

SAMVEGA AND THE INCIPIENT PHASE OF FAITH

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One of the most engaging dimensions of human self understanding that becomes available to the student of humankind's religiousness is a continuing process of watching unfold the depth and the complexities of what is involved in being human religiously, or of becoming fully, authentically human. One comes to understand that being religious involves the totality of the human personality: one's thinking and acting, one's feelings, perceptions, and responses. The grander in historical continuity the religious tradition being studied, the more comprehensive is the analyses of the human person that is placed before the student. A student of the Theravada tradition, and of the men and women who have perpetuated this magnificent heritage by participating in it, is not without examples depicting acute sensitivity to mental processes from which one can learn more about the variegated components of religious awareness.

There are key terms in the Theravada Buddhist tradition awaiting patient, thorough, exhaustive treatment, terms a fuller understanding of which would enhance our knowledge of this tradition and the religious staying-power it has had in human history. We still have not exhausted the need to study further *paññā*, that entirely admirable insight which one might achieve (on the *lokiya* level) and life-altering spontaneous salvific realization that is available to one (on the *lokuttara* level), or *saddhā*, a sense of entrusting, of placing one's heart on something, of commitment (both in a *lokiya* and *lokuttara* sense). Nor have we learned all we can about *pasāda*, that remarkably delicate awareness of serenity that arises concomitantly with a sense being taken up. One key term that awaits our further inquiry is *samvega*.

This brief study has a narrow objective, that of pointing to the significance of the notion of *samvega* and indicating how one might begin to discern its place in the dynamics of Theravada Buddhist religious awareness. There will be no attempt to determine historical strata representing stages or development of interpretation of this term, although that would be a splendid objective for a longer and more exhaustive study. The task here is merely to call attention to a subject that would repay our further reflection.