

Identity in Relation: The Buddha and the Availability of Salvific Truth¹

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WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE BUDDHA, one meets a historical figure, in this case a human being—but, in a sense, much more—and a focal figure in one of humankind’s great religious traditions. From one point of view, the Buddha refers to a person who really lived, an objective referent in space and time. From another point of view, for centuries now and even presently, this person has been acclaimed as the Awakened One. Were this not to have been the case and to have continued to be merely a recorded event, the Buddha would have been forgotten and probably would be of little interest today. This epithet, *Buddha*, “the Awakened One,” has been extended to the Buddha because of what people have found to be true in his teachings, and in the collective memory of his life and testimonial accounts of that life. From the beginning, then, to speak of the Buddha is to speak in human terms. However, it is also to speak in terms of relation—not merely between and among human beings, but with the preexistent salvific truth that he rediscovered. It is this rediscovery that constitutes his being the Awakened One at the time he lived and subsequently in the lives of men and women. People do not affirm that he is the Awakened One only because they were taught this—at least not if they are reflective persons. Nor do they propose it because everyone around them is doing the same. Both occasions are important, of course, in shaping a cumulative religious tradition. But both are not sufficiently foundational for the living of one’s life in the world as one knows it to be.

A personal realization is required to anchor a reflective person’s life. And, for centuries and through many cultures, men and women have had a realization that the truth made accessible through the Awakened One’s teachings, is, indeed, salvific. Those teachings do, certainly, enable life to be lived with purpose and meaning—both in relation to one’s own life and in relation with others—by affirming that the natural human physical process into death is a noble human experience.

As one finds one’s *identity* in relation—for an example, as a man might be a son, a husband, a father, a friend, and so on—so, too, the Buddha’s identity is found in relation: surely with *dhamma* as salvific truth, but also as teacher of *dhamma* as the reliable expression in words that will lead one,

if followed conscientiously, to that salvific truth. And further, the Buddha's identity through the centuries is in relation with countless men and women who have averred that the Buddha is indeed the Awakened One because they have confirmed the availability of salvific truth in the living of their lives.

Of numerous possibilities that one might choose to investigate, or themes to pursue, one of the most engaging has to do with a delicate and profound shift in perspective symbolically communicated by means of a bodily activity, in this case, the act of seeing. Now, of course, the notion of seeing yields an immense field for interpretation: seeing, perceiving, discerning, realizing, knowing, and understanding, to name a few. Particularly interesting is the way a change—let us say, a change in fundamental orientation—occurs in people's lives that enables them to see with insight what otherwise they had only noticed. The pivoting on this delicate soteriological point is subtle and a consideration of a related dialectic will be instructive for people seeking to understand a dimension in human religiousness. We may consider here the Pāli term *passati*, which literally means "one sees," but which implicitly carries meanings of "to know" or "to find."²

I.

One of the most celebrated passages in the Theravāda canonical literature is an exchange between a *bhikkhu* named Vakkali and the Buddha.³ Our story begins with the Auspicious One (*bhagavan*) living in a grove near Rājagaha. At that time, Venerable Vakkali was not at all well, in pain, considerably ill. Vakkali asked his attendants to go to the Buddha with a statement and a request. The statement and the request communicate what the tradition considers to be a quality of faith (*saddhā*). Vakkali makes the following request of his attendants:

Having approached the Bhagavan with my words, show obeisance with your heads at the feet of the Bhagavan, saying "The fellow monk Vakkali is not well, is in pain, and is very ill. He does obeisance at the feet of the Bhagavan." And say also, "It would be well, indeed, were the Bhagavan, out of compassion, to come to the fellow monk Vakkali."

Vakkali was sick and in considerable distress. He wanted to communicate this to the Buddha *and* he wanted the Buddha to come, to be present in person by his bedside, as an expression of the Buddha's sympathetic consciousness of Vakkali's poor condition and a desire to alleviate it. And note, too, the presence of the notion of showing obeisance (by literally

paying homage with the head at the Bhagavan's feet) which is mentioned three times in the narrative before the Buddha signals, in his customary way of remaining silent, his agreement to visit Vakkali.

It appears that upon seeing the Buddha approaching from afar, Vakkali, out of anxiety about propriety in showing due respect for the presence of the Buddha, tossed about on his bed.⁴ The text is already setting up an engaging dynamic with some degree of tension. A sick monk longs for the physical presence of the Buddha, seeking healing of his illness—all understandable, ordinary human wishes. His veneration of the Buddha is framed for us by ritual acts of obeisance and his aspiration is for improved physical health. The dramatic plans are in place and, with Vakkali perturbed about failing in hospitable deference, the conversation begins.

Advising Vakkali not to fret about not providing an appropriate seat, the Buddha takes an available seat and asks how Vakkali is fairing, whether he is improving, whether his aches and pains are decreasing. Vakkali replies that he is not managing very well and that his pains are, indeed, increasing. Then a somewhat surprising turn in the conversation occurs: there is no question about food and water, the possible cause of the illness, or whether attendants are rendering suitable care. The Buddha asks, rather, whether Vakkali has remorse, whether he has any regret. Vakkali replies that he is not troubled and has no remorse. The Buddha then asks whether Vakkali blames himself regarding his own moral virtue. To Vakkali's reply that he does not, the Buddha inquires again, this time whether some remorse and regret remain.

And then the dramatic issue emerges. Vakkali puts it this way: "For a long time, I have been desiring to approach the Bhagavan for a *darśana*, but there has not been enough strength in my body that I might approach the Bhagavan for a *darśana*."⁵ The problem is that Vakkali really wanted to see the Buddha—this is ocular perception but not without a heightened sense of the significant presence of that looked upon—but had been too weak to make the journey.

