

INVINCIBLE THOUGHTS

by

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Dedicated to Bharatamata, Mother India, who has given me some of my life's finest experiences, and who has also given my life content, meaning and interest, and who generously even gave me one of her daughters, Valsa, to be my wife and companion without whose inspiration these thoughts would not have been written.

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- *What happens when a drop of water falls into the ocean?*



Ever since I was little, I have been attracted to Asia, especially Central and South Asia. I read adventure books and travel stories in Swedish and sometimes there were short sections on the religions in these countries. I was fascinated by Hinduism and Buddhism, their philosophies seemed sensible and appealed very much to me. Eventually, in my young life, I could feel in practice that some of the teachings were correct. That's how it has been throughout my life.

I attended a Christian boarding school (Lundsberg) for six years where we were fed Christianity. But Christianity has never spoken to me and I have always thought it lacks logic. Christianity is so evidently created by people, its entire structure with God at the top, humanity in the middle and the Devil in the cellar is so clearly modeled on an earthly kingdom, or possibly a big family, with a relatively badtempered and jealous patriarch at the top. Eventually, I discovered that I am a Buddhist. It happened when I was in my teens, and so it has been since then. However, I have never undergone any formal conversion.

Of course, all religions are created by humans. They are different ways to try to express the truth about existence. Personally, I think the Indian religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) express the truth much better than the Abrahamic religions.

The Indian religions are transcendental by nature. The emphasis is not on faith, but on insight and wisdom. It is sometimes said that Hinduism and Buddhism do not care about this life, but are merely dealing with the beyond, but that is not true. Both emphasize the importance of fulfilling one's worldly duties. A fascinating aspect of Hinduism, especially, is that the same image of a god, the same ritual, can mean completely different things for a simple villager and an advanced nuclear physicist or philosopher. Hinduism automatically adjusts to the level of the practitioner. The same applies to some extent to Buddhism. That's why it's quite amusing to listen to people who complain about Hinduism's superstitions, magic, many gods and idols. It only shows the level of understanding of the speaker himself!

Buddhism's central doctrine, on the other hand, is that everything in the universe, including ourselves, our bodies and "souls", is composite and impermanent.

Composite: Everything consists of constituents which can in turn be divided into smaller constituents, etc. This is not that hard to understand. A table can be divided into the surface, the trestle and the legs, screws, etc., much like when dismantling a piece of IKEA furniture. When the table is disassembled, does it exist? Yes, but not as a table, but as its component parts. Each component part may be further divided into smaller parts or divided into its chemical substances, its atoms or even its sub-atomic particles. The same goes for

our bodies. After a corpse has been cremated, does the body exist then? Yes, but not as a body, but as the ash and energy that has gone into the atmosphere. In India, the ash, after cremation, is dispersed in a river. Does the ash disappear? No, it dissolves in the water and eventually converts to other substances, but it does not disappear.

It is much the same with what is experienced as soul or consciousness - the part of us that is not material. The soul is also made up of sensory impressions, memories, thoughts, etc. Buddhism has a number of lists of the constituents of the "soul".

Impermanent: Nothing lasts forever. Everything changes. Immediately after conception, the newly born person begins to age. We say it grows, matures, and later ages, but it is in reality the same process all the time. Objects, landscapes, communities change and eventually disappear. Anyone who later in life has visited one of her childhood's favorite places realizes that the feeling is not the same as it was remembered! Often we experience the change as something negative.

This contains a lesson for us: one should not be attached to the past. Attempting to hold on to things is similar to trying to stop the water in a river with only the bare hands: it is completely impossible. In Buddhism this is referred to as clinging.

I often compare our lives with the tones of a piece of music. The tones of a piece of music come and go, they have a very short duration, the musical piece itself has a little longer duration. The piece of music is composed of the tones. Play a single tone - it's nothing. It's the complexity that makes the piece of music. It is the same with us people: we are the tones. The society or the historical period in which we live is the piece of music. It is the same with everything in the universe, objects, countries, societies. Everything is like the tones of a piece of music. Even the single tone - man - is in its turn composite. According to Hinduism, the universe itself is but a tone in a larger context.

