind and heart and to find the means to combat deep-seated and destructive human tendencies.

18 See Driscoll, *Ad Monachos*, 12–13.

19 In the Septuagint, the version of the Bible used by Evagrius.

20 Sinkewicz (trs.), *On Thoughts, Evagrius of Pontus*, 153.

21 Tilby, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, xiii.

22 Ibid., 18.

23 The *Philokalia* was compiled by Saint Nikodimos (1749–1809) of the Holy Mountain (Mount Athos) and Saint Makarios (1731–1805) of Corinth. There are four works by Evagrius in the compilation although one of them is attributed to Saint Nilus. A much loved anthology of eastern Christian texts, it was designed to assist in the inner life of prayer. It is evident that the thought of Evagrius was fundamental to many of the writings to be found in it. The *Philokalia* is still popular today. Rowan Williams has recently written, in “The Theological World of the *Philokalia*” that “. . . the philokalic vision is of bodily senses themselves working in a somewhat different way. What this might mean is not clear – though there are other traditions of meditation, notably certain Buddhist disciplines, which would echo the idea and might offer some lines for investigation.” In Bingaman and Nassif (eds.), *The Philokalia*, 109–110.

24 See Cook, *The Philokalia and the Inner Life*, 245.

25 *Vm*, 69.

26 Sinkewicz (trs.) *Evagrius of Pontus*, Chapters on Prayer, 22, 195.

27 *Vm*, 69.

28 Bodhi (trs.), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (*Anguttara Nikāya* I 11), 98.

29 Bunge, *Dragon's Wine and Angel's Bread*, 12. Bunge emphasizes that a virtue can only be properly known if it is practiced and made one's own. Elsewhere, using terminology that would not be unfamiliar to a Buddhist, Bunge wrote that if the human being gives his consent to the prompting of the demons “evil grows roots in us” (*Despondency*, 37). This may lead to the establishment of habits but, regarding the phenomenon from the Christian viewpoint, he situates the process in the soul, where evil becomes a *habitus* and then a passion (*pathos*), and the soul suffers as from a disease. Establishing the virtue will counteract this process.

30 Driscoll (trs.), *Ad Monachos* 12, 43.

31 The journey toward God is not a straightforward movement from *praktiké* to *theoretiké*. Evagrius always insisted that the need for *praktiké* is ongoing. Although this terminology is not the invention of Evagrius, he used it to analyze the interrelationship between the two poles of spiritual life and augmented it with exegetical categories used by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. See Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 28.

32 In an interview with Dr. Adam DeVille, Augustine Casiday quotes from *Causes for monastic observances* where Evagrius makes clear that monks should aim to be happy and that happiness is not incompatible with seeking stillness (ἡσυχία): “Do you wish, then, beloved, to take up the monastic life as it is, and hurry toward the trophies of stillness? Then abandon the cares of this world and the principalities and powers set over them! That is, be free from material things and from perturbations, set apart from every desire. If you thus become a stranger to all that concerns them, *you will be able to be still in happiness*”; easternchristianbooks.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/augustine-casiday-on-evagrius-of-pontus.html, accessed August 8, 2020.

33 Driscoll, *Ad Monachos*, 102, where he comments on *Ad Monachos* 67, “In front of love, passionlessness marches; in front of knowledge, love,” Driscoll (trs.), *Ad Monachos*, 53.

34 Ibid., 14–15.

35 Makransky, “Contemplative Practice, Social Analysis and Compassionate Action,” in *Meditation in Buddhist-Christian Encounter*, 382.

36 Driscoll (trs.), *Ad Monachos* 53, 50.

37 Brakke (trs.), *Antirrhetikos*, 51.

38 Ibid., 137. The passage from Scripture recommended by Evagrius against “the intellect that does not know that, when thoughts of listlessness persist in it, they trouble its stability, and at the time of prayer they obscure the holy light in its eyes” is “My heart is troubled; my strength has left me; and the light of my eyes is not with me” (Ps 37:11).

- 39 Driscoll, *Ad Monachos*, 109.
- 40 "The proof of *apatheia* is had when the spirit begins to see its own light," *Praktikos* 64, Bamberger OCSO, *The Praktikos, Chapters on Prayer*, 33. "It is a proof of impassibility when the mind has begun to see its own light," *Praktikos* 64, Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, 109.
- 41 Driscoll, *Ad Monachos*, 121, 125.
- 42 The image of the morning star is not only one of light but has a number of associations with Christ in Scripture. This was particularly important for Evagrius for whom Christ is *the* mind, to whose condition of union with essential knowledge each fallen mind is called to return. See Driscoll, *Ad Monachos*, 310, 312.
- 43 Harmless, Fitzgerald (trs.) *Skeemmata* 2, 521.
- 44 Sinkewicz (trs.), *On Thoughts* 39, *Evagrius of Pontus*, 180. This echoes the Pauline idea of "stripping off the old man" (Colossians 3: 9–10, Ephesians 4: 22–24).
- 45 Harmless, Fitzgerald (trs.), *Skeemmata* 25, 521.
- 46 Sinkewicz (trs.), *On Thoughts* 39, *Evagrius of Pontus*, 180.
- 47 Harmless, Fitzgerald, *Skeemmata*, 518.
- 48 "His place is established in peace and his dwelling in Zion."
- 49 Harmless, Fitzgerald (trs.), *Skeemmata* 25, 526. See also Bunge, *Dragon's Wine and Angel's Bread*, 105–107.
- 50 Bunge, *Dragon's Wine and Angel's Bread*, 67–68.
- 51 Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, 242.
- 52 *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, 114.
- 53 *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, 114.
- 54 A new homily in the Bedjan Syriac text.
- 55 *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*, 114.
- 56 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 272.
- 57 HH Dalai Lama refers to it as one of the hidden jewels of Tibetan civilization, Baker, 12.
- 58 Baker, *The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple*, 40.
- 59 Baker, 38–39.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 63 Walshe (trs.) *Thus Have I Heard*, 108, *Samaññaphala Sutta* (D I 84).
- 64 Boord, quoting *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, I.16–17 in "Sacred Space," in Harvey (ed.), *Buddhism*, 297–298.
- 65 Boord, "Sacred Space," in *Buddhism*, ed. Harvey, 298.
- 66 Wallace, *Mind in the Balance*, 174.
- 67 Allchin, *Wholeness and Transfiguration*, 3–4, quoting A J Wensinck, *Mystic Treatises of Isaac of Nineveh*, 8.
- 68 Winkworth (trs.), *Theologia Germanica*, chapters x, xi.
- 69 Gorainov, *The Message of Saint Seraphim*, 14. See also Sergius Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, 139.
- 70 James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 360.
- 71 *Ibid.*, xxix–xxx.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alfeyev, Hilarion. 2000. *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications.