It is at this point in the story that the Buddha speaks words that have echoed through the centuries.

Pull yourself together, Vakkali! What is there for you with seeing this putrid body. Indeed, Vakkali, the one who sees dhamma sees me. The one who sees me sees dhamma. Indeed, Vakkali, the one seeing dhamma sees me; the one seeing me sees dhamma.⁶

The Buddha immediately turns Vakkali's attention to the five aggregates that constitute the empirical individual and acknowledges Vakkali's recognition of their transitoriness, concluding, "Seeing it so, one knows that one does not go to such [current] state again." The Buddha then departs.

Vakkali is subsequently carried to a place for the night, in the very early morning of which two *deva*-s appear before the Buddha. One *deva* announces that Vakkali indeed aspires for release (*vimokkhāya ceteti*). The other *deva* says, "Surely he will attain release completely." At dawn, the Buddha requests that some *bhikkhu*-s go to Vakkali to inform him of the announcements by the *deva*-s and with words of profound consolation the Buddha adds, "Fear not, Vakkali, do not fear, Vakkali. Your dying will not be detrimental, your death will not be bad." When Vakkali hears all of this, he affirms, "I have no doubt that there is no desire, passion, or affection in me for that which is impermanent, painful, of the nature of change." Shortly thereafter, Vakkali takes up a knife and kills himself.⁷ The story ends with metaphorical power. Dark clouds move here and there covering the sky in darkness. The tumbling, churning, dark clouds represent Māra searching for but not finding the consciousness of Vakkali, who has attained final *nibbāna* (*parinibbāna*).

The paradigm shift provides a new context for understanding a sick *bhikkhu*'s physical pains and his predominant disposition toward the efficacy of devotion in ritual acts. There is a more fundamental order of truth—not in contradiction, but in ever expanding and inclusive supportiveness. The body, as well as the other four aggregates which cluster to form an empirically discernible individual, is fleeting, is not stable, and will dissolve, decaying in the process—the jolting assertion the Buddha made when he referred to *his own body* as "putrid." The foundational truth is the reliability of this regular process of impermanence. Vakkali came to see this, but also much more. All that comes together to form an individual—physical form, feeling, perception, synergetic process, and consciousness—is fleeting and, because of this, it is awry and of the nature of withering. Upon seeing this point, obviously in the sense of understanding,⁸ Vakkali gives a testimony that there was neither delight nor passion nor love for any of these aggregates nor doubt regarding this truth about these things. A change of orientation to the entire setting has now occurred. The longing of a sick man to see the body of the Buddha has become the acknowledgment by a wise man of the abidingness of salvific truth.

II.

Let us turn to some important terms to catch a glimpse of subtle and profound affirmations of what Theravāda Buddhists have seen. And the sight is spectacular, like a majestic waterfall with both a cumulative force of tradition and the alluring quality of rainbows appearing now here, now there in the mist. The approach for, or procedure of, our reflections, is not to trace upstream to find a tiny spring of origins, nor to trace the meanderings

of brook, stream, and river, but to see the collective efforts of people discerning, responding, and remembering the conceptual structure of what has been passed down and the truth thereby disclosed. Usually, interpreters of the Vakkali passage move quickly on with a passing comment that *rūpakāya* refers to the Buddha's material or physical body and *dhammakāya* means the body of teaching or doctrine. One does well to reflect more carefully on this old and frequently repeated passage.

To return to the "seeing" passage, the point is to focus on the relation of the physical presence of the Buddha and the abiding salvific truth which his teachings have made accessible. This is no easy matter, for the relation is not posited as though it is an objective impersonal fact, but requires an engaged response on the part of persons to the truth of that relation. The tradition offers categories for understanding the truth of the relation: material or form body (*rūpakāya*), dhamma body (*dhammakāya*), one who has become dhamma (*dhammabhūto*), who has become the best or the highest (*brahmabhūto*). The key point that is being underscored is the salvific continuity in the figure of the Buddha, a man among men and women, the paradigm for integrity, the illustrious one whose teaching (dhamma) converges consistently and reliably in his life with the salvific truth (dhamma) which he rediscovered. Were there to be any distortion whatsoever between what he taught and the truth about which he spoke, there would remain at the core of the Theravāda tradition a soteriological gap, so to speak, that would have to be addressed, filled, for there to be clarity and continuity in doctrinal formulations about the possibility of personal realization of salvific truth in this very life.

What is the truth about the physical body that is being observed? What kind of seeing is taking place in the one who "sees dhamma"? What is the relationship of this person and dhamma, rather, the integral, contiguous completeness of the realization in his awakesness, his qualities as an auspicious exemplar, and the teachings? What is seen? What might be a few consequences of this seeing?

Over three decades ago I was inside the main inner hall of the Kelaniya Temple in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the dramatic final evening of its extravagant *perahera*. The great doors were shut behind us and worship in sound (*śabdapūja*) began. The shrill, piercing sound of the *horāna* and the concussion felt from the sounding of many drums in the presence of a veiled Buddha image was a marvelous sight to behold. The cacophony of drums, the images and paintings lit by flickering torches, the smell of flowers and incense, the presence of other people all converged to provide a "feast for the eyes."

In Anurādhapura there is a stature of the Buddha in meditation posture (Sinhala: *samādhi budu pilime*). It is a serene place where, even on Poson Poya when the coming of Mahinda to Sri Lanka is commemorated by many thousands of pilgrims arriving at the memorable sites at this

ancient capital city, the area around this statue remains quiet. It is a place for calm, of peace. This, too, is a *sight* to behold.

