

# OF HARPOCRATES AND NUIT

AN ESSAY ON BUDDHIST MEDITATION FOR THELEMITES

BY ALTAIR

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## PREFACE

*“The Five Precepts are mere nonsense. [...] The argument that ‘the animals are our brothers’ is merely intended to mislead one who has never been in a Buddhist country. The average Buddhist would, of course, kill his brother for five rupees, or less.”* Equinoxe Vol.1 No. 3  
The Buddhist Review.

Aleister Crowley was harsh on Buddhism as shown in the quote above. In fairness, we must bear in mind that he mostly criticized Buddhism on the ground of its Morality system. Practical methods from that tradition, on another hand, were included in the teaching of Thelema. We will explore some of them in the current essay. However, Aleister Crowley favored Yoga and most of the meditation exercises presented in Thelema are coming from Yogic traditions. It must be said that Buddhism has some advantages over Yoga, the foremost of which is the addition of Insight Meditation. Also, it is an open religion and its practice is available to everyone. Thanks to that

openness, the teaching has been improved by many great masters over the years. Another way Buddhists outweigh yogis is they are expert phenomenologists, as a direct product of Insight Meditation. The greatest masters, following the guidance of the Buddha, have studied their experience in minute detail and consigned it in their teaching giving us an invaluable map for the Great Work.

The intention behind the current essay is to break the ice and build bridges between Thelema and Buddhism. Of the many branches of Buddhism, we will mostly be concerned with Theravada. Thelema includes practices from Yoga and Buddhism. Both doctrines use their own terms, sometimes overlapping, sometimes contradicting one another, but the methods look alike more than they differ. The aim of the current publication is to connect the dots. It must be borne in mind that this essay is theoretical. It won't offer practical meditation exercises. That being said, it is written with the intention of guiding the practice, by decrypting the stages and aspects of Concentration and Insight meditation from a

Theravada Buddhist perspective. The essay attempts to translate Crowley's terms, which unfortunately are sometimes vague, into Buddhist terms, making possible the research into the Buddhist view on these topics. The reader will find occasional criticism of Crowley's teaching which I hope will be excused. The intention is only to suggest humble improvements in the methods of Thelema. It might come at a surprise how many concepts of Thelema are already present in the Buddhist teaching. Unveiling them is the ambition of this essay.

Even though this essay is theoretical, everything explored herein comes from personal experience and is confronted with research from Theravada Buddhist sources. Every practitioner is unique, but our experiences should be similar enough that the concepts explained here apply to everyone's practice to a satisfying degree. Should meditation bring a phenomenon that is hard to explain, it is advised to seek reliable resources on the subject, taking care to pick the ones with the best phenomenology.

Buddhist teaching is organized in Three Trainings: Morality, Serenity (Concentration Meditation) and Wisdom (Insight Meditation). Given Crowley's opinion of the Morality side of the training, it won't be discussed in this essay. We will however, try and dispel any further bias. We will study Concentration Meditation and explore how it leads to Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi and Nirodha as Crowley intended them. We will also delve into Insight Meditation, the practice of looking at sensations without judgment, which leads to selflessness and more.

# CONCENTRATION

Concentration meditation is the practice of keeping the attention on one point to the exclusion of anything else. That point is commonly called the Object of Concentration in Buddhist literature. The Object of Concentration the most often recommended is the breath, but the meditator is free to choose anything: a part of the body, a kasina (which is somewhat similar to tattvas), a concept like nothingness... The breath is so commonly advised because it takes no effort; in fact it can't be stopped or forgotten. We usually pay little attention to the breath in our daily life which means that when we *do* pay attention to it, we have little tendency to attach stories to it. It's an easy object to look at without distraction. It is indeed important to keep in mind that the goal of Concentration Meditation is maintaining our attention on the Object, not thinking about the Object or analyzing the Object. Anything other than steady attention is considered a distraction (what Crowley called Break). It is noteworthy for the reader that at the

beginning of a session of Concentration Meditation, even for an advanced practitioner, the sole goal will be to handle distractions. The difference between an advanced meditator and a beginner is how quickly one can deal with the waves of distractions. In Buddhism, distractions are separated in Five Hindrances: sensory desire, ill will, torpor, restlessness and doubt. Sensory desire is here intended in the sense of a distracting sensory impulse like an itch or a sound in the room. Ill will is meant as an aversion for the practice at hand or for the Object of Concentration itself. Torpor is the tendency to dose off causing the dropping of the head. Restlessness is an agitated urge to move or a short attention span. Doubt is distrust in the method or the teacher. There will be time when distractions seem gone only to come back in a new wave, crashing against the shore of one's practice. Eventually, when distractions subside, comes Dharana.

