



## Chapter 2

### Luang Phor Sodh and Dhammakaya Meditation

This chapter explains the Dhammakaya meditation technique. As this meditation technique was developed and re-discovered by Luang Phor Sodh, a brief biographical section is provided initially, followed by the description of the system. The complex and involved nature of the technique necessitates first describing the system in general, and then in detail. Next, the Dhammakaya ideas from different schools of Buddhism are explained in order to better understand the Dhammakaya concept of Dhammakaya meditation. As the emphasis Dhammakaya meditation places on visualization is very similar to visualization meditation from schools of Tantric Buddhism, a comparison is made to illustrate this fact.

#### **Biography of the Founder<sup>1</sup>**

Luang Phor Sodh was born Sodh Chandassaro was born on October 10, 1884 (2427 BE), in Suphanburi Province. His father passed away when he was fourteen, and Sodh took over the family's successful rice trading company. Although he proved to be a competent businessman, Sodh decided to enter the monkhood at age nineteen, but worked for an additional three years to ensure his family would be able to continue the business without him. Then, at the age of 22 he ordained as Chandassaro Bhikku at Wat Songpeenong, a temple near his home, and began meditating. His desire for knowledge, and search for additional meditation instruction brought him to Bangkok, where he stayed at Wat Phra

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<sup>1</sup> Biographical Data from Phra Ajahn Sermchai, pp 7-11, and "Kwam Yingyai Kong Phra Mongkolthepmuni" (The Greatness of Phra Mongkolthepmuni), Lokthip, Thamsamadhi Magazine, No. 264, 13 January 1994, pp 12-33.

Chetupon Vimomangkaraam, commonly known as Wat Po. While here, he is said to have frequented the different meditation and Pali learning centers in and around Bangkok. Even at that time his meditation instructors, Phra Khru Nanavirati of Wat Po, and Phra Ajahn Singha of Wat Lakhorn Tham, were said to have recognized that Chandassaro Bhikku could be an accomplished meditation instructor. Chandassaro Bhikku favored the Dhutonga style of meditation, which involved long periods of time meditating in the wilderness. After ten years as a monk, Chandassaro Bhikku's knowledge of Pali was sufficient to read and understand the Maha-Satipatthana Sutta, a sutta containing information on meditation. After reading and studying this sutta, Chandassaro Bhikku concentrated his efforts on meditation. The lent following this research was spent at Wat Bang Khoo Vieng on Bangkok Noi canal. While there, he is reported to have dedicated his life to Buddhism, and made a vow to remain seated until he could attain some level of Dharma as seen by the Buddha, even if it cost him his life. This was on the full moon night of the tenth lunar month in Chandassaro Bhikku's twelfth year as a monk. On this night, Chandassaro Bhikku is said to have discovered/re-discovered the Dhammakaya meditation system.

After Chandassaro Bhikku systematized his new technique, he was able to teach it to others. When that lenten season had concluded, Chandassaro Bhikku went to teach his new technique at Wat Bang Pla. His students were able to attain varying degrees of insight, and Chandassaro Bhikku's reputation as a skilled meditation instructor began to spread. Word of the monk's skills in teaching meditation reached the head of the Sangha District at Bhasicharoen, who asked Chandassaro Bhikku to assume the abbotship of a five century old monastery in need of repair; Wat Paknam. Luang Phor Sodh accepted the abbotship of Wat Paknam reluctantly, after being told by the district sangha head that he could not make displays of magic, the practice of which might alienate other temples in the

area by drawing away their followers.<sup>2</sup> But it was his criticisms of other monks' behavior which initially earned him disfavor with local monks and laypersons. This eventually led to criticism of his meditation technique, once it began to attract large numbers of followers. Luang Phor Sodh was even labeled as a "danger to the religion" (Pai-daw sasana),<sup>3</sup> but he took no apparent action against anyone. It was rumored that Luang Phor Sodh prevailed over his detractors by using powers attained in high-level Dhammakaya meditation, and followers increased. Word of his magical abilities soon greatly outnumbered those of a negative nature, and the movement began to grow. Chandassaro Bhikku's reputation as a skillful meditation instructor spread throughout the country. Included in this fame were miraculous feats attributed to those who practiced Dhammakaya meditation, as well as Chandassaro Bhikku's supernatural abilities.

This fame also generated money, which was used to refurbish the centuries old temple, and earned Chandassaro Bhikku the ecclesiastical ranks of Phra Bhavana-Kosolthera, then Phra Mongkol-Rajmuni, and finally Phra Mongkol-Thepmuni in 1957 (2500BE), two years before his death. Luang Phor Sodh is described as having thousands of followers in every part of the country. Although the primary concern of those at Wat Paknam was meditation, the temple also had a Pali language institute, and served as a community temple for the surrounding area.

### **Dhammakaya Meditation**

Dhammakaya meditation can be broadly divided into two multi-level levels: one dealing with ordinary Dhammakaya meditation; and the other dealing with what is called "high-level" meditation. Ordinary Dhammakaya and high-level meditation were practiced in many places throughout the country, but at Wat Paknam, special

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<sup>2</sup> Lokthip, p 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

high-level meditation took place in an enclosed area, where only those chosen by Luang Phor Sodh could enter and meditate. Once inside, the meditators generally did not venture outside for long periods of time. Food was provided through small windows, and high-level meditation was practiced here without interruption. Luang Phor Sodh had developed this special enclosed area to practice high-level Dhammakaya meditation, the focus of which would be directed at resolving a large scale problem occurring locally, nationally, or internationally.<sup>4</sup> As *mae chis*\* are reportedly capable of progressing rapidly in Dhammakaya meditation, Luang Phor Sodh commonly chose a small number of them to participate in the inner area where high-level meditation was being conducted. A small number of monks also meditated in this area with Luang Phor Sodh. While the ego-boosting/bruising problems inherent in the practice of selecting the extraordinary from the ordinary apparently did not surface while Luang Phor Sodh was alive, they appeared in full force after his passing away in 1959. These problems as well as the instability generated by appointing no heir apparent as the certified leader of the meditation technique after his passing, caused his movement to splinter under different meditation masters, each one claiming to control the technique, and possess all the knowledge passed on by Luang Phor Sodh. This is part of the reason for the formation of new movements in the years following Luang Phor Sodh's death.

### **Technical Explanation of the Meditation System**

Dhammakaya meditation is a complex visualization technique initially involving three types of meditation: *alogga-kasina*, meditation by concentrating on

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<sup>4</sup> Information obtained during a personal interview with Phra Mettanando Bhikku, Wat Phra Dhammakaya.

\* Female disciples wearing white robes, with shaven heads, and living in accordance with the eight precepts of Buddhism.

a bright object; *anapanasati*, meditation by concentrating on the motion of your breathing, and a part involving a mantra called *buddhanussati*, where the mantra *samma araham* is repeated.<sup>5</sup> Unlike many meditation techniques, simplicity is not the key factor in Dhammakaya meditation. The combination of the three methods become the initial step in practicing Dhammakaya meditation. They are used to give the meditator the ability to focus his/her mind on a bright sphere called the *pathama-magga*, a Dhammakaya term for the center of a person's body. Once concentration is able to be focused on this *pathama-magga*, the mantra recitation and the breathing awareness cease. The bright object or crystal ball has become the *pathama-magga*, the starting point to real progress in Dhammakaya meditation. From this point, further spheres, and later bodies, will be encountered, but just getting to this point requires a good degree of concentration and visualization.