How much more would be a sight of the Buddha in our midst! The ordinary, average person is not a simpleton! The ordinary sense of seeing is the customary mode by which average persons sort out visible objects in form and color, in movement and distance, and in spatial dimensions.⁹ The ordinariness in this sense is placed in perspective by the extraordinariness of salvific truth and the profound change appropriating that truth has on people's lives. Seeing a physical body is by means of the ordinary "eyes of flesh" (*maṃsacakkhu*), while seeing dhamma involves the "eye of knowledge" (*ñāṇacakkhu*).¹⁰

What do the commentaries tell us about what is being seen in this and related passages? Certainly it is not "doctrine," although this term is often used in English interpretations of this matter. Nor is it "teaching." Doctrines and teachings do not transform people. It is the activity of becoming engaged with that to which doctrines point, to that about which the teachings teach, that enables one to discern wherein and how one can become, or has become, other than what one was. Any interpretation less than this would fail to heed a Buddhist admonition to avoid clinging to views, that is, to doctrines, to teachings.

Having learned of Vakkali's desire to engage in acts of devotion, of his longing to see the Buddha, one's expectations are flanked by the Buddha's poignant comment about the true condition of the human body—Vakkali's as well as his own. The cumulative tradition preserves this story, replicated at numerous places. The story presents a lively dialectic in which one understands the true condition of all materiality in light of reality—*rūpakāya* in light of *dhammakāya*—the former is seen by discerning the latter, understood through a realization of the latter. The dialectic this coincidence of opposites provides moves through the developing tradition toward correlation.

The adjective used by the Buddha to describe his physical body, the body that Vakkali longed to see, at the feet of which he wished to place his head in obeisance, is *pūti*, akin to the Latin base for the English word "pus."¹¹ There is a radical shift here, a reorientation to the physical body *sub specie aeternitatis*, under the form of eternity, a recognition of the universal principle that defines the body—odious, offensive to the senses. Yet this is just the opposite of a standard description of the Bhagavan, the auspicious exemplar, the Lord. "And he has glory of each and every limb, perfect in every way, which is able to bring about a delicate sense of composure (*pasāda*) in the eyes of persons which are bedecked with a *darśana* of his physical body."¹²

The *Visuddhimagga*, a great scholastic compilation of the literary heritage by Buddhaghosa in fifth century Śrī Lāṅka, provides interpretations of *rūpakāya* that cluster around commentarial glosses for the epithet

bhagavan, “fortunate one,” “auspicious exemplar,” “Lord.” In doing this, he shows the pair *rūpakāya* and *dhammakāya* in correlation rather than in contrast.

By his state of fortunateness (*bhāgyavatā*) is illustrated the prosperity of his material body which bears a hundred [auspicious] marks of virtuous achievement [*puñña*: merit], and because of [his] state of having defects destroyed [is depicted] the prosperity of [his] *dhammakāya*.¹³

The *Paramatthamañjūsā*, commenting on this passage in the *Visuddhimagga*, elaborates,

“The prosperity of his material body,” because of the fact that it is the root and the basis for bearing fruit on the part of those [others mentioned in the text]. “The prosperity of his *dhammakāya*” [is so because of the fact that it is the root and the basis] for the attainment of knowledge (*jñāna*) and so forth, because of the fact that it is preceded by the attainment of illumination (*pahāna*).¹⁴

When the *Visuddhimagga* considers that great and persistent human issue of death in its extended discussion about mindfulness on death (namely, that death, indeed, will come), *rūpakāya* and *dhammakāya* appear. There, the Buddha’s physical body is described as being adorned with eighty minor marks and the thirty-two marks of a great person. The passage says of the *dhammakāya*, his “magnificent *dhammakāya* [is] by means of precious gem-like qualities of the group of moral virtue, etc. [concentration, insight-wisdom, release, and knowledge combined with wisdom], made pure in every way.”¹⁵ The commentary on this passage adds, “and because he has destroyed all defilements together with [their] mental traces.”¹⁶

Elsewhere the pair of terms appear with *rūpakāya* interpreted in light of the thirty major and eighty minor marks of a great person while his *dhammakāya* is glossed as being adorned with the ten powers and four confidences.¹⁷ Elsewhere a commentary explains “the glory of Sakyaputta” as being due to the splendor of both the *rūpakāya* and the *dhammakāya*.¹⁸

The commentary on the *Khuddaka-pāṭha* offers considerable insight into the dynamic of an identity in relation. A complementary parallelism is maintained, in an extended gloss on *bhagavan*, when, on the one hand, the Buddha’s *rūpakāya* is designated by “one hundred marks of merit (*puñña*)” while his *dhammakāya* demonstrates his destruction of defects.¹⁹

And further, in considering the customary beginning of discourses, *evaṃ me sutam*, “Thus have I heard,” or, “Thus it has been heard by me,” one makes apparent the *dhamma-sarīra* of the Bhagavan and causes to be

resolved the disappointment people have in not seeing him. When one teaches dhamma as it was heard, the heritage avers, "This is not the proclamation of a departed teacher. This, indeed, is your teacher."²⁰ In considering another standard introductory phrase to the discourses, "At one time the Bhagavan," the *Paramatthajotikā* draws attention to the Bhagavan's not being present at the time and notes that this indicates the complete extinction of his *rūpakāya* (*rūpakāyaparinibbānam*).

