

DEVOTION VERSUS INTELLECT

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There are two approaches to the final goal of enlightenment according to Buddhist scriptures. They are the path of devotion and the path of reasoning. Of these two, the devotional path or the path of *shraddha* is more practical for the average person. Unshaken positive attention towards an object or a cause is what we are talking about when we use the word devotion. Devotion has been categorised into three types on the basis of characteristics. The first is devotion with serenity. The second is devotion with confidence and the third is devotion with inspiration.

Consider the body, speech and mind of the Buddha and let us understand these with our mental projection of the Buddha: His body full of serenity, the soothing sound of his mind, compassionate and all-knowing. Such a perception of the Buddha is devotion with serenity. Attention to speech is devotion with confidence and attention to the mind of the Buddha is devotion with inspiration. When we see or imagine a beautiful statue of the Buddha, for example, of the Gupta period, we feel the sense of serenity of not only the face of the image but can feel almost as though Buddha is speaking to us with compassion. We can get the feel of an atmosphere of simplicity and peace around us. In my understanding, this is what fine art is supposed to do to us.

These three kinds of devotion are also explained to another way on certain occasions. This is to understand them with the help of the Buddhist trinity: devotion with serenity towards Buddha, devotion with confidence towards dharma or the teaching, and devotion with inspiration towards sangha, the spiritual community.

The second way of explaining the three kinds of devotion is a more philosophical way than the first one. One experiences the serene atmosphere, in which the Buddha appears in order to benefit many living beings, and the main act of the Buddha is to show the path he himself found and traversed; one also gets confidence that the dharma is the definite and the only way to enlightenment. Your spiritual friends – the *kalyanmitra* circle – are a source of inspiration. This is because you may have found the right path to enlightenment, but without inspiring role models around you, it is difficult to proceed with the experience.

Sometimes there is a tendency in Buddhism to look down on the devotional path to contrast to the philosophical one. In any faith one may find the shift of emphasis between the paths of devotion and philosophy and the idea that the philosophical approach is for the sharper intellect while devotion is for the one with duller intellect. This is too much of a generalisation. One thing is clear. Every spiritual seeker cannot be expected to be a philosopher. Therefore, it is important to appreciate the role of devotion. A Mahayana Buddhist sutra states that devotion precedes all the other spiritual qualities because it is devotion that will guard and further develop all the spiritual qualities. For, human beings look forward to the appropriate basis of life, some degree of confidence and a lot of inspiration from many sources.

The acts of devotion are many. One practical way is chanting of name mantras. Mindful repetition of such mantras increases concentration on the one to whom the mantra is addressed and there by the first step of devotion is taken.