In beginning the meditation technique, the meditator may look at a crystal ball,\* and remember its image, or may simply conjure up an image from memory. This image is to be imagined floating in front of the meditator's body. It will enter the body via the nostril, the left nostril for ladies, and the right nostril for gentlemen. While the imagined sphere is entering the body, the meditator recites the mantra *samma araham* three times at each location. This nostril position is position number one of seven. From here the sphere moves to the meditator's eye

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<sup>5</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, p 32.

\* Since practice begins with the visualization of a crystal ball, it is very common to see crystal balls of all sizes anywhere Dharmakaya meditation is being practiced. At Wat Phra Dhammakaya crystal balls appear to have earned some status as a deified object. There is a great crystal ball statue near the main meeting hall, many followers can be seen wearing crystal balls on gold chains around their necks, in the same manner as amulets, and often next to images of Luang Phor Sodh, and in some cases the image is contained in the crystal ball.. In the main meeting hall where Sunday meditation sessions are held, there are white circles in front of the seating areas, for assistance in visualizing the crystal ball. The Dharmakaya statue in this meeting hall sits in the center of what appears to be the top half of a crystal ball, as if it were emerging from the center of the sphere.

socket, back to the center of the head, down to the palate, then to the throat, further down to the stomach in line with the navel, and then back up slightly about an inch from the previous position. At each position the meditator will recite the mantra *samma araham* three times, while concentrating on the sphere. Although the imagined crystal ball is seen passing through seven bodily centers and resting at the seventh position, during meditation it will float back down to the sixth position. This position is called the center of the body, and plays an important role in Dhammakaya meditation theory. In this position, the meditator will concentrate on the image of the crystal ball, making it clearer and brighter. Here the breathing awareness ceases, but the mantra recitation continues in an effort to focus all of one's concentration at the center of the crystal ball. Once the meditator is comfortable with his/her concentration, the recitation also ceases. As the meditator concentrates on the center of the image, a new image will come from that center, and as one concentrates on the center of the new image, a newer image will appear. This is continued until the image of the *pathama-magga* arises from the center of the crystal ball image. The sphere is very bright, and may vary in size from being as small as a distant star, or as large as the sun in the noon sky. Concentration on this sphere will reveal five smaller spheres contained within. One sphere in the center is concentric, and the other four are located in front, to the right side, in back, and to the left side. These spheres are described as the refined element centers of the basic elements of the human body. The front sphere is the water element, the right is the earth element, the back is the fire element, and the left sphere is the wind element. The center concentric sphere is the space sphere. Contained within it is the sphere of cognitive function, which gives the space sphere its concentric appearance. Four thin lines connect the four outer spheres with the center sphere. (see figure 1)

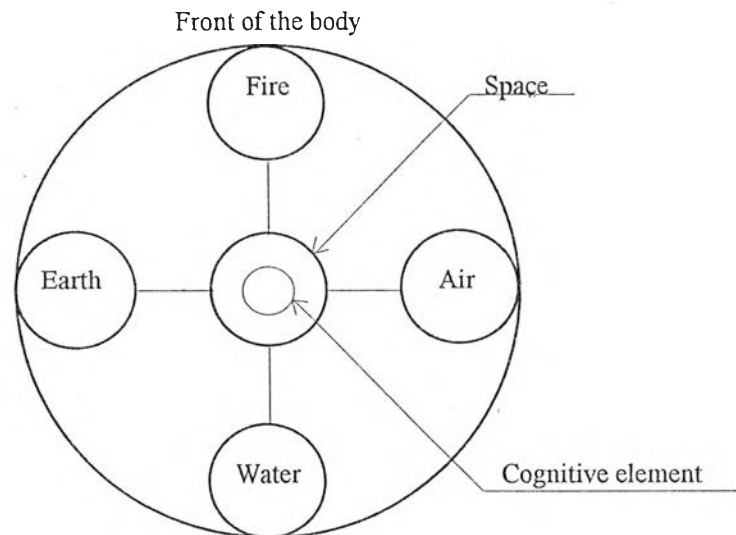


figure 1. Arrangement of the element centers in the *pathama-magga*.<sup>6</sup>

Before continuing on to the explanations of the next levels, it is important to point out that reaching this luminous sphere is a milestone in Dhammakaya meditation. It reflects a person's great achievement in meditation practice, as well as that person's physical, verbal, and mental purity.<sup>7</sup> For if the person were not somewhat pure, and able to concentrate his/her mind as instructed by the Dhammakaya meditation masters, the refined elements would not come together to form the *pathama-magga*, and there would be no illumination, which is linked directly with a person's purity and wholesomeness. Some people who have practiced Dhammakaya meditation for years have never reached this point, and some claim to have reached it after only a few sessions. The only explanation given is that some people are more adept at concentration than others, some have the ability to focus their mind better than others, and that some are more pure than others. This is also important in that it is offered as the reason why children are reported to be some of the most successful practitioners of Dhammakaya meditation:

<sup>6</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, p 67

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p 68

they are younger and have yet to acquire the evil traits many adults have, and their minds, being more faultless and naive, are easier to control. Meditation practitioners who are not able to visualize the ball, or luminous sphere, are consoled with the fact that simply sitting in Dhammakaya meditation while being mindful of breathing, reciting the *samma araham* mantra, and focusing the mind, will have a positive, calming affect on the mind.<sup>8</sup>

Once this *pathama-magga* level is reached, the meditator continues focusing his/her mind on the center of the sphere, from which will arise a new sphere, and subsequently from the center of this sphere will arise another sphere, this trend continuing for an unspecified period. Each time a new sphere appears, it should be brighter and clearer than the previous sphere. This brightness and clarity reflect the mind of the meditator, and practitioners are informed of procedures to perform if cloudy or unclear spheres appear, as this indicates impure thoughts have entered the meditator's mind. In such cases, the meditator is instructed to purify his/her mind, think pure thoughts, and or concentrate on the image of a perfectly clear crystal ball. When the *pathama-magga* expands, the next sphere to come from its center is called the sphere of *sila*. When a person's concentration is focused further, the *sila* sphere expands to reveal the *samadhi* sphere. This in turn expands to reveal the *panna* sphere. Further concentration focus allows the *panna* sphere to reveal the *vimutti* sphere. Continued right concentration will bring the *vimutti-nanadassa* sphere from the expanded center of the *vimutti* sphere. This *vimutti-nanadassa* sphere is the final luminous sphere encountered by the Dhammakaya meditator.

From this point on the sequence of inner bodies begins.<sup>9</sup> This sequence actually begins with the meditator's own human body, as he/she sits in meditation.

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<sup>8</sup> From a personal interview with Phra Ajahn Sermchai, Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram, Rajburi, Thailand.

<sup>9</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, pp 69-72.