Even the Bhagavan, teacher of the noble dhamma, whose body, carried the ten powers and was like a cluster of diamonds, became fully extinct [*parinibbuta*], so how is it that one, with this knowledge, would engender a desire for life. So he causes somber emotion in those people intoxicated with life and he engenders effort regarding dhamma true.²¹

A splendid example of the complementariness and cumulative convergence of these two dimensions of the Buddha as they become integrally fulfilled in the life of a sincere person is reflected in a passage in the commentary on the *Sutta-nipāta*:

Then Dhaniyo, having seen the *dhammakāya* with the eye of wisdom, with thoroughly established faith, well-rooted and with unshakable serenity in the Tathāgata, having a heart reproved, thought, "The bonds are severed. There is no reentering a womb for me. Having put an end to Avīci and to whatever other limit of existence, who else other than the Bhagavan will roar the Lion's roar. My teacher has come."²²

The commentary continues,

There, because Dhaniyo, with his wife and children, having seen by the world-transcending eye the *dhammakāya* through a penetration (attainment) of the noble path, having seen with the customary eye the *rūpakāya* acquired the attainment of faith, and hence he said, "Indeed, it is no little gain for us that we have seen the Bhagavan."²³

We see that the two bodies are held together in the figure of the Buddha, the Tathāgata the Bhagavan, and that the *dhammakāya* is without exception the primary, foundational element. When the focus is on the *rūpakāya* of men and women, in light of dhamma, the reality of the material body's inherent nature of decay and passing away is seen—not in despair but in a calming, supportive sense. When the *rūpakāya* of the Buddha is seen, in light of *dhammakāya*, it is also celebrated for its beauty and attractiveness

as a metaphorical example of virtuous living, i.e., living completely in accordance with dhamma.

There are several strands of the Vakkali narrative, all relating Vakkali's longing to see the Buddha, or wishing ever to remain in his presence, and the popular exchange between the two. These narrative strands differ in the subsequent development of the story. One account has Vakkali achieving arahantship upon rising in the air.²⁴ Another has him jumping down safely from a considerable height.²⁵ In still another he attains arahantship upon the visit of the Buddha.²⁶ The use of the knife in our *Samyutta-nikāya* account provides, for Vakkali, the occasion for great pain which brought him to the point of recognizing his ordinary situation (*puthujjana*) and, with considerable focal concentration, of acknowledging his transformation into the condition of arahantship. Vakkali, the tradition avers, is remembered as being preeminent among those who are zealous in faith (*saddhādhimutta*).²⁷

III.

The themes of our passage also enable us to see an example of how the developing tradition addresses the relationship between the person of the Buddha and salvific truth. In our narrative, the focus now shifts from the physical, a particular human being with stress placed on the form of a human being, to a particular person, the Buddha, with emphasis placed on a complex of distinguishing characteristics indicating identity in relationality. Concerning the term "*dhammakāya*," a commentary asks, "Why is the Tathāgata called *dhammakāya*?" The passage continues, "The Tathāgata, having reflected on the *tepiṭaka* Buddha-word in his heart, sent it forth in words. Therefore his body is dhamma because he himself consists of dhamma."²⁸

In dealing with this delicate theme of integral relationship of the person of the Buddha and salvific truth, a parallel expression was found to be useful: *dhammakāya*, *brahmakāya*; *dhammabhūta*, *brahmabhūta*,

because he himself consists of dhamma so is he *brahmakāya*. Dhamma is called Brahmā here in the sense of "best." He has become dhamma [*dhammabhūta*] in the sense of being one who has dhamma as inherent nature. He has become Brahmā in the sense that he himself is the best.²⁹

The parallelism appears elsewhere.³⁰

He has become dhamma because of setting in motion dhamma that is to be learned [the authoritative teaching] without distortion or

in the sense that he, having reflected in his heart, consists of dhamma that was expressed in words. He has become Brahmā in the sense of “the best.”³¹

One meets the standard phrasing *dhammabhūta* and *brahmabhūta* again with one suggestive but unelaborated addition:

...become dhamma, in the sense of one whose condition is not unfavorable [*aviparīta-bhāva’atthena*] or consists of dhamma that was expressed in words or because of setting in motion dhamma to be learned [the authoritative teaching] having reflected on it in his heart. *Brahmabhūta*, in the sense of “the best.”³²

And elsewhere the integral identity in relation is communicated as “the one who has become dhamma,” which means “the one who has dhamma as inherent or essential nature (*dhammasabhāva*). *Brahmabhūta* is glossed, in parallel, as “the one who has the best (or the highest) as inherent or essential nature.”³³

The sense of identity *in* relation, closer than identity *by* association, appears in a late utilization of our Vakkali passage, extending the sense in going to the Buddha as refuge by indicating that when one goes for refuge in the Bhagavan, one also goes to dhamma as refuge.³⁴ And one who teaches dhamma as it was heard, with the words “Thus I have heard (*evaṃ me sutam*),” sees the dhamma-body (*dhammasarīra*) of the Bhagavan.³⁵

Different formulations of the teachings are offered for dhamma in the compound, *dhammakāya*. The entire collection of utterances by the Awakened One(s) is frequently noted³⁶ as is the spectrum of salvific truth presented as the authoritative teaching,³⁷ and also as the ninefold world-transcending dhamma,³⁸ or phrased as paths, fruits, and nibbāna.³⁹ The commentary on the *Udāna* utilizes the exchange as recorded in the *Samyutta-nikāya* and glosses dhamma with “noble truths.”⁴⁰

IV.