The whole idea, that things are complex and impermanent, may not be so difficult to understand. But it can be hard to really see it and apply the consequences of it in practice. I myself experienced a shock-lesson in impermanence when my wife, Valsa, died relatively quickly from cancer in November 2016. Valsa's tone in the music fell silent. Her consciousness left her body. She lost the five senses and everything else that is based in the physical body. Just as her body ceased to exist when it was cremated and the ash spread out, her soul, as it were in the body, ceased to exist. Exactly what remains of the consciousness I do not know, but nothing disappears in existence, it is only transformed.

Valsa's incarnation on earth (her conception and birth) meant that a lot of biological and chemical substances came together and became a human body. Likewise, she owned a lot of material things, clothes, books, jewelry, items of various kinds, all her belongings. Also, people gathered about her and connected with her, relationships were created. All this congregated around her. In the same way as her consciousness and body were dispelled by her death, her belongings were also dispelled and the relationships were transformed into memories. The belongings were donated or disposed of. They no longer remain in one place, but are spread out among different relatives and friends. Only photographs and some single items that I have retained remain in our home. It's only a matter of time before they too are scattered - if not before, surely so after my own death. When Valsa's brothers and their children - and I - have died, hardly even the memory of her will be left. The same applies to me. This applies to all of us, but it may take different lengths of time before we fade from memory.



Valsa 1950-2016.
It is difficult to accept
that nothing is permanent

In theory this might be easy to comprehend but we have difficulty coming to terms with it and accepting it in reality. I have difficulty accepting Valsa's death and I have wept and still miss her very much. This inability to adapt to the realities of existence causes suffering. It is human nature to hold on to things that are temporary. We want it to be the same all the time, though everything is constantly changing.

That everything occurs, exists, and ends in an ongoing process is fascinating. I've likened it to the tones of a piece of music. As I sit on a bench in Karlaplan (a square in Stockholm) and gaze at the fountain, I see the same thing: the water drops rush out of the nozzle forming the fountain. One can consider the fountain as a unit, but it consists of a myriad of water droplets that rush up, turn and splash down. The fountain is renewed all the time. Is it the same fountain? Yes and no. I sometimes compare the fountain to society or the times we live in. The water drops are the people. People are born when the droplets come out of the nozzle, grow and are middle aged at the top. Then they turn and fall downwards: we age. When they hit the water's surface, they die. Do the drops cease to exist after "death", i.e. when they hit the water's surface? Both yes and no. They cease to exist as individual water drops, but the water in the drops continues to exist in the basin. It is the same water, the same drops (but not really the same) that will always return. Looking closely you see that some drops of water go up high before they turn, others turn and fall earlier. The lifetime of the water drops is not equally long, just as is the case with us humans.

One can also consider the fountain as a human being. The water drops in the fountain then become all physical and mental elements. In addition to the body's constituent parts and processes, memories, senses, thoughts, reactions, etc. Our consciousness and our bodies are in fact processes. Everything is in motion, all things are processes. Even a rock is a process, albeit a very slow process. I like to watch the fountain - an illustration of the cycle of existence, what is known in the Indian religions as *Samsara*.

Most of us get frightened by the impermanence of existence. We try to hold on to our youth, our health, our property and our loved ones. Even though we might be young, healthy, rich and have many friends, there is a risk that this will suddenly change. Sooner or later, it *will* change. Our attempts to hold on - our clinging - cause suffering. The existence is full of suffering. Our lives, as most of us live them, are full of suffering, manifest or potential.

We are afraid of this because we see ourselves as individuals. We want to stick to our individuality and our individual lives. It is as if the water droplets in the fountain would try to hold on to their individuality. Therefore we get scared by the nature of existence - which is impermanence and complexity. But if we could see ourselves as part of a broader context, for example, the whole universe, then we would not be intimidated. It is as if the water drops could see themselves as parts of the fountain and the basin.



An illustration of the cycle of existence,
but also of the nature of the "soul"

Now, we *are* parts of the universe, whether we realize it or not. The water drops are parts of the fountain and the basin. Our individuality is just an approach. If we think our individuality is real, we are living in an illusion. Because we cling to an illusion that is doomed to vanish, we suffer. That

is why suffering is always manifest or lurking around the corner. If we could free ourselves from this illusion then we would see and accept the existence as it really is - that's what Buddhism calls *nirvana*.