The next step in this sequence of bodies is called the refined human body, or *Panita-manussakaya*. When this body appears at the center of the meditator's body, he/she is instructed to let the body expand in order to become that body. Continuing with the now established trend in the technique, the meditator continues to focus his/her concentration on becoming the new body, and then on the center of the body. Concentrating correctly on the center of the refined human form allows it to expand to reveal the Crude Celestial Body, or *Dibbakaya*. This expands to reveal the Refined Celestial Body, or *Panita-Dibbakaya*. This in turn expands to reveal the Crude Form-Brahman Body, or *Rupabrahmakaya*. Inside this is the Refined Form- Brahman Body or *Panita-rupabrahmakaya*. The final set is the Crude Formless-Brahman Body, or *Arupabrahmakaya*, which expands to reveal the Refined Formless-Brahman Body, or *Panita-arupabrahmakaya*. This series of bodies is essentially two versions of four different bodies, with the elements of the refined body being able to be seen by the meditator due to his/her advanced degree of concentration and purer mind. This advanced concentration and purer mind come about as a direct result of proper Dhammakaya meditation practice. One important procedure now firmly established in the meditator's mind is the continuation of going into the center of the center of the center, over and over. This is interesting for two reasons: it is an effective technique for concentration meditation, allowing the mind of the meditator to become focused on one slightly complex idea after another while disallowing stray thoughts from entering the mind; and it creates the image of the human body as a series of layers in concentric circles, the core of which being the pure Buddha Nature, said to be in every being. The layers are defilements to be peeled away one after the other by purifying one's mind and strengthening one's concentration. The fabulous clothes and jewelry adorning the different celestial bodies within each person are explained as the merit earned through good deeds performed in this life and in past lives.

## The Dhammakaya

After the Refined Formless-Brahman Body, or *Panita-arupabrahmakaya*, is reached, the next body to come from the center of this body will be the first in a series Dhammakayas. Attempting to define this word has been the source of a great deal of confusion for those interested in Dhammakaya meditation and the movements utilizing it. The term Dharmakaya is commonly found in Mahayana Buddhism referring to one of the Buddha's three bodies, or kayas, each body representing a plane of reality: the Dharmakaya, the Sambokaya, and the Nirmanakaya. The Dhammakaya, is defined as; Dharma-body,<sup>10</sup> Law-body,<sup>11</sup> with English language definitions varying primarily depending on the point of view of the one defining the Dharmakaya. Murti cites Buston's definition of the Dharmakaya, which sheds some light on the concept, saying:

The Sanskrit name for the cosmical body is the Dharmakaya. The word Kaya is derived from the verb-root ci-to collect, accumulate. (The Cosmical Body) is thus regarded as the accumulation, the aggregate of all the elements, uninfluenced (by defiling agencies). The Satyadvaya-vibhanga accordingly says: The Cosmical Body is thus called, Being the aggregate of all the elements. The substratum of all the unthinkable virtues, and the essence of all things, the nature of which agrees with logic.<sup>12</sup>

The following explanation is also very informative:

The Dharmakaya. . .is free from impurities and desires. It unfolds itself here, there, and everywhere responding to the call of karuna. It is not an individual reality; it is not a false existence, but is universal and pure. It comes from nowhere, it goes to nowhere; it does not assert itself; nor is it the subject to annihilation. It is forever serene and eternal. It is the One; devoid of all

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<sup>10</sup> Coomaraswamy, Ananda, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, Secausus, NJ., Citadel Press, 1988. pp 238-9.

<sup>11</sup> Kapleau, Roshi Philip, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, Anchor Books New York and London, Doubleday, 1989. p 359.

<sup>12</sup> Buston, *History of Buddhism*, Vol. 1, pp 128-9, cited in Murti, T.V.R., *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Madhyamika System*, London, Syndey, Unwin Paperbacks, 1987. p 285n.

determinations. This body of Dharma has no boundary, no quarters, but is embodied in all bodies. Its freedom or spontaneity is incomprehensible. . .The universe becomes, but this body for ever remains. It is free from all opposites and contraries, yet it is working in all things to lead them to Nirvana.<sup>13</sup>

Murti's own definition of the Dharmakaya is as follows:

As the Dharmakaya, Buddha fully realizes his identity with the Absolute (dharmata, sunyata) and unity (samata) with all beings. It is the oneness with the absolute that enables Buddha to intuit the Truth, which it is his sacred function to reveal to phenomenal beings. This is the fountain-source of his implicit strength which he concretises in the finite sphere. . .It would be, however, not exactly correct to take the Dharmakaya to be the abstract metaphysical principle-Sunyata or suchness (tathata).<sup>14</sup>

The Dhammakaya is often personified as Vairochana, "The All-Illuminating One," and is described as the essence, or reality of the universe.<sup>15</sup> Vairochana is defined by Govinda as the "Diamond Body."<sup>16</sup> In Mahayana Buddhology, Vairochana is described as the first earthly Buddha, Kakusandha, and occupies the central position in the Mahayana pantheon, with the second Buddha Konagammana in the East, the third Buddha Kassapa in the south, Gautama Buddha in the West, and the future Buddha Metteya, in the north.<sup>17</sup>

Although the term Dhammakaya is common in Mahayana Buddhism, it is more obscure in Hinayana Buddhism and is defined somewhat differently. This fact is explained well in the article by Frank Reynolds entitled "The Several Bodies of

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<sup>13</sup> Suzuki, D.T., *Outline of the Mahayana*, pp 223-4, cited in Murti, p 285n.

<sup>14</sup> Murti, p 285-6n.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Govinda, Lama Anagarika, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, London: Rider and Company, 1972. p 187.

<sup>17</sup> Coomaraswamy, p 249.

Buddha: Reflections on a Neglected Aspect of Theravada Tradition."<sup>18</sup> In the article he explains the importance of the Dhammakaya and Rupakaya concepts in Theravada Buddhism, the Theravada concept of the Dhammakaya as a body the Buddha acquired through his supranormal and soteriological attainments, and how this second concept played an important role in the Buddhism of northern Thailand and Cambodia describing it as having "a long though rather obscure career on the fringes of the Theravada community."<sup>19</sup> The Dhammakaya and Rupakaya concepts are essential elements in Theravada Buddhism in that they represent the teachings of the Buddha, his Dharma, and his physical body, his Rupakaya. In these cases the meanings are quite literal, Reynolds even notes the coffin-like containers used in Theravada countries to store the Tripitaka, representing the Dharma and symbolizing the body of Dharma.

The next Theravadin Dhammakaya concept is the supramundane body the Buddha acquired through his advancement along the path towards Nirvana, which is called the Dhammakaya. This body is attained through concentrative meditation, and enabled the Buddha to visit deities residing in the heavenly realms. This is the most similar to the Dhammakaya experienced in Dhammakaya meditation, although the physical descriptions are sometimes similar to Mahayana concepts of the Dhammakaya.

The final concept Reynolds mentions concerns the school which existed on the "fringes" of the Theravada community, and explains the different components of Buddha. The text is called Dhammakaya or Dhammakaya Atthavannana, and comes from a Pali language anthology entitled Suttajatakanidananisamsa. This anthology was discovered in Phnom Penh by G. Coedes in 1912, who later found a

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<sup>18</sup> Reynolds, Frank, "The Several Bodies of Buddha: Reflections on a Neglected Aspect of Theravada Tradition." *History of Religion*, Vol 16, no.4, May 1977.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p 375

copy in the Vajiranana National Library in Bangkok. In the text, twenty-six parts of the Buddha's body, and four parts of his clothing are explained.<sup>20</sup> Like the previously mentioned Dhammakaya, these parts, most of which are supramundane knowledge, are attained through meditation.