The later tradition inherited much that had gone before providing both flashes of insight along the way and structured scholastic analyses. The quality of faith becoming fulfilled in Vakkali’s attainment of arahantship echoes in the words describing his “having an abundance of faith by means of the [Buddha’s] incomparable physical body, having an abundance of insight-wisdom by means of [his] profound body of teachings...”⁴¹ The subsequent heritage reveals a continuity with what went before. Writers provide several informative glosses for the term *dhammakāya*. It is the instruction in the teachings written in books,⁴² even as the entire three

baskets of the canon are also written down,⁴³ and which can be spoken and heard.⁴⁴ The distinction between *rūpakāya* and *dharmakāya* is maintained, with the *rūpakāya* considered in light of the exceptional physical qualities of the Buddha. When these qualities are expressed in the homiletical etymological elaboration of the word “*bhagavan*,” in the standard phrasing “*iti pi so bhagavan*,” the “body of dhamma,” *dharmakāya*, is utilized.⁴⁵ Also, the interpretation of *dharmakāya* as that which was taught by the Buddha, particularly in the classic threefold analysis of that which is to be learned (the authoritative teaching), practiced, and penetrated or attained, is maintained.⁴⁶ The wealth of the *dharmakāya*, we learn, as the tradition has continued, is attained by means of the eye of knowledge.⁴⁷

The identity in relation of the Buddha and the body of dhamma *dharmakāya* is expressed with an alluring metaphor. The Buddha, we learn, caused “the nectar of dhamma true to overflow from the vessel of his body that was filled with the ambrosia of dhamma just as honey in a filled bowl overflows and falls outside when there is no space inside.”⁴⁸

Insofar as one today might consider the current English usage or sense of “believing,” “to believe,” suggests holding a position one is oneself incapable of persuasively demonstrating or, for another person, a position about which he or she is not really certain.⁴⁹ Seeing, in spite of the cliché, *is far more than believing*.

In religious discourse, metaphors and analogies abound, levels of discourse operate. We see this in the metaphorical use of “eye” (*cakkhu*) to communicate insight, penetrative vision, and understanding. As pertaining to the Buddha, we see it designating his knowledge of everything that can be known in space and time, of all knowables (*sabbadhamma*), forming an epithet of the Buddha (*cakkhumant*), “one having vision.”⁵⁰ The received tradition is aware of the force of “eye” in the sense of insight. “Eye of dhamma’ (*dharmacakkhu*) in the sense of eye [vision, insight] with regard to knowables, or eye made of, consisting of dhamma. In other places [in the texts] it is a synonym for the three paths, but here just the path of stream entrance.”⁵¹ In offering this interpretation, the literary tradition is no doubt also fully aware that the texts, elsewhere, put into words what the insight of *dharmacakkhu* discloses: “Whatever has the inherent nature of arising, all that has the inherent nature of cessation.” This phrasing regarding the dhamma-eye occurs in canonical texts⁵² and one notes its applicability to the insight of Upāli, a householder.⁵³ There are alternative and complementary ways of illustrating the metaphorical eye, the eye of dhamma. One reads, “‘*Dharmacakkhu*’ in the sense of vision of the path of stream attainment or entrance, which is the comprehensive acquisition of the teaching of the four [noble] truths.”⁵⁴

Rūpakāya and *dharmakāya*, when held together, bring into focus the life and ministry of the Buddha, the latter undergirding the majestic

resplendence of the former. The pair, working together, provide a continuity between the religious practices of devotion through ritual and joy of faith *and* the religious attainment of salvific knowledge through insight yielding a clarity and a sense of composure. *Rūpakāya* enables one to visualize through metaphor the just deserts of a singularly virtuous life. *Dhammakāya* suggests the profound basis on which a virtuous life can be established. Both *rūpakāya* and *dhammakāya* bring together into a focal aperture an extremely broad perspective drawn from narratives from the past and stories of the present, teachings remembered and elaborated through the centuries into our today. It is only *dhammakāya* that simultaneously and integrally relates salvific truth that abides with human words uttered from a perceptive, wise, and undivided heart in such a way that one's thorough penetration of the truth of the words is assured of being fully integrated with that abiding salvific truth. *Dhammakāya*, the body of teaching with which one can become engaged, is also that with which the Buddha himself also became (*dhammabhūta*), having himself reflected on it in his heart.

There is a delicate hesitance in the Theravāda tradition to append terms or designations for anything that might be sensed as having unchanging ontological reality, as truly, lastingly, existent. Having a hesitance in making this move, a quiet continuity in refraining from making it is not the same as saying there is absolutely such an eternally existing, ontological something. It seems that as soon as one makes such an assertion, freedom is, to some degree, curtailed—so Theravāda Buddhists have known for centuries the salvific quality of this freedom to be.

NOTES

1. Nearly four decades ago when I entered the doctoral program in the Study of Religion at Harvard, Masatoshi Nagatomi, freshly tenured in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, was away in India on his first sabbatical leave, polishing up his Tibetan. Upon his return he asked me, "What do you expect to learn at the Center [for the Study of World Religions] that you cannot learn in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies?" In his case, he provided a memorable answer through his years of remarkable collaboration with Wilfred Cantwell Smith and many students in the expanding program at the Center. My answer, as he probably anticipated, is still in process. Over those years "Mas" demonstrated his authentic commitment to his appreciative students in several programs at Harvard, pushing himself to become a superbly reliable scholarly resource in their broad and increasingly variegated subjects. He excelled in this with integrity all along as a rigorous academic and, as we later came to learn and also to appreciate deeply, as a conscientious Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist.

2. Grammatically, this form is the weak present tense of *dassati*, also "to see," which is the dominant form for non-present tense primarily meaning "saw," "to be seen," "to point out," "showed," and there is the notion of looking at something (*pekkāhti*), "one looks at," a less frequently occurring etymological form.

