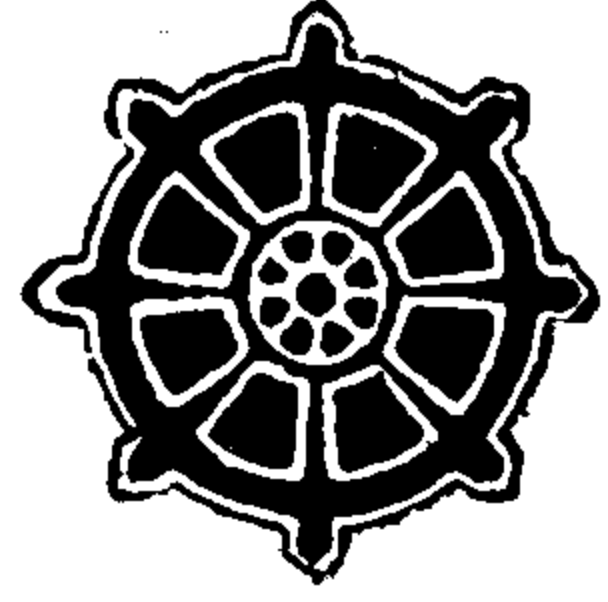


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# ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM IN INDIAN HISTORY

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THE WHEEL PUBLICATION Nos 195/196

**ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM  
IN  
INDIAN HISTORY**

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**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**  
Kandy                      1973                      Sri Lanka (Ceylon)

**Sir Baron Jayatilleke Memorial Lecture  
for the year 1973**

February 13, 1973  
Y. M. B. A. Hall, Colombo.

14708

**THE WHEEL PUBLICATION Nos. 195/196**

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# **ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM IN INDIAN HISTORY**

## **I**

### **Discovery of the Buddhist Heritage**

Today India is again appearing on the Buddhist map of the world. Indians are awakening to their Buddhist past. In the second half of the nineteenth century — thanks to western and Indian archaeologists and orientalists — Indians began to be surprised at the discovery of the Buddhist legacy. To talk of a “revival of Buddhism” in modern India is right in this sense of the discovery of the Buddhist heritage by Indians. Even today, 199 years after the foundation of the Asiatic Society, 81 years after the foundation of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, 71 years after the foundation of the Archaeological Survey of India, the process of the discovery of Buddhism in India is still going on. There is no doubt about it that much good work has been done in recent decades to disseminate some knowledge about Buddhism among those who care to know or those who can read and write. But the number of those who care to know is small and of those who cannot read or write is very large, and much literary and educational work remains to be done in order to give a glimpse of the wonder that was Buddhism in the Indian sub-continent before the Muslim invasions.

The year 2500 of the Buddhist Era (1956 A.D.) was of far-reaching importance and historic consequences for



Buddhism in India. On the one hand, the celebration of *Buddhajayanti* on an international scale, organized by the central government and by state governments may be considered as symbolic of modern Indians' express acknowledgement of their profound debt to the Buddhist tradition. On the other hand, the government's enthusiasm and involvement in the yearlong celebrations were perhaps indicative of her respect for the universal ideas and principles taught by the Buddha. The government also took upon itself the task of renovating sacred Buddhist monuments and making the Buddhist centres of religion and culture accessible to pilgrims and tourists. An important portion of Buddhist literature in Pali and Sanskrit has been published under the patronage of the government since 1956. A few learned institutions have been financed to promote Buddhist Studies and this branch of study is now recognized in its own right. A number of universities in the country provide facilities for study and research in Pali, Tibetan, Buddhist Sanskrit, art and archaeology of Buddhism. The Maha Bodhi Society, in spite of its meagre resources, has been trying to keep up the tradition of *bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya*. The Indo-Japanese Friendship Society has been displaying rare interest in the task of promoting good-will and peace through the construction of Buddhist shrines. Much good work has been done by the neo-Buddhists in Maharashtra and other parts of India.

Most important of all, there is now a sizable number of professed Buddhists in the mixed population of India. The number has been increasing since 1956. The Buddhists in modern India are a mixed group and in some sense truly representative of the wide variety of practices and beliefs characteristic of Buddhism that is universal.

First of all should be mentioned the *Buddhists by tradition*, those who have inherited the Buddhist religion from their ancestors. They are generally found in Orissa, Bengal, on the Indo-Nepal border in northern districts of Himachal Pradesh and in Ladakh. Next come the neo-Buddhists, the followers of B. R. Ambedkar and others, who have embraced Buddhism from time to time after renouncing their status as *harijans*. They form the largest section of the Buddhist population and are generally wedded to the *Theravāda* tradition. The third group of Buddhists consists of *those who have grown into Buddhist religiousness through education, conviction and consideration*. Buddhists in this group have come from different strata of society, *ex-brāhmaṇas*, — *kṣatriyas*, — *vaiśvas*, — *kāyasthas*, and so on. Men like the late Dharmānanda Kosambi, the late Rāhula Sāṃkrityāyana and Bhikṣu Jagadish Kashyap belong to this group. The fourth group of Buddhists consists of *non-Indian Buddhists resident in India*. These include over fifty thousand Tibetans headed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. There are some Buddhist families and monks from almost all Asian lands and also a few from Europe.

India continues to be respected as the holy land of the Dharma by all devout Buddhists the world over. Educated Indians too are now aware of India's Buddhist past and her cultural contacts with other Asian peoples. There is, however, no organization on an all-India level nor any other kind of liaison among the different sections of the Buddhist population. There seems to be, e. g., no contact between professional Buddhist scholars and the Buddhist masses of modern India. The organization of monastic life is practically non-existent; the *bhikṣu-saṃgha*, it seems, is nobody's concern. Of all the sections of the

Indian people, Buddhists are the poorest. There is a clear dearth of Buddhist monks in the country. Educated and trained *bhikṣus*, versed in Dharma lore, are greatly needed. But there are no material resources, no Buddhist schools, no good monasteries or temples or funds or rich donors to maintain and take care of Buddhist monks. In most parts of the country it is difficult to come across a *bhikṣu*. The lonely families of lay Buddhists have to carry on their religious activities often without the presence of monks.

The individual families of lay Buddhists as well as individual Buddhist monks, living in different parts of the country, are in fact facing a cultural and religious crisis due to the absence of an organized community of workers and an established *saṃgha*. So long as the absence of able leadership, proper education, necessary funds, and organizational liaison among all scattered sections of the Buddhist population on a countrywide scale, continues to exist, I have grave doubts about the prospects for the progress of Buddhist thought, culture and literature in India.

There is also the other side of the situation in which Buddhism finds itself in contemporary India. This is its relationship with the tradition of the majority of Indians who are called "Hindus". The Buddhists, especially the neo-Buddhists, will continually have to seek the goodwill and sympathy of the followers of Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism, Sāktism and of Vedāntic "Hinduism". Due respect for the faith of others has been a cardinal feature of the Buddhist tradition. No true Buddhist can afford to disparage the religious beliefs and practices of others. Emperor Aśoka commanded, some three and twenty centuries

ago, that "There should not be honour to one's own religion or condemnation of another's without any occasion, or it may be a little on this and that occasion. By so doing one promotes one's own Dhamma, and benefits another's too. By doing otherwise one harms both his own and also another's religion. One who honours his own and condemns another's Dhamma, all that through attachment to his own religion—why?—in order to illuminate it. But in reality, by so doing, he only harms it, to be sure. Concourse (*samavāya*) therefore, is commendable (*sādhū*)—why?—in order that people may hear and desire to hear one another's Dhamma". (Rock Edict XIV).