When one has mastered distractions, one falls in a state commonly called Access Concentration (Crowley sometimes referred to it as Neighborhood Concentration). In yogic terms,

it is Dharana. It is a definite state of consciousness. It is tempting to fool oneself into thinking that one is concentrated enough to call it Dharana. However Dharana feels like something has changed, with a definite and clearly perceived transition, like a piece of machinery that fits in place. During the initial stages of Concentration Meditation, one will undoubtedly start seeing moving lights of various colors and shapes behind the closed eyelids. The Buddhists call it Nimitta<sup>1</sup>. Meaning “sign”, the Nimitta is useful to cultivate because it points in the right direction. However it shouldn’t distract from the Object of Concentration. The practitioner should simply notice that a Nimitta appeared and keep practicing. There is a special kind of Nimitta that usually makes quite an impression on the meditator, even with experience. Often called the Counterpart Sign, it is the Nimitta that marks the entrance into Dharana and that leads to Dhyana. It can appear as moonlight or sunlight, sometimes shyly peeking through a veil or a cloud. It is beautiful and precious. The Nimitta, in its guiding role, is akin to a whisper of the Holy Guardian Angel. Let’s briefly

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<sup>1</sup> See “The Jhanas” by Ajahn Brahmavamso for a detailed study and description of the various types of Nimitta.



examine the phenomenon of Dharana. It is characterized by the lack of effort required to stay focused on the Object of Concentration. Attention is drawn to the Object like a magnet and distraction takes no hold. Thoughts might happen, but they will simply pass by, in the background of the mind. Dharana may feel like an antechamber, like something is about to happen or like anything is possible from here. It's an empowering state. All is quiet though. The mind is clear and fully aware of itself. Dharana brings pleasurable sensations caused by the surrendering of the mind and of the stories of the ego. This pleasure should be sought after, desired. It is the equivalent of inflaming oneself into prayers as often advised in the teaching of Thelema. The more complete the surrender of the mind, the bigger the pleasure and the closer one gets to Dhyana.

Dhyana is spelled Jhana (from Pali) in Buddhist literature. Both terms will be used interchangeably in the following pages. But before delving into Dhyana, it would be best to mention mundane jhanas or what some call the soft jhanas. We here

enter a muddy territory and one might say the obsessive phenomenology is biting its own tail by creating more categories of experience than one might need. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain them in more details<sup>2</sup> than painting them as a mild Jhana. It is only important to realize that when they write about the Jhana, some writer will mean mundane or soft jhana and some will mean the Dhyana as Crowley intended it. It is an unfortunate state of affairs, but it is what it is and the reader should be warned. The mundane jhana isn't the most useful state, but it teaches the basics of Dhyana. It introduces to the Five Factors<sup>3</sup>. It helps distinguish between the Eight Jhanas (that Crowley barely mentioned). It allows learning Insight by studying the Three Characteristics<sup>4</sup> of those Factors as they appear, which is impossible in the actual Jhana or Dhyana. The mundane jhana framework also gives a sense of progress which is encouraging given how long it takes to reach Dhyana. Hopefully, this segue didn't confuse our reader. The Thelemite will be well advised to stick to the Buddhist writers

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<sup>2</sup> A comparative approach to the two types of Jhana is taken by Henepola Gunaratana in his book "Path of Purification A Critical Analysis of the Jhanas". The mundane jhanas are what is meant by Jhana in the popular book "Right Concentration" by Leigh Brasington.

<sup>3</sup> More on the Five Factors below.

<sup>4</sup> More on studying the Three Characteristics in the chapter on Insight Meditation.

who talk about the supramundane or “deep” Jhana (Crowley’s Dhyana) such as the traditional texts (the Pali Canon), the Visuddhimagga or the work of Pa Auk, Henepola Gunaratana or Ajahn Brahmavamsa to name a few. It might be of interest to note that these authors are usually also the ones who talk about the Siddhis (powers).

Upon repeated basking in the luminous pleasure of Dharana, the practitioner is taken into Dhyana. The term Dhyana or Jhana is usually translated as absorption and it is literally how it feels. The consciousness is absorbed through the cranial suture into a blinding light in the Crown Chakra, spirited away. The transition is often announced by what could be characterized as a sensory overload: bright light, ringing or roaring in the ear, buzzing skin... It can be so overwhelming that one is quickly taken back down into mundane reality. The intimidation can take a while to master and the swinging back and forth of consciousness can mark the end of the meditation session, in frustration or confusion. Every peek in the Light, ever so short, is the discovery of a lifetime. It should be

treasured. With practice, the transition gets softer and consciousness adapts itself to the brightness of the Light.