3. *Samyutta-nikāya*, parts I-V, ed. M. Léon Feer (London: Luzac & Co., 1960; hereafter abbreviated as *S*), III.120; see also *Iti-vuttaka*, ed. Ernst Windisch (London: Oxford University Press, 1948; hereafter abbreviated as *I*tv.), p. 91, and John Ross Carter, *Dhamma: Western Academic and Sinhalese Buddhist Interpretations: A Study of a Religious Concept* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1972), p. 93 and related notes.

4. The *Sārattha-ppakāsinī: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Samyutta-nikāya*, 3 vols, ed. F. L. Woodward (London: Oxford University Press, 1929 [vol. I], 1932 [vol. II], 1937 [vol. III]; hereafter abbreviated *SA.*), on this passage, interprets the tossing about as due to Vakkali's deep concern about not rising to salute the Buddha and providing an appropriate seat. The Pāli phrasing, *addasā...dūrato āgacchantam*, the Venerable Vakkali "saw the Bhagavan coming from afar," is parallel to *addamsu kho pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū bhagavantam dūrato 'va āgacchantam* (*The Vinaya Piṭakam*, 4 vols., ed. Hermann Oldenberg [London: Luzac & Co., 1964; hereafter abbreviated as *Vin.*], I.10), where the ensuing discussion among the group of five was whether to offer a seat.

5. *S*.III.120. It is unlikely that the more familiar notion of *darśana*/*darśan* in Hindu theistic traditions, where one is uplifted joyously and/or with

awe upon viewing the deity and also gratefully receives the gracious gaze of the deity, was at play during the time reflected in the Pāli canon. It is likely that the term in the particular semantic frame here (*bhavantam dassanāya upasankam*^o), and as will be mentioned later in this chapter in the context of *pasāda*, with reference to *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosācariya*, ed. Henry Clarke Warren, rev. Dharmaranda Kosambi (Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. XLI. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950; hereafter abbreviated as *Vism.*), VII.61, is not totally without some convergence in meaning. Utilizing the activity of the senses in acts of devotion—seeing, hearing, smelling, touching—has been long a part of Indian religiousness such that keeping *darśana* in our translation tends to underscore the depth and quality of the activity of the eyes in religious acts. This is hardly an act of “looking at” or of merely noticing.

6. S.III.120. Carter, *loc. cit.*

7. Vakkali is well known in canonical and commentarial literature. His final demise is variously recorded, whether in apparent suicide as the *Samyutta-nikāya* account presents it, or while arising into the air at the instruction of the Buddha, according to the commentaries on the *Theragāthā* and the *Dhammapada*. See G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (London Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1960 [1938]), II.799–800, and F. L. Woodward, *The Book of the Kindred Sayings* (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1954 [1925]), III, pp. 103–104, n. 4. Woodward refers to the commentary on our passage and says that it was at the point of dying that Vakkali was able to attain release. The commentary on the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* notes that Vakkali jumped down from a considerable height but alighted safely in the presence of the Buddha. Vakkali is held as an exemplar of a person who is characterized as being devoted through faith.

8. *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā of Buddhaghosācariya* (parts I–II, ed. J. H. Woods and D. Kosambi, London: Oxford University Press, 1922 [part I], 1923 [part II]; parts III–IV, ed. I. B. Horner, 1933 [part III], 1937 [part IV]; abbreviated hereafter as *MA.*), I.22 (on *Majjhima-nikāya* [vol. I, ed. V. Trenckner, London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1964; vols. II–III, ed. Robert Chalmers, London: Luzac & Co., 1960; hereafter abbreviated as *M.*], I.1) draws a contrast between *cakhuṇā dassanam* and *ñāṇena dassanam* and quotes our key passage from S.III.120. The ordinary person puts emphasis on the customary activity of the eyes and seeks for the physical presence of the Buddha, while the person of admirable bearing sees with insight. *MA*’s reference is considering the case of an average person (*puthujjana*). *Paramattha-Dīpanī Udānaṭṭhakathā (Udāna Commentary) of Dhammapālācariya*, ed. F. L. Woodward (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1926; hereafter abbreviated *UdA.*), 310–311 (on *Udāna*, ed. Paul Steinthal [London: Oxford University Press, 1948; hereafter abbreviated as *Ud.*], 58)

draws attention to Soṇa, who, as an average person, longed for the presence of the Buddha that he might be seen directly.

9. The human eye is a remarkable organ in its own right, and for some Christian theologians, conservative and liberal, on both sides of the Atlantic, in the past fifty or so years, the development of the organ of the eye has become a focal point for inferring divine intervention in the erstwhile natural evolutionary process.

10. *Paramattha-Dīpani: Iti-Vuttakaṭṭhakathā (Iti-Vuttaka Commentary) of Dhammapālācariya*, Vols. I–II, ed. M. M. Bose (London: Oxford University Press, 1934 [vol. I], 1936 [vol. II]; hereafter abbreviated as *ItvA.*), 116 (on *Itv.*90–91), where reference to S.III.120 is included. *MA.I.22* (on *MI.19*) notes the distinction between seeing (*dassanam*) with the eyes (*cakkhunā*) and with knowledge (*ñāṇena*), also referring to the account recorded at S.III.120.

11. *Sv. pūti* in *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede (London: Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1966).

12. *Vism.*VII.61 (with reference to the *The Visuddhi-magga of Buddhaghosa*, vol. I, ed. C. A. F. Rhys Davids [London: Oxford University Press, 1920]; hereafter abbreviated as *PTS.*), I.211.

13. *Vism.*VII.60, *PTS.*I.211.