In these days of the encounter of the religions of the world this teaching of Aśoka has a special relevance. India has always been a multi-religious nation. Brahmanism, Jainism, and Buddhism existed and flourished side by side for many centuries. The tradition of religious tolerance was violated, especially by Brahmanical followers, only occasionally till Islam appeared on the scene. Sectarian fanaticism and religious intolerance unfortunately characterized the medieval history of India and incalculable harm was done to the true ideals of religiousness. Today the government of the country is wedded to a secular policy so that the votaries of different faiths are free to pursue and promote all that is best in their respective faiths. But even under a secular government the position of Buddhism remains the weakest, for its followers are among the poorest and most disorganized. The vast majority of neo-Buddhists are, by and large, illiterate and ignorant about the real nature and significance of Buddhism. Only by sustained and stupendous efforts can we overcome these weaknesses.

As a matter of fact, revival or promotion of Buddhism in modern India is possible only through education and creative literary publications of a high standard. Ignorance or *avijjā* in any form is incompatible with the Buddhist message. The Buddha is the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom. The path of Buddhahood is a path of wisdom (*ñāṇa-magga*). Propagation and progress of Buddhism in ancient Asia was due, to a large extent, to its missionaries who were not only pious men but often vastly learned. The amount of sacred books and the great number of languages in which they were written by ancient and medieval Buddhists testify to the Buddhist emphasis on education and learning.

## II

### **The Brahmanical Attitude towards Buddhism**

Further progress in the development of Buddhism in modern India depends, to some extent, upon the attitude of Brahmanical "Hindus" towards Buddhism and its followers. The importance of this attitude can scarcely be exaggerated in view of the past history of the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism.

The attitude of modern Indian intellectuals and national leaders towards Buddhism may be described as "traditional" and "apologetic". It is "traditional" because its upholders view Buddhism from the standpoint of their own (Brahmanical) tradition which they style "orthodox". Buddhism from this standpoint is regarded as "heterodox". Another reason for calling this attitude "traditional" is that it has been handed down

traditionally from the time of the Vaisnavaite *Purāṇas*. Briefly speaking, the *Purāṇas* treat the Buddha as a heretical teacher of Vedic culture; Lord Viṣṇu himself, they teach, assumed the form of the Buddha and taught Buddhism. Modern Indian intellectuals hailing from the Brahmanical “Hindu” tradition have accepted this view of the *Purāṇas*, although they do not, perhaps, subscribe to the puranic view that the Buddha-*avatāra* of Viṣṇu was a delusive phantom and Buddhism a trick to mislead the “demons”. They want to interpret their ancient heritage and history in the light of its higher doctrines associated with Buddhism and the Vedānta of Saṃkara’s school. There is a tendency to trace all the great and sublime elements of modern “Hinduism” to the Vedic tradition. As a result of this tendency an attempt has been made in modern Indian works dealing with Indian religions, philosophies, and culture to vindicate Vedic or Indo-Āryan origins of the dominant ideas in Indian civilization. It is worthy of remark here that modern “Hindu” intellectuals, generally speaking, do not share the Brahmanical hostility towards Buddhism which characterized ancient and medieval centuries of religious history in India. Following the *Purāṇas*, they accept Buddhism as a part of their Brahmanical heritage, but unlike the authors of the *Purāṇas*, they regard the Buddha as genuinely, the greatest “maker of modern Hinduism”. The greatness of the Buddha is recognized, and the role of Buddhism in Indian history and culture, though never scientifically and completely investigated or estimated, is generally appreciated. The contributions of Buddhism to Indian art and literature, religion and philosophy, mysticism and morals, are unequalled and one cannot overlook them. Indian intellectuals therefore, justly take pride in acknowledging and praising

the Buddha and his legacy. This pride is a part of their heritage conceived traditionally. "Refined Brahmanism" or "modern Hinduism" would not possibly have come into existence without acknowledging the Buddha and assimilating Buddhism. In this fashion the "traditional" attitude becomes strongly eclectic and syncretistic from the standpoint of the Hindus.

Some of the greatest names in modern Indian history can be associated with this "traditional" understanding of Buddhism, and its relationship with Brahmanism or "Hinduism". One can see the strong influence of the Buddha's personality and of the Buddhist legacy on Sri Rāmakrishna, Swāmi Vivekānanda, Rabindranath Tagore, Asutosh Mookerjee, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vinoba Bhave, S. Radhakrishnan, Kaka Kalelkar, and others. One can enumerate scores of other distinguished artists, poets, writers, and social workers of modern India who have been inspired by Buddhist ideals and ideas. All these leaders, scholars, and men of letters have praised the Buddha and Buddhism in magnificent terms, They have resented that Buddhism declined in India; they have reaffirmed the Buddhist tradition of religious tolerance; they have criticised the existence of those very customs and institutions in their own tradition which were criticised first by the Buddha and the Buddhists. Caste-system, priestly laws, feudal customs, untouchability, social disabilities of women, and the like, all these elements of traditional Brahmanical heritage have been attacked and reformed, at least in theory. The name of the Buddha is cited as an authority in support of modern social reforms. The Buddha is the source of religious authority for abolishing casteism and untouchability.

There is no sanction in the Vedic scriptures for this reform. The constitution of the Indian Republic is thus inspired by the message of the Buddha.

The secular government also seeks to respect the faiths of all Indians whosoever they may be. The 'wheel of righteousness' (*dhammacakka*) on the national flag of India is a symbol of the universality of the Buddha's message of wisdom and compassion. The ideals of religious tolerance and social justice, taught and practised by Emperor Aśoka, have found their permanent approval on the Indian soil. The official seal of the government contains Aśokan symbols of the beating the drum of righteousness (*dhammaghosa*) in all the four quarters of the world, symbolized by the roaring lions facing the directions and surmounted by the sacred 'wheel' (*cakka*). It is also worthy of note that the motto inscribed on the official seal of the government of India, *satyaṃ eva jayate*, 'truth alone is victorious,' is also of sramanic origin preserved in a text attributed to the "shavenheaded ones", the *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* (III. 16). One of the epithets given to the Buddha by Vedic *brāhmaṇas* was *muṇḍaka*. The contemptuous sense attached to this word in the age of the Buddha has long since vanished from the Brahmanical tradition. For enlightened modern 'Hindus' the *Dhammapada* is perhaps as venerable a scripture as the *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*. Indian universities and scholars have been publishing standard and sub-standard books in English, Hindi and other provincial languages on Buddhist subjects for over fifty years now. Indeed, the amount of literature on Buddhism produced and published by modern Indians is tremendous, and the work is continuing. All this is a proof of their interest in and respect for the Buddhist heritage albeit understood as a part of the Brahmanical heritage.



There is however, a fundamental confusion deeply involved in this attitude of modern “Hindu” intellectuals. This confusion is partly rooted in the historical fusion of Buddhism and Brahmanism that took place during the first millennium of the Christian era. During this period the *brāhmaṇas* and other leaders of the Brahmanical society declared the Buddha the ninth *avatāra* of God and assimilated many cardinal elements of Buddhist culture. This remarkable cultural feat was achieved by the authors of the *Purāṇas*. This deliberate fusion or rapprochement between Buddhism and Brahmanism was later on forgotten and a confusion developed which resulted in the identification of the two religious tradition. Only a vague memory remained and in this Buddhism came to be treated as a “heretical” and “atheistic” branch of Brahmanism.