The *sine qua non* condition of Dhyana is the absence of discursive thought. The brain is still active with non-verbal thoughts and the practitioner is present. Crowley described it in these words: “*The condition of thought, time and space are abolished.*” (Book 4 Pt.I p.31) If the question “Is this Dhyana?” arises, it isn’t Dhyana. To enter this place, the mind has been surrendered, so to speak. One of the oddities of Dhyana is the ability to decide before-hand how long the practitioner wants to stay. There is no sense of time in Dhyana, but *something* has a sense of time in there. It is amazing how precise the timing can be. The practitioner will often come out of absorption only a few seconds off the appointed time.

The Dhyana state in Buddhist tradition is constituted of Five Factors of Jhana (in yogic terms, these would of course be premised on the three essential elements of Existence,

Consciousness and Bliss or Sat, Chit, Ananda). The Five Factors of Jhana are:

1. Applied Concentration
2. Sustained Concentration
3. Rapture
4. Happiness
5. One-pointedness.

The Buddhists separate the Jhana into eight individual states, the most important of which are the first four. Each Jhana should be seen as a purer version of the previous one, each Jhana losing some Factors of its predecessor. The First Jhana has all the Five Factors (Applied Concentration, Sustained Concentration, Rapture, Happiness and One-pointedness) and is characterized by a dominant sensation of mental excitement. The Second Jhana loses Applied Concentration and Sustained Concentration and is characterized by the dominant sensation of emotional happiness. Applied Concentration and Sustained Concentration are the precondition for discursive thinking, so it follows that in the First Jhana some small degree of discursive thought is possible, but it is very limited. In the Second Jhana

discursive thought is completely gone. Therefore, it could be argued, if we want to be precise, that the Second Jhana is Crowley's Dhyana. The Third Jhana loses Rapture and is characterized by the dominant sensation of peaceful contentment. The Fourth Jhana only keeps the One-Pointedness and is characterized by the dominant sensation of stability and equanimity. The progress through the Jhanas could be described as going deeper from the mental excitement of Rapture to the emotional Happiness and finally to the pure experiential equanimity; peeling one layer after another, from the mind to the core of consciousness. As mentioned before, there is no conscious thought in Dhyana so these sensations aren't mentally recognized or labeled. The practitioner feels them without knowing precisely what is felt. However, upon exiting the Dhyana, those sensations will be accessible. They will be remembered and experienced anew. Theravada tradition lists series of attainment aimed at perfecting the Jhana and called them the Five Masteries. They are as follows:

1. Mastery in entering the Jhana when one wants to.

2. Mastery in remaining in the Jhana for as long as one has determined.

3. Mastery in emerging from the Jhana at the determined time.

4. Mastery in adverting one's attention to the factors of the Jhana after one has emerged from it.

5. Mastery in reviewing the factors of the Jhana (i.e. practicing Insight Meditation on the factors).

These masteries should be applied to each of the Four Jhana individually. This practice will refine the Dhyana causing the Five Factors to drop one by one and ultimately leading to the equanimity of the Fourth Jhana, which could be equated to Crowley's Samadhi.

Once the Five Factors of Jhana have subsided, the only thing that remains is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. This is Samadhi as Crowley intended it, the perfected Dhyana. In Theravada Buddhism, Samadhi isn't specifically considered a state of consciousness. It more or less equates to the fifth of the Five Factors of the Jhana, One-pointedness. The only one that

remains once the Fourth Jhana is attained. It is safe to assume that Crowley's Samadhi corresponds to the Fourth Jhana of Buddhism. The reason why it is the fourth and not the eighth and final one is because the Fifth Jhana to the Eighth Jhana, called Immaterial Jhanas, are considered modes or aspects of the Fourth Jhana. Samadhi being a perfected Dhyana, it shouldn't be pursued on its own. Dhyana should. Once Dhyana is attained, it will naturally purify itself into Samadhi with practice. The two states are very similar and only differ in intensity and purity. When Crowley talks about the state of Samadhi, it can safely be replaced with the state of Dhyana. The benefits of Dhyana on the practice of magick for example are the same as that of Samadhi. The only difference is the strength. It could be argued that reaching Dhyana is a more important milestone. On a side note regarding Samadhi, it is worth mentioning that Crowley had a bad tendency of using the word Samadhi as a synonym of union (like Buddhist do), not as the actual state. It is confusing and unfortunate. Whenever Crowley spoke of Samadhi in a context where the practitioner is doing something, physically or mentally, he was



being poetic, because little can be done in the state devoid of discursive thought that is Samadhi.

