



*The Unbroken Wholeness
of
Sublime Understanding and Love*
reflections
on
A Sadhana of Buddha Amitabha

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Preface

This book has a personal story behind it. At the time of my 50th birthday, I and others were at the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre in New Zealand attending a course given by Namgyal Rinpoche. In the late afternoon of March 3rd, Rinpoche was leaving the teaching hall to drive back to where he was staying. He wound down the car window and with a smile beckoned me to come closer. "If you like," he said, "I will give you the Amitabha empowerment for your birthday." I was slightly startled by his offer. Over the many years I had studied with him, I had never experienced him offering to give a *wongkur* – a ceremonial teaching/initiation/empowerment, to anyone. Traditionally, the student would actively ask for for such a teaching. Adding to my surprise was the fact that I had received this particular practice from him on a number of previous occasions and had never found it to be personally engaging. I should confess that at the time, I had little experience in what is sometimes called Pure-land practice tending to dismiss it as a relatively superficial faith-based form of culture bound Buddhism. Given my passion for integrating science and dharma, this approach had never really held my interest and I had not seriously explored it. What was he saying to me? Why was he directing me to this *sadhana*?

The text he used the next day was a very traditional flowery translation, filled with prayers and elaborate offerings and yearnings for a good rebirth. It was a perfect example of all the aspects of Buddhism that I found least inviting and meaningful. However,

because Rinpoche's offer was so unusual and direct, over the following years, I took the practice to heart.

While contemplating each image and suggestion in the sadhana, I would gently carry the question; what does this actually mean? What is it pointing to? Experimenting this way, the meditation came to life. Gradually, I began to glimpse the profundity of Pure-land practice and with it, a deepening respect for all forms of Buddhist teaching.

In this essay I will offer some reflections on the Sadhana of Amitabha with the hope that sharing them may inspire further explorations in your own life and living. The words of this particular sadhana-text, gradually assembled and reassembled in my mind during the course of my practice. These waves of experience – reverberations of aspiration and intuitive deepening – finally began to appear on paper in March 2006 while retreating in Triple Gem Hermitage, at Wangapeka. Over the following years, inspired by a desire to create a public form of this meditation that can be used in times of transition and grief, a form that would speak meaningfully to Buddhists and, with only a little explanation to non-Buddhists, these words have been further refined and polished.

Due to busy schedules and later, a cascade of health issues, the project was way-laid in the 'yet to complete' file. Now however, with the global Covid-19 pandemic bringing so much suffering to so many people, I'm inspired to finish this project and make it available. May this heart breath of Namgyal, flowing to you through the lens of my life, become a cause of inspiration and happiness for many beings.

Introduction

*The language of sadhana is the language of poetry,
a subtle and sometimes oblique hint,
A veiled intimation of levels of life deeply known,
yet often hidden;
Tucked away in cherished beliefs and expectations,
just out of sight.*

The words and verses of a sadhana, and even the words of its title, could be seen as an invitation to dance in and with a timeless mystery; a mystery that is being revealed and demonstrated in each movement and moment of our living. This pathway of natural blessing is instantly available to any who, saturated with curiosity, integrity and compassion for all beings, find themselves answering life's prompting to open their senses, their heart of empathy and their deep commitment to supporting this vibrant community of life-unfolding in all its abundance.

The following reflections on the sadhana of Buddha Amitabha may enlarge your appreciation of this practice and help transform your understanding of the words and images found in the text into palpably evocative experience. Originally, I had considered adding footnotes to the sadhana text itself, but that seemed to obstruct the flow and tended to turn what could be experienced as a transformational dancing of wholeness into a fragmented intellectual and academic study.

This booklet will add background, and commentary, and suggest ways that could further enrich your experience. As a practical suggestion, I

think you will find it helpful to print a hard copy of the sadhana and keep it beside you for reference as you read.¹ This will help remind you of how the details being discussed in the essay fit together as an integrated whole.



¹ <https://greendharmatreasury.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/amitabha-sadhana-gdt-may-2021.pdf>

The Title:

"A Sadhana of Buddha Amitabha"

Sadhana => is a widely used Sanskrit term, often translated as "daily practice". The sadhana being referred to in this book, involves an orderly cultivation of contemplative themes that weave together experiences of body, speech and mind, self and other, perception and conception, in an integrated flow of transformation and deepening understanding. Each section of the sadhana can be viewed as a poetic nudge towards realising immanent wholeness. As such it is not a factual description of life but an artful encouragement, enticing us to live our way into new dimensions of experience. Practiced in sequence, each section builds on the experience of the preceding sections in a methodical step by step cultivation of inner calm/clarity and outer compassion/caring. This way, the sadhana becomes an experiential journey of awakening. Successfully worked with, it will inevitably stimulate fresh ways of engaging with the real world of relating and relationship; the intimate and ineffable dancing through which life and living is continuously revealed.

In general, there are two ways of using a sadhana such as this. The first involves sitting comfortably in meditation and contemplatively reading through the entire text. With each new idea or image, pause to allow sufficient time and space for the words to reverberate into your flesh. Gradually, what might initially seem like intellectual concepts will transform into direct, visceral knowing/understanding experience. As you come to feel more at home with exploring this way, a second approach might begin to feel more useful. Here, we allow whichever

section feels most meaningful to us that day, to inspire a flow of contemplation in the course of our living. With this form of practicing, don't worry about the order of the sadhana text. Just jump directly into the section that feels most relevant and interesting to you at that time.

Of => Conventionally, the word 'of' simply indicates that this sadhana is a practice that can lead to a realising Buddha Amitabha. Less conventionally, 'of' indicates possession. Here we might think of the sadhana as a practice that Amitabha, him or herself, does. This sadhana leads us into a way of living that is Amitabha-in-action.

Buddha => The word buddha derives from Sanskrit 'bu' or 'bodhi' which means unfolding, flowering or awakening. 'Ha' is the sound of joy and laughter, so the word *Buddha* is really hinting at a process of joyous flowering.

In the ancient Buddhist texts, it is related that after the awakening, Gautama, who at that time was not yet called the Buddha, was walking along a road when he met a stranger. Seeing that Gautama was radiating a vitality of extraordinary presence and gentle alertness, the stranger was moved to approach and ask, "Who are you?" I could imagine Gautama taking this inquiry very seriously. He might have paused to look deeply into himself as if to say; "what a good question – just a moment while I find out". Feeling his way into the fullness of living that was weaving his immediate experience, he saw that 'he' was a vast unfolding that involved the entire world; an inter-being of teachers and ancestors, a planet-wide ecology of being and becoming, all flowering at this point as the uniqueness of his living experience, a

vivid manifesting of pure and total presence. He felt the joy and goodness, the rightness of being this beginningless, endless creative dynamic and he said, "I am bud - ha". Perhaps he said, "I am bud-ha-ha-ha-ing or bodhi-ha-ha-ha-ing", bursting into joyous laughter, but this wasn't recorded in any official text. Thereafter, he was referred to as the Buddha, one who is realising his or her innate Buddha or joyous budding nature. The great yogi and scholar Longchenpa once wrote; "The term 'buddhahood' is nothing more than a label for what is simply recognition of the very essence of being – the way of abiding."²

Amitabha => In Buddhist tradition, Amitabha is often referred to as the 'Buddha of Infinite Light' or sometimes 'Boundless or Immeasurable Light'. For many, this invokes a sense of luminosity extending in all directions and so Amitabha is often portrayed with a halo of light rays emanating from his head. Beautiful and evocative as this image is, it could become subtly misleading if it points the practitioner towards a state of transcendent otherness, instead of inviting them into an immanent here-ness – a living experience of the natural Buddha-ha-ha-ing that they are.

I'll try to illustrate this with a bit of creative word derivation. In ancient times the sound 'A' was thought to contain all the other sounds and vibrations of the alphabet. In some Tibetan schools, it represents love. Along with being the shortest mantra it is sometimes used as a visualised focal point, supporting a form of primordial guru-yoga practice. Here we could consider the state of love as being a mode of functioning in which we meet or engage with the universe in all its

² *A Treasure Trove of Scriptural Transmission*, Shambala Publications, p 250

diversity in a deeply meaningful and life affirming way. Living in such a state of openness and acceptance helps us to learn and grow. This primordial ever-fresh awareness, *rigpa*, *yeshé*, non-dual awakens, is what teaches us. It gurus us. Guru-yoga entails the work of 'yoking' (yoga) or joining oneself to 'that which teaches' – guru. Ultimately it involves realising the fundamental ground of love and clear seeing presence in a profound and insightful way.

The syllable *mita* can be related to the words *mitra* or *metta* which refer to friendship and lovingkindness. This is much more than a flood of emotional warm positive feeling. Loving-kindness has more a sense of harmonious, settled, engaged, attentiveness – a capacity for embracing the fullness of whatever is arising, with appreciative understanding.

The syllable *bha* is related to the Pali word *obhasa* which means light, radiance or illumination. In Buddhist teaching, light and illumination are archetypes or symbols pointing towards a profound degree of experiential clarity, clear discernment and incisive understanding. In Tibetan Buddhism, Amitabha is regarded as one of five 'Wisdom Buddhas' and represents 'discriminating wisdom'.