The Dhammakaya encountered in Dhammakaya Meditation would seem to fall into the category of the Theravadin Dhammakaya which is acquired through concentrative meditation, and capable of visiting heavenly realms. It is defined theoretically as, "The supramundane body which is of the purest element and is not compound. It is not subject to the three characteristics of annica, dukkha, and anatta."<sup>21</sup> The Dhammakaya seen during meditation is described as : " Characterized in appearance by being similar to a diamond-like statue of the Buddha, whose crown is like a budding lotus. The Dhammakaya is luminous, radiant, clear as a first-rate diamond, pure and perfect."<sup>22</sup>

The Dhammakaya initially attained in Dhammakaya meditation is the Dhammakaya-gotrabhū. Now, the size of the Dhammakaya image seen becomes important. Just as there were four humanoid bodies, each having a crude and a refined form, so too there are four Dhammakaya bodies to be attained, each having a normal and a refined appearance. But since the physical descriptions of the different bodies remain the same, size becomes the determining factor as to which Dhammakaya a meditator is attaining. Both ordinary and refined Dhammakayas have the same size. The *Dhammakaya-gotrabhū* has a lap-width and height of nine meters, or larger. Following this, a *Dhammakaya-sota* appears with a lap-width and height of ten meters or larger. This level of Dhammakaya is described as being

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<sup>20</sup> G. Coedes, "The Dharmakaya", *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, Vol. XX parts 3-4, December 1956. pp 255-9.

<sup>21</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, p 108.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p 74.

a "stream-winner." The next Dhammakaya is the *Dhammakaya-sakadagami*, whose lap-width and height are twenty meters or larger. This is the level of the "once-returner." The next Dhammakaya is the *Dhammakaya-anagami*, whose lap-width and height are thirty meters. This is the level of the "non-returner." The final level is the *Dhammakaya-arahatta*, whose lap-width and height are forty meters. This is the level of the Arahant or perfect one. It is claimed that if one concentrates one's mind at the center of the sphere of the *refined Dhammakaya-arahatta*, one can reach ayatana-nibbana, the place of residence of the highest *Dhammakaya-arahatta*. It is also claimed that this is the place where all of the arahants and Lord Buddha exist forever.<sup>23</sup> However, this visit to ayatana-nibbana is not necessarily permanent, and one would return to one's previous existence once the meditation session was completed, unless one had actually become enlightened, thereby becoming an Arahant.

### **High-level Dhammakaya meditation**

This is the basic Dhammakaya meditation system as developed by Luang Phor Sodh. It is the low-level meditation; the one commonly practiced by the majority of Dhammakaya followers, both monks and lay people. Once an individual has attained the highest level of low-level Dhammakaya meditation, the *Dhammakaya-arahatta*, one may progress to practicing high-level Dhammakaya meditation. High-level Dhammakaya meditation is where much of the magic, or special powers of Dhammakaya meditation can be performed. Among the special powers to be attained are those which enable one to visit one's own past lives, or the lives of others, discover where someone had been reborn, and know the reason for why the person was reborn there, cure oneself, or others, of any disease, extra sensory perception, mind control, and similar accomplishments. Phra Ajahn

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p 75.

Sermchai emphasizes using high-level meditation to understand Buddhist Dharma, to break attachment, delusion, and craving, and to understand the three aspects of Nirvana. According to Phra Ajahn Sermchai, these three aspects of Nirvana are: void of passion and self; the purest virtue of the body - which is the Enlightened Dhammakaya; and Nirvana as the place of the Buddha and all arahants, that is, existing in forms which may be seen and visited during high-level Dhammakaya meditation.

At Wat Phra Dhammakaya, the high-level meditation primarily concerns the battle of good over evil, called the *Wicha-rop* by Luang Phor Sodh. The *Wicha-rop* is an ongoing, universal battle of good over evil, where high-level Dhammakaya meditators use their powers obtained in Dhammakaya meditation to defeat Mara, the leader of evil in the universe.<sup>24</sup> In this *Wicha-rop* it must be understood that Mara is not simply a personification of evil, or some symbolic reference to evil, but an actual being who is trying to destroy the good and virtuous beings in the universe in order to reign supreme as the leader of the universe. According to Methanando Bhikku of Wat Phra Dhammakaya, before the present Buddha, Sidartha Gautama, attained enlightenment, conquering Mara in the process, human beings' existence was not a cyclic circle of rebirth, sickness, death, subsequent rebirth, sickness, etc., until enlightenment, but rather moving in a straight line toward emancipation, or enlightenment. In order for the Buddha to attain enlightenment, he had to defeat Mara. This caused the universe to split. Where there had once been only a single center in the universe, around which existed good, evil, and indifferent beings and forces, there were now three poles or dimensions. These are: the Kusala, or good pole; Akusala, or evil pole; and the pole of indifference. After this, Mara is described as twisting existence into the

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<sup>24</sup> From a personal interview with Phra Mettanando Bhikku, Wat Phra Dhammakaya, Phatum Thani, Thailand.

samsaric circle which it is described as today, perhaps as retribution for being removed from the original single dimension of the universe. The corresponding colors to these poles are: white, or clear and bright for the Kusala pole; black, or murky and opaque for the Akusala pole; and gray or smoky for the indifferent pole. These colors are important for recognizing the images from the different centers of the universe which appear during meditation. This is because for every image, or body described in the previous section of this paper, there is a corresponding image from the other dimensions of the universe. That is, there are eighteen bodies in Dhammakaya meditation for the good dimension of the universe, just as there are eighteen bodies each of the evil and indifferent dimensions of the universe. Just as Mara is described as real, and not simply a personification for purposes of understanding, so too the different dimensions of the universe are also real, with the Akusala center being the universe of negative reality, and the indifferent universe composed of indifferent reality.

While practicing Dhammakaya meditation, one must be certain to concentrate on the purity and clarity of the image one visualizes. If the image starts to become cloudy or dark, one's own purity is fading, and one must concentrate to restore it to its former brilliance. Otherwise, the power one gains through meditation will be passed on to the evil or indifferent dimension of the universe. Once there, it can be used in the *Wicha-rop* to destroy the good forces. It is also important to know that only the Kusala and Akusala forces engage in battles during the *Wicha-rop*, as the forces and beings in the indifferent dimension of the universe will side with the winning dimension when the battle is over. For this reason, any powers attained in meditation which do not go directly to the side of good, are of no use in defeating Mara. This is very important in understanding how the battles of the *Wicha-rop* take place, or how the meditators work to defeat Mara. Methanando Bhikku describes Luang Phor Sodh as a "crusader" of the first Buddha,



Adi-Buddha, sent to destroy Mara, and put an end to the Samsaric cycle of life. To do this, groups of meditators would be employed to provide Luang Phor Sodh, and the other practitioners of high-level meditation, with the power to defeat Mara. Luang Phor Sodh would also work to correct the worldly problems which arise from Mara. These include small scale problems such as local disturbances, and large scale problems, such as world wars.