So, we are already in nirvana, but we do not understand it, we can not see it because we are haunted by illusions. When we free ourselves from the illusions - then we reach nirvana. In principle, I could reach nirvana when I'm sitting there at Karlaplan. There is no need for a geographical relocation, or physically dying, to reach nirvana.

But even though I realize all this, I miss Valsa and mourn her. I miss her company, her food, our common language that we developed during our 38 years of life together. This is because I have not reached Nirvana. Nor had Valsa reached nirvana, and therefore she will be reborn in the material world.

Traditionally, it is believed in Asia that all living beings are reborn here on earth. Nowadays, we think it is likely that there is life on other planets, so that earthly beings may be reborn there. But if personality is compounded, how can you be reborn? What is being reborn? The body and the physical senses obviously dissolve at death. But the mental processes continue, the "soul" lives on. You may speak of the "soul" in Buddhism, just remember that the "soul" is a process, just like the flame of a candle, and that it is composite. One can talk about the "fountain" at Karlaplan, if only one realizes that it is composed of all the water droplets, the water in the pool, etc. The fountain is also a process. Has anyone seen a stationary fountain? So the illusions and clinging remain with the soul even after death, and therefore it is reborn. You do not automatically become wiser just because you die.

Suppose the water in the basin at Karlaplan is cloudy, but that the water drops are subject to a purge procedure when they are in the air. They come out of the basement polluted, but fall back into the pool clean - or at least cleaner - than when they came up. After some time the water in the pool becomes clean and clear. So it is with us. The purpose of life is to increase our wisdom. We should die wiser than we were at birth. Then the whole world will eventually be wiser and better, just like the water in the basin at Karlaplan.

Another important teaching in Indian religions is that of karma. Karma is a fact, one can easily see that everywhere in existence. My life is a good example: When I was very young, I became interested in Asia. I don't know why, it was part of my personality - possibly a result of karma from an earlier life. This led to studies in comparative religion at Lund University. This led to my involvement in the Swedish Tibet Committee, which led to my position as Assistant at the Department of Indology at Stockholm University. At Stockholm University I met my wife, but it also led me to start my own company. The marriage with my Indian wife led to increased contacts in India and now, in older days, that I live in

Kerala in southern India during the Swedish winters. In addition, Valsa had contact with the Indian guru Amritanandamayi ("Amma") who healed me from Bechterew's disease, which otherwise is considered to be incurable. If I had not met Valsa, I would not have become healed, and then I'd probably have suffered severely from Bechterew's disease.

Karma is a natural law, much like gravity. It has no purpose, for example to administer justice, just as gravity has no purpose. But it's there. Karma is significant, karma acts on the mental plane. It's not a fate or predestination, nor is it retribution. We are always working on our karma. My teacher in Sri Lanka emphasised that everything that happens is not karma. There are also coincidences. But the way in which we respond to these coincidences is partly a result of our mental status - a result of our karma - as well as creating new karma. You mould yourself, and you are responsible for yourself. Many think this is scary but for me it is the other way around. It's amazing that you have the freedom to influence yourself and shape your future! For me, it would be much scarier to imagine that one's future is determined once and for all by a God, the social order, genes or something similar.

In the West, the question of whether man has a free will has kept the philosophers busy since the time of the ancient Greeks. In India, this has never been a problem: the teaching of karma gives us a free will, but we must proceed from the limitations we have. We can choose direction, although we may not reach very far in the beginning. A much more interesting question, I think, is about how karma works for animals. Can animals shape their karma? Do they have a free will? Here, there are different theories in Indian religions, but personally I think that karma basically works the same for animals. The only animals I have experience of are horses and dogs. They are flock animals just like we humans are and therefore they basically have the same emotional life as us: group community, exclusion, hierarchy, affection, jealousy, joy, etc. There are not two dogs or horses of the same temperament or personality, just as we humans differ in intelligence and expression of our human emotions, traits and characteristics. Certainly, some of them make choices - moral choices - sometimes, for example, refrain from eating another dog's or horse's food. I have a number of amusing stories about this. So I think karma somehow works for the animals as well. Then the question arises as to how it is with plants. I do not know, but scientific evidence shows that the plants notice much more of what is happening in their surroundings than we have thought so far. That they in fact have complex systems of communication in adverse soil and weather conditions.