If we look deeply and discerningly into anyone or anything we will see that their ongoing existence is composed of dynamic inter-relatings of uncountable other things, beings and processes which themselves are further weavings of matrices of relating in action. Atoms relate with each other forming molecules. Dynamic communities of interacting molecules form cells. Cells collaborate together as organs and tissues, and collections of organs and tissues form organisms. These examples

of collaborative meetings point to different forms or domains of knowing – atomic knowing, molecular knowing, cellular knowing, organism knowing, verbal, conceptual and social knowing – knowings within knowings, knowing knowings. With this perspective there are no eternally fixed boundaries to anything. Everything is a contributing participant in a deep ecology of being and becoming, that ultimately includes the entire universe. To appreciate the fullness of anyone, we will have to realise that, from a human perspective, they are fundamentally immeasurable and 'un-pin-downable'. Deepening love and profound understanding arises in the very act of seeing the immeasurable inter-being nature of anyone or anything. There has never been another exactly like this in the entire history of the universe and there will never be one again! Seemingly ordinary beings are extraordinary!³ With deep-seeing clear discernment, we can appreciate the immeasurable, unique inter-becomingness of everything and everyone that we meet. This empathic knowing of the vast dancing of inter-being that makes up anyone is inseparable from lovingkindness. Understood this way, Amitabha is an indivisible union of sublime understanding and love.

³ For more on this sense of immeasurable, <http://greendharmatresury.org/writings/essays/meditation-four-immeasurables>.

Preface Verses

The sadhana is prefaced with three verses which invite reflection on the ground, path and fruition of all spiritual endeavour. They help set the tone for what follows, encapsulating the spirit or intent of the entire sadhana.⁴

In the immeasurable expanse of nature in process
in faith and trust and wonderment,
we give ourselves to this suchness;
this seamless mystery of birthing and dying.

Spacious, loving, with feet solid in the earth,
we nurture the hints at blessedness;
the myriad faces and masks of luminous knowing.

Moving as this flow of compassion and deepening enquiry;
we engage with all beings in ways that support
the integrity, stability and beauty of the
entire field of life and living.⁵

The pronoun 'we' occurs in each verse. "We give ourselves." "We nurture the hints at blessedness." "We engage with all beings." This 'we' is not to presumptuously speak on behalf of everyone – after all, some people might not agree with these sentiments – rather, it is to acknowledge that each one of us exists as community-in-process. Though we may regard ourselves as singular individuals, in fact, we

⁴ For a more extensive commentary on an earlier version of these verses, see <https://greendharmatreasury.org/2012/11/05/prayer-of-heartfelt-aspiration-intimations-of-view-meditation-and-action/>

⁵ The indented font used in these sections indicates that it is taken from the sadhana text.

are multi-celled organisms; symbionts, holobionts, collaborative endeavours or, if you like, evolving ecologies in action. As you contemplate these verses – we give, we nurture, we engage – can you have a sense of all of you, the entire community that you are, engaging in the contemplation?

To "give" can mean more than to engage in an act of generosity, though that in itself is quite magnificent. From an engineering perspective 'to give' is to flex and bend. Materials have 'give'. In New Zealand where there are many earthquakes, architects know this very well and must take it into account when designing buildings. The opposite of this type of give involves remaining rigid and unmoving. When the quake comes, a rigid structure is the one more likely to fall down. Multi-celled organisms exist as continuously adjusting, flexing, bending, and mutually responding domains and dimensions of being. "We give ourselves to this suchness". We flex and bend and respond in and as this current dancing of suchness, this seamless mystery of birthing/dying.⁶

Taking Refuge

GURU BUDDHA DHARMA SANGHA NAMO

(Repeat three times)

Throughout the sadhana there are a number of mantras. I have included them for the benefit of Buddhist practitioners. If you are

⁶ For a more complete explanation of what is meant by 'suchness', see <https://greendharmatreasury.org/2018/06/24/translating-suchness/>

unfamiliar with mantra meditation, or feel awkward with this type of practice, you could replace these sections with a short period of quiet reflective sitting.

Contemplating my teachers and ancestors, along with my human and non-human companions.

These lines allude to a contemplative practice called "Touching the Earth"⁷ or touching what I think of as the 'triple ground of being'. Each of us is inspired and encouraged by spiritual mentors and teachers; beings who have helped inform our patterns of thinking about the world and our attitudes to living, in ways that are uplifting and supportive. We are expressions of an immense river of evolving ancestral talents in the form of genes, metabolic pathways, physiology and cultural tendencies. We are embedded in a vast planet wide ecology – a biosphere in process. By taking time to reflect on this our sense of inter-beingness will enlarge. Everything is profoundly interconnected through myriad domains and dimensions of being. We are all in this together and so, on behalf of all of us, "I take refuge".

I realise refuge. I go for refuge. I find my refuge. I recognise refuge. I take refuge. These are different ways of hinting at the same mystery.⁸ In Buddhism the word 'refuge' refers to a quality or mode of being in

⁷ For a full description of Touching the Earth, see <https://greendharmatreasury.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/touching-the-e-in-6-p-gdt.pdf>

⁸ Contemplative exploration of refuge is profound and transformative. For a detailed look into this practice you may find my book "[True Refuge](#)" to be helpful. Within it you will find not only an extensive examination of what is meant by refuge but you will find many alternate verses that may help you find your way home.

which we feel profoundly complete and utterly at home. True refuge implies good functioning. It is a space in which we can feel both welcomed and welcoming – a place of multi-levelled thriving and belonging.

I take refuge in Buddha;
pure and total presence.
I take refuge in Dharma;
love, compassion and clear seeing deepening everywhere.
I take refuge in Sangha;
the diverse ecology of bodhisattva activity.

Buddha => Refer to preceding pages 7 and 8.

Dharma => has a number of meanings; for example, spiritual teaching, truth, phenomena and thing. In a broad sense, *dhar* is a Sanskrit root of the verb 'to hold' and *ma*, in many languages, is 'mother'. Together, *dhar-ma* is that which mothers and holds us. It is also the activity of mothering and supporting others.

Sangha => means community and in particular refers to the community of dharma practitioners.

If the words Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are not particularly meaningful for you, you could leave them out. Instead, while appreciating yourself as a continuously transforming embodiment of the triple ground of being, contemplate each moment of living as a dancing of pure and total presence. With love, compassion and clear seeing, feel yourself and all beings as an immeasurable flow of collaborative interdependent awakening. Then, in faith and trust and

wonderment, release into the embrace of the unfolding community of all life.

Through actively cultivating the six parami,⁹ (generosity, wholesome relating, patience, skilled use of effort, a continuity of caring and enquiry, and profound understanding)

the six parami => In Mahayana buddhism, the six parami – often referred to as the six perfections – are considered to summarise the essential spiritual path for all awakening beings – bodhisattvas. These encompass what this refuge prayer calls the "diverse ecology of bodhisattva activity". For most people, the six are initially cultivated in a roughly sequential order. As we become more and more familiar with them, they merge into each other, together forming a seamless whole.

A generous spirit tends to support wholesome relationships. With less conflict between ourselves and others, patience arises in a spontaneous unforced way. Grounded in giving, wholesome relating and patience, we are better able to skilfully apply what are called the four great efforts; to recognise any presently arising unwholesome trends, to diminish and eventually let go of them, to recognise presently arising wholesome trends or activities, and to nourish them and invite them to grow. With the first four parami somewhat active in our living, then we can begin to effectively cultivate the discipline of meditation. Essentially this involves encouraging a continuity of caring and wide

⁹ The six parami could be thought of as six avenues for perfecting one's skill in wise, compassionate living.

open enquiry in the midst of whatever we are doing. Increasingly well integrated, these five parami will lead to the sixth which is wisdom – a profound understanding of the immeasurable inter-being and inter-becoming nature of everything and everyone.

May I be the Sangha,
practising Dharma,
realising the innate Buddha mind
for the wellbeing of everyone.

May I be the diverse ecology of bodhisattva activity, practicing love, compassion and clear seeing deepening everywhere, realising pure and total presence, for the wellbeing of everyone.

Reflecting on Bodhicitta

Supported by the confidence, well-being, and natural humbleness, that arises from tasting the experiential heart/core intent of refuge, we now sense a deeply pervasive stirring of aspiration. Something is flowering, growing, awakening; something both viscerally powerful and, at the same time, utterly ineffable.

In the timeless presence of Buddha-Mind-Nature-unfolding, actively cultivating wisdom and compassion, for the sake of all living beings, I am determined to realise the heart essence of Buddha Amitabha, the joyous flowering of immeasurable love and understanding.

Bodhicitta => is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism yet the English language has no single word to encompass it. *Bodhi* can be

translated as awakening or unfolding or flowering. Think of a slow motion movie of a budding leaf or an opening flower. Bodhi hints at a multi-realmed continuously fluid flowering process, beautiful, fecund, and pregnant with mystery. *Citta* means mind, heart, state of mind and intent. When we say that we will do something with all our heart, we are implying that we will do it with clear intent; with focus and skill and delicacy and exquisite attentiveness. Together, bodhi and citta become bodhicitta – the heart/mind/intent of awakening.

Bodhicitta is simultaneously obvious and elusive. In its obvious mode it is called '*relative bodhicitta*' and it refers to the evolving process of the manifest world of relativity. Here every object and phenomena is interconnected. Every shift or change reflects shifts and changes in everything else. This is the graspable face of bodhicitta, a dancing of collaborative form, "compassion's play unceasing, working in space like rainbows meeting".¹⁰ Relative bodhicitta is the energy of compassion, of caring for and nurturing the continuously unfolding ecology of inter-being.

In its elusive mode, it is referred to as '*absolute bodhicitta*'. It is absolute in the sense that it can't be dissolved into, or reduced to, separate fundamental parts. Life, in its full mystery, works as a functioning whole, yet in a world of dynamic inter-dependency the whole of what is going on is elusive, un-pin-downable and empty of being either this or that. This empty nature, *sunyata* (Skt.) could be described as the 'spacious openness of inter-being'. To experience this with confidence

¹⁰ From the Sadhana of Guru Rinpoche

in the midst of living skilfully in the world is considered to be wisdom in action – absolute bodhicitta.