Modern scholars have, however, pushed the origin of this confusion further back to the time of the Buddha. They believe that even at the time of its origin Buddhism was a ‘heresy’ within Brahmanism. Here the “apologetic” attitude comes in full force. A class of Vedic texts, called *Upaniṣads*, is believed to be the source of Buddhist doctrines. This has become almost an authoritative dogma with modern intellectuals of India. To discuss and analyse the composite character and hybrid origin of the *Upaniṣads* is nothing short of a “heresy” in “traditional” Indology. The official theory of the origins of Buddhism, which governs the “traditional” attitude of modern Indian historians and intellectuals, is that it was a kind of “protest” against Vedicism and a reform upon old Brahmanism. We will quote the views of three of the most important of modern Brahmanical “Hindus”, who may be said to represent their ‘reformed’ tradition at its best. Swami Vivekananda says: “Do not mistake

Buddhism and Brahmanism . . . Buddhism is one of our sects.”<sup>1</sup> “He (i. e. the Buddha) taught the very gist of the philosophy of the Vedas.”<sup>2</sup> S. Radhakrishnan observes: “Buddhism did not start as a new and independent religion. It was an offshoot of the more ancient faith of the Hindus, perhaps a schism or a heresy.”<sup>3</sup> “The Buddha utilized the Hindu inheritance to correct some of its expressions.”<sup>4</sup> P. V. Kane, the greatest modern Indian scholar of the Brahmanical tradition, says that the “Buddha was only a great reformer of the Hindu religion as practised in his time.”<sup>5</sup>

These statements are representative of the general opinion prevalent in Brahmanical “Hindu” circles of present day India. Buddhism is sought to be reinterpreted theistically in terms of Upanisadic doctrines. The Buddha is brought to the Brahmanical fold again after the manner of the *Purāṇas*: This development, in our view, may prove dangerous for the progress and understanding of Buddhism in modern India. It has influenced not only the writing of ancient Indian history but also the interpretation of Buddhist principles. Swami Vivekananda, one of the most influential teachers of modern “Hinduism”, tells us that Buddhist doctrines did not attract him at all. Although his writings and speeches are full of Buddhist doctrines, he is said to have stated the following: “All

1. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition, 1964) Vol. IV, p. 135
2. *Ibid*, Vol. VIII, p. 97
3. *2500 Years of Buddhism* (Ministry of Information, Government of India, New Delhi, 1959) p. XIII
4. *Ibid*. p. XV
5. *History of Dharmasāstra* (B. O. R. I., Poona, 1962) Vol. V, Part II, p. 1004

my life I have been very fond of Buddha, but not of his doctrine.”<sup>1</sup> This seems to be an attitude characteristic of many other Indians who write on and talk about Buddhism frequently. Addressing some Americans in California in 1960, he remarked, “*I do not understand his (i. e. Buddha’s) doctrine - we Hindus never understood it.*”<sup>2</sup> This is a very honest confession and a profoundly revealing fact in so far as it throws the cat out of the bag. Modern leaders of eclectic, syncretistic and apologetic “Hinduism” scarcely reveal an awareness of the delicate difficulty in understanding the faith of other men. Those who have studied Pāli texts or *Mahāyānasūtras* or texts of the school of Nāgārjuna or of Dignāga, even they tend to overlook the flaws in this “traditional” approach, although they certainly know the differences between early Buddhism and Vedic Brahmanism. Not only the ancient and medieval *brāhmaṇa* teachers did not understand Buddhism; modern scholars born into the Brahmanical tradition have not shown any better understanding. Saṃkara, Kumārila, Udayana, and Śāyaṇa-Mādhava did not understand Buddhism. This is true also of Tagore, Gandhi, Coomaraswamy and Radhakrishnan. The difference between these two groups is that the former was not confused by the fashion of eclecticism and the *cliche* of the “unity of religions” and that it had its roots deep in the Sanskrit tradition of the *brāhmaṇas*.

Several modern leaders and intellectuals of “Hindu” India praise the Buddha perhaps for political reasons.

1. *Op. cit.* Vol. VIII, p. 103

2. *Op. cit.* Vol. III, p. 529

Such admirers derive their socialist and communist doctrines from Buddhism.

All those who have tried to study Buddhist thought and culture from the standpoint of the Brahmanical tradition may be said to have failed to understand Buddhism. They will have to shake off their "traditional" bias and "orthodox" attitude before they can impartially study the history of Buddhism and appreciate its essential thought patterns.

It is curious to note, however, that our intellectuals and historians, in spite of their official theory and "traditional" attitude also talk of the decline of Buddhism in India. On the one hand they believe that Buddhism was only a reformed version of Brahmanism, on the other hand they believe that Buddhism made a "complete exit" from India. Only a few sophisticated scholars perceive the persistence of Buddhism in Neo-Brahmanism or "Hinduism." Most of our scholars display a paradoxical and arbitrary behaviour in their treatment of the history of Buddhism in India. When they discuss the origin and development of Buddhism, when they write about the doctrines and practices of Buddhism, they maintain that all these elements already existed in the Vedic tradition. Buddhism, they ask us to believe, was not a new and independent religion. It was only a "reformed" or "refined" version of Brahmanical "Hinduism". But when they see the material evidence of Brahmanical opposition to and persecution of Buddhism in ancient and medieval literature and archaeology, and when they see that Buddhist monks, Buddhist families, Buddhist monasteries and libraries were wiped out from the Indian heartland, and even the names of the Buddha and Aśoka had almost been forgotten

by Indians, they conveniently find fault with Buddhist doctrines and their votaries. The causes of the decline of Buddhism in India are attributed either to Tāntrika practices or to the Muslim invasion, or to both. Nobody even imagines that if Buddhism were only a “reformed” or “refined” version of “Hinduism” how it could be said to have declined and died away while “Hinduism” is still flourishing and is the faith of the majority of Indians. Buddhism can be said to have declined only when there was evidence for its existence at a certain period in Indian history apart from the existence of “Hinduism”. If Buddhism did not exist apart from Brahmanism or “Hinduism” it did not die at all. A non-existent tradition or way of life does not die. The theory of the decline of Buddhism, from the standpoint of “traditional” history, is a false theory. On the other hand, if the decline of Buddhism in India was a historical fact, the theory of its origin as a “reformed” Brahmanism is a false one and must be discarded.

### III

#### **Early Buddhism and Early Brahmanism**

Scholars who study early Buddhism from the “traditional” standpoint seek to emphasize two things. They concentrate on points of agreement between some Upanisadic tenets and a few elements of the early Buddhist teaching; they also insist on the chronological priority of at least two *Upaniṣads*, the *Chândogya* and the *Brhadāranyaka*, over the Pali *suttas*. Since I have criticized

this theory and pointed out its defects elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> I will not repeat my arguments here. I would, however, make some observations in brief.

When we speak of *early Brahmanism* we mean the Vedic religion and thought as a whole and not just Upanisadic Brahmanism. The sources of early Brahmanism include the *Samhitās*, the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the oldest *Upaniṣads*. We must note that these *Upaniṣads* are minor texts of Vedic literature, appended, at different dates, to this or that *Brāhmaṇa* or *Āraṇyaka* text belonging to a particular tradition of a *Samhitā*. Chronologically, they are the latest of Vedic texts. These *Upaniṣads* did not enjoy such high prestige or authority in ancient India as they have earned in modern age since the time of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 - 1860). The *Dharmasūtras* are generally opposed to their tenets. The commentaries of *Saṃkara* (cir. 900 A. D.) made them famous and authentic in medieval India. There is no evidence that the *Upaniṣads* were very influential in Brahmanical circles before Gauḍapāda and Saṃkara, while there is evidence to prove that the pre-Upanisadic Vedic texts continued to be influential till the *Mahābhārata* established itself as the "Fifth Veda" for the Kali Age. The religion and philosophy of the older *Upaniṣads* formed a small and latest part of old Brahmanism, and we are not justified in taking these texts as representatives of the whole of Vedic Brahmanism. I am one of those who consider the *Upaniṣads* as composite texts of different dates. In my opinion, "no *Upaniṣad* text can be proved to be pre-Buddhist in date, and the partial agreement between the