To speak further of Samadhi as Aleister Crowley intended it, in Liber AL, Nuit answers the question “Who am I?” with the surprisingly practical answer:

*”Thou Knowst! And the sign shall be my ecstasy, the consciousness of the continuity of existence, and the omnipresence of my body.”*

These lines describe Samadhi in no uncertain terms. “*Thou Knowst*” as the practitioner has the wisdom of who he or she is, from personal experience: GNOSIS. And “*the sign shall be my ecstasy, the consciousness of the continuity of existence*” or Ananda, Chit and Sat. Sat Chit Ananda are presented here in reverse, because that is how they are experienced in Samadhi. First the meditator is overwhelmed by bliss, then comes the realization that the source of that bliss is the consciousness of existence. Samadhi is “*The omnipresence of my body*” as it is the continuous body of Nuit itself. Samadhi is the state of Nuit. It should also be noted that the Nimitta mentioned earlier means sign.

Beyond Samadhi is the mysterious state of Nirodha Samappati, only accessible to more advanced meditators (the Anagami and the Arahant in Theravada doctrine). Of the three elements of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, at least one disappears: Consciousness. Without consciousness it is impossible to tell whether the other two elements are still present. Can unknown Bliss be said to exist? As for Existence, we can infer that we still exist in Nirodha since we can come out of the elusive state. Nirodha can only be understood by studying the sensations preceding and succeeding it. We know Nirodha from its silhouette. There is a divinely inspired lesson here: to reach for the unknowable and incomprehensible one can observe the negative space around it, which, by definition, can be known and understood. Even though Nirodha is the luxury of the most advanced meditator, there is a similar state that is accessible earlier. Fruition, also characterized by the absence of consciousness, often happens in the context of Insight, when something new has been learned. The practitioner curious to study Fruition will get a glimpse at

Nirodha and peek through the fabric of reality. Let's attempt an overview of the phenomenon of Fruition and Nirodha. An analogy could be made with an operating system needing the computer to shut down to finish installing a new update. Both Fruition and Nirodha feel like reality stops and reboots. They are followed by an exalted vibration in the body. The practitioner coming out is a different person altogether. The peak of the effect wanes quickly leaving room for an afterglow characterized by the ease of spiritual practice. A state without consciousness is unsurprisingly hard to control and only lasts for a split second and rarely more. With practice however, it can last up to six days for the most advanced practitioners. So it follows that the beginner might experience Fruition and Nirodha and be at a loss as to what happened. In truth it doesn't really matter. Progress is being made. Mastering Nirodha, in the system of the A.:A.:, is the privilege of the Ipsissimus. The reason is unclear. Why would a state of consciousness that can be mastered even before crossing the Abyss (by an Anagami in Theravada tradition) be assigned to the aspirant at the last stage of the work? The grade of Magus is already an outstanding

accomplishment on the level of the greatest Prophets. Not many people would practice Nirodha if it was such a feat, yet clearly a few people do. Maybe it was placed there because it could be said that Nirodha is the practice of Pan, the Fool. Nirodha is a great oblivion: existence stripped of knowledge.

One of the benefits of Concentration Meditation for magicians is the development of a view of consciousness that is premised on states. Magicians sometimes talk about entering a trance state without specifying what kind of trance. First of all, a trance is a state of consciousness. Seeing it as such is a key step in recognizing its nature and complexity. Secondly, it follows that there are many types of states of consciousness. Dhyana is one and Samadhi is another. How do they differ? The practitioner will encounter many more such states, some of his or her own making. When that happens, it is well advised to define the experience in order to understand it and find a way to return to the state in question. How does the body feel? What about the mind? Is there anything particular in terms of energy? Are the senses of space, time or self altered in any way?

These are the basic questions one must ponder in order to understand the state of one's own consciousness, which is the essence of being. Insight Meditation, as we will soon see, will give us tools to deepen the analysis. Another major advantage of Concentration Meditation for magicians is the afterglow, the state of exaltation one is left in after a deep meditative experience. Dhyana and Samadhi (as well as Nirodha) have a powerful after effect that sets the meditator in an elevated frame of mind propitious to perform magick or any spiritual practice.<sup>5</sup> These are best discovered by personal experience. Experiment!