The union of relative and absolute bodhicitta is essentially the seamless expression of wisdom~compassion-in-action. In its most basic form, bodhicitta is the aspiration to awaken in, to and through, wisdom and compassion, for the sake of all beings.

Contemplating the True Nature of Being

Energised by the preceding reflections on refuge and aspiration, we now deepen our investigation of our presently arising body of experience, this fullness of inter-being that we are. In Tibetan teachings these contemplative investigations into the true nature of being would sometimes be referred to as 'developing sacred outlook'.

Opening wide the doors of responsive awareness and heartfelt empathy, lovingly and discerningly examine the environment, both within and around you.

Begin by sitting in an easeful and relaxed manner, and inviting a tremendous sense of openness to whatever is happening in the world around you, and simultaneously, to what is happening within you.¹¹

¹¹ People today often associate meditation with the physical posture of sitting. This is a result of confusing metaphor with intent. Conventionally speaking, we could sit on a chair or a cushion but in the context of meditation, we are sitting down into the fullness of living that we are. In this sense we could 'sit' while walking, standing or lying down. To sit down into the fullness of living that we are, is to relax into it, to soften into it, to let go into it, to release into it. This is the correct posture for meditation.

Breathing attentively.
Softening and releasing . . . again and again.

Allow a tactile kinaesthetic appreciation of the textures and rhythms of your breathing to be a support throughout this enquiry. If you experience areas of physical tension, invite a softening and releasing. Open your senses – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. We exist as a multi-domained and multi-dimensional dancing of responsiveness; us changing in response to the world and the world changing in response to us. Physiology responding to changing feelings and emotions. Feelings and emotions responding to changing physiology. Perception changing in response to conceptualising or thinking. Conception changing in response to perception. Opening the doors of responsive awareness and heartfelt empathy we lovingly and discerningly examine the environment, both within and around us. Sitting this way could be thought of as fundamental practice.

This presently arising miracle of your existence,

Throughout the sadhana, the word 'this' is used to remind us to look around and to embrace all that is happening in the very midst of doing this practice. This actual, in-your-hand and in-your-mind moment of here and now, is not a general category. It is the unique alive dancing of living in all its fullness that you are and that includes you breathing and reading these words.

. . . this living world, just as it is – in all its ripening fullness – this is the Buddha realm, a pure land; the divine abode of Deva Chen;

Meditations on Amitabha are often associated with what traditionally became known as the 'Pure-land School' of Mahayana Buddhism. Common to these teachings is a belief that there are innumerable Buddhas throughout the universe and that each of them, through the radiance of their presence, creates what is called a 'Pure-land'. You could think of Amitabha's Pure-land as a place or domain or foundation of beingness that is particularly conducive for awakening the healing power of love and the experiential realisation of profound peace.

In western culture, the word purity or pure is often linked with ideas of being virtuous, good, un-tainted or un-spoiled, but there is another thread of meaning that might give us some fresh insight into 'purity'. If you read the label on a jar of organic peanut butter, it may say something like, "Pure Peanut Butter – 100% peanuts – no additives." In this sense 'pure' means 100% – nothing added and nothing taken away. From this perspective, a thing is pure in that it is completely what it is in all its relational fullness.

Cosmologist, Carl Sagan hinted at this when he reputedly quipped that "to make a cherry pie from scratch, you would first of all have to make a universe". In a similar way, to make this current moment of you reading this essay, one would first of all have to make a universe. Deep, multi-levelled seeing/appreciation will reveal that both where we are, and what we are, involves the dancing of the entire universe. It takes the inter-beingness of the everything to make it what it is. In this sense, purity is a state of radical inclusivity, a breadth of being that encompasses everything and everyone. The term 'pure-land'

refers to this open dimension of understanding. A modern equivalent of this is sometimes revealed through the lens of living systems biology.

The pure-land or dwelling place associated with Amitabha is called *Devachen*. *Deva* means radiance and *chen* means great or magnanimous. Devachen is a 'place' or, perhaps we should say, a domain of lived experience characterised by luminous understanding – a place of magnanimous understanding and great happiness. A not uncommon Buddhist belief is that if one prays to Buddha Amitabha during one's life, then after death, one will be reborn in Devachen where all the conditions are optimal for awakening. It is possible, however, to approach this practice in a very deep way without needing to have any belief in rebirth or reincarnation.

Mythologically, *Devachen* (Tib.) or *Sukhavati* (Skt.) is said to be located in the west and is sometimes referred to as the 'Western Paradise'. Here, the journey of the sun is equated to the journey of the bodhisattva – a pilgrim of awakening. It rises in the east with birth and the learnings of childhood and youth. At midday the adult power and capacities of good qualities are active and strong. As it sets in the west there can come a sense of profound integration – an appreciation of life completeness with nothing more to be done. The light of our understanding, – conscious awareness – gently merges with the darkness of "the cloud of unknowing" – nonconscious awareness – thus we enter the pure land. We let go of all efforts and rest in pristine openness; a state of profoundly nourishing ease suffused with serene alertness and vivid discernment. Everything is embraced, everything

is a valued participant: knowing and not-knowing, self and other, graspable and ungraspable. Amitabha, immeasurable love and clear seeing, is the path and the realisation, the practice and the fruit. With this understanding, the western paradise is already here and now.

The tendency to associate Amitabha with death and rebirth perhaps originated in a confusing of fact and metaphor. Consider the possibility that what is being profoundly addressed is the death of one's opinion fuelled sense of separation, which occurs with a simultaneous birth of realised wholeness or fullness. Whether we call it mind-fullness or heart-fullness, in the end there is beyond words fullness, wholeness, completeness. This is *samma* (Pali) the summit, the highest, the wholeness of the Buddha's Eight-fold Path where the path is the realisation and the realisation is the path. This is Mahamudra. This is Zen. This is why great Chan masters of ancient China could take up Pure-land practice after a fruitful life of Zen. To be the pure land – the immeasurable expanse of responsive knowing in the act of realising itself – this is the practice of Amitabha.

In New Zealand, the winter solstice is referred to with the Maori word, '*matariki*'. This is a very important time of the year for Maori and is increasingly celebrated by all New Zealanders. Imagine your life is sinking into utter darkness; 'the valley of the shadow of death'. We each have our individual experience of this; sickness, depression, grief, loss of vision, grasping, anger, jealousy, pride etc. Then in the midst of this, a glow of red on the horizon, a possibility, a hint of coming dawn – the beginning of looking deeply and increasingly recognising

the immeasurableness of everything and everyone. This is the dawning of Buddha Amitabha.

The sadhana text goes on to illustrate possible understandings of Pureland by enumerating various overlapping facets of Devachen. Keep in mind that this is mythic poetry; evocative hints, dancings of possibility of what we are and what we might be. It is not an analytical explanation, an exercise of detached logos. Having invoked a spacious open state, allow these words to resonate deep empathies and subtle understandings, linkages that help to make sense of everything, knitting together inner and outer, self and other, mundane and sacred.

– a mirror-like dancing of radiance,

I remember as children we used to play what felt like an intriguing game. I suspect that was because it unintentionally opened some doors of appreciation for this profound mirror-like wisdom quality of life. Standing in front of each other, we would take turns 'mirroring' the movements of the other. I would copy you while simultaneously you would copy me. Each of our movements was uniquely different yet at the same time, excitingly similar – a visceral pleasure of intimate coordination. A number of years ago, inspired by this memory I began to explore an exercise I called "Finger Dancing".¹² You might like to give it a go and allow the joy and pleasure of inter-knowing movement to teach you directly without words and verbal concepts.

– a multi-dimensional weaving of responsive knowing,

¹² You can read more about Finger Dancing here. <https://greendharmatreasury.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/finger-dancing1.pdf>

Responsive knowing encompasses so much more than we usually think. Even seemingly simple acts such as standing up or sitting down involve a dancing of relational knowing happening through myriad domains and dimensions. From micro to macro, there are countless inter-dependent domains of knowing: metabolic knowing, synaptic knowing, skeletal muscular knowing; a symphony of corporeal knowing. All of these together comprise a pre-verbal silent symphony playing day and night, continuously underpinning and enabling all one's conceptual, verbal and social knowing. Organisms know other organisms – a vast ecology of life and living. We exist as oceans of knowing. Volumes of sentience. Knowings within knowings, knowing knowings.

– a realm of clear discrimination and immeasurable love,

To discriminate is to register difference, to discern this from that. All knowing involves discrimination: inside and outside, self and other, edible and toxic. This atom will covalently bond only with other atoms of particular types. This molecule will couple with that one but only when the temperature is right. This shade of green is darker than that shade of green. This is heavier, louder, or more pungent than that. Our immune system discriminates between cells that are part of us and cells that come from outside ourselves.

Love is the readiness to meet another as they are, in all their fullness. Biologist Humberto Maturana defined love as "the capacity to accept the legitimacy of another co-existing with oneself".¹³ To love another

¹³ *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love*, Humberto Maturana Romesin and Gerda Verden-Zoller, translated and edited by Pille-Bunnell, 2008.

involves discriminating what is unique and special about them. To discriminate requires that we be open and generous enough to appreciate difference. Seen this way, discrimination and love merge as inseparable union.

– a manifesting of lucid discernment and all-embracing openness.