As earlier stated, Karma can clearly be seen. However, most of us can not see reincarnation, we do not remember our past lives. But we do not remember as much as we believe we do from our present life either. If I ask someone, what she did, say on February 18, 2001 she would not know unless the memory is connected with a special event ("that was the day I was hit by a car"). We are reborn because we live in an illusion, the illusions and

clinging keeps together the apparent individual. This happens during life and between lives. During life, it happens at every moment of time. So you can say that the individual is held together or is reborn at every moment in the present life. Should we suddenly reach nirvana, this process ends. The reincarnation process takes place all the time in our present life, when we die, it continues without the material part - the body. So the soul and the body are processes that are constantly taking place, they are recreated at every moment of time because of our illusions. Should the individual suddenly reach nirvana, do these processes cease? Apparently yes, but in reality this is not so. The processes have never taken place, they were always part of the illusion!

The Greek philosopher Herakleitos is famous for his dictum "One can not jump into the same river twice". This is because when you jump the second time, it's not the same river, the water has been replaced. One of my Buddhist teachers paraphrased this and said, "One can not even jump into the river once!" This is because it is not the same river when you take the leap as when you land in it. In addition, you are not the same person when you take the leap as when you land in the river. He used to joke about this: "You can not jump into the river, it's impossible!"

But back to the "soul" and the fountain at Karlaplan. The Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna - one of the greatest philosophers humanity has produced - is known for his "four denials", such as:

1. Does one exist after death?: No!
2. Does one not exist after death?: No!
3. Does one both exist and not exist after death?: No!
4. Does one neither exist nor not exist after death?: No!

1. *Does one exist after death?: No!* This is the conventional truth. Valsa is no more. Her body is cremated and her soul or consciousness has lost all her body-based functions. She does not live as "Valsa" after death. Just like the water drop does not exist when it has fallen into the pool. This contradicts the popular belief that one lives on after death as a sort of ghost or soul without body.

2. *Does one not exist after death?: No!* It is not a total annihilation. Nothing is annihilated in the universe. Both the physical constituents (the body) and the mental constituents are scattered and transformed. Just as the water drop has not suffered total annihilation when it fell into the pool. The water in the droplet and its properties remain.

3. *Does one both exist and not exist after death?: No!* The question is a consequence of the answers to the two previous questions. But the question is incorrectly posed because it assumes that existence (life) and non-existence (death) are absolute, real states that

exclude each other. This is an error. If so, existence and non-existence cancel out each other and nothing would exist. What we perceive as life and death, or existence and non-existence, are not absolute objective stages. Absolute existence and absolute non-existence do not exist. You do not exist as an individual, but you are not annihilated. The water drop does not exist, but nor is it non-existent. The soul and the water drop have entered into a state that most of us can not imagine, beyond time and space.

4. *Does one neither exist nor not exist after death?: No!* This is the ultimate truth as it is viewed by one who can see the true nature of existence. We neither exist nor not exist, neither after death nor when we lived. The independent individual, the ego, is an illusion. It is not existing, but nor can you say that it is not existing. In reality, it's not existing, but it's existing as an illusion. The water drop is in fact a part of the fountain and the pool as a whole, its individuality is an illusion. The three previous denials take place at the starting point of our everyday world, samsara. The fourth denial takes place with the starting point outside of our world, from nirvana.

Nagarjuna also taught that existence, as most of us perceive it, is illusory. All the characteristics we attribute to existence are illusory, they are products of our limited minds and limited perceptions. In reality, existence lacks all the characteristics we attribute to it, it is empty of properties. He launched the concept of emptiness as a description of existence. That does not mean that he considered existence to be a single big vacuum, but it is empty of our concepts. But what is the existence like then? Well, it exists but most of us can not understand its true nature. It is simply *such*, the existence is full of *suchness*.

Already during his lifetime, Nagarjuna was accused of nihilism: according to him there is nothing, nor moral rules. Everything is emptiness. Then it does not matter if you live a virtuous life or if you steal, lie, kill and rape women? No, Nagarjuna replied, it's not like that. In the ultimate analysis, yes, but most of us can not see the truth. We live in the relative, illusory, world and there the moral rules are valid. Nagarjuna differentiated the ultimate reality from the relative reality, our world. Those of us who can see the truth as it is, who have reached Nirvana, see that even moral rules are illusory. But then, on the other hand, there is no craving, you are not interested in lying, stealing or raping women.