It is claimed that the powers of high-level Dhammakaya meditation have been used to counter Mara's negative dharma. As mentioned earlier, while Luang Phor Sodh was alive, high-level meditation was done in a secluded place within Wat Paknam. In this area, only those monks and mae-chis selected by Luang Phor Sodh could enter and engage in high-level meditation. No other people were allowed in, and food and other necessities were passed in through small windows. Here, the meditators would engage in high-level meditation 24 hours a day by working in six hour shifts. As Luang Phor Sodh was the lead warrior in this battle, he led the meditation battle, and directed the other meditators in attacking Mara. This was usually done by controlling a neutral device called the *Patticcasamupada*, or dependent-origination device. This device is the controller of cosmic existence, and its output depends on its input. Therefore, to cause good things to happen, good things must be input. These good things are the positive results of attaining the higher levels of low-level Dhammakaya meditation, as well as the powers of the high-level meditation. One very important consideration in this amassing of powers using meditation is that of numbers: the more people practicing at the same time, the more power gained. In addition to powers obtained through meditation, there are also other supernatural forces which may be harnessed in this battle of good over evil. These powers include the powers extant in crystals, which may be activated and used to input positive forces into the dependent-origination device to

cause positive events to take place. The powers residing in fossils may also be activated and used in a similar manner.

An example Methanando Bhikku offered as a result of the positive results of Dhammakaya meditation, was the bombing of Bangkok during World War Two. He wished to clarify the information which first appeared incorrectly in Baan Mai Run Rooy, and was later cited by Peter Jackson in his book, *Buddhism Legitimation and Conflict, The Political Functions of Urban Thai Buddhism*. Methanando Bhikku describes the mae chi Khun Yai Chan, as using the powers of high-level Dhammakaya meditation to travel into the sky and deflect the bombs which were falling on Bangkok. It is believed by Dhammakaya followers that she, and others, were able to keep Wat Paknam, and other important areas of Bangkok safe from the falling bombs. A different function of high-level Dhammakaya meditation was used to protect Bangkok from the atomic bomb. This, he insists, was the mind controlling power of Dhammakaya meditation, which was applied to the allied planners who were choosing the site on which to drop the bomb. Luang Phor Sodh discovered that Bangkok was a possible site for the bomb, and set to work to make them choose another site. The meditators at Wat Paknam used the mind-controlling powers to force the planners to change their plans, and they were successful, for as history shows the atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and not on Bangkok.\*

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\* As this particular topic seems to catch the attention of people interested in Wat Phra Dhammakaya, I will provide some additional information here. Why drop the bomb on Bangkok in the first place? is the question most commonly asked, and the one I posed to Phra Metthanando. According to Phra Metthanando, the large number of Japanese troops in Bangkok made it the first choice on the list of the allied planners. By destroying the troops here, Japan would not have the strength to carry on with the war, and would sue for peace. The high-level meditators reportedly convinced allied war planners change the target very close to the time the bomb was dropped. One witness claimed to have seen an American bomber dropping practice bombs over Bangkok simulating the dropping of the atomic bomb. These simulation drops reportedly occurred on the days before the bombings of the Japanese cities.

### **Meditation: Traditional vs. Dhammakaya**

Here it is necessary to look more closely at traditional meditation practiced in Thailand to note differences and similarities with Dhammakaya meditation, in order to better understand why leaders of the movements felt it is necessary to replace traditional meditation practices with Dhammakaya meditation. Luang Phor Sodh is described as being dissatisfied with his progress in traditional Theravada meditation practices, and makes a vow that he would not move from his seat “unless he could see and attain the Dhamma even the least permissible, as seen and attained by the Buddha.”<sup>25</sup> Even though he is praised by his meditation instructors, he is not content and feels there is something missing.<sup>26</sup> He reportedly attained the Dhammakaya on the same night he made the vow, and declares the meditation system he has experienced as the same one used by the Buddha to reach enlightenment. In teaching a new meditation technique as one originally used by the Buddha, and citing canonical evidence, Luang Phor Sodh was able to begin a movement away from traditional Thai meditation practices, and at the same time align himself more closely with the Buddha to avoid accusations of heresy would-be critics might have made. It is significant that the canonical evidence cited by Luang Phor Sodh is the Maha Satipattanasutta. This sutta is often considered the starting point for meditation study. However, the emphasis that Luang Phor Sodh placed on a specific idea contained in the sutta, that of “bodies within bodies,” sets Dhammakaya meditation apart from traditional meditation, which did not interpret the sutta the same way. When Dhammakaya meditation is compared with traditional Theravada meditation systems, it appears compact and complete. Normally, traditional Theravada meditation is divided into two types, calm or *samatha*, and insight, or *vipassana*. To explain briefly, meditation performed to

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<sup>25</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, p 9.

<sup>26</sup> Lokthip, p 17.

calm the mind is usually done to prepare for insight meditation. *Samatha* meditation takes the practitioner through the four *jhanas*, which will enable the practitioner to advance in *vipassana* meditation. Dhammakaya meditation is described as both *samatha* and *vipassana*,<sup>27</sup> incorporating both types of meditation in one compact meditation technique. Also, while incorporating traditionally Theravadin themes, such as concentration on breathing, its emphasis on visualization makes it unique. In better explaining the comparison the differences are listed side-by-side, and then explained in detail.

Traditional Meditation

- Individually performed
- Desired meditation theme chosen
- Vision may or may not appear
- Vision may or may not have significance
- Powers are a by-product

Dhammakaya Meditation

- Practiced in groups
- Meditation theme provided
- Vision should appear
- Significance of vision underscored
- Powers are an essential goal

In traditional meditation, one is told to find a secluded spot, preferably quiet and meditate individually.<sup>28</sup> Dhammakaya meditation, while capable of being done individually, is nearly always done in groups. This does not vary at any of the three Dhammakaya movements described in this thesis. The themes of traditional meditation and Dhammakaya meditation also vary considerably. While there are forty meditation themes described by Buddhaghosa,<sup>29</sup> traditional meditation in

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<sup>27</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, p 18.

<sup>28</sup> Bhikku Khantipalo, *Calm and Insight, A Buddhist Manual for Meditators*, London and Dublin, Curzon Press Ltd., 1987, p 4, Buddhadasa Bhikku, *Anapanasati Mindfulness With Breathing: Unveiling the Secrets of Life*, Santikaro Bhikku tr., The Dhamma Study & Practice Group, second edition 1989, p 19.

<sup>29</sup> Buddhaghosa Bhadantacariya, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Bhikkhu Nyanamoli tr., Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1975. p 112.

Thailand usually revolves around breathing awareness, *anapanasati*. Other popular themes are contemplating the body, *kayagatasati*, cultivating the divine abodes of the mind, *brahmavihara*, and concentration on bright objects, *aloka-kasina*. The major theme of Dhammakaya meditation, while incorporating sub-themes, is visualization. Dhammakaya meditation begins with breathing awareness, reciting a short mantra, and concentrating on an imagined bright sphere, but these are left behind once one is able to visualize a bright sphere expanding to reveal another bright sphere in its center, or the level of the *pathama-magga*. From this point, the meditator is told in detail what to see, and what to feel when seeing the images. This is a serious departure from traditional meditation practices.