Lucid discernment reveals a world of detail and form. All-embracing openness is a hint at the inner meaning of *sunyata*, the ungraspable spacious openness of inter-being.¹⁴ Our understanding of this complex inter-being nature of life can be greatly enhanced by cultivating what I have come to think of as the art of translucencing. Here we learn to relax into an appreciation of the myriad domains and dimensions of living process. Each object of our attention becomes translucent to our understanding revealing many flowings of inter-dependent process taking place in and through each other, all together forming a dynamic integrated whole. This is a huge exploration that I have outlined in many of my other writings. The following poem gives a hint. I called it, "Bottom Walking"¹⁵

*Birds and fish swim through their medium,
but I am a bottom walker,
stirring the life-tracks of other bottom walkers*

¹⁴ Sunyata is most often translated as 'emptiness' but given our modern association of emptiness with meaninglessness and vacuity, I have come to feel that the 'spacious openness of inter-being' is a more helpful phrase.

¹⁵ Written Jan 29, 2012; Orgyen Hermitage, NZ.

*and leaving rhythmic marks
that scribe a story of my going.*

*This knowing,
 which is my going,
also walks upon bottoms,
 slipping down through understandings
too ethereal to support,
 till, sinking no further,
is stopped by densities too viscous to penetrate.*

*We call these surfaces truth,
 and here, and now.
And they become the virtual-walls of our worlds,
 declarations of property for others to see.*

*I enter a wondering about the knowing
 of fishes and birds,
I wonder about weightlessness and neutral buoyancy,
 and realms interpenetrating realms.
And in that breadth of wondering,
 I leap from the bottom
into a spaciousness both soft and vast.*

*Or perhaps I should say
 the bottom simply drops away
or transluscentises into a shimmering gel,
 an interwoven surface/space/knowing
that is strangely familiar*

*and wrapped all around,
and filled with textures, smells and movement.*

*Revelling in surfaces,
Yearning to swim,
Our minds discover flight.*

The Pure-land of Amitabha is neither a transcendent dimension of being nor a cultural myth. It is a metaphor pointing to a wondrously integrated vision of the living world that is all around you – that is you.

This vibrant ecology of being and becoming, this inseparable dancing of knowing and known, this living world within and around you, this unbroken wholeness, this dynamic weaving of all of us together, this is the actual Pure Land of Amitabha.

Here, with care filled examination, the ordinary is seen as extraordinary, and the extraordinary is seen as ordinary. This is the inter-being world of all of us – a re-enchantment of the world which can come through reverential wonderment, passionate enquiry and love.

OM SVABHAVA SUDDHA SARVA DHARMA

SVABHAVA SUDDHO' HAM

(In their true nature, all phenomena are intrinsically pure.)

As you recite this mantra, rest ever more deeply into the true nature of being. Breathing with it. Smiling with it. In their true inter-being ~ inter-knowing nature, all phenomena are intrinsically pure and worthy of exploration.

The Yoga of Skilful Fabrication

In this section we engage in a yoga or disciplined practice of creative imagination that involves both perception and conception. Think of it as an experimental exploration into what we and the universe could be. Let me try to illustrate what I mean.

If I asked you to bring to mind someone you dearly love, I think that you would experience more than just a visual image of that being. You would feel a shift throughout your entire organism; tensions and relaxations, your digestion would change, the way you use your five senses, your expectations, your memories, your physical readiness for action, all of these would take on a particular tone just by thinking of this person. Conversely, if you were to imagine unexpectedly bumping into someone you strongly dislike or fear, your entire way of being would shift in a very different way than it did when imaging someone you love. In this section of the sadhana we are exploring the possibilities of intentionally, skilfully, nudging our experience in a direction that is profoundly healing. In Japanese Zen, this approach is referred to as *jiriki* or 'self-powered'. We are participants; not merely passive victims of circumstance.

Although this type of meditation is often referred to as visualisation practice it might be better to think of it as sensualisation. In it we train ourselves not merely to 'see' an image of Amitabha, but to hear, feel, taste, smell, understand and intuit Amitabha; to fully sense a radiant presence of appreciative understanding and love.

Try embracing this practice as if it were an invitation to experiment – a playful exercise in being or becoming radiant – a hint in mythic or imaginal language as to the feeling quality of being/living a manifestation of immeasurable lightness and love.

Within the ever fresh continuity of your own embodied knowing, appears a precious throne, from which is flowering a radiant rose-pink lotus.

Throne => stability of understanding, foundation, the ground of being. The throne of all buddhas is *sunyata*, the ungraspable, un-pin-downableness of being – a unity of form and emptiness. The throne symbolises all the good qualities and realisations upon which buddha realisation rests. In some sadhanas the throne is a lion throne. The lion was seen as a solitary, fearless, powerful king of beasts and hence courageous.

Within the creative continuum of your own embodied knowing – the web-working of relationships that you are – emerges a sense of unshakable stability, unshakable *samatha*, a quality of profoundly easeful abiding. This is the stable throne or foundation upon which one can 'sit'.

Rose-pink lotus => A lotus often grows in stagnant waters and its flower blossoms on a stalk above the swamp. Swamp mud is the chaos of what Buddhists call *samsara* – a social world dominated by acquisitiveness, defensiveness, one-up-manship and ego gratification.

The lotus is the flowering of clarity and discrimination. The rose-pink colour indicates warmth, gentleness, caring, full acceptance and

unconditional love. Seamlessly merged, the rose-pink lotus is an expression of great beauty. This flowering of indescribable beauty and love are essential qualities flowing from the presence of clear, discerning appreciative understanding, *vipassana*. Together, lotus and throne represent a precious dynamic stability of beauty unfolding.

Resting within the lotus is a magnificent sun-moon cushion.

In the midst of this stability of *samatha/vipassana* is the life giving dancing of duality; the yin yang of wholeness and part, absolute and relative, male and female, creative and passive; the seat of life unfolding both fiery-radiant and serene.

Sun-moon cushion => the sun of wisdom and the moon of one's insight or experience of wisdom; the sun of absolute bodhicitta and the moon of relative bodhicitta.¹⁶ The astronomical sun is the primary energy source and substance of the biosphere – all bodies are ultimately transformed solar radiation – hence it represents the body of suchness, absolute bodhicitta. The moon reflects the light of the sun at night. When we can't see the body of suchness, the moon which symbolises relative bodhicitta, compassion and practice of liberation along with the bodhisattva path of the six perfections, is what lights our way in the night darkness of partial viewing and confused perception. Together, the sun-moon points to one completely integrated dharma or truth. Some people see the sun, others see the moon. These are two ways of seeing the same thing, filtered through the screens of one's understanding.

¹⁶ See p. 17 – 19

Seated upon this cushion is the glorious Buddha Amitabha, red in colour, with two hands and one face, legs enfolded in the vajra posture, and hands in the mudra of meditative equipoise, holding an alms bowl filled with the nectar of immortality.

Buddha Amitabha => 'the joyous flowering of boundless universal love and illumined clarity' You might find it helpful to imagine that Amitabha is sitting directly in front of you so that your knees almost touching – as if you were sitting in front of a mirror but instead of seeing a familiar reflection of yourself, you see Amitabha.

Red => warm, friendly, strong, radiating vitality, utterly grounded.

Two hands => *prajna* (wisdom) and *upaya* (skilful means, compassion)

One face => *dharmakaya* (body of truth, reality or suchness; the unbroken wholeness of totality)

Legs => the means by which one walks the path of life. One leg is wisdom and one leg is compassion.

Vajra posture => Outwardly, this is the full lotus posture, a very stable cross-legged way of sitting practised in traditions of hatha yoga. Inwardly, the vajra posture is a living presence of utter groundedness and strength – a confidence of being unshakeably at one with reality.

An alms bowl filled with the nectar of immortality => Traditionally buddhist monks rely on the generosity of the lay community for the food, clothing, medicine and shelter needed to support life. The monks would receive this *dana*, these gifts of support, in a round dana or alms

bowl which could also serve as an eating utensil. Amitabha holds an alms bowl containing the nectar of immortality sometimes referred to as *amrita* or ambrosia => the deathless, no beginning no end, nirvana, the nectar of thusness; the whole of reality – just as it is; the continuous coming / going / being of everything.

We live in and as the alms bowl of Amitabha

receptive openness

receiving the gifts of life.

The surrounding horizon of knowing is the bowl rim.

The nectar within is the beginningless endless

dancing of living and dying.

We are both bowl and contents,

cradled at the abdomen,

wombs of immeasurable love and clear seeing,

this suchness;

this mystery,

blessed.

The text then fills in more detail by describing particular qualities of the body, speech, mind, essence and expression of Amitabha.

The body of Amitabha displays all the major signs and minor marks of a fully enlightened being and is adorned with the robes of a monastic.

Major and minor signs => The body referred to here is not a mere anatomical object. A body is a collective, a collaboration of interdependent participants. Think of a body of knowledge, a body of

experience or even a body politic. Although there are ancient Buddhist texts that list these major and minor signs in terms of often unlikely sounding anatomical features, I suggest you think about this in a more ordinary fashion.

Consider the physical body of a person with a history of alcoholism, physical abuse and chronic mistrust. These experiences would be reflected in how they look; for example, their posture, their way of moving through the world, the texture of their skin, the way they use their eyes, and so forth. In a similar but positive way, the form body of Amitabha exhibits an over all beauty that is a balanced integration of myriad positive qualities – 'major and minor signs' – qualities such as attentiveness, empathy, compassion, faith, trust, wonderment, acceptance, interest, enquiry, appreciative understanding, patience, generosity and so forth. According to your background and way of understanding the world, you will see different major and minor signs.

Robes => In ancient times a monk would wear three robes. In this sadhana, the three robes represent three vehicles or levels of teaching: hinayana, mahayana and vajrayana. Together they demonstrate skilful means in ekayana – the vehicle of oneness or samayana – the total vehicle which is based on the unbroken wholeness of totality and the integrated and inclusive approach to realising this.¹⁷

¹⁷ "Seeing, hearing, reading and reciting are the small vehicle; understanding the teachings and solving the meanings is the middling vehicle; cultivating conduct in accord with the teaching is the great vehicle. Penetrating the truths, encompassing all realities, undefiled by everything, detached from the appearance of all things, not grasping anything at all, is called the supreme vehicle." Hui Neng, *The Platform Sutra*, translated by Thomas Cleary

Monastic => gelong or gelongma, a fully ordained monk or nun; literally, 'one who is free to ask question'¹⁸

The speech of Amitabha resounds with myriad qualities of excellence.

