

robe of the neophytes. Edkins states that this “grass cloth” was brought to China from Tibet in the Tong Dynasty. “When an Arhan is born this plant is found growing in a clean spot” says the Chinese as also the Tibetan legend.

Verse 142 thus highlights a paradox: Perfection has no room for imperfection or pain. And so those who have attained perfection cannot participate in the pain of others (be compassionate) or in the alleviation of that pain. Only the not-yet-perfect can help the imperfect. Which is better — to remain imperfect and work for the welfare of the many imperfect human selves or to reach perfection in the One Self and have nothing to contribute to others?

*The Voice* has no trouble in answering that question. In verse 143, the first option is called the “open” or exoteric path. It is the public teaching of religions: get saved! Become enlightened! It is said to be the way to “selfish bliss.” And that is another aspect of the paradox. How can selflessness be selfish? That option is “shunned” by those who follow the “secret heart” or esoteric wisdom. They remain in the world and are Buddhas of compassion.

Yet another aspect of the paradox is set forth in verse 144. To become perfect oneself — that is, to practice the six glorious virtues — has second place in the steps one takes on the Path. The most important thing is “to live to benefit mankind.” The way to personal perfection is to forget about oneself by serving others. The six glorious virtues are the *paramitas* (described later in verses 198 and 206-213), as HPB’s gloss makes clear: Gloss 23. To “practice the Paramita Path” means to become a Yogi with a view of becoming an ascetic.

First, we forget about ourselves and devote ourselves to helping others. Then we can set about trying to make ourselves better by practicing spiritual disciplines and acquiring virtues that extend from the first of the *pāramitās*, namely, sharing what one has with others (*dana* or giving) to the last, namely, attaining insight into the nature of things (*prajña* or intuitive wisdom).

The alternative to merging with the absolute and leaving this world is to remain in it — an alternative developed in verses 145 and 146. If we do not put on the Dharmakaya robe by becoming perfectly enlightened and merging with the absolute, we can instead put on the Nirmanakaya robe, that is, remain in this world, continue to incarnate in order to teach others and thereby help