- Allchin, A. M. 1974. *Wholeness and Transfiguration: Illustrated in the lives of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Seraphim of Sarov*. Oxford: SLG Press (Fairacres Publication no. 44).
- Baker, Ian A., Laird, Thomas (photography). 2000. *The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple: Tantric Wall Paintings from Tibet*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Bamberger, John Eudes OCSO., (trs., ed.). 1981. *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications.
- The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Bingaman, Brock and Bradley Nassif (eds.). 2012. *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bodhi Bikkhu (trs.). 2013. *The Fruits of Recluseship: The Sāmaññaphala Sutta and its Commentaries*. BPS On-line © 2013.
- Bodhi Bikkhu (trs.). 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bristol: Pali Text Society and Somerville: Wisdom Publications.
- Bolshakoff, Sergius. 1976. *Russian Mystics*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications.
- Brakke, David (trs.). 2009. *Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons, Antirrhētikos*. Evagrius of Pontus: Cistercian Publications.
- Bunge, Gabriel, OSB. 2009. *Dragon's Wine and Angel's Bread: The Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Meekness*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- . 2012. *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press.
- Common Worship: Daily Prayer*, London: Church House Publishing, 2015.
- Cook, Christopher. 2011. *The Philokalia and the Inner Life: On Passions and Prayer*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co.
- Dhammadharo, Ajaan Lee (Phra Saddhidhammaransi Gambhiramedhacariya). 2013. "The Demons of Defilement: Kilesa Mara," Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trs.), Access to Insight, Legacy Edition, 2 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/thai/lee/demons.html> (last accessed August 2020).
- Driscoll, Jeremy, OSB. 2003. *Evagrius Ponticus, Ad Monachos*. Newman Press.
- Dysinger, Luke, OSB. 2005. *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ehara, Rev. N. R. M., Soma Thera, and Kheminda Thera (trs.). 1961. *The Path of Freedom of Aravant Upatissa—Vimuttimagga*. Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Gorainov, Irina. 1973. *The Message of Saint Seraphim: 'The Aim of Christian Life is the Acquisition of the Holy Spirit'*. Oxford: SLG Press.
- The Goshō Translation Committee. 1999. *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Tokyo: Soka Gakkai.
- Harmless, William, SJ, and Raymond R. Fitzgerald, SJ. 2001. "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus," *Theological Studies* 62, 498–529.
- Harris, Elizabeth, and John O'Grady (eds.). 2019. *Meditation in Buddhist-Christian Encounter: A Critical Analysis*. Germany: EOS.
- Harvey, Peter (ed.). 2001. *Buddhism*. London, New York: Continuum.
- Isaac the Syrian. 1984. *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery.
- James, William. 2008. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. London, New York: Routledge Classics.
- Lewis, C. S. 2002. *The Four Loves*. London: HarperCollins.
- Nyanaponika Thera. 2013. *Preface to The Three Basic Facts of Existence: I. Impermanence (Anicca)*, Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013.
- Tilby, Angela. 2009. *The Seven Deadly Sins: Their Origin in the Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius the Hermit*. London: SPCK.
- Schopen, Gregory. 2005. *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

- Sinkewicz, Robert E (trs.). 2003. *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wallace, B. Alan. 2009. *Mind in the Balance: Meditation in Science, Buddhism and Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Walshe, Maurice (trs.). 1987. *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha, a new translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. London: Wisdom Publications.
- Walshe, Maurice. 2012. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (translated from the Pali). Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Ward, Hannah, and Jennifer Wild (eds.). 2006. *The Monastic Way: Ancient Wisdom for Contemporary Living*. Norwich: Canterbury Press (Seelaus, Vilma, OCD. 2000. "Teresa, Suffering, and the Face of God." In *Carmel and Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness*, edited by Culligan, Kevin, OCD, and Regis Jordan, OCD, Washington DC: ICS Publications).
- Winkler, Jakob. 2003. "The Dalai Lama's Secret Temple: Tantric Wall Paintings from Tibet." In *The Tibet Journal*, vol. XXVIII, no. 1 & 2 (Spring and Summer 2003). Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- Winkworth, Susanna (trs), 1893. *Theologia Germanica*, Golden Treasure Series, [www.ntslibrary.com/PDFBooks/Theologia Germanica](http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDFBooks/Theologia%20Germanica), accessed August 2020.