Qualities of excellence => Speech involves both speaking and listening. In a sense the qualities of excellence are similar to the major and minor signs; to listen deeply and to speak truthfully; in short, to communicate in a skilful and compassionate manner.

Buddhist texts convey various lists of these excellent qualities. One such list describes the voice of Amitabha as being:

"Gentle, soft, appealing and attractive,
Pure, flawless, distinct and captivating,
Worthy, indomitable, pleasant, melodious and clear,
Not rough, not coarse and extremely pleasing to hear,
Satisfying and delightful for body and mind,
Creating happiness, without sorrow while instigating insight,
Comprehensible, elucidating, and generating joy,
Utterly satisfying, bringing comprehension and full understanding,
Reasonable, relevant, and free from the fault of repetition,
Melodious like the sound of the lion, the elephant, and the dragon,
like the naga king, the gandharvas, and the kalapinga bird,

¹⁸ For a modern glimpse into the meaning of robes, see "Taking Robes" <https://greendharmatreasury.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/taking-robes.pdf>

For further explanation of the terms hinayana, mahayana, vajrayana, refer to "Foundations of Mindfulness", pages 8 and 15 <https://greendharmatreasury.files.wordpress.com/2019/09/foundations-of-mindfulness-gdt.pdf>

like the voice of Brahma, and the shangshang bird,
Majestic like the voice of the drum of Indra,
Not boastful, yet pervading all sounds with truth,
Without corruption of too many words, without incompleteness,
Not feeble, not weak, extremely magnificent,
Pervasive and free from rigidity,
Connecting, without interruption,
Satisfying to the senses, not inferior, and unchanging,
Not blurring but fully resounding to the assembly
Endowed with the supreme of all aspects,
He teaches in the manner of the profound and vast teaching."¹⁹

The mind of Amitabha displays the wisdom of simultaneously understanding the infinite diversity and the profound unity, of all that exists.

Think of mind as a field or expanse of knowing. In this sense, we don't so much have a mind as we are a mind – minding in action.

In essence, Amitabha is the innate bodhi mind.

Bodhi mind => bodhicitta; sunyata => the ungraspable union of wisdom and compassion

In expression, the union of clear discernment and boundless lovingkindness.

Sitting, ablaze with wisdom light, surrounded by countless Buddhas, bodhisattvas and radiant beings, gazing with

¹⁹ There are many such lists. I was unable to find the original source of this particular quote but it will give you a sense of the range of enlightened speech being considered.

compassion on all sentient beings in every dimension of existence, Amitabha is the essential heart reality of each guru, yidam, Buddha, bodhisattva and dharma protector of every lineage and tradition of awakening.

Sentient being => Sentient derives from *sentire*, to feel. Sentient being can refer to any living creature, a feeling being, a sensing being, a responsive being.

Meditators can sometimes fall into the trap of sectarianism, revering their particular lineages of teachers and guides while undervaluing teachings and teachers of other traditions. This sadhana has emerged from an ecumenical practice of Buddhism that honours all schools and traditions. To clearly acknowledge this universalist spirit of inclusivity and to make the practice accessible to everyone, the text emphasises that "Amitabha is the essential heart reality of each guru, yidam, Buddha, bodhisattva and dharma protector of every lineage and tradition of awakening." – in other words, Amitabha – immeasurable love and clear seeing – is the core, pith or essential reality/truth of all greatly realised beings.

guru => refers to dharma teachers.

yidam => is a Tibetan word referring to archetypal radiant figures that serve as inner personal guides.

buddha => manifestations of profound realisation.

bodhisattva => beings dedicating their lives to cultivating wisdom and compassion for the sake of everything and everyone.

dharmaprotector => fierce and sometimes challenging elements of life that serve to move us into a flow of living that is supportive of all life.

Sevenfold Prayer

Imagine yourself and all beings offering gestures of profound respect to the Buddha Amitabha and all the surrounding radiant beings. Then enter the seven-fold contemplation of Samantabhadra.

The seven-fold prayer or, as I like to think of it, the seven-fold contemplation of Samantabhadra, probably first appeared in sixth century China, in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* – The Flower Ornament Sutra²⁰ – where it is part of a very extensive aspiration prayer/vow made by a great bodhisattva named Samantabhadra. Today, depending on tradition, it is found in a variety of different forms. Prayer often carries a sense of wishing for something to happen in the future but these contemplations involve much more than pious wishing. Having cultivated a vibrant sense of being in the presence of Buddha Amitabha, the seven contemplations further broaden our vision and understanding of interdependent life to include all beings, everywhere. Practiced sequentially, these disciplines draw us into a deepening and expanding experience of skilful action in the world. In this way, the seven-fold contemplation is a practice of profound yoga – a way of

²⁰ *The Avatamsaka Sutra* could be thought of as a very comprehensive instruction manual for bodhisattvas. It describes the path of awakening in such an inspiringly universal and thoroughly inclusive way that it has provided a textual foundation for most, if not all of the schools and traditions of Mahayana Buddhism that exist in the world today. It has been skilfully translated by Thomas Cleary and is available from Shambala Publications.

being in and with the world that is utterly in tune with our growing intuition of wholeness-in-process.

1 – Reverencing the Infinite Realm of Awakening

To all the Tathagatas, however they appear in the immeasurable expanse of space and time; to each and every one of them, with body, speech and mind, I bow with great sincerity and respect.

The historical Buddha did not use the pronoun 'I' when referring to himself. Attempting to be more accurate in what he was saying he used the word *tathagata*. *Tatha* means 'such' or 'thus'. *Ga* derives from the verb *gate* which means to come, to go and to be. I sometimes wish we had a similar single term in English that can remind us of the truth that every 'coming', from another perspective, is a 'going' and that all acts of 'being' are themselves composed of dynamic coming~going process. In a general sense the *ga* indicates movement. The suffix *ta* indicates 'ness'. Put together, *tathagata* could be translated as 'thus moving one', 'one moving as thusness or suchness', or 'suchness moving'.²¹

Tathagata is often capitalised and used exclusively to indicate a fully awakened Buddha. However, I don't think that the Buddha was trying to claim anything special for himself. He looked deeply into the mystery of his living and saw suchness moving. Every living being is *tathagata* – an unfathomable mystery of inter-becoming. Of course, not everyone realises this. A closely related term is *tathagatagarbha*. *Garbha*

²¹ For a more on 'suchness'; <https://greendharmatreasury.org/2018/06/24/translating-suchness/>

means womb or seed, and so tathagatagarbha could be thought of as a gestating tathagata realisation. In this sense all beings are either tathagata or tathagatagarbha. Through this practice of "reverencing the infinite realm of awakening", we strengthen this understanding. Awakening is everywhere we look. Everyone we meet is suchness-in-action. Can we honour this? Can we train ourselves to see each and every being this way?

For many people today the idea of bowing is archaic and overly formal. We are unlikely to bow to everyone we meet and if we did we would probably be regarded as strange and quirky. To bow with integrity, we probably need to look at this in a fresh way. Consider a dandelion flower. It continuously turns towards the light, changing its 'posture' – the direction and angle of its 'bow' – following the sun as it moves through the day. In this sense, to bow is to give all of our attention to what we are doing and to whom we are meeting. Explore the tactile kinaesthetic sensations that arise in your organism when you do this. Our entire being leans into the encounter: our eyes and ears, our sensitivity, our thinking, our feeling and empathising – all of me present with and for all of you. And so, we bow with great sincerity and respect.

By the power of this prayer of profoundly inclusive activity,

By the power of this practice of profoundly inclusive attentive engagement . . .

. . . bowing with as many bodies as atoms in the myriad fields of awakening, in the presence of all the Enlightened

Ones, manifest in my mind, I fully honour and revere the Victorious Ones.

In the act of appreciating the tathagata-nature of whoever we are meeting and giving them our sincere attention, each one of us is already an inter-being of 'many bodies', many integrated collectives. We are collaborations of atoms, molecules, cells, tissues, organs, feelings, attitudes, social and cultural bodies of knowing and being. We are symbiosings of complex gatherings, and through this continuously evolving activity, our current body of experience is brought forth. Each one of us is composed of myriad fields of awakening process. Each participant, at every level of being, is reflecting the activities of all the other participants, like an infinite hall of moving mirrors; minds shaping minds, knowing shaping knowing, worlds interpenetrating worlds without obstruction.

Victorious Ones => an epithet for buddhas or tathagatas.

Around each single atom, there are as many Buddhas as atoms seated in the midst of their countless spiritual sons and daughters and so I imagine the immeasurable realms of dharma as filled with myriad radiant beings; victorious in the flow of awakening.

The word atom is being used in its original sense of 'not dividable'. It is referring to the basic building blocks of any particular domain of existence. From this perspective, a human being is one atom of a human society. A cell is an atom of a multi-celled organism. A molecule is an atom of a cell. Individual elements of the periodic table are atoms of molecules. Strangely, sub-atomic entities are atoms of

'atoms'. Essentially, depending on the frame of reference, an atom can be any being or phenomena of interest. If we look deeply into them we will find that they are composed of myriad other interacting beings and processes, which themselves are composed of interacting beings and processes. Mysteriously, in the midst of all this whirling, the being or phenomena of interest remains for a time, in our view. Experiencing thus, we find that this ordinary world is in fact an immeasurable dancing of change and transformation.

spiritual sons and daughters => bodhisattvas; beings in the process of awakening and cultivating skill in supporting the awakening of others.