Nagarjuna emphasized that it is through the relative, everyday and illusory world, our world, that we must receive the enlightenment. When we normal, unenlightened, people look at reality, it appears to us as the everyday world. Nagarjuna did not deny the everyday world, but he pointed out that it is not the ultimate nature of reality. It is relative and created by us - an illusion. So Nagarjuna was neither a nihilist nor a positivist, he followed a middle way. Therefore, his philosophy is called the Middle Path.

The Indians have always liked to speculate about "emptiness", the absolute nothing. It's hard to tell if Nagarjuna started this or if the tradition was already there. It is no coincidence that the zero was invented in India approximately at the same time as Nagarjuna lived, thus enabling modern mathematics. A few centuries after Nagarjuna, the masters Asanga and Vasubandhu developed teachings based on Nagarjuna's philosophy. They founded an advanced psychological school whose thesis is that everything we see and perceive around us - all existence - exists only in our minds. The universe is a product of our senses. Their school also contains doctrines on the sub-conscious, hang-ups, archetypes, thought structures and idiosyncrasies common to all of us. Their teaching is not entirely different from Jung's psychoanalytic school.

These philosophical masters, Nagarjuna, Asanga, Vasubandhu (who also was famous for his parrots¹), Matriceta, Kukkuripa (whose guru was a dog²), Naropa, Tilopa and many others are almost forgotten today. In the West, they are unknown because they are excluded from the Western philosophical circles, they are tucked away in the narrow pocket of orientalism. In Asia, only the Tibetans are still interested in them. Among them, there are lively discussions about the nature of Nagarjuna's emptiness, and the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism have different views on this.

Indian philosophy is fascinating because it can be understood at a high abstract level - at the same time it is very clear and simple. This lives on among the Tibetans, who have a fantastic educational tradition. Western philosophy is essentially descriptive, Indian philosophy aims to lead the adept towards Enlightenment.

In India and Tibet, one believes that a yogi, an advanced master, exerts a favourable influence on the environment just by being there. I have experienced this influence at least three times: when I was in the presence of the Dalai Lama, in association with Chogye Trichen Rinpoche in Lumbini, Nepal, and when I visited a yogi outside Dharamsala.

There is a story about this with the influence: The aforementioned master Tilopa came to a village where the population was very poor. Tilopa's name was actually Tilapada. Tila is Sanskrit for sesame. He came to the village and there he started extracting oil from sesame

¹ The parrots in the tree under which Vasubandhu used to teach could repeat his lectures by heart. If a parrot recited anything wrongly, it was corrected by Vasubandhu. If a disciple came to the tree when Vasubandhu was gone away, the disciple could listen to the parrots instead.

² A stray dog became affectionate towards Kukkuripa and protected him from intruders, and also kept watch when Kukkuripa was gone away. In return, the dog received food from Kukkuripa. Later Kukkuripa achieved enlightenment and left the earthly life, but the dog remained. It continued to guard the hut but got no food and became emaciated and unhappy. Kukkuripa, who had reached nirvana, discovered that he had been liberated from his own suffering, but instead he felt the dog's suffering - his suffering had been replaced by compassion. It became natural to Kukkuripa to return to earth and take care of the dog - and all other suffering creatures. The dog had taught Kukkuripa the bodhisattva ideal!

seeds, then the population became very rich. What does this mean? Yes, he taught the people to extract oil from sesame seeds and sell it, thereby making the village rich. But it can also mean that he saw the population's potential to grow in wisdom. The potential is the sesame seeds, and the oil is the wisdom that the population gained through Tilapada's teaching. In Indian religions, the "seed" is a common symbol of everyone's potential to reach the Enlightenment. The people became rich in wisdom. The same story can mean two different things. Even Buddhism adapts to the level of the audience.