For the mystic on another hand, Concentration Meditation is the way to true GNOSIS, a direct experience of the divine. The emotional impact is overwhelming, the spiritual progress ascertained. However, the exaltation is temporary. For a steady, albeit less intense, union with the divine, we must turn to Insight Meditation.

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<sup>5</sup> See "Path of Purification: A Critical Analysis of the Jhanas" by Henepola Gunaratana for further exploration on the topic. The book "Mastering the Core Teaching of the Buddha" by Daniel M. Ingram also has a chapter on powers that might interest the reader.

# INSIGHT

*“Let there be no difference made among you between any one thing & any other thing; for thereby there cometh hurt” Liber AL.*

Insight is the practice of looking at sensations, without judgment, as they arise and pass away. It leads to dissolution of the sense of self and to the prized reward of liberation from Sorrow. The quote from Liber AL above is encouraging the Thelemite to seek unity or selflessness by practicing Insight to free oneself from suffering. Insight is seeing the worlds as if it was the first time. When adults see a frog they remember other times they saw a frog. The mind is inclined to invent stories about the frog and assign qualities to it. A baby who has never seen a frog will simply look at the frog for what it is, without thinking about it or inventing stories. That is Insight. For the Thelemite, it is a state of expectation, open to the Voice of the Holy Guardian Angel. The state of alertness is similar to trying to hear something in another room. Insight Meditation is the

practice of listening, of directing the senses to the endless void of the sphere of sensation. There is nothing particularly Buddhist about experiencing sensation. It's the nature of every human being. What is Buddhist is the method.

Today, one of the most efficient Insight Meditation technique is the Noting practice as taught by the Venerable Mahasi. He was a Theravada Buddhist monk from Burma who expanded upon the traditional mahasatipatthana practice from the Pali Canons. Mahasi started teaching around the 1930s, so he came after Aleister Crowley. His method might not be well known among Thelemite, which is a shame because it is outstanding. The Noting technique is deceptively simple at first glance, yet out of its simplicity emerges profound realizations. It is separated in three exercises: a walking, a sitting and daily life practice. For a quick overview of the technique<sup>6</sup>, the walking practice has the meditator walking in circle paying close attention to the sensations that arise at every step, noting, without judgment, the “lifting” and “placing” of the foot. As

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<sup>6</sup> See “Practical Insight Meditation” by Mahasi Sayadaw for further study.

precision of perception improves, the practitioner is invited to further detail the noting “Lifting, moving, placing”. With dedication, the technique is brought to a level of detail ever more precise, where every grain of sensation is perceived. The sitting meditation applies the same effort to the movement of the chest caused by breathing. The meditator notes “rising and falling”. Here the goal isn’t particularly the details of sensations, but rather the diversity. Since this isn’t Concentration Meditation, distractions are allowed and even welcome, as every one of them is an opportunity to note. The subtle sensations that arise during such an introspective moment, duly noted, reveal the vast range of human experiences. The last of the three practices is the daily life exercise which invites the practitioner to pay attention (still without judgment) to every sensation constituting mundane life activities.

The Noting method is very simple, but it can only bring results through intense and relentless practice. Noting Insight Meditation must be performed in retreat situation (home retreat is fine), meaning at least eight hours a day for several



days per retreat, limiting social interaction and mundane tasks to a minimum. Only by committing to the three exercises given by Mahasi all day for several days will the ego be kept from looking at sensation with a judgment and a story. If only doing it one hour here and there, the practitioner inevitably reverts into the ego-driven view of sensations and the practice won't take root in consciousness (this is at least true until Stream Entry). A retreat is intimidating. We are all busy. It is not easy to arrange for a few days, let alone two weeks of solitary lifestyle. It is advisable to start with a few hours here and there to understand what the practice is about from first-hand experience. However, once the method is understood, it is highly recommended to make arrangements for a one-week home retreat, the aim being to reach a two-weeks retreat as soon as possible. It will probably take several retreats to obtain any tangible result like the Arising and Passing Away (quickly followed by Stream Entry), but with commitment, attainment is inevitable. In-between two retreats, a period of rest from Insight Meditation practice should be taken to reflect upon and experiment with the newly acquired skills of Insight. It might

help the ones hesitant to commit to a retreat to know that the attainments brought forth by Insight Meditation are permanent. Every ounce of progress is acquired once and for all.