This paragraph is pointing to what might be thought of as mandala practice, a flow chart of life in its fullness. In the centre is the primary person or object of interest – a tathagata or tathagatagarbha. Surrounding them are other beings who in one way or another have contributed to this being's existence. You could visualise concentric rings or spheres of contributing factors: historical, physical, environmental, social, conceptual and so forth. Each being could themselves be the centre of attention in which case the original buddha in the centre would shift to the side and becomes a supportive factor. From this perspective, life is immeasurable, filled with radiant knowing, actively participating in this dance of awakening.

With unending oceans of praises for them all, with a symphony of wonder, appreciation and heartfelt reverence, I extol the Tathagata's virtues and sing hymns to all these Sugatas.

Sugata => is another way of referring to tathagatas, enlightened ones, or victorious ones. *Su* means auspicious, good or goodness; *gata*, as in tathagata, means coming, going, being; in other words moving. *Sugata* can literally mean; goodness moving, or moving in, as, or towards goodness.

2 – Releasing into the Vast Flow of Offering

As we learn to see and respect everyone and everything as tathagata, we increasingly realise that through their sheer existence, each being, without doing anything in particular, is a continual outpouring of offering to the world. The question remains though, what exactly are we offering? Are we offering misery, fear, suspicion, anger, stupidity, selfishness and so forth. Or are we offering love and compassion and appreciative understanding? In this world of inter-being, the process of giving and receiving is not optional. Rather it is the fundamental dynamic of all life. Realising this, we begin to train ourselves to live in ways that uplift and sustain all beings.

Beautiful flowerings and networks of flowerings, easeful communication and the balm of healing presence, canopies of shelter and refuge, lamps of clear seeing and deep understanding, and the fragrance of love and wholesome relating, these I offer to all those manifestations of primordial ever-fresh awareness.

Traditionally this section would describe symbolic offerings such as you would find in Buddhist temples: beautiful flowers, garlands of flowers, precious parasols, fine cymbals, healing balms, radiant lamps, fragrant incense, exquisite apparel, sweet-smelling perfume, and jars

of scented powder piled high like a mountain.²² Essentially, these offerings represent qualities of living experience and so our manifesting them becomes a profound and meaningful offering to the world. Many of these offerings are self explanatory so I will only comment on some of them.

beautiful flowerings => Flowerings of perception and conception. In general, flowers represent mental factors or mental states, particularly the cultivation of wholesome qualities and the unfolding or flowering of knowledge/understanding.

networks of flowerings => linked networks of lived understanding.

canopies of shelter and refuge => physical and social structures that support a deepening sense of belonging, groundedness and well being.

With the clothing of harmonious thought forms and the exquisite perfume of devotion, with activities that beautify the body of manifestation and a measureless array of wonderfully inspiring qualities, I make offerings to these beings dwelling in the realm of spontaneous liberation.

clothing => In tantric symbology, clothing, often in the form of robes, often represents conceptual thought forms. Harmonious thought forms could be thought of as well integrated, non-conflicted thinking.

perfume => This symbolises devotion, in this case devotion to realising radically inclusive wholeness.

²² For more on the meaning of these offerings see <https://greendharmatreasury.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/yoga-of-eight-offerings-gdt.pdf>

activities that beautify => Beauty is an indication of functional attunement or harmony.

Offerings, incomparable and vast, continuously arising in the spacious play of my own knowing, I joyfully offer to all Awakening Ones. By the power of my faith in wholesome activity, I bow to and pay respects to all these Victorious Ones.

Releasing into the vast flow of offering we give all that we have and all that we are to support the unfolding of beings, wherever and whoever they are.

3 – Acknowledging One's Own Unwholesome Actions

Seeing the tathagata nature of all beings and embracing a life of profound generosity-in-action brings a refinement to our living that contrasts strongly with any unresolved habit patterns of negativity which may still surface from time to time. With the support gained through the wholesome practice of the preceding sections, we now have the strength and courage to acknowledge these difficult patterns and to learn from them.

Whatever unwholesome actions I have done, driven by compulsions such as desire, hatred, delusion and fear, whether by body, speech or mind; each one of these I thoroughly and openly acknowledge.

With heart/minds of generosity and deepening understanding, we revisit and reflect on any unwholesome actions – activities that have supported increased states of fragmentation and negativity – that we have initiated or engaged in. Held gently, with patience, forgiveness

and love, these states begin to soften and fade in the light of more deeply understanding our natural inter-being nature.

4 – Rejoicing in All Wholesome Actions

Having acknowledged our own unwholesome tendencies, we now cultivate *mudita*, empathic joy, by contemplating the wholesome activities of others.

Contemplating the inconceivable merit of the Awakened Ones in the ten directions, along with the merit of all Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, Sravakas, and all sentient beings, wherever they appear, in this vast ocean of life-affirming activity, I rejoice.

inconceivable merit => literally punya kamma, powerful activity; not in the sense of being able to damage or destroy, but in the sense of activity that it is inspiring and healing. "Inconceivable merit" could be thought of as a deepening disposition for creative goodness manifesting in an inconceivable number of ways. Consider human beings throughout the world and how everyone has engaged in spontaneous acts of life supporting generosity, kindness and love.

Buddhist eco-activist, Joanna Macy suggested a playful contemplation to contact the magnitude of this. Imagine as each wholesome act takes place, a unique and beautiful snowflake falls into the world. Each time a moment of generosity arises; a gift, a smile, an offering of wonderment, inspiration, encouragement, teaching or practical support, a beautiful snowflake gently descends upon the earth. Viewing the activities of living beings throughout the biosphere, such

moments are uncountable. In this fourth section of the prayer, we celebrate the beautiful life enhancing activities brought forth by buddhas – awakened ones, bodhisattvas – beings consciously cultivating the arts of wisdom and compassion for the sake of all beings, pratyekabuddhas – beings who have spontaneously awakened with very little obvious study or practice, sravakas – monks and nuns who are living a life of formal buddhist training – along with myriad other sentient beings of innumerable backgrounds and traditions. With wide open arms, we gently gather the flakes together into a huge radiant snowball and then we play with it, tossing it up into the air. Eventually it dissolves into us and we are filled with this uplifting love and inspiration.

5 – Entreaty to Turn the Wheel of Dharma
They who illumine all worlds of experience,

We could extend this to 'they who illumine all worlds of experience with the wisdom of true emptiness, *sunyata* – the wisdom of non-clinging realisation – the harmonious union of love and clear seeing'.

solid in their realisation of love and awareness in every situation and circumstance, protectors of life in all its abundance and mystery, I entreat you to turn the incomparable wheel of dharma.

In Buddhist traditions, when a wise being gives teaching, she or he is said to "turn the wheel of dharma". In teaching, such a being is offering the best of themselves; their presence, their understanding, their empathy, compassion, skill and so forth – in short, their most admirable qualities or talents. With the practice of this section we

actively cultivate situations and circumstances whereby the finest capacities in whoever we are meeting are invited to flower. Can we interact with others in ways that encourage their goodness to fully shine? This is entreating them to turn the wheel of dharma.

Looking deeply into any living being, we see that their very existence grows in and from the collective activity of the entire evolving universe, worlds of knowing inter-becoming with worlds of knowing. Each being has something wonderful and unique to offer to the world. Entreating them to turn the wheel of dharma is really to interact with them in ways that facilitates the flowering of their best talents and qualities.

6 – Request to Stay

Here we encourage bodhisattvas, including our bodhisattva selves, to continue to turn the wheel of dharma even when difficulties and challenges to do so become great. Have courage – keep going with the good work!

To those who would pass from sorrow, retreating from active engagement into a nirvana of inner peace, I fervently pray that for as many eons as there are atoms in all Buddha fields, you continue to inspire and teach in myriads ways, supporting the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings.

A life of helping others can from time to time feel overwhelming. Faced with what seems to be an inexhaustible ocean of need, caregivers often totter on the edge of burn-out. We might think about retiring, about changing our profession, and yet how can we retire from this

ever evolving inter-being of life unfolding that we are? Experienced yogis and meditators may think they have found an answer having developed varying degrees of ability to enter into blissfully detached states and to remain there, in some cases, for as long as they wish. This can appear as a seductive option. Faced with the immense amount of suffering in the world, it's not difficult to understand but it falls short of full realisation of love and clear seeing. It is still motivated by concern for one's own well being while neglecting the well-being of others. This "request to stay" is a reminder of something that we all know deep in the heart of our living. May we stay actively involved, actively engaged. We have no other life.

7 – Sharing the Merit

This is really a review of the six preceding practices while aspiring that these efforts be of benefit to all beings. Gradually this practice will shift from being an expression of wholesome aspiration to being a deepening confidence born from insight. Everything is interconnected. These wholesome activities immediately support the well being of everything and everyone.

May any virtue generated through this practice of reverencing, offering, acknowledging, rejoicing, entreating, and requesting, support the awakening of wisdom and compassion in all sentient beings.

Breathing Yoga

Having engaged with the practices outlined in the Seven-fold Prayer, and with a clear sense of being in the presence of Amitabha and countless surrounding buddhas and bodhisattvas, we strengthen this experience by linking it with the tactile/kinaesthetic sense of breathing. Now we touch a level of knowing that is visceral and intimate.

While exhaling, white light is exiting through your left nostril, entering through Amitabha's right nostril and thence descending to, and merging with, Amitabha's heart. Your mind and that of the Buddha become inseparable.