1. See L. M. Joshi, *Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism* (Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1970)

Buddha's teachings and those of the early *Upaniṣads* is due to the fact that these Vedic texts were composed between the age of the Buddha and that of Aśoka."<sup>1</sup> I am aware that this opinion runs counter to the view generally held by Indologists. But I find no convincing proof for assigning even the earliest *Upaniṣads* to a period before 550 B. C. The language of the *Upaniṣads* does not by itself permit us to place them before that date. Some of these older *Upaniṣads* mention King Ajātaśatru (Ajātasattu) and the *brāhmaṇa* theologian Aśvalāyana (Assalāyana) who were contemporaries of Sākyamuni. The belief in the pre-Buddhist date of the *Upaniṣads* seems to rest entirely on "traditional" fancy.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Brahmanism of these early *Upaniṣads* is different, to a great extent, from the Brahmanism of the pre-Upanisadic Vedic texts, on the one hand, and from that of the *Purāṇas* and *Dharmasāstras* of early medieval India, on the other. Nevertheless, the Upanisadic thought remained a part of old Brahmanism.

What Franklin Edgerton<sup>3</sup> called the "extraordinary norm" in Indian tradition is of Sramanic or non-Brahmanic origin. The great doctrines concerning *yoga*, *dhyāna*, *karma*, *ahiṃsā*, *moksa*, and *saṃsāra* seem to have been the legacy of *munis* or *sramaṇas*, 'ascetic sages'. These great ideas were the distinguishing features of *sramaṇa* thought which was perfected in early Jainism and Buddhism. In the older *Upaniṣads* these ideas appear

1. L. M. Joshi, *Studies in the Buddhistic Culture of India* (Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1967), p. XVIII
2. L. M. Joshi "The Genesis of Buddhism Restated" in *World Buddhism: Vesak Annual*, 2516 (1972) p. 72
3. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 62 (1942) pp. 151-156

only as intruders in the frame-work of *brāhmaṇa* thought. We venture to suggest that these ideas entered into the Brahmanical thought-current through the Sāṃkhya and the Yoga, and also perhaps through early Buddhism and Jainism. There is nothing in the older Vedic texts corresponding to these ideas and the possibility of their inner or linear evolution within Vedic Brahmanism is ruled out not only by Vedic opposition to them but also by the existence of non-Brahmanical *munis* as early as the time of the *Rgveda*.<sup>1</sup> The fact that only a few passages in some early *Upaniṣads* appear to be critical of old Vedic ideas and sacrificial rituals is an additional proof of the non-Vedic or non-Brahmanical origin of these great ideas. It is possible to suggest that Yoga, Sāṃkhya, early Jainism, early Buddhism, and the 'extraordinary' ideas of the early *Upaniṣads* had a common śramanic origin.

The fact that in spite of their opposition to Vedic authority, their non-theistic and dualistic character, the Sāṃkhya and the Yoga systems were at a later stage counted among the "six systems" of the "orthodox" tradition should not surprise us. For their ideas had been admitted to the Brahmanical fold by such venerable and ancient authorities as the *Upaniṣads*. The fact that Bādarāyaṇa in his *Brahmasūtras* and Saṃkara in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* noted the non-theistic and dualistic and therefore "heterodox" character of these systems was of no consequence against their wholesale

1. See *Rgveda*, X. 136; G. C. Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism* (Allahabad, 1957) pp. 251 ff. L. M. Joshi, *Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism*, pp. 47 ff.; *History of the Punjab*, Vol. I, edited by L. M. Joshi, (Punjabi University, Patiala, 1973) Chapter on 'Religion and Society in the Rgvedic Age.'



appropriation by the *Mahābhārata*, especially by the *Bhagavadgītā*. Attempts were made in medieval times to interpret these systems on theistic lines of Vaiṣṇava theology. We see this attempt even in the Great Epic. The admission of Sākyamuni, the greatest *sramaṇa*, who had disregarded the Vedas and the *brāhmaṇa* teachers of the Vedic tradition, who criticized priestly ritualism, the system of fixed castes (*varṇas*) and their duties (*dharma*s), and ridiculed Vedic sacrifices, to the rank of an incarnation (*avatāra*) of God in the *Purāṇas*, is another similar example. The Buddha, in spite of being what he was and what he stood for, was counted as an exalted member of the Brahmanical pantheon of the “orthodox” tradition in medieval India because so powerful and sacred authorities as the *Purāṇas* had declared him the ninth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. These examples of assimilation of Sramanic elements should not mislead us into believing that they were not of non-Vedic origin.

The partial agreement or rather vague similarity between the teaching of early Pali *Suttas* and those of the early *Upaniṣads* is thus explained by the plausible hypothesis of their common Sramanic background. How shall we explain the outstanding and fundamental differences between them? The answer is obvious. Sramanism and Brahmanism, the two religious philosophies of ancient India were in early stages diametrically opposed to each other. The Upanisadic teachers were influenced by non-Vedic ascetic teachers, *munis* and *sramaṇas*, and they attempted to harmonize the two ideologies from the standpoint of their own Vedic tradition, criticizing or reinterpreting several of their older concepts and practices. For example, they offered a symbolic interpretation of sacrifice, declared the path of rituals as insecure and

emphasized inner awakening instead of hymns. But the *Upaniṣads* remained firmly within the Vedic tradition guarded as they were by Vedic *brāhmaṇas*. Early Buddhism, on the other hand, had no roots in the Vedas, traced its origin and antiquity to the 'ancient path' (*purāṇaṃ maggaṃ*) of *sramaṇas* and *munis* or enlightened sages of former ages.<sup>1</sup> It had been rediscovered by Sākyamuni, the Great Sage (*mahāsramaṇa*), and developed along the lines indicated by him.

When a modern student of the religious history of ancient India seeks to study these differences, it is not because he is opposed to the idea of the unity of religions. The unity among the religions of mankind, if and when achieved, will be one of the greatest blessings on this earth. Certainly we cannot bring about this unity by mystifying or misinterpreting their differences in origins and doctrines. We can perhaps contribute towards achieving harmony among the votaries of different faiths by impartially and respectfully studying their doctrines, beliefs, and practices. According to this method of historical study of the religious traditions of mankind, one has to be sensitive to both the common points among different traditions and the distinctive elements peculiar to each. In addition to this impartial awareness, one has to have what might be called historical awareness. The past history of a particular religious tradition cannot be deduced from its present vicissitudes; the development of a particular tradition should be studied historically, through its early, middle and modern phases; the ideas and beliefs that characterized its middle phase may be

1. *Samyuttanikāya* Vol. II, (1959) Nalanda Devanagari Edition pp. 90-91; P. T. S. Edition, Vol. II, pp. 106-107.

found to have been non-existent in its early phase. Contrariwise, beliefs and practices characteristic of its earliest phase may be wanting in its latest phase. At the same time the awareness of the co-existence of other religious traditions and of the possibility of mutual contacts and interactions between them should not be lost sight of. One should also be able to free oneself from the yoke of the monolithic theory of the existence of only Indo-Āryan culture in early India. We must never forget that alongside the Indo-Aryanism or Vedic Brahmanism there existed in India non-Vedic, perhaps non-Āryan, cultures since prehistoric times.

Precisely speaking, we have to understand that early Brahmanism differed substantially from early Buddhism, on the one hand, and from neo-Brahmanism, on the other, that in the second stage of their development the character of both early Buddhism and early Brahmanism was seriously changed and modified due to historical reasons and they came close to each other. Let us briefly review here some of the main differences between early Buddhism and early Brahmanism.