Traditional meditation systems also describe images one may see while meditating, but their importance varies with the desired theme of meditation, and therefore are more important for some than for others. The visions, or *nimitta*, seen may appear in a variety of shapes and sizes, but are described as being mind created and not real.<sup>30</sup> There are benefits to be had by using visions. Buddhadasa recommends using *nimitta* to develop *egaggata*, or one pointedness of the mind, but others recommend just leaving them alone. Phra Srivissuddhikavi describes *nimitta* saying:

It may be generally included that these visions are to a great extent the projections of the aspirants' habitual thoughts and feelings...The overall advice for the aspirants is therefore to be disinterested, paying no attention to whatever occurs as a vision even if it is a delightful one.<sup>31</sup>

For practitioners of Dhammakaya meditation, the visions seen during meditation are of extreme importance. They are milestones used to gauge

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<sup>30</sup> Bhikku Kantipalo, p 106, Buddhadasa Bhikku, p 41, Phra Srivissuddhikavi, (Pichitr Thitavano), *Mind Development*, Siri Buddhasukh Trans., Bangkok, Mahamakut Buddhist University, 1988. p 200.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 202-3.

meditative progress, and can enable one to visit Nirvana, if only temporarily.<sup>32</sup> Without the visions which enable the meditator to progress from the crystal sphere to the *pathama-magga*, through bodies of the human forms and Dhammakaya forms until the final Dhammakaya is reached, there would be nothing to gauge one's performance. Additionally, without these things to see, the meditation technique could not be taught in groups, which is important for developing power used in high-level Dhammakaya meditation. Simply put, without the visions, Dhammakaya meditation could not exist.

A final note of comparison should be made concerning high-level Dhammakaya meditation and powers gained through traditional meditation, called *abhinya*. The powers attributed to practitioners of Dhammakaya meditation are not unique, and can also be attained in traditional meditation. *Abhinya* are defined by Thitavano as "super knowledge," and he lists five types: *Iddhividhi*, or psychic feats; *Dibbasota*, or clairaudience; *Cetopariyanana*, or telepathy and mind reading; *Pubbenivasanussatinana*, or recollection of former lives; and *Dibbacakkhu*, or clairvoyance.<sup>33</sup> As was true with visions which appear during meditation, attaining and utilizing *abhinya* is emphasized in Dhammakaya meditation, and may or may not have importance for practitioners of traditional meditation.

### **Similarities with Tantric Schools**

The Dhammakaya in the meditation system developed by Luang Phor Sodh has several striking similarities with Tantric meditation systems popular in Tibet, particularly where the properties and powers of the Dhammakaya are concerned. The similarities are related primarily with the concepts of bodies within bodies, and the Dhammakaya assisting with attainment of powers and even enlightenment.

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<sup>32</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, p 25, 75.

<sup>33</sup> Thitavano, pp 215-6.

Dhammakaya philosophy and Tantric philosophy also have many similarities. In both schools of thought there are mantras and mandalas, and battles of good and evil taking place deep in the cosmos. Powers to participate in these battles, or work miracles are attained by practicing "creative vision"<sup>34</sup> meditation.

Although mandalas seldom, if ever, appear in Thai Buddhism, the diagram Luang Phor Sodh used in explaining the concept of the *pathama-magga* is very similar to the mandala of the Dhyani Buddhas found in the Vajrayana school of Tantric Buddhism. Its basic design is common to many mandalas, with a central circle surrounded by four circles, situated left, right above and below. In the case of the *pathama-magga* of Dhammakaya meditation, the four outer circles are linked with the center circle by lines, and the center circle contains a smaller circle in its center. The six circles represent the centers of the body's basic elements: space, fire, water, air, and earth, and something Luang Phor Sodh labeled the cognitive element. (see figure 2)

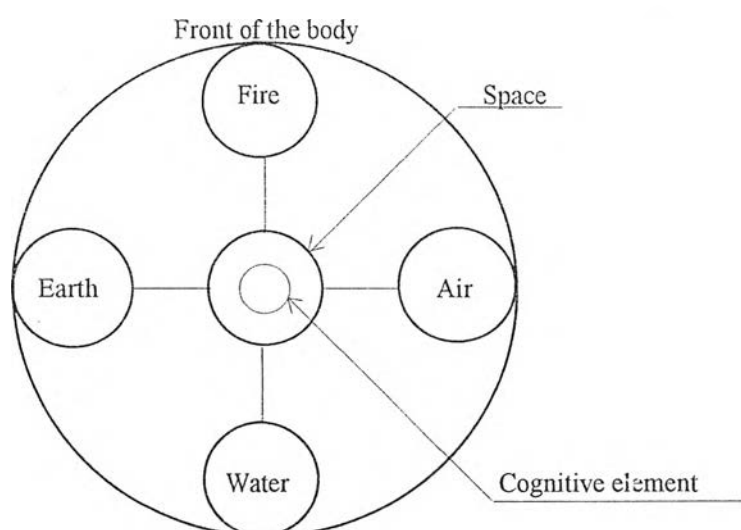


Figure 2. Arrangement of element centers in the *pathama-magga*.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Govinda, p 104.

<sup>35</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, p 67.

This is almost an exact duplication of the distribution of the elements in the mandala of the Dhyani Buddhas. (see figure 3)

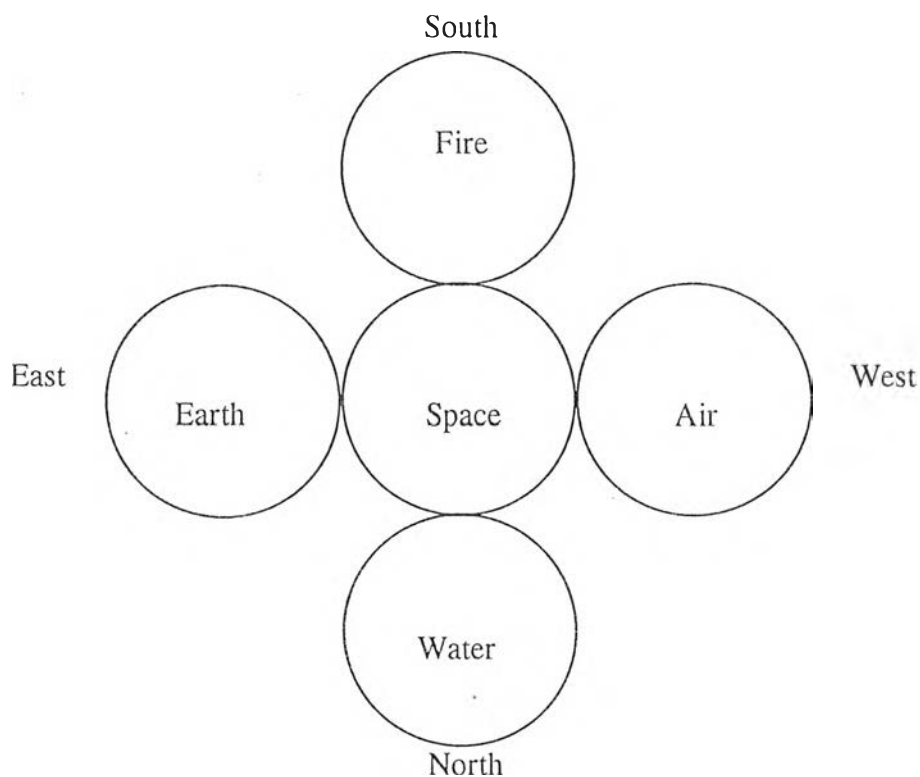


figure 3. Arrangement of elements in the mandala of the Dhyani Buddhas.<sup>36</sup>

For Dhammakaya philosophy it is believed that these element centers will assemble in this fashion when the mind becomes concentrated perfectly still, at the center of the center, of the human body. As mentioned when describing the different steps of Dhammakaya meditation, reaching the level where one can see the elements in the patthama-magga is considered an important achievement, and a high level of concentration is said to be required. To be able to witness the Dhyani Buddhas in Tibetan meditation, one must work to cultivate one's creative vision. Creative vision may come about when one has reached a "pure and spontaneous awareness" (a level similar to satori in Zen Buddhism).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Govinda, p 122.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p 118.