While inhaling, a white light issues from the heart of the Buddha, leaving through Amitabha's left nostril. It enters through your right nostril and is absorbed into your heart. Your mind (the ocean of knowing that is you) and the Buddha's mind (the ocean of knowing that is the Buddha) become utterly one and undivided.

White light => symbolises profound experiential clarity; clear discernment and incisive understanding; and spacious open non-linging awareness. The whiteness is hinting at purity, 100%-ness. When light is refracted through a prism, it reveals a spectrum of colours. In this practice the white light represents all the colours of life involvement – all the domains and dimensions of knowing which together are comprising our experience.

As you continue to breathe this way, all the surrounding Buddhas, bodhisattvas and radiant beings become absorbed into Amitabha. Amitabha is absorbed into you as simultaneously, you are absorbed into Amitabha. Thus one enters the samadhi of Buddha Amitabha.

Breathing in this manner while letting go into the inter-dependent inter-beingness of everything, the seeming multiplicity of oneself and Amitabha and all the surrounding radiant beings, reveals itself to be a dynamic play of unbroken wholeness; collaborating worlds within worlds; like water poured into water or light poured into light – an ocean of being and knowing.

Thus one enters the samadhi of Buddha Amitabha.

Samadhi => means absorption, concentration, stabilisation or unification – a harmonious inter-beingness of subject~object, inner~outer, self~other – a continuity of caring and enquiry. The syllable *sama*, closely related to *samma* (*Pali*), conveys a sense of completeness. *Dhi* carries a sense of firmness, solidity. Put together, samadhi literally means completely firm (in the midst of experience). Thus one enters, one realises, one fully experiences, one becomes absorbed in or one with the joyful budding of immeasurable understanding and love – Buddha Amitabha.

Now, begin to recite the mantra:

Throughout this section we link breathing with sound. Let the tactile-kinaesthetic texture of each inhalation be an invitation to deepen into this silent absorption/samadhi of Amitabha. Then, with each exhalation, quietly murmur the mantra, imagining that immeasurable light and love are streaming from your heart/mind, your core essence (*bodhicitta*), illuminating all living beings, revealing each and every one of them to be unique and precious embodiments of the body, speech and mind of Buddha Amitabha. When we meet others with deep

appreciative understanding we inevitably realise that they too are unfolding mysteries of immeasurable understanding and love.

OM AMITABHA HRIH SVAHA

This is the primary mantra for this sadhana. With the sound *OM*, we invoke a sense of totality or all-encompassing wholeness. With the sound *AMITABHA* we invoke the multiplicity of meanings that have been hinted at so far. In short, the *bha* part of Amitabha (from *obhasa*), refers to infinite or immeasurable light, immeasurable clarity, immeasurable experiential understanding of the non-finite nature/ reality of everyone and everything. With the *amita* part of Amitabha; we touch the quality of love; warm, responsive presence; or profound friendliness. *HRIH* is a syllable invoking the heart, core intent, the *bodhicitta* of sentient life. *SVAHA* means joyfully with it; *sva – ha!* In some traditions *svaha* is pronounced 'so-hah'.

OM AMI DEVA HRIH

This second mantra could be roughly translated, "within all-encompassing wholeness is the heart of radiant love".

If you are new to meditating with mantra and feel drawn to explore it, experiment with different approaches. You could simply speak the mantra as if you were talking to someone but that may feel like a distraction keeping you from going deeply into meditation. You could sing it or sound it, until you feel it reverberating throughout your body. You could murmur it so quietly that someone immediately beside you would not be able to discern the words yet you can sense each syllable running along like a flowing stream. Kalu Rinpoche, once suggested

that you should chant mantra as if you were having an intimate conversation with your shirt collar! Somedays you may not feel moved to work with the entire the sadhana but instead find it supportive to simply carry the mantra with you in the midst of whatever you are doing. Other days, working with mantra might feel overly contrived and you might focus more on a sense of breathing stillness/presence. Explore these possibilities. As you become more familiar with this way of meditating you will find that the sound of the mantra reverberating through your being will invoke and support the visualisation/experience, and vice versa.

The Yoga of Effortless Naturalness

Thus far in the sadhana, most of the explorations could be seen as being part of the yoga of skilful fabrication. With increasing confidence and competence we are learning to steadily nudge our experience towards a way of living that is thoroughly integrated and profoundly healing. These explorations are intentionally directed and require a degree of effort on the part of the meditator. As I mentioned earlier, in Japanese Zen practice, this type of work is referred to as *jiriki* or 'self-powered'.

As our skill and understanding in these practices matures and refines, even the most subtle efforts of fabrication reveal themselves to be grounded the beginningless endless expanse of suchness. Everything: our sense of self, the objects of our perception, our thoughts and feelings and understandings, emerges from this uncontrived play of ever-fresh responsive awareness – the process of a universe making itself known through each unique moment of living.

Even the sense of engaging in skilful fabrication is experienced as emerging spontaneously, naturally and without effort. Continuously learning and sharing as we go, we release into this 'buddha-ha-ha-ha-ing'. Like water poured into water, "we give ourselves to this suchness, this seamless mystery of birthing/dying". In Zen, such experience is termed *tariki*; 'other powered', 'universe powered' or 'totality powered'. I, the meditator as a separate entity, disappears and what remains is totality dancing. This is the yoga of effortless naturalness.

Finally, everything is experienced as the display of clear light; a play of luminous knowing and all embracing openness. Sunyata – beginningless, endless, effortless.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the ultimate dimension of experience is sometimes poetically referred to as the domain of clear light. Too often, yogis forget that this is a metaphoric hint and instead, find themselves meditatively seeking an experience of light as if it were equivalent to what we see coming from the sun or a lightbulb. When this happens, our experience, or as the yogi/scholar Longchenpa put it, "the natural way of abiding", is unwittingly transformed into a thing; an object to be seized and savoured. In this way, liberating lightness becomes dark and heavy.²³

The term clear light is sometimes expanded into the phrase 'the subtle mind of clear light' and is used to refer to the presence of luminous knowing and all embracing openness. This is the spacious openness of inter-being/inter-knowing. Ungraspable, un-pin-downable and

²³ See *The Precious Treasury of the Natural Way of Abiding* and *The Precious Treasury of the Scriptural Transmission* by Longchenpa, published by Padma Press

ultimately inconceivable; it is often said to be beyond words and description. It is the fullness of the mystery of living that we are.

Not a light,

but a lightness.

Not a place to come from or to go to

but the womb of all textures.

Not a this or a that

but beauty manifesting.

Not here or there

but thusness personifying.

Try to grasp it

and the grasping heavys, obscuring lightness.

Try to reason it

Why? Where? How? ... and the reasoning densifies.

Letting go and letting be,

completely relaxing within,

the lightness/knowing is apparent all over.²⁴

Within this seamless flow of ease and lucidity, this pristine 'just-as-it-is-ness', life ripens as profound peace, beyond all words and description.

²⁴ This poem emerged in 1999 while in retreat at the Wangapeka Study and Retreat Centre N.Z.

Everywhere we look and everything we know is a dancing of unbroken wholeness. Meditators first glimpse this as an arising moment of intuition; a co-emergent union of ease and lucidity, effortless naturalness and skilful fabrication, sublime understanding and love – inseparable facets of a single living wholeness. With ripening experience, this intuition gradually coalesces into a continuity of confident knowing. Lucid discernment of just-as-it-is-ness reveals a vitality of easeful presence – everything resting in its own place, the fullness of what it is. This is the union of wisdom and skilful means; the actual Pure Land of Amitabha – love and clear seeing, seamlessly inter-meshing.

Familiarise yourself with this state until it suffuses all the activities of your life.

For many people it may seem that this mode of experiencing is the ultimate destination of a life of spiritual endeavour. However, in the heart traditions of what might be called essence Zen, Mahamudra and Dzogchen, this way of seeing or experiencing is really just an initial taste of truly liberating meditation. Having finally recognised what meditation really is, we can now enter the real practice.

The Tibetan word for meditation is *goms*. This is more accurately and perhaps more usefully translated as 'familiarisation'. Again and again we approach and abide in and as this ultimately ungraspable, ever creative process of life unfolding. In a multitude of situations and circumstances, with deepening confidence and competence, we explore

the implications of such living, learning and transforming as we go.²⁵ Refining the art of resting as this seamless flow of ease and lucidity, this pristine 'just-as-it-is-ness', this continuous ever fresh immediacy, our lives ripen as profound peace, beyond all words and description. Here all experience becomes teacher. This is the ultimate practice of guru yoga.

*Resting in and as suchness;
softening, opening, embracing, letting be,
and in this flow of living-now,
we engage.*

Concluding Aspiration

When the time of death befalls
(either one's own death or the death of someone else):

In some long established Buddhist traditions, especially those of Pure-land, contemplating Amitabha is particularly valued at times of death and dying, either one's own death or the death of someone else. In terms of a religious practice, one might pray for the dying person – oneself or another – to be 'reborn' in the Pure-land. Such prayers can be heard today in temples and households around the world, enhanced with varying degrees of ritual, ranging from simply holding this

²⁵ "in a multitude of situations and circumstances"=> In other words, all the myriad experiences that constitute our particular daily living: working, playing, studying, engaging in dharma practice, preparing and eating food, raising children, caring for others, earning a living, waking up, going to sleep, being sick, living with restrictions such as prison or health issues, participating in birth, facing death. This stage of familiarisation (*goms*) extends into every aspect of our living, becoming increasingly clear, apparent and stable.

aspiration while repeating a few mantras, through to extensive ceremonies involving elaborate offerings in front of images of Amitabha or other revered figures. These practices rest on deeply assumed views and values of life and living. They imply a degree of belief in re-birth, along with accompanying dualistic assumptions that there is a someone or something to be re-born; and somewhere, in this case the pure land, in which to be re-born. For those endowed with faith in such a world, this form of practice can feel both strengthening and meaningful. Not everyone, however, will make sense of the world in this manner.