When noting sensations become second nature, the practitioner is invited to study the Three Characteristics of each of these sensations. The Three Characteristics form a core tenet of Buddhism. Firstly, every sensation is impermanent, it comes, it lingers a bit and then it passes away. Secondly, every sensation is a source of dissatisfaction, as it triggers the mind into a judgmental mode of analysis. We cling to the things we like and we fear the things we don't like, engaging in an endless dance of pushing and pulling that leaves us perpetually dissatisfied. This is the source of suffering. Thirdly, every sensation exists unconditioned by the presence of a self. In other words, sensations happen, nothing more, nothing less. It is by seeing the Three Characteristics from personal experience that union with the divine slowly arises. It is crucial to understand that we are talking about a personal experience, not

about knowing, coming to a conclusion through reason or believing. The profound realization is nothing short of a GNOSIS characterized by selflessness and detachment. Enlightenment as intended by the Buddhists is reached through this very practice of Insight Meditation. Its importance cannot be underestimated.

Since there is no discursive thought in Dhyana, studying the Three Characteristics during the experience will be impossible. The analysis must be operated upon exit. Pa Auk recommends concentrating on the heart which causes sensations experienced in the Dhyana to automatically resurface.<sup>7</sup> The heart is the resting place of what Theravada Buddhism calls the Bhavanga. It is the passive consciousness devoid of active cognitive process or the intentional consciousness that operate between active consciousness moments, in deep sleep or in a state like Nirodha. The Bavangha holds the Will. It continuously carries an individual's essential features throughout their life. It is the memory center

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<sup>7</sup> "Mindfulness of Breathing" Pa Auk Sayadaw.

of past lives. It is the resting place of what Crowley called the Magickal Memory. At the time of death, it is said in the Abhidhamma, that the Bavangha will bring into awareness a snapshot summary of the individual's life, the most important aspect of that life. That snapshot will determine the direction of the next birth. In other words, the Bhavanga brings into mind the Will of the individual, however crudely or clearly understood by that person, in order to renew the momentum of that Will into the next life.

The results of Noting Insight Meditation come in the form of a series of realizations that expand the practitioner's worldview. Reality is what we perceive through the five senses and our thoughts, the six sense-doors, as the Buddhist call them. It is through these six sense-doors that we can create a mental image of the world at large, which remains constantly beyond our grasp. In truth we have no idea whether or not such a world at large actually exists. The only thing we can know is the image in our mind (image is intended in the sense of representation and is not strictly visual). That is what

knowledge is made of. We know by investigating with our six sense-doors. Knowledge is the fruit of consciousness. It is this definition of knowledge that is intended in the Wisdom through Insight Meditation in Buddhism. It leads to Right View.

Looking at sensations without judgment or Right View brings a series of pleasurable impressions. It is like being in the presence of a baby, a being of pure existence. It commands silence and calm. It is a sign of relief given by the glimpse of liberation, like the ones felt when entering Access Concentration mentioned in the previous chapter. Likewise, the pleasure should be nourished and enjoyed. As it is refined through diligent practice, it becomes equanimity, the sensation that everything is exactly how it's supposed to be. The neutral emotional and mental state of equanimity is the closest to liberation that one can feel. As noted before, the attainments of Insight Meditation are permanent. The sharp analytical mind thus developed should therefore be used to investigate every sensation that constitute reality until the most subtle sensations are reached, ones that weren't even noticed before, such as a

slight flickering of the peripheral vision or a light swinging of awareness. Right View is a mode of looking at the world the experienced meditator can switch to at will. Much like Edgar Rubin's optical illusion of an image looking either like a vase or like two faces, one feels a switch in perception when one enters Right View. At this point of the practice, it should be obvious to the meditator that there are two modes of view, Right View and the Heart Girt with a Serpent. It is advised to practice switching into this mode of view until it becomes second nature as it will prove useful both in the spiritual practice and in daily life.

Insight Meditation is taught in the system of A.:A.: in the form of mahasatipatthana, coming straight from the Pali Canon. It is one of the practices of Philosophus, right before the undertaking of the task of attaining to the Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel. It is first introduced to the Zelator in a breathing practice that "may resolve itself into mahasatipatthana"<sup>8</sup>. The fact that it is progressively introduced in the work leading to the Adeptus

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<sup>8</sup> "Liber RV vel Spiritus" Aleister Crowley.

Minor is undeniable reassurance that Crowley realized its importance. James A. Eshelman in his book *The Mystical and Magical System of the A∴A∴* is equally unequivocal about it: *“This is one of the most effective and extraordinary techniques in the entire canon of A∴A∴ methods.”*

The importance of Insight Meditation was well understood by Crowley and it still seems to be today in the system of the A∴A∴. However, it is still underestimated.