### Meditative Assistants

As there are five levels of Dhammakaya to attain, so too there are five Dhyani Buddhas which may be realized. The Dhyani Buddhas are all said to originate within the central image, the Vairochana. From this center body, they emanate, and take up positions at the four points of the compass; north, east, south and west. In Dhammakaya meditation, the Dhammakayas are sheath-beings, each contained within the center of the previous body until the final *Dhammakaya-arahatta* is attained. A key difference in this comparison are the colors and characteristics of the Dhyani Buddhas. They are blue, green, red, yellow and white, appear in different gestures, and possess slightly different wisdoms. The Dhyani Buddhas also have female counterparts, the most famous being Tara, a Bodhisattva who symbolizes boundless, loving devotion in Tibetan Buddhism. The various Dhammakayas appear very similar to each other, being differentiated only by their size. These slight differences however, do not detract from the significance of the similarities. The central figure in both schools of thought are the namesakes of the schools: the Vajrayana (Vajrasattva) and the Dhammakaya. Each is said to encompass the Buddha nature, and represents experiencing ultimate reality through meditation. Both are described physically as radiant beings, one literally as a "Diamond being," the other nearly always described the same way.<sup>38</sup>

Another important element both schools share is the concept of spiritual assistants in meditation. Once one has attained the highest level of Dhammakaya, one can see the Lord Buddha and all the arahants in Nirvana. These arahants as well as the Lord Buddha may assist one in whatever one seeks, whether it be personal healing, the healing of others, similar special powers, and even enlightenment. Vajrayana meditation also offers the same benefits. The Dhyani

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<sup>38</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, pp 72, 74, and Govinda, p 187.

Buddhas are described by Lama Anagarika as 'lha' which he says corresponds to the Indian word deva, an inhabitant of a higher plane of existence, they are not necessarily Buddhas or divine beings.<sup>39</sup> They do, however, assist one with progress in meditation. Other meditation assistants in Tibetan Buddhism include Dhakini, a genie of meditation, a spiritual helper who inspires the meditation practitioner to realize the impermanence of worldly desires, and Khadoma normally a female genie, appearing surrounded by flames, and assisting the meditator in a variety of ways, including concentrating and integrating meditative experiences, and even leading one to enlightenment.<sup>40</sup>

### **Bodies Within Bodies**

Another key element in both school of meditation is the notion of bodies within bodies. For Dhammakaya meditation, it is the fundamental concept on which the system is based: that is within each of us is a diamond-like, pure Dhammakaya, who can be reached and realized by penetrating through the numerous other sheath-bodies. This is very similar to Tantric idea of the 'five sheaths.' In Dhammakaya meditation, the practitioner must penetrate eight bodies before he/she realizes the Dhammakaya, but these eight bodies are actually only four bodies, as each body has a crude and refined form. The body type does not change. Each of the four types, Human, Celestial, Form-Brahman, or the Formless-Brahman, simply has two appearances. Within the center of the Formless-Brahman is the Dhammakaya. In the same way, the doctrine of the "five sheaths" describes bodies which must be penetrated to experience the "body of highest, universal consciousness, nourished and sustained by exalted joy."<sup>41</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> Govinda, p 111.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p 190, 195.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p 148.

concept of the "five sheaths" however, does not describe the bodies which must be penetrated in the same way Dhammakaya meditation does. The sheaths which surround our central body are: physical, anna-maya-kosa; fine material, prana-maya kosa; thought, mano-maya-kosa; and potential consciousness, vijnana-maya-kosa. The center is the body only "experienced in a state of enlightenment or in the highest states of meditation."<sup>42</sup> In Tibetan Buddhism it is called the Sambogaya, body of bliss, but this is very similar to the manner in which the Dhammakaya is experienced in Dhammakaya meditation. And as those considered expert in Dhammakaya meditation describe the Dhammakaya experienced during meditation as different from that of Mahayana Buddhism, it is not unusual to discover striking similarities having slightly different names. That the concept of penetrating bodies to reach the purest "Body of Inspiration/Bliss" is found in both schools is significant regardless of specific labels given to the bodies.

### **Bodily Centers**

These bodies or sheaths are penetrated in both meditation systems by concentrating ones efforts on the center of the body. In both schools of meditation, there are various centers of the bodies in which to do this. And in both schools there are seven body centers. Lama Anagarika points out that there are similarities in Hindu and Buddhist notions of psychic centers in the human body, however he asserts that the way the Buddhist system used in meditation differentiates itself from the Hindu system saying:

The Hindu system emphasizes more the static side of the centres and their connexions with elementary nature, by identifying them with the fundamental elements of the universe...The Buddhist system is less concerned with the static-objective side of the cakras, but rather with that which flows through them, with

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

their dynamic functions, i.e., with the transformation of that current of cosmic or nature energies into spiritual potentialities.<sup>43</sup>

The seven bodily centers in Tantric Yoga are: Sahasrara-Padma, the Crown Center, located at the top of one's head; Ajna-Cakra the Eyebrow Center, located between the eyebrows; Visuddha-Cakra, the Throat Center, located in the throat; Anahata-Cakra, the Heart Center, in the heart area; Manipura-Cakra, the Navel center, located behind one's navel, Svadhithana-Cakra, the Abdominal Center, located 'four finger-widths below the navel,'<sup>44</sup> and Muladhara-Cakra, the Root Center, located in the pelvic area. Lama Anagarika describes the centers succinctly, saying:

...These cakras are the points in which psychic forces and bodily functions merge into each other or penetrate each other. They are the focal points in which cosmic and psychic energies crystallize into bodily qualities, and in which bodily qualities are dissolved or transmuted again into psychic forces.<sup>45</sup>

He goes on to explain the importance of the centers, saying:

The great secret of Tantric Yoga consists in the experiencing of reality on the planes of different or, if possible, all psychological centres available to us. It is only through this multidimensional awareness that our knowledge gains depth and universal perspective which converts into inner experience and dynamic reality (actuality) what otherwise would have been perceived outwardly and superficially.<sup>46</sup>

In Dhammakaya meditation the centers have a slightly different function, except for one, which is used as the object of concentration to experience the Dhammakaya plane of reality. The other centers of the body are used as positions through which an imagined/envisioned crystal sphere will pass on its way to the navel center. The position which Dhammakaya meditation holds as the center of the body is a place described as approximately two finger widths above the navel

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p 134.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p 144