14. *Paramatthamañjūsā of Bhandantācariya Dhammapāla Thera: Or the Commentary of the Visuddhimagga*, vols. I–III, ed. Morontuḍuwē Dhammānanda Thera (Colombo: Mahābodhi Press, 1928 [vol. I], 1930 [vol. II], 1949 [vol. III]; hereafter abbreviated as *Pm.*), 210 (on *Vism.*VII.60, *PTS.*I.211). The received tradition regarding this gloss is drawn from the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya* (vol. I, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter, London: Published for the Pali Text Society, Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1947 [vol. I], 1949 [vol. II]; vol. III, ed. J. Estlin Carpenter, London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Messrs. Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1960; hereafter abbreviated as *D.*), III.142–179, with its magnificent poetic depictions of an ideal life and its metaphorical casting of marks of an auspiciously great person. See also *M.II.133–146*, and the engaging exchange with the *brahmaṇa* Brahmayu.

15. *Vism.*VIII.23, *PTS.*I.234.

16. *Pm.*239 (on *Vism.*VIII.23, *PTS.*I.234). The commentator indicates that in this case, the Buddha, having such dhamma-body, will not return to existence as we know it. All defilements are entirely destroyed as well as all of their samsaric oriented traces or impressions.

17. *Paramattha-Dīpani Theragāthā-Aṭṭhakathā: The Commentary of Dhammapālācariya*, vols. II–III, ed. F. L. Woodward (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Messrs. Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1952 [vol. II], 1959

[vol. III]; hereafter abbreviated *ThagA.*), II.121–122 (on *The Thera- and Therī-gāthā: Part I, Theragāthā [Stanzas Ascribed to Elders of the Buddhist Order of Recluses]*, ed. Hermann Oldenberg and Richard Pischel, 2nd edition with appendices by K. R. Norman and L. Alsdorf [London: Luzac & Co., 1966; hereafter abbreviated as *Thag.*], verse 288). The four, presented at *M.I.*71–72, are (1) being fully awakened to all that there is to know, (2) knowledge that for him all defilements are destroyed, (3) the confidence of having described accurately obstacles that hinder one in religious living, and (4) that dhamma as he taught it leads reliably to the destruction of *dukkha*.

18. *ThagA.I.06* (on *Thag.* verse 94).

19. *The Khuddaka-Pāṭha: Together with Its Commentary Paramatthajotikā I*, ed. Helmer Smith from a collation by Mabel Hunt (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1959; hereafter abbreviated *Khpa.*), I.108 9 (cf. *Sutta-Nipāta*, new edition by Dines Andersen and Helmer Smith [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1948; hereafter abbreviated *Sn.*], 258).

20. *Sutta-Nipāta Commentary: Being Paramatthajotikā II*, vols. I–II, ed. Helmer Smith (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916 [vol. I], 1917 [vol. II], reprinted, 1966; hereafter abbreviated *Pj.*), I.110 (cf. *Sn.* 258). See also *SA.I.12; Manorathapūraṇī: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Anguttaranikāya* (vol. I, ed. Max Walleser [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by the Oxford University Press, 1924], vol. II, ed. Max Walleser and Hermann Kopp, 1924, vol. V, with indexes to vols. I–V, ed. Hermann Kopp [London: Published for the Pali Text Society, 1956]; hereafter abbreviated *AA.*), I.14; cf. *Sumaṅgala-vilāsini: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dīgha-Nikāya* (part I, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1886], parts II–III, ed. W. Stede [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, the Oxford University Press, 1931 (part II), 1932 (part III)]; hereafter abbreviated *DA.*), I.34. It is likely that in the context of considering the case of the Buddha's no longer being present in his ordinary body (*kāya*) that *sarīra* might have carried the added sense of relic-body, i.e., the dhamma-body of one no longer with us.

21. *Khpa.*110 (cf. *Sn.*258).

22. *Sutta-Nipāta Commentary: Being Paramatthajotikā II* (vols. I–II, ed. Helmer Smith [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916 (vol. I), 1917 (vol. II)]; hereafter abbreviated as *SnA.*), I.41 (on *Sn.*30).

23. *SnA.I.42* (on *Sn.*31).

24. *Itv.*91.

25. AA.I.140ff. (on *The Anguttara-nikāya* [part II, ed. the Rev. Richard Morris (London: Luzac & Co., 1955), parts III–V, ed. E. Hardy [1958]; hereafter abbreviated A.], II.465ff.).

26. *ThagA.*I.420.

27. See Malalasekera, G. P. *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names* (vol. II, London: Luzac & Co., Ltd., 1960 [1938]), *loc. cit.*

28. *DA.*III.865 (on *D.*III.84).

29. *DA.*III.865 (on *D.*III.84).

30. Wilhelm and Magdalene Geiger have made a very impressive, but incomplete, study of dhamma, restricting their work particularly in the canonical texts, with occasional interpretations provided by a few Pāli commentaries. They were fully aware of some of the significance of the meaning of *dhamma* in the highest sense. They wrote, “*Mit voller Absicht hat der Buddha den Begriff dhamma an die Stelle von brahman gesetzt, an die Stelle der ewigen unveränderlichen Weltseele die Idee des ewigen Entstehens und Vergehens, an die Stelle der Vorstellung von der Substanz die von der Nichtsubstanz*” (*Pali Dhamma: vornehmlich in der kanonischen Literature* [Abhandlungen der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften; Philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse, Band XXXI, 1. Abhandlung (vorgelegt am 1. Mai, 1920), München: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1920], p. 7). It is doubtful whether the Buddha himself interpreted his activity as deliberately placing a concept in a particular systematic position.