David Abram, in his book, *Becoming Animal*²⁶ coined a novel phrase to indicate the mystery of death. He was acknowledging the mentorship of eco-philosopher Arne Naess and 'geo-logian' Thomas Berry who had both passed away the year before *Becoming Animal* was published. Abram didn't say that they had died, rather that they had "slipped back into the wider life of the planet". I thought this was a wonderful phrase that reflected the continuously creative inter-being nature of our lives. We exist as mysteries of birthing/dying. Birth is a coalescence of knowing: molecular, cellular, organ system and creaturely. We are constantly birthed; emerging out of the dancing of living that is this evolving planet/universe. Death is a dissolution of domains of knowing; the elements that form our bodies are eaten and incorporated into the lives of other living beings and so, from an ecological perspective, we dissolve into the wider life of the planet. It strikes me that, rather than waiting to die in order to slip back in, we could use

²⁶ David Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*, Pantheon Books, 2010

the practice of Amitabha to slip back in; continuously, gloriously, fearlessly; right now in this moment; celebrating the lives of all beings as we do.

having clearly experienced the living state of Buddha Amitabha, may I and all beings, continue to engage in this Pure-land of Deva Chen: this realm of clear discrimination and immeasurable love, this manifesting of lucid discernment and all-embracing openness, this mirror-like dancing of radiance, this multidimensional weaving of responsive knowing, this unbreakable wholeness of sublime understanding and love.

The "living state" of Buddha Amitabha reminds us that the text is not merely identifying a static symbol or archetype. It is not referring to a person or an actual historical being. Rather, it is encouraging us to continuously and sensitively evaluate our immediately present lived experience in all its fullness. With love and clear seeing, we might recognise our living in relationship with the world around us is a mystery that Buddhist practitioners sometimes call the 'Pure-land of Deva Chen'. Five phrases hint at this elusive yet obvious ground of experience. Each begins with the pronoun/adjective 'this', not referring to the phrase that follows but referring to the one's own immediate living that is occurring at the very act of reading these words. *This* realm, *this* manifesting, not some transcendent other.

Abiding thus, may all my wholesome aspirations become realised. May I fulfil every one of them, bringing benefit to beings for as long as the world exists.

Consider your wholesome aspirations; to be more loving, forgiving, helpful, knowledgable, wise, skilful, generous, patient, gentle, kind,

equanimous. This list is potentially endless. May all these wholesome aspirations become realised. Having arrived at the end of the sadhana, we are taken back to the beginning, particularly to the sections on Refuge and Bodhicitta. "May I be Sangha, the diverse ecology of bodhisattva activity; practising Dharma, love, compassion and clear seeing deepening everywhere; realising the innate Buddha-mind, pure and total presence – for the well-being of everyone." By recognising that engaging with others from a space of wholesomeness encourages them to do so as well, we gain confidence that truly wholesome activity can bring benefit to beings, "for as long as this world exists". I uplift you. You uplift someone else, and so it goes.

In the blissful flow of realisation, unshakeably centred in this vast mandala of suchness, may I receive a prophecy to Buddhahood, (a dawning confidence in awakening) directly from Amitabha the Victorious One; this oceanic expanse of innate awareness and love.

In the various traditions of Buddhism there are fabulous stories of how Buddhas came to their realisation. These are not seen as history, in the sense of being a record of actual events and dates, rather they are poetic vehicles for teaching. One of the events that occurs in many stories, involves the bodhisattva in training – a pre-buddha – meeting with an existing Buddha who prophesies that they – the bodhisattva – will also realise Buddhahood. This teaching story is really pointing out a stage of development where the meditator, having come to a stability of profound understanding, experiences a dawning of confidence that awakening (*bodhi*), is not only possible but is already happening. Reciting these prayers, we find ourselves situated in the same story.

We can realise that awakening is not something fantastic and otherworldly but is a richness of being and living that is here and now and within ones' grasp.

Strengthened and blessed with profound inner confidence, through the power of wisdom suffusing the ten directions,²⁷ may I too, with myriad emanations, accomplish vast benefit for the sake of all beings.

Myriad emanations; think of these as the uncountable reverberations of our living, rippling out into the world.

If you are doing this sadhana for someone who has died, then recite the following:

Realising that the Pure-land of Amitabha – "this realm of clear discrimination and immeasurable love, this manifesting of lucid discernment and all-embracing openness, this mirror-like dancing of radiance, this multidimensional weaving of responsive knowing, this unbreakable wholeness of sublime understanding and love," – is none other than the living that we are in all its fullness, will inevitably transform our attitude to death and dying. In our culture however, this realisation is all too rare. Life is more frequently seen as a struggle of separate entities, carving out niches and competing for resources. Death is often feared as something negative and dark with loss; a time of intense emotion and tearful grieving. Fortunately though, it can be a time for deep healing and profound re-connecting.

²⁷ ten directions => front, back, right, left, the in-between directions, above and below; basically, in all directions of space and time.

A living being is a dynamic pattern of relationships. The webs of spiders or tent caterpillars often remind me of this. Imagine the strands, glistening in the sunlight. A tug on any thread will lead to responsive micro-adjustments throughout the whole network, so too in our lives. This web of living that we are has a familiar texture, tone, and shape; tightening here and loosening there, syncopations of rhythm and harmony. We are dancing in and through each other. Our sense of being the particular being that we are is rooted in this continuously evolving yet familiar matrix of relating. With death, a significant thread is suddenly cut and the whole edifice sags into an unfamiliar music, an unfamiliar rhythm or geometry of being. Not only has our loved one died but to a degree we may feel that, we too have died. We are stunned, no longer knowing who we are or what in the future we will do. The familiar has collapsed and un-knowing is in the driver's seat.

Gradually, over the ensuing days and weeks, we rediscover our sense of connectedness; a shift from the old into unexpected new patterns of possibility. Perhaps, what we call grieving is the period of turmoil that happens after a significant thread in our life is cut. It comprises all the readjustments; emotional, physical, social and even financial, that are taking place as we find ourselves into a new way of being – a different me – in a different world – and so we continue.

This sadhana of Amitabha is filled with potential reminders of who and what we are. It reminds us of deep abiding connection, and so in buddhist cultures, it is often communally practiced both for the benefit of someone who has died and for the benefit of their families and loved

ones. If you are dedicating this practise for someone who has died then you might continue with the following. Otherwise, you might skip ahead to the final sharing of the merit

Contemplating the inconceivable number of wholesome moments birthed into the world through the life of _____ ,

Review the life of the person or being that has died. Recognise the inconceivable number of moments of joy, gratitude, compassion and native wisdom that graced their life: the smiles, humour, love, patience, caring, sharing, and so forth. All these activities took place through relating with others; goodness inspiring goodness, wholeness inspiring wholeness.

May they continue to flower and increase, inspiring, supporting and beautifying the lives of uncountable beings to come.

Realise that although this person has died, the reverberations of their living continues to radiate out in the lives of countless beings. In a sense, it takes a long time for a wonderful being to die. It has been 2500 years since the Buddha walked the earth but the wisdom and compassion of his life continues to inspire and uplift countless beings today.

May _____ and all their families and friends find rest and clear seeing, in the heart of Dharma.

Having spent some time reflecting on all that was good in the life of the person who has died, we now embrace their immediate family and

friends, widening the circle of connections to eventually embrace the entire universe.

May the blessings of Amitabha Buddha be realised by everyone everywhere.²⁸

Sharing the Merit

May the merit arising from these wholesome activities nourish the seeds of bodhi in all beings, everywhere.

An alternate and more detailed sharing could go as follows.

*By the power of these wholesome activities,
may our lives be rich with awakening.*

*Living thus,
may we abandon all unwholesomeness.*

*In the very midst of this endless process of birth, growth,
occasional illness, inevitable ageing and death;
may we help all beings to realise their true inter-being nature.*

²⁸ You may find that you come back to these reflections many times over in the course of your grief. In fact you may find that the grieving goes on until you feel that these contemplations have flowered into a new familiarity of being-ness in which you feel, alive, engaged and at home.

Last Thoughts

Now you have finished reading this essay, in terms of skilful practice it would be good to set it to one side. Forget these conceptual hints and explanations, and begin to contemplatively, experimentally, playfully, and mindfully explore the sadhana on its own. What can you discover? Allow your intuitive understanding to make sense of this practice in the context of the world of relatings in which you live.

It is said that the dharma is to be realised by the wise, each for them self. Put in another way, we need to study these teachings and then make them work for us. As you practise, keep the flame of curiosity alive. What does this actually mean? How can I apply it in the context of my life? Could I re-word this part of the sadhana so that it feels more potent and engaging for me and my community?

After a period of time, perhaps weeks or months, you may find it useful to return to this booklet and perhaps you may find yourself understanding in a fresh way. Then again set it aside and explore even further. Gradually this sadhana will sink into your bones, no longer a mere practice or method of meditation, it has become a manner of living – an unbroken wholeness of sublime understanding and love.

Final Note of Thanks:

The *thanka* painting of Amitabha, on page 6, was acquired by Jack Swaffield while he was serving in the British Army of Colonial India sometime before 1948. In 1953, the British Museum dated it as being over one hundred years old. In 1984 it was given to his niece, Sue Willey. In 2005 Sue gave it to Tarchin Hearn during the Wangapeka School of Living Dharma. May this generosity continue forever.

Sarva Mangalam
(All is Blessing)

Completed by Tarchin Hearn at Orgyen Hermitage in May of 2021. Mary Jenkins and Anne Sharplin helped in proofing and layout. Please share this text with any who might benefit by reading it.