Right View, arrived at by Insight Meditation practice, is the state of Harpocrates. Indeed Harpocrates is the innocent child seeing the world for the first time. Right View is seeing reality without assigning it stories, like a baby discovering the world. Harpocrates is the hermaphrodite god, the symbol of non-duality who casts no judgment. Right View is seeing the sensations as they are, without judgment, abiding in non-duality. Harpocrates is the silent god. Right View is the silent expectative state of listening. Insight is being silent and aware. It

is becoming Harpocrates, which opens the way to the Voice. The Neophyte Formula explains symbolically the Silent Aleph, as representation of Harpocrates, the silent god, the mediator between the Mem of the aspirant and the Shin of Ra-Hoor-Khuit, the Holy Guardian Angel. Harpocrates is the emptiness, the air between the water and the fire. Right View *is* the state of Harpocrates (much like Samadhi is the state of Nuit). And if Harpocrates, the Harbinger of the New Aeon, is at the core of Thelema, then so should Insight Meditation.

Insight teaches phenomenology, the ability to describe sensations in minute details. A look at the Mysticism part of Book IV quickly reveals that Crowley couldn't explain Dhyana and Samadhi in the level of detail they merit. It is unfortunate that he wasn't very good at phenomenology. He resorted to describe mysticism in vague poetic terms instead of meticulously detailing what he experienced. That wouldn't have been the case had he not underestimated Insight Meditation, which is a master class in phenomenology. It unlocks the understanding of sensations and states of



consciousness with the accuracy of a biologist. If we claim to have “the method of science, the aim of religion”, then accurate description of our experience of mystical phenomena is imperative. Insight Meditation allows the mystic to discern the traits of a Dhyana. It allows the magician to describe a magical sensation, like a presence in the room. Its benefits are numerous, making the method paramount for Thelema.

Right View is a state of communion with the Holy Guardian Angel. It is a mild union compared to Samadhi, but it is readily available, waiting patiently for the practitioner to look at it. In the system of the A.:A.:, once the aspirant has attained to the Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel, his or her Great Work consists mostly of strengthening the bond with the Master. Basking in His presence through Insight is one of the best practices to purify the relationship on a sensory or experiential level. Every look at reality in Right View is an intimate exchange with the Holy Guardian Angel. Reality has a divine nature that bears the mark of Ra-Hoor-Khuit. Insight Meditation is the practice of looking at an image

(reality) of the Holy Guardian Angel in selflessness, without judgment or attachment. The pleasure of Right View is caused by that often ineffable realization of union with the Holy Guardian Angel. We are trying to see Adonai when we already are and we always have been. *“I awaited patiently, and Thou wast with me from the beginning.”* Liber LXV. Insight has the power to bring about the Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel. Through it, we are invited to discover our true nature in a simple act of consciousness, us, who are in essence conscious creatures. A non-magickal approach to the Knowledge and Conversation might seem strange to some, maybe even impossible. Crowley dispelled that bias himself. In *The Temple of Solomon the King IV* in the chapter *The Buddhist Doctrine* (Equinoxe Vol. 1 No 4 p.145) Crowley compares the attainment of Right Comprehension (i.e.: Right View). *“Having attained to mastery over Right Comprehension the aspirant begins to see things not as they are but in their right proportions. His views become balanced, he enters Tiphareth [...] In Tiphareth the aspirant attains to no less a state than that of conversation with his Holy Guardian Angel, his Jechidah. [...] Once*

*Right Comprehension has been attained to, he has discovered a Master who will never desert him until he becomes one with him.*” What he meant by “*Right Comprehension has been attained*” can only be Stream Entry, the first stage of Enlightenment in Buddhism. Of the four stages, only the Stream Entry and the Arahant stages are significantly impactful. Arahant is attained after crossing the Abyss (marked by the Night of Pan), leaving us with only Stream Entry. In his book “Mastering the Core Teaching of the Buddha”<sup>9</sup>, Daniel M. Ingram, being one of the best phenomenologist in the field, further narrows down the attainment of Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel to the Arising and Passing Away, a stage of progress in Insight Meditation that is quickly followed by Stream Entry. One would be hard pressed to disprove the similarities between the flamboyant spiritual shock of the Arising and Passing Away and the way Aleister Crowley describe the result of the Bornless Ritual in Liber Samekh:

*“Now, the Angel will make contact with the Adept at any point that is sensitive to His influence. Such a point will naturally be one*

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<sup>9</sup> Available for free on the author’s website.