The first outstanding difference is that Brahmanism was a theistic system of faith, (even frankly polytheistic in pre-Upanisadic days) while Buddhism was a non-theistic tradition. The second major difference was that Brahmanism was a form of *ātmavāda* expounding the eternal existence of the self (*ātman*), whereas the early Pāli *Suttas* expounded a kind of *anātmavāda* or the doctrine that there is nothing lasting which one could call one's own. The *Upaniṣads* glorified and magnified the idea of the self and often identified it with the power pervading the world (*Brahman*). Liberation (*mokṣa*) in this theory consisted

in the realization of this power within oneself and of its identity with the ground of the universe. Early Buddhist texts, on the other hand, taught the extinction of the idea of the self; a real and changeless self, they taught, was not to be found anywhere. In the Pāli *Suttas* freedom from belief in a substantial and permanent self is regarded as essential for liberation (*vimutti*).

The Upanisadic quest centred on the attainment of happiness (*ānanda*) in this present and an after-life. The attitude of Vedic teachers was world-affirming; they do not seem to have had an awareness of *dukkha* or dissatisfaction of phenomenal existence. It was in this awareness that early Buddhist monks found the basis of world-renunciation. The ideal of Nirvana was pursued by those who were thoroughly disgusted with the world and who were convinced of the sufferings of *saṃsāra*. We shall look in vain in Vedic texts including the early *Upaniṣads* for anything corresponding to the doctrine of the “three marks” (*tilakkhaṇa*), viz; impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anatta*), which according to Buddhist intuition characterize all phenomenal things (*dhammā*). The hallmark of Buddhist philosophy was the doctrine of conditioned genesis (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) according to which all the phenomenal things are causally interrelated and destined to fade away (*vyaya-dhammā*). This doctrine is foreign to Vedic or Brahmanic thought.

The institutional character of an ascetic community (*bhikkhusaṃgha*) among the followers of Sākyamuni and its regulation by a body of ascetic rules called *pātimokkha*, or *Vinaya* code, are unknown to Vedic texts. The idea of renunciation or “going forth” (*pabbajjā*) from home life was foreign to early Brahmanic ideology. It was

introduced in the *Dharmasūtras* as the fourth stage (*āśrama*) in a *brāhmaṇa*'s life only during post-Buddhist epoch. The *Upaniṣads* which refer to *āśramas* are commonly assigned to a date later than that of the Buddha and Mahāvīra. Even after the formulation of the scheme of four *āśramas* after the age of these *sramaṇa* teachers, the *brāhmaṇa* law-givers continued to exalt the householder's stage (*grhastha*) as the best and foremost of all the stages.<sup>1</sup> Although the early *Upaniṣads* refer to *yoga* practices and include *dhyāna* in a theistic scheme, a system of meditational exercises is far from the ken of their philosophers. The contrast with Buddhism is striking and important. Bodhisattva Siddhārtha attained Nirvāṇa through awakening consequent on perfecting all the stages of meditation. The theory and practice of meditation were among the core elements of early Buddhistic culture.

The ideal of practising and perfecting the four "holy abidings" (*brahmavihāras*) or "immeasurable" social emotions, does not appear in the Brahmanical tradition till the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali (cir. 300 A. D.) was written. It is likely that the practice of these virtues was of Sramanic origin but they were emphasized especially in Buddhism.

Early Buddhism stood in striking contrast with Vedic Brahmanism. It did not recognise the religious authority of the Vedas and rejected their sacrificial ritualism. By rejecting and refuting the religious authority of the Vedas, Buddhism rejected the very basis of Vedic Brahmanism. It ridiculed the claims of priestly *brāhmanas* regarding their ability to attain companionship with gods through the

1. See *History of the Punjab*, Vol. I, appendix on 'The Institution of Stages (Asramas)'; *Gautama Dharmasūtra*, III. I. 35-36; *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*, II. 6. 29-36.

study of the Vedas and performance of sacrificial rites. The greatest gods of the Vedic Aryans were considered by early Buddhists far inferior to the Buddha. Whereas in Vedic Brahmanism kings, priests and the people alike worshipped gods like Indra and Prajāpati (Brahmanaspati, Brahmā), in Buddhism these exalted gods figured as devotees and disciples of the Buddha who was the teacher not only of men but also of the gods (*satthā deva manus-sānam*). In Brahmanism the gods are powerful and immortal, in Buddhism they are declared to be subject to the law of *kamma* and therefore to death and rebirth. The Brahmanical view of the creation of the universe by an omnipotent and supreme Person or Lord is clearly opposed to early Buddhism. In short, the whole theology of early Brahmanism was irrelevant to the Buddhist quest of the ultimate release.

The ideas of Vedic *brāhmaṇas* ran counter to those of early Buddhism. The seers (*ṛṣis*) and sages of the Vedic tradition lived a householder's life and sought health, wealth, longevity and offspring through sacrifices and singing hymns. The Buddhist ascetics (*munis, sramanas*), on the other hand, having renounced the household life with all its perils and pleasures, sought transcendental peace and spiritual liberation (*vimutti*) through meditation (*jhāna*) and inner awakening (*paññā*). Vedic ceremonialism (*karmakāṇḍa*) was matched by Buddhist meditation (*jhāna*) and asceticism (*yoga*). The Brahmanical tradition of "three knowledges" (*veda-trayi*), i. e. the knowledge of the first three Vedas (*R̥k, Yajus, Sāman*), was matched in the Buddhist tradition by three kinds of "superknowledge" (*abhiññā*) called "threefold insight" (*tevijja*) i.e., knowledge of former lives, clairvoyance, and the destruction of the four *āsavas* (sensuality, the desire to be something, wrong

views, spiritual blindness). Whereas in Vedic Brahmanism *brahmacarya* was understood to mean studentship or the study of the Vedas under a learned *brāhmaṇa*, in Buddhism it came to be regarded as synonymous with holy conduct or religious life lived with a view to attaining freedom from *saṃsāra*. In Buddhism *brahmacariya* included whole range of spiritual culture. The scriptures say: *brahmacariyaṃ dhammacariyaṃ*. Buddhist spiritual culture emphasizes the simultaneous development of morality (*sīla*); concentration (*saṃādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), whereas the Brahmanical culture insisted on clearing a threefold debt to seers (*ṛṣis*), gods (*devas*) and ancestors (*pitrs*) through the study of the Veda, performance of sacrifice, and procreation of sons.

Whereas the slaughter of animals in religious rituals (*yajñā*) was a regular element of old Brahmanism, practice of inoffensiveness (*ahiṃsā*) towards all living beings was kept at the head of the Buddhist list of moral precepts (*sikkhāpada*). The other virtues extolled in early Buddhist scriptures are compassion, friendliness, impartiality, truth, non-attachment, self-denial, selflessness, chastity, liberality, forbearance, humility, freedom from greed, anger and conceit, self-reliance, watchfulness, satisfaction, benevolence, meditation, wisdom, and a mind turned towards Enlightenment.

The Buddha's teachings sought to liberate human beings not only from the self-system (*ātmavāda*), they also paved the way for social emancipation of men and women. The Brahmanical theory of the four castes was criticised as ridiculous and the practice of untouchability and social inequality was condemned as unjust and irrational. The Buddhist tradition recognized the freedom of faith and offered equality of opportunity in matters of religious

culture to men and women without regard to their caste, colour or social status. The Buddhist critique of the Brahmanical doctrine of four castes and their fixed duties and privileges (*dharma*s) was one of the main issues to which the privileged *brāhmaṇas* strongly reacted. This was the beginning of Brahmanical hostility towards Buddhism which stopped only with the disappearance of Buddhist monks from Indian soil.