31. *MA.*II.76 (on *M.*I.111). One should note that *-maya*, “made of,” “consisting of,” used in the commentaries, is the suffix most closely rendering a sense of identity.

32. *SA.*II.389 (on *S.*IV.94). *Saddhamma-ppajotikā: The Commentary on the Mahā-Niddesa* (vols. I–II, ed. A. P. Buddhadatta [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1931 (vol. I), 1939 (vol. II)]; hereafter abbreviated *Sdpj.*), II.295 (on *Niddesa I: Mahāniddesa*, ed. L. de La Vallée Poussin and E. J. Thomas [London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1916 (vol. I), 1917 (vol. II)]; hereafter abbreviated as *Nd1.*), I.178 [on *Sn.* 834]) reads *aviparitasabhāvatthena*, “one whose inherent nature is not unfavorable,” or “one whose inherent nature is not distorted or perverted.”

33. *AA.*V.72 (on *A.*V.226). The parallelism appears numerous throughout the canon. One notes, for example, *M.*I.111 (cf. *MA.*II.76 on this), III.195; *A.*V.226 (cf. *AA.*V.72). Another set of parallels is *dhammajāla*, “net of dhamma,” and *brahmajāla* (*D.*I.46). The commentary takes the former in

the sense of “the teachings spoken in many strands.” *Brahmajāla* here refers to the analysis of knowledge of omniscience in the sense of its being “superior” or “the best” (DA.I.129). We find *dhammayāna*, “dhamma-vehicle,” and *brahmayāna*, “best vehicle,” both referring to “the noble eightfold path.” S.V.5 (cf. SA.III.121). Regularly *brahma*° in compounds is taken as “best” or “highest” or “superior,” as in *brahmadeyya*, “best gift,” (MA.III.415 [on M.II.164]), as “best” or “highest” world or realm, *brahmaloka* (DA.II.663 [on D.II.240]). *Brahmabhūta*, “who has attained the highest or the best,” can stand alone as a synonym for one who has realized the extinction of all defilements, who has realized the ease of meditative absorption (*jhāna*), paths, fruits, and nibbāna (so MA.III.10 [on M.I.341]). And one living the higher life (*brahmacārin*) refers to one living the noble path in the best sense unendingly (cf. DA.III.737 [on D.II.283]). Interesting variations appear at MA.III.418 (on M.II.165) where *brahmavaccasin* is glossed by “one having the best color,” which means “one endowed with the best golden color among the pure castes.” Also here one finds *brahmavaccasin* glossed by “one endowed with a body like the body of Mahābrahmā.”

34. *Vaṃsatthappakāsinī: Commentary on the Mahāvamsa*, vols. I–II, ed. G. P. Malalasekera for the Government of Ceylon (London: published for the Pali Text Society by Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1935; hereafter abbreviated as *MhvT.*), I.45–46.

35. DA.I.34; SA.I.12.

36. DA.III.865 (on D.III.84).

37. MA.II.76 (on M.I.11); SA.II.389 (on S.IV.94); *Sdpj*.II.295 (on *Nd1*.I.78 on *Sn*.834).

38. *ThagA*.II.20 (on *Thag*.49); *ItvA*.116 (on *Itv*.90–91).

39. *ThagA*.III.70 (on *Thag*.1174).

40. *UdA*.311 (on *Ud*.58).

41. *The Mahā-Bodhi-Vamsa*, ed. S. Arthur Strong (London: Oxford University Press, 1891; abbreviated hereafter as *Mbv.*), 83.

42. *Saddharmāvavāda Saṃgrahaya*, ed. Vēragoḍa Amaramoli Thera (Colombo: Ratnākara Mudraṇalayaya, 1956; hereafter abbreviated as *ŚsdhAv.*), 263, 285.

43. *ŚsdhAv*.300.

44. *ŚsdhAv*.300, 302, 304.

45. *Saddharmalaṅkāraya*, ed. Kiriāllē Nāṇavimala Thera (Colombo: M. D. Guṇasēna, 1954; hereafter abbreviated *SdhAl.*), 2.

46. *ŚsdhAv*.249.

47. *SdhAl*.370.

48. *Pūjāvaliya*, ed. Kiriāllē Nāṇavimala Thera (Colombo: M. D. Guṇasēna & Co., 1965; hereafter abbreviated as *PūjāV.*), 190.
49. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998 [first published as *Faith and Belief*, Princeton University Press, 1979]).
50. *Sn.*992–993.
51. *DA.I.237* (on *D.I.86*). The same specificity of reference occurs at *DA.I.278* (on *D.I.110*). At *DA.II.467* (on *D.II.38*) reference is made to the knowledge of the three paths. However, *SA.II.392*, no doubt led by the context of *S.IV.107*, takes *dhammacakkhu* as the four paths and the four fruits.
52. *M.I.380*; *Vin.I.16*; *Ud.49*, for example.
53. *M.I.380*. The commentary here makes a similar observation, drawing attention to another sutta where *dhammacakkhu* refers to the destruction of the “outflows” (*āsava*) related to the three paths, but here, at this place, it refers only the path of stream entrance. See also *UdA.283* (on *Ud.49*) and *Dhammapāla’s Paramattha-Dīpanī, Part IV, Being the Commentary on the Vimāna-Vatthu*, ed. E. Hardy (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1901; hereafter abbreviated as *VvA.*), 317, where it is stated succinctly, “*dhammacakkhu ti sotāpattimaggam.*”
54. *AA.II.356* (on *A.I.242*). *M.III.92* (on *M.I.380*), commenting on *ditthadhamma*, in association with *dhammacakkhu*, takes the former to refer to the four noble truths, and the latter to understanding the arising and cessation of all things.