*that is salient in the Adept's character, and also one that is, in the proper sense of the word, pure.*

*Thus an artist, attuned to appreciate plastic beauty, is likely to receive a visual impression of his Angel in a physical form which is sublimely quintessential of his ideal. A musician may be rapt away by majestic melodies such as he never hoped to hear. A philosopher may attain apprehension of tremendous truths, the solution of problems that had baffled him all his life.” Liber Samekh.*

The quote above also serves as a warning to the magician who would be tempted to claim the Knowledge & Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel can only be magical. It brings about magickal result to the magician, like it brings “*the solution of problems*” to the philosopher. Compare Crowley’s description to the way the Arising and Passing Away is exposed by Daniel M. Ingram:

*“Visions, unusual sensory abilities (such as seeing nearby things through closed eyelids), and out-of-body experiences are common. Bright lights tend to arise for the meditator, sometimes first as jewel-*

*tone sparkles and then as a bright white light. [...] Experiences of other powers are also common here, with the list being too long to go into, and this is the most spontaneous-powers-prone stage of them all. Meditation in dreams and lucid dreaming is common in this territory.”*

Mastering the Core Teaching of the Buddha.

That doesn't suggest that rituals like the Operation of Abramelin, the Bornless One ritual or Thelema as a whole are useless and obsolete of course. The Arising and Passing Away, on its own, will be a Conversation falling in deaf ear without a framework such as Thelema. Obviously, a magician should seek that union via Ceremonial Magick, but a natural meditator will be able to attain through Insight Meditation. Furthermore, Thelema will help such a meditator in understanding the phenomenon and reveal both the Knowledge and the Conversation aspects of the mystical experience. In regards to the parallels between the ritualistic and the meditative approach, it is interesting to note that Insight Meditation is recommended as a retreat practice just like the last weeks of the Operation of Abramelin or the Operation given by Crowley in

Liber Samekh and in The Vision and the Voice. Both require exhausting the ego until it surrenders, leaving room for the prized GNOSIS.

Related to the above, there is another interesting connection between the Theravada Concentration Meditation and Thelema to be found in Internal Confidence (Ajjhattam Sampasadanam), sometimes called or equated to Saddha or Faith. It is a state of self-confidence attained at three specific points in the practice, two of which are of particular interest to the Thelemite: One is the attainment of Stream Entry, which, in the last paragraph, we associated with the Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel. Another is upon reaching the Second Jhana (Crowley's Dhyana) when surrendering the Applied Concentration and the Sustained Concentration, both preconditions to discursive thoughts. In other words, by way of abandoning the discursive thoughts of the ego, the meditator experiences a type of Faith in the Second Jhana. Internal Confidence was described by the Buddha as the forerunner or the seed of spiritual life. It becomes apparent that

even in Concentration Meditation, Theravada tradition provides signs of something akin to a Knowledge and Conversation with the Holy Guardian Angel. At this point and with so many coincidences, it is tempting to advance the hypothesis that Theravada Buddhist teaching includes the entire concept of the Holy Guardian Angel without ever giving it a name.

Another underestimated aspect of Right View for Thelemites (and indeed for magicians in general) is its ability to break attachments. Keeping Lust of Result at bay is a fundamental tenet of Magick. At the peak of an operation, when comes the time to forget and break the emotional egoic bond to the desired result, the magician only needs to switch the mode of perception to Right View and, in a click of the brain, all forms of clinging vanish. Right View at that climactic moment unplugs the mind from the story of the magician's life, preventing the ego from meddling with the new course of things engendered by the magickal operation. At a later stage of the Great Work, when comes the time to cross the Abyss, the

Thelemite is requested to surrender attainments and every attachments of the ego into the Cup of Babalon. Right View is undoubtedly invaluable in the darkest recesses of the Abyss, giving the magician the detachment necessary to let go. And again, during Concentration Meditation practice, Insight Meditation techniques become essential not only to study the traits of the Jhana, but also to keep distraction away. Simply noting the distracting thought turns it into a harmless passing thought. The benefits of Insight meditation cannot be underestimated.



## CONCLUSION

We have explored the parallels between Aleister Crowley's definitions of states of concentration such as Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi and the Theravada Buddhist teaching. We have connected the terms from one doctrine to the other. In doing so, we unlocked for the Thelemite access to a treasure trove of Buddhist knowledge which is characterized by its openness and by its precise phenomenology. Crowley being sometimes vague or poetic in describing things that are nevertheless important in the Great Work, this source of clarity is hopefully welcome.

We have also tightened the bonds between Thelema and Insight Meditation. Being the practice of Silence it corresponds elegantly with the thelemic Harpocrates which gives it a seat right at the center of the Great Work. In that process we discovered the attainments of Insight align themselves closely with the attainments of Thelema and the System of the A:A:.

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