Buddhism emphasized a practical and empirical approach and generally supported a rational outlook towards life and its problems. It did not enforce any dogma or *credo* on its votaries. Brahmanism repeatedly insisted on the dogma of the authority of the Vedas and condemned every other idea and practice not sanctioned by the *śruti*. The *Kālāmasutta* presents a statement of the Buddhist attitude towards rational thought and emphasizes conviction born of careful understanding. Transcending theistic and atheistic theories, the Buddha proclaimed the middle way (*majjhimā paṭipada*) in thought and practice. The highest goal in Buddhism is Nirvana, the Dhamma, which is impersonal and absolute. With the attainment of Nirvana, *saṃsāra*, or the world-process of change and suffering, ceases. Buddhism is chiefly concerned with the liberation of beings from this world-process. Just as the water of the great ocean has but one taste, that of salt, likewise the doctrine and the practice of Buddhism has but one taste, the taste of liberation (*vimuttirasa*).

A remarkable feature of Buddhism is its universality. The scope of the Buddhist teaching is coextensive with the whole of humanity. It is not a religion of a particular race or chosen people. Its holy books and its noble practices are open to people of all lands. Buddhism aimed at



the enlightenment of all beings. Its teachings are universal and not relative to a particular geographical area or country. Although it originated in India it soon made the world its home. The Buddha had directed his pupils to disseminate the doctrine of pure conduct and higher life in all directions.

This universality or cosmopolitanism was not shared by Vedic and Upanisadic doctrines. The Vedic *brāhmaṇas* zealously guarded their scriptures and the techniques of sacrificial rituals were the special crafts of priests. The *Upaniṣads* continued this tradition of secrecy and class consciousness. The very word *Upaniṣad* means something to be learned by sitting close to the teacher, a mystery or a secret and confidential doctrine. The *Upaniṣads* do not insist on caste, it may be observed, but to expound a doctrine for the good and enlightenment of all humans was beyond the purview of their authors. It was in Buddhism, for the first time in history, that the doors of spiritual perfection were opened wide for all those who sought it. Men and women of all castes and of no castes were given the full freedom to live a pure life in quest of good rebirth and ultimate release. In this tradition there is no eternal hell or purgatory, nor an eternal paradise. Everyone has the freedom to work out his or her destiny. Even the most evil and vicious person could attain not only heaven but also liberation, and even the greatest of gods was subject to the law of *kaṃma* and conditioned genesis. The supreme goal had been announced for one and all, the doctrine (*dhamma*) and the method (*vinaya*) had been expounded by the Torchbearer of Humanity out of supreme compassion for the living beings. This ideal of great compassion, wholly absent in the Vedas, came to be the mark of the Buddhist way.

## IV

### The Buddhist Contribution to the Indian Civilization

#### *Art and Architecture*

Even if we judge only by his posthumous effects on the civilization of India, Sākyamuni Buddha was certainly the greatest man to have been born in India, and the contribution of his teachings towards Indian history and culture was perhaps greater than that of Brahmanism. Before becoming a major faith and a civilizing force in the world, Buddhism had been a mighty stream of thought and a tremendous fountain-head of human culture in its homeland. Ignorance or neglect of the available Buddhist literature is not the only shortcoming of the "traditional" approach. The fact that the knowledge of Indian archaeology is confined to a handful of scholars is another factor which has prevented most of us from viewing Buddhism in its entirety. Mortimer Wheeler observes that "Archaeologically at least we cannot treat Buddhism merely as a heresy against a prevailing and fundamental Brahmanical orthodoxy".<sup>1</sup> For, in spite of the ravages of time and destruction by Indian and foreign fanatics, Buddhism is still speaking vividly and majestically, through its thousands of inscriptions, about one thousand rock-cut sanctuaries and monasteries, thousands of ruined *stūpas* and monastic establishments and an incalculable number of icons, sculptures, paintings and emblems, that it prevailed universally among the classes and masses of India for over fifteen centuries after the age of the Buddha, and that its ideas of compassion, peace, love, benevolence,

1. *Antiquity*, Vol. XXII No. 89, March 1949, p. 5

rationalism, spiritualism and renunciation had formed the core of the superstructure of ancient Indian thought and culture. What is proved by Buddhist archaeology is affirmed by Buddhist philosophy and literature also. Not only the numerical strength and volume of Buddhist texts extant in Pāli, Buddhist Sanskrit, classical Sanskrit, Prākṛit and Apabhraṃśa, or preserved in South and South-East Asian, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese and Central Asian languages and scripts, but also the variety, modernity, depth and subtlety of Buddhist literature and philosophy lead us to conclude that the religion and philosophy of Buddhist texts had captivated the Indic world. According to Swami Vivekananda, Buddhism had at one time “nearly swallowed up two-thirds of the population” of India.

Buddhism in the Theravāda tradition has been a two-fold movement. Buddhism of monks and nuns or ascetic Buddhism, and Buddhism of the laity or popular and social Buddhism. Along with the way to Nirvana there was the way to ‘good rebirth’. In the *Brahmajālasutta*, the *Pātimokkha*, and the *Visuddhimagga*, all worldly arts and crafts are described as unworthy of those who seek ultimate liberation. Prohibition of participation by monks and nuns in dances, songs, instrumental music, shows of entertainment, and use of articles of personal beautification is the burden of the 7th and 8th *sikkhāpadas*. The case was different in popular Buddhism or *Upāsaka-dhamma*. The *Mahāparinibbānasutta* narrates how the nobles and the commoners, both men as well as women, of the Malla clan, honoured the body of the Ththāgata by dancing and singing in accompaniment with instrumental music, with garlands and perfumes. Similar artistic activities full of ceremonial dignity and aesthetic sense are reported in the *Lalitavistara* and the *Buddhacariya* to have

been performed by men and women of Kapilavastu at the birth of the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha.

The growth of Buddhist fine arts was due largely to the educational, religious, and devotional needs of the Buddhists. The supremely perfect and supernal personality of the Buddha (*sarvāṅga sundaram* or *sarvākāravaropeta*) was the greatest attraction for artists and poets and the supreme object of devout contemplation for monks and mystics. Hence the growth of Buddhology, Buddhist iconology, sculpture and painting. With the emergence of Mahāyāna, the Buddha image became the central plank of popular Buddhism and it was manufactured in a thousand plastic forms. Manufacturing religious icons and emblems was viewed as a pious deed. So was excavating *vihāras* in live rocks and erecting shrines and *stūpas*. The Pāli *Apadānas* as well as the Sanskrit *Avadānas* eminently display the popular enthusiasm for adoration (*pūjā*) of emblems such as the wheel, bowl, foot-print, the bodhi-tree, and other items connected with the Master's earthly existence. From about the beginning of the Christian era images of the Buddha began to come into existence and revolutionized rituals of worship not only in Buddhism but also in Brahmanism. In place of sacrificial rituals, temple rituals now became popular. The style of the Buddhist *stūpa* seems to have inspired the style of Brahmanical temples, especially those with a *sikhara*. It may be suggested that the early Buddhist practice of raising *stūpas* or sacred reliquary mounds perhaps reflected, *inter alia*, a sense of time and historicity. The Vedic Arians lacked this sense and hence in Brahmanism the tradition of building *stūpas* did not develop. The *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* considered the practice of venerating *stūpas* or *caityas* (called *eḍukas*) as a mark of the 'dark age' (*kaliyuga*).

However, later on the practice was adopted by those sects of the Brahmanical tradition which were most influenced by later Buddhism, viz; Sivaite Vedānta and Gorakhpānṭh.