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p 135.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

level. This is to be envisioned by imagining two perpendicular lines cutting through one's body: one running from one's navel, straight back; the other running perpendicular from the left to the right of one's body. The point where these two lines connect is the navel center. The center of a person's body is the place two finger widths above this place. To get to these places, one must first visualize a crystal-like sphere floating initially outside one's body. Beginners of Dhammakaya meditation are told to visualize this sphere floating in through either their right or left nostril; right for men and left for ladies. This is the first position, called the Nostril Aperture. When the sphere has been positioned in this place, the meditator will repeat the Dhammakaya mantra *samma araham* three times to keep his/her concentration focused. From this position the imagined sphere will drift up to the second position, the eye socket. As with the Nostril Aperture, the right eye socket is for men and the left is for women. The third position is the Center of Head. In this position there is no left of center or right of center based on gender, only the center of one's head, behind, but at the same level as one's eyes. From this position, the meditator moves the sphere down to the fourth position, the Palate Terminus. This is done by rolling one's eyeballs back, which assists one in moving one's vision back into one's body. The fifth position is the Throat Aperture, which is located just below the Palate Terminus, at the top of one's throat. From here, the imagined sphere moves straight down to the sixth position, at the navel level. From here, the meditator imagines the sphere floating back upwards, about two finger widths. This is the seventh position called simply, the Position of the Sphere. It is here that one concentrates one's mind to reach an advanced state of concentration. This is done by imagining the sphere expanding to reveal another crystal-like sphere contained within its center. This is repeated over and over until one is able to the advanced state of concentration required to see the *pathama-magga*. When this occurs, one "will notice the gradual decrease in response to

external sensations."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, one's mind, now visualized in the glowing ball, will fall back to the sixth position, the center of the body in line with the navel. In Dhammakaya meditation this is considered the center of a person's body as it is believed that this is the mind's permanent resting place. From this point, the meditator can continue through the remainder of low-level Dhammakaya meditation, and possibly even progress to high-level Dhammakaya meditation. Practicers of Dhammakaya meditation believe that all of the bodies and images, including those of the Lord Buddha and all the arahants in Nirvana, seen during meditation will emerge from this Navel Center.

In Tibetan Buddhism a slightly different experience is to be had by concentrating on one's Navel Center. Lama Anagarika describes the Yoga of the Inner Fire as a typical example of concentrating upon one of the body's centers.

After the Sadhaka (devotee) has purified his mind through devotional exercises and has put himself into a state of inner preparedness and receptivity; after he has regulated the rhythm of his breath, filled it with consciousness and spiritualized it through mantric words, he directs his attention upon the Navel Centre, in whose lotus he visualizes the seed-syllable 'RAM' and above it the seed syllable 'MA', from which latter emerges Dorje Naljorma (Skt.: Vajra-Yogini) a Khadoma of brilliant red colour, surrounded by a halo of flames.<sup>48</sup>

He goes onto describe how the meditator becomes Dorje Naljorma and precedes through ten stages of experiencing a great flame that begins small, grows to engulf the world and universe, then recedes and extinguishes itself once again. This is a process of destroying the human world, through fire, to move a human being to see the impermanence of the mundane world, and strive to move beyond it. In low-level Dhammakaya meditation, on the other hand, one attempts to experience the bliss of Nirvana by peeling away one's "bodies" until one exits with Buddha and the

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<sup>47</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, pp 66, 91.

<sup>48</sup> Govinda, pp 159-60.

arahants in Nirvana. This is done in the same manner as the Yoga of the Inner Fire: that is attaining a high state of concentration by employing anapanasati, reciting mantras, and then applying the high degree of concentration towards visualizing predetermined images, becoming that image (or images), experiencing some fantastic experience, and returning to the normal world.

What these comparisons with Tibetan Tantric practices is intended to show is the strong similarities Dhammakaya meditation and many Tantric meditation methods share. Clearly, Dhammakaya meditation is not typical of more traditional forms of Theravada meditation practiced in Thailand, and many people, particularly those who do not practice Dhammakaya meditation, have expressed doubts to the claim that Luang Phor Sodh rediscovered Dhammakaya meditation while meditating and studying the Maha-Satipatthanasutta. Describing the similarities Dhammakaya meditation shares with Tantric beliefs and practices is one way to better understand the meditation system. Instead of declaring Dhammakaya meditation the original meditation system practiced by the Buddha when he attained enlightenment, and which was subsequently lost five hundred years later, it is much more interesting to investigate other meditation systems which share similar beliefs and practices. By doing so one can discover meditation systems which may enable one to experience new meditative sensations. After all, if you practice Dhammakaya meditation to cut attachment and ties to the world, and are able to accomplish this by visiting the Buddha and the arahants in Nirvana, wouldn't seeing the physical world consumed in an ocean of flames also assist in this endeavor? The problem one faces in presenting similar meditation systems to followers of Luang Phor Sodh is the personality cult which has formed around the former abbot, which in turn has created very dogmatic beliefs. Particularly strong is the belief that this is the meditation system: complete, perfect, and certainly without equal. It was developed and used by the Buddha, and rediscovered only recently by Luang Phor Sodh, who

was kind enough to share it with all persons interested and capable. To infer that Luang Phor Sodh was influenced by, and borrowed Tantric practices is unwelcome news to most followers, as it goes against what they have been previously taught.

Dhammakaya meditation has a reputation for allowing practitioners to progress more rapidly than other meditation systems, for enabling practitioners to acquire miraculous powers, and even for empowering the most adept with changing the world and the universe. To introduce elements which challenge this uniqueness has been, for the most part, thoroughly dismissed. Leaders of the movements utilizing Dhammakaya meditation provide different possible explanations. The abbot of Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram, Phra Ajahn Maha Sermchai Jayamangayalo, suggests that the monks who developed Tantric Buddhism in Tibet could have been working towards a powerful meditation system, such as Dhammakaya meditation, but have yet to reach this goal. And the fact that they have been attempting to do this for more than 700 years makes the fact that Luang Phor Sodh accomplished the feat in a comparatively short time all the more outstanding. He admitted hearing about similarities between Dhammakaya meditation and Tantric Buddhist meditation, but understood Tantric meditation systems lacked the completeness of Dhammakaya meditation. Phra Methanando Bhikku of Wat Phra Dhammakaya suggests that when Dhammakaya meditation was lost five hundred years after the Buddha's passing away, that the system could have moved into Tibet. Lacking the qualified monks to maintain the system caused it to fall into the confused state Tantric meditation appears in today.

Luang Phor Sodh's passing away more than thirty five years ago has made the task of answering the questions about the many apparent similarities between Dhammakaya meditation and the Tantric systems almost insurmountable. It is known that Luang Phor Sodh spent many years studying at Wat Phratchetupon, or Wat Po, and other temples in Bangkok. Wat Po is well known for being a school,



and is considered by some to be Thailand's first university. It is likely that monks from different countries, including those practicing Tantric Buddhism, could have been present with Luang Phor Sodh, and taught him about Tantric ideas such as mantras, mandalas, bodily centers, etc. Luang Phor Sodh is described in his biography as devoting years to studying the Maha-Satipatthanasutta, which he used as the main canonical evidence for supporting the bodies one sees and realizes during Dhammakaya meditation.<sup>49</sup> It is significant that this sutta is also cited by Tantric schools as canonical evidence of Khadomas or genies who appear during meditation.<sup>50</sup> Since Tantric meditation systems have been in use for approximately 700 years, and Dhammakaya meditation has been utilized in modern times only since the early part of this century, one is strongly inclined to believe Luang Phor Sodh was influenced Tantric meditation in his development of Dhammakaya meditation. However, knowing exactly how he was influenced, and by whom, is by all accounts impossible. Only circumstantial evidence based primarily on speculation remains

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<sup>49</sup> Phra Ajahn Sermchai, pp 9, 91.

<sup>50</sup> Govinda, p 194.