As I write this I am 67 years old and it is four months since my wife Valsa died. What will happen now? My life has been constantly changing. I'm not the same person today as when I was younger or went to Lundsberg boarding school. But I'm not entirely another person either. Here too, Nagarjuna's four denials would fit well. I have not done the same thing all the time. At first I was a student, then a graduate at Stockholms University. During that time, I was quite academic and nerdy, but at the same time I traveled a lot in South Asia. Later I conducted my own business, at that time I was more interested in finance, business and world affairs. Now I have discontinued the company. At the age of 32 I married and at the age of 67 I became single again. Valsa and I traveled a lot together. Sometimes we traveled as backpackers on lorries or rickety trains and buses and stayed at shelters, sometimes in luxury and stayed in five-star hotels - the whole span. I have done a lot of administration and arrangement of seminars, lectures (as well as lecturing myself), visits by dance troupes, musicians and the Dalai Lama (1988), as well as being active in different associations. I have been on a number of both association and corporate boards. Now I do not want to do any of this anymore. Life must not just be a repetition all the time, one must try to move on. Otherwise it will only be like marching on the spot. Hinduism teaches that one's life consists of four stages: the student, the housekeeper, the retiree and the ascetic. Each stage has its tasks, and one should definitely not cling to one stage and refuse to leave it.

My life is more lonely without Valsa, but that does not mean that it is less meaningful. The meaning of life is the same.

Time passes, and it is said that it heals all sores.

Certainly, I start to get used to the fact that Valsa no longer exists. But what is time? Time is perceived

differently in different cultures. In the West (and especially in Sweden) time is moving. It runs like a kind of stream through our everyday lives. For us time is in short supply, it has a beginning and an end. The whole western world image is based on this: God created the



Life must not just be a repetition all the time

world and after a certain time he will destroy it. A more modern version, put forward by astronomers, is the theory of The Big Bang when the galaxies, the suns and planets were created by a massive explosion emanating from an infinitesimal point known as a 'singularity'. Our galaxy, the Milky Way, will collide with the Andromeda galaxy in 15 billion years. That will not be pleasant, but we do not have to worry about it because the Sun would already have expanded and have swallowed the Earth ten billion years before that happens! Then, if not before, it's over for our planet. Likewise, it is with us humans: we are formed during conception, before that we do not exist - this is a common belief of the Abrahamic religions and the natural sciences. We are born and we live - for a limited time - until we die. Then it's finished in this world, we will never return. According to the Abrahamic religions, we go to heaven or to hell. There life is for ever. Thus, according to the Abrahamic religions and natural sciences, our lives on earth, the existence of the earth, the existence of the entire universe are time-limited one-time events. Time becomes a linear movement between a beginning and an end.

Does time have a beginning and an end? Here again, Nagarjuna's four denials fit.

According to Indian religions, everything is cyclical. Humans and animals are reborn, the universe is created and destroyed and created again. There is no beginning and no end. In India, time is perceived as stationary, just like a room. This may be enhanced by the fact that many fruits and crops in India don't have any season. You can perceive time in different ways in different cultures. Indians and Swedes have a very different perception of time, which often leads to conflicts in business contexts.

Surely we think the room is standing still? But the Earth is whizzing around the Sun at an average speed of 110,000 km/h, and besides which it rotates around its own axis. So the quiet of the room is obviously an illusion!

Our world consists of three dimensions, height, length and width. We lack the fourth dimension, time, but we travel through it all the time. One can imagine a point. It has no dimension, height, width or length. Now someone moves the point forward in a straight line, it stretches. The point has become a line, it has got one dimension: length. Now someone moves the line across. The line forms a surface. It has got a further dimension: width. The former point now has two dimensions: length and width. Now someone takes the surface and lifts it straight up. The surface forms a cube, or a room. Now it has three dimensions: length, width and height, just like us. Now, someone takes the cube and moves it through the fourth dimension: time. But the cube can not leave a stretch mark behind it this time. It only lets itself be moved forward in time. This is what happens to us all the while. We are moving forward in time, but we have no extension in time. The journey through the time dimension with its current of infinite short moments gives us the

same feeling as the point, the line and the surface had when they were moved in a new dimension. Only the present exists, neither the past nor the future exists.

