

The Levels/Meanings of Alaya

Alaya is a Sanskrit word which means “all ground” or “all base.” The Tibetan for this is *kun gzhi* which means “all ground.”

1. *Alaya*. This is not a “consciousness” (*viññāna* in Sanskrit). It is the absolute, reality, buddha nature (*tathagatagarbha*), our enlightened mind (*bodhicitta*). It is *śūnyata*, “emptiness” (absence of I and other), and it is comprised of three aspects:
 - a. Utter, limpid clarity. The clear-seeing which is one aspect of our basic, core nature. It is a function of *śūnyata*, emptiness.
 - b. Vivid, luminosity – *prabhāsvara* in Sanskrit, *ösel* in Tibetan. This refers to the fact that, when we see with the utter clarity of the alaya, the phenomena which are constantly arising and passing away (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, and mental events) do so very, very vividly... luminously, in fact.
 - c. Absolute compassion (comprised first of *maitrī*, kindness/love to oneself, and then *karuṇā*, kindness/love to others, the world).
2. *Alaya viññāna* (*alaya consciousness*) – the 8th *viññāna* or “consciousness” of samsaric mind. The eight consciousnesses are:

The consciousnesses of the five senses:

 - Eye consciousness (looks through the organ of the eye and perceives sights).
 - Ear consciousness (looks through the organ of the ear and perceives sounds).
 - Nose consciousness (looks through the organ of the nose and perceives smells).
 - Tongue consciousness (looks through the organ of the tongue and perceives tastes).
 - Body consciousness (looks through the organ of the body and perceives physical sensations).
 - The sixth consciousness is the mind consciousness (it looks through the organ of the mind and perceives mental events, and it also coordinates the five sense consciousness).
 - The seventh consciousness is *klistamanovijñāna* in Sanskrit which means “defiled mental consciousness.” This consciousness is that function of mind which looks at the 8th consciousness and calls it “I.”
 - The eighth consciousness is the *alaya viññāna*, the *alaya consciousness*, the storehouse consciousness which is said to store the impressions (*vāsanāḥ*) of previous experiences, which form the seeds (*bīja*) of future karma in this life and in the next after rebirth. It is very like the Freudian concept of the “subconscious.”

Our job: to rest in #1, the alaya awareness of reality (which transcends the eight consciousnesses), effortlessly, clearly seeing the vividness of all phenomena with compassion.

We start out approaching this by practicing *śamatha-vipashyana*, mindfulness-awareness meditation. This meditation practice will lead us into the alaya: effortless clarity, luminosity, and compassion.

We begin the lojong slogans with Point 1 (the preliminaries, the four reminders) which is basically telling us not to waste any time.

Then Point 2’s first five slogans are about absolute bodhicitta, about resting in the alaya awareness in order to cultivate clarity, vividness, and especially compassion, because this will lead us into the rest of the slogans which are about relative bodhicitta, how we can deal with the phenomenal world in a way that will lead us more deeply into compassion, clarity, and vividness and ultimately to enlightenment itself.