Of all the joys that of Dhamma, *dhammapīti*, was supreme. The Buddha had said that “the gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts.” This was the teaching of Emperor Aśoka too.<sup>1</sup> The gifts of Dhamma included all that was conducive to nobler and higher life, including the knowledge of doctrines, articles of faith and devotion, scriptures, icons, symbols, and all the other means of growing in piety or expressing compassion and liberality. In this way Buddhism became the source of manifold artistic and literary activities reflecting the creative and aesthetic genius of its teachers and followers. With the passage of time old inhibitions receded into the background; moreover, the theory of ‘perfection in expedient means’ (*upāyakauśalya pāramitā*) naturally required and encouraged the proficiency in various arts and sciences. The Bodhisattva ideal of Mahāyāna left no difference between *bhikṣus* and *upāsakas*. The art and literature of Buddhism was produced through the donations not only of *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* but also of monks and nuns. For instance, there are 827 Brāhmī inscriptions on the monuments of Sānchi alone. Among the donors are mentioned the names of over two hundred monks and nuns; the rest are lay followers.<sup>2</sup> Similar is the case at a number of other centres of Buddhist art and culture. Hsüan Tsang has noted the names of a number of monks who established monasteries, built shrines and erected images. Mention may be made

1. *Dhammapada*, verse 354; Asoka, *Rock Edict XI*

2. John Marshall (ed.) *The Monuments of Sānchi*, Vol. I, (Delhi 1940), pp. 264 ff

in this connection of Jayasena of Yaṣṭivana-Vihāra, an *upāsaka* but a great teacher and author of Buddhist *sāstras*.<sup>1</sup> The Nālandā Stone Inscription of Mālāda describes the monks of the University of Nālandā as “reputed experts in true scriptures and the arts.”<sup>2</sup> The community of monks became in the course of time a community of teachers of society, and they have left a permanent influence on the country-people who esteem any tawny-clad person not only for his austere dress but also for his supposed proficiency in solving secular problems, such as knowledge of medicine, for example. King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi of Sri Lanka is reported to have said that “the very sight of monks is auspicious and conducive to our protection.”<sup>3</sup> The ‘sharers’ of alms (*bhikkhus*), before whom kings and nobles bowed, had been the cultural leaders and religious teachers of society and a source of inspiration for the masses for several centuries before the sack of Nālandā Mahāvihāra by Bukhtyar Khilji.

The great mass of Buddhist art and literature, so rich, varied and deeply inspiring in both form and content, was inspired by the beauty and the norms of the Dhamma. This Dhamma itself was conceived of as a blessing in the beginning, a blessing in the middle, and a blessing in the end. It is to be noted that the Buddhist seers make a distinction between the pursuit of abstract beauty which they found through the spotless spiritual eye of the Dhamma, and the delights of its ephemeral beauty. All

1. Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, Vol. II (Delhi, 1961) p. 146
2. *Memoires of the Archaeological Survey of India*, No. 66 (Calcutta, 1942) p. 79 *sadāgama-kalā-vikhyāta-vidvad-janāh*.
3. *Mahāvamsa*, XXV. 3 (ed. N. K. Bhagavat, Bombay, 1959) p. 169

that is holy and utterly well and is conducive to the attainment of the supreme Goal, is indeed beautiful. This is the spiritual dimension of aesthetics.

We need hardly mention that the earliest and the best painting of ancient India is the Buddhist painting; that the best sculpture of the golden days of ancient Indian culture is the Buddhist sculpture, that the earliest historical sculpture of India is also the Buddhist sculpture. In the field of architecture too, Buddhism was the pioneer source of inspiration. In both structural and rock-cut architecture of ancient India, Buddhist examples had provided a permanent legacy in planning, technique and style. The earliest historical buildings in brick are the ruins of Buddhist monasteries; the earliest man-made rock-cut halls are the *vihāras* of Buddhists and Ājīvaka monks excavated under the orders of a Buddhist emperor. Last but not least the earliest and the best free standing monolithic pillars with beautiful capitals of animal figures were inspired by Buddhism and conceived by a Buddhist genius. All subsequent examples of *kīrtistambhas* and *dhvajastambhas* have been influenced by Aśokan *lāṭas*. Indian paleography and epigraphy owe a great deal to the original and pioneer inspiration of Buddhism and its lithic records. The earliest historical inscriptions of India are the Buddhist inscriptions. The *dharmalipi* of Aśoka became the mother of all subsequent varieties of Brāhmī and its derivative Indian scripts.

### *Polity*

Buddhism had contributed significantly to the development of the forms and institution of civil government including the ideals of kingship in ancient India. Sākya-muni was a teacher also of the principles of righteous

government, individual freedom, and the rule of law. The seven conditions of stability of a republican body which he suggested to the Magadhan diplomat Vassakāra are words of social wisdom still relevant to our contemporary political life.

The influence of Buddhism on ancient Indian political theory and administrative organization could be understood in the light of (i) Buddhist speculations concerning the origin of state and government, (ii) the Buddhist organization of the *bhikkhu-saṃgha* and its impact on democratic states of ancient India, (iii) the influence of the Buddha's teachings on the kings, queens, and their vassals and ministers, and (iv) certain concepts and institutions concerning political life which were inspired by Buddhist teaching. In the first place, the Buddhist theory of the origin of state and government as related in the *Aggaññasutta*<sup>1</sup> is of democratic import. A similar version in the *Sāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* seems to have been modelled after the Buddhist theory. The fact that many ancient Indian kings and authors of political thought felt that the king owes his authority to his subjects may have been suggested by the legend concerning Mahājanasammata, the first traditional king. The *Arthasāstra* of Kauṭilya, the Junāgrh Rock Inscription of Rudradāman I, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Mañjusrīmūlakalpa* and the *Rājataranṅinī* suggest that the tradition of the election of kings was continued till 12th century A. D. in some parts of India.<sup>2</sup> With respect to the second point it is a well-known fact that the organization and administration of the Buddhist *saṃgha* was

1. *Dīghanikāya* vol. II (Nalanda Ed. 1959) pp. 58-60

2. See L. M. Joshi in *Maha Bodhi Journal*, vol. 73 Calcutt, May, 1965) pp. 115-116



based on democratic ideas, and that the democratic traditions of early Buddhist republics<sup>1</sup> were continued till as late as the time of Samudragupta (4th century A D.), who seems to have wiped out the republican states in his time. But the tradition survived in *paura-jānapada* assemblies and also in village-administration, and has come down to our own era in the form of *grāmo-pañcāyatas*.

With regard to the third point, namely the influence of the Buddha's teachings on ancient Indian kings, queens, and their ministers, there is a mass of evidence in the form of literary, epigraphic, and foreign records and a modest volume could be written on this subject alone. It is impossible here even to mention the mere names of all the kings, queens, nobles, and ministers of ancient India who were Buddhists or were influenced by Buddhism. Among the kings who were Buddhist by faith, we may include Bimbisāra, Ajātaśatru, Puṣakarasārin (of Gāndhāra), Kālāśoka, Emperor Aśoka, Daśaratha Maurya, Brhadra-tha Maurya, Menander, the Greek king, Kaniṣka I, the Kuṣāna king, one of the Sātavāhanas, either Sīmuka or his son Kṛṣṇa, Buddhagupta, Tathāgatagupta, Narasiṃha-gupta Bālāditya of the Gupta dynasty, Pūrṇavarman of Magadha, Rājabhāṭa of Bengal, Rājyavardhana and Harṣavardhana of Thāneśvara, Dhruvasena or Dhruva-bhāṭa of Mālavā, Śīlāditya I, Dharmāditya of Mālavā, Meghavāhana of Kashmir, Subhakaradeva of Orissa, almost all the rulers of the Candra dynasty, Khaḍga dynasty, Bhadra dynasty, and the Bhaumakāra dynasty of Bengal and Orissa, Gopāla and Dharmapāla and some other kings of the pāla dynasty. This list is by no means

1. Cf. Gokuldas De, *Democracy in Early Buddhist Saṃgha*, Calcutta, 1954; R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, (Calcutta, 1922) chapter IV.

comprehensive. Many of these kings were *paramopāsaka* or *paramasaugata*, i.e. 'devout Buddhists.' With the ignoble exception of about ten kings who persecuted Buddhism in their kingdoms, as a rule most of the kings of ancient India had sympathy and respect for Buddhism and patronized the monks and their establishments. The same is true of most of the queens and ministers whose patronage of Buddhism is known either through literature or through inscriptions or through foreign records.