But is time objective? Does it exist in reality? Nagarjuna would answer with his four denials, the masters Asanga and Vasubandhu would say that time is a product of human consciousness. Time is an illusion, but it seems so real to us. Everyone knows that time is moving with different speeds on different occasions. It moves slowly when you are bored and fast when you are having fun. Certain days, weeks and years just disappear, others are dragging on for ages. In addition, we know today that the faster you travel the slower time moves for the traveler. If the Earth suddenly stopped in its orbiting and stood still, time would go a little faster for us on Earth. Newton was wrong in believing that time is the same throughout the universe. So the speed of time is subjective, an illusion. One has brooded a lot on how animals perceive time. Does it make a difference for a dog to be left alone for an hour or a day? The researchers disagree, but anyone who knows dogs knows that they have a sense of time, but exactly how they experience it, we do not know.

I like the movie "The Time Machine" based on the novel with the same name by H.G.Wells. The main character travels into the future with his time machine. The friends left in the workshop see how he and the time machine suddenly disappear. They remain in the same place, but in another time. The main character travels well into the future and is involved in a lot of adventures. He meets a beautiful girl, but they are separated by a barrier that suddenly occurs. The main character then travels backwards in time to a point before the barrier occurred, he moves the time machine about 50 meters and travels forward to the girl's time. Then he ends up with the machine on the other side of the barrier, where the girl is. You could thus move instantaneously in space by traveling in time.

All this shows that both space and time, as we perceive them, are illusions. They exist in our minds (according to Asanga and Vasubandhu) but the reality out there is empty of our concepts (according to Nagarjuna), there is only suchness³.

With the increasing ability to look out into space, the issue has arisen as to whether space is finite or infinite. Can you travel in a straight line into space without it ever ending? Or is space like a balloon, and in that case what's outside the balloon? On all these questions, Nagarjuna's four denials would fit well.

So Valsa has gone out of time. She has also left the other three dimensions. But that does not mean she has been annihilated. She neither exists nor does not exist. The same was true when she lived and it is the case with me now. I will never meet Valsa again, at least

³ There is a very good account of the nature of space and time in the book *Space and Time in the Modern Universe*, by P.C.W. Davies. Cambridge University Press, 1984. ISBN 0 521 29151 8

not as "Valsa". But her energy and vitality, essence, remains, just like the water droplet when it has fallen into the basin at Karlaplan.

In the ultimate analysis, it was like that already when Valsa lived. She and I, and the surroundings, the whole world, the whole universe neither existed nor did not exist, according to Nagarjunas fourth denial above. So it appears for someone who has reached Nirvana, who can see reality as it really is. The purpose of life is that we should try to grow in wisdom and clarity so that we can see the reality as it really is.

All of this may sound abstract, but the Indian religions advise a number of methods that enable one to see this. In Buddhism, there are essentially three methods: maitri (love), samatha (calm) and vipashyana or vipassana (insight). Vipassana is considered the most important, the others are preparatory. In vipassana you have breathing as the object of meditation. Breathing is appropriate because it is always available and it is easy to compare it with the nature of existence. A breath (an inhalation + an exhalation) is like a human life: it has a beginning, a middle and an end. The breath can also be the lifetime of the universe, or just the lifetime of a moment. Sometimes, when I meditate, I see the drops of water in the fountain at Karlaplan in front of me. A breath = a water drop's journey out of the nozzle, into the air, turning, falling down, meeting the water's surface. Meditation on this eventually leads to a lot of consequences. To learn this, one needs a teacher, I had Sivali Thera in Sri Lanka and I'm very grateful to him.

Describing meditation is difficult. It's not thinking, contemplation, concentration or relaxation, though all of these elements do exist in meditation. It is to be entirely here and now. Eventually you forget your body and later your ego. To forget about the ego is consistent with a certain level of enjoyment. Everybody who has been inspired e.g. when one gets completely absorbed working on something, knows this. Then you forget that you really should be doing something else and engage single-mindedly on that one task. The same can be experienced, for example, when out horse riding, blissfully enjoying a oneness with nature and the horse. It's a lovely feeling and it's the same in meditation. Indian religions often describe this feeling as "pleasure", "joy", "rapture" and the like. The beauty of Indian religions is that even the beginner can get a glimpse of the final goal.

My mind returns to the fountain at Karlaplan and I have one simple wish - that the pool will become purer when my little drop of water falls into, and merges, with it.

- Nothing! It was there all the time!