It appears that India owes to Aśoka, *the idea of a welfare state* as well as *the idea of a secular state*, secular in the sense not of a state without any religion, but in the sense that political administration of a state should be free, as far as possible, from sectarian principles and must respect the truly religious sentiments of different votaries that dwell in a particular state. Both these ideas are suggested by the inscriptions of Aśoka. Aśokan ideals of kingship were directly responsible for the growth of the idea of a welfare state free from the exclusive influence of a particular church. The idea of *dharmaviṣaya* or 'conquest by righteousness' practised and propagated by Aśoka, was inspired by Buddhist morality. This grand concept remained an ideal for many kings who came after Aśoka. It does not seem to have been merely an imperial boast of Aśoka when he declared that he had gained a righteous victory by silencing the war-drums (*bheri-ghoṣa*) and by beating the drums of righteousness (*dharma-ghoṣa*) throughout his empire and along its frontiers. The author of the Chinese *Hou Hanshu* also noted that the people of India "practise the religion of the Buddha; it has become a habit with them not to kill and not to fight."<sup>1</sup> Along

1. Quoted after Sten Konow, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. II, p. LXVII

with this concept of conquest through righteousness Buddhism gave us the concept of an inoffensive sacrifice by kings, a *yajña* entirely free from *himsa*<sup>1</sup> and full of charity and kindness. This concept was practised by Emperor Aśoka and King Mehavāhana of Kashmir.<sup>2</sup> In the Nānāghāṭa Cave Inscription of Nāganikā we hear of this non-violent sacrifice called *anārabhaniyo yaño*.<sup>3</sup> Lastly we may mention that ancient Indian political theory owes to Buddhism such institutions as that of *dharmamahāmātra*, *dharmasamāja*, *dharmadūta*, such royal epithets as *Sīlāditya*, *Vinayāditya*, *Dharmāditya*, *Paramasaugata*, *Paramopāsaka*, etc. and to Buddhist social thought such historical examples as kingship of *brāhmaṇas*, *sūdras* or of *vaisyas*. In early Brahmanical texts only a *kṣatriya* could be a ruler. In about the 2nd century B.C. this rule was changed and it was declared that even a *brāhmaṇa* could be a ruler. This change in the duties of a *brāhmaṇa* was possibly suggested by the concrete example of Puṣyamitra Suṅga, the *brāhmaṇa* general of the last Maurya king who, having murdered his sovereign, made himself king of the decaying Maurya empire. Among the *brāhmaṇa* families which ruled over small areas in different periods of ancient Indian history, mention may be made of the Suṅgas, Kāṇvas, Kadam̐bas, Vākāṭakas, and Sātavāhanas.

### *Education :*

When the Buddha had founded at Vārāṇasī the ideal *saṃgha* consisting of sixty worthies (*arhats*) he commanded

1. *Dīghanikāya*, Vol. I, *Kūṭadantasutta*,
2. See L. M. Joshi in *Journal of Oriental Institute*, Vol. XIV (Baroda, 1964) pp. 156-157.
3. D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions* (Calcutta; 1942) p. 187

them in the following words: "Walk, monks, on your tour for the blessing of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing the happiness of *devas* and men. Monks, teach Dhamma which is a blessing in the beginning, a blessing in the middle, a blessing in the end." We quote this passage from the *Mahāvagga* to recall that Buddhism was, from the very beginning, a missionary movement founded on compassion, determined spiritually to transform the world of humanity, and to awaken it morally, intellectually and spiritually. Who can say how many millions of human beings had been awakened morally, intellectually and spiritually by the message of Buddhism in the course of its long history? We can only imagine that an immeasurable multitude of creatures must have been awakened in India alone. Buddhist monastic colleges and universities of ancient India threw open their doors to all those who wished to know, irrespective of caste, colour, creed or country. This universal attitude and catholic spirit of Buddhist culture and its educational centres earned a great international reputation for India and attracted students and scholars from far-off countries. The same cannot be said of the Brahmanical system of education and its institutions. It is, therefore, quite proper to attribute to the influence of Buddhism the rise of organized public educational institutions in ancient India. The influence of Buddhist monastic and educational institutions on the growth and propagation of Indian culture can scarcely be overestimated. It was through Buddhism that Indian art, literature, thought, and morals were transmitted throughout the length and breadth of Asia during the first millennium of the Christian era. In India it was after the Buddhist model of an organized institution of monks, that Saṃkarā-Cārya established

*advaita* seats (*pīṭhas*) with an ordained and regulated community of Saiva-Vedāntika monks. There is no evidence of Brahmanical monasteries before the time of Saṃkara (cir. 900 A.D.). Charles Eliot is right when he observes that “the monastic institutions of India seem due to Buddhism.” “Saṃkara perceived the advantage of the cenobitic life for organizing religion and founded a number of *maths* or colleges. Subsequent religious leaders imitated him.”<sup>1</sup> One of the centres founded by Saṃkara was located in Puri or Jagannāthpurī in Orissa. According to Svami Vivekananda, a leading modern teacher of Saṃkara’s school, “the temple of Jagannath is an old Buddhistic temple. We took this and others over and re-Hinduised them. We shall have to do many things like that yet.”<sup>2</sup>

### *Language & Literature*

Buddhist contribution to Indian languages and literature was matched only by the richness and variety of the Buddhist religion and philosophy. The development of Pāli and its literature was wholly due to Buddhism. Of its great historical, cultural, and literary value scholars are well aware. But Pāli was not the only area which contributed to the flowering of the Buddhist tradition. The vast amount of Pāli texts, canonical and non-canonical, is the contribution of only one major branch, doubtless one of the most ancient and orthodox branches, of Buddhism. Several other schools of Buddhism cultivated varieties of Buddhist Sanskrit and varieties of Buddhist Prākṛit. The Buddhist intellectuals of ancient India contributed not only to what is now called Buddhist Sanskrit

1. *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol. II (London, 1921) p. 175

2. *Complete Works*, vol. III, p. 264

and its varieties but also to what is called Pāṇinian or Classical Sanskrit. Thus while we have the *Avadānas* and *Mahāyānasūtra* in a Sanskrit peculiar to the Buddhist tradition, we also have such texts as the *Madhyamakasāstra*, the *Jātakamālā*, and the *Tattvasaṃgraha*, to mention only three out of numerous texts, in classical Sanskrit. The Sanskrit of the Buddhist *tantras* and *sādhana*s presents yet another category of language. Then, the language of the epigraphs of Aśoka is a kind of Prākṛit, by no means uniform in all versions of the major rock edicts, quite different from the language of what has been called the *Gāndhārī Dharmapada*. The Buddha's injunction to his disciples to learn the sacred word in their own languages (*sakāya-niruttiyā*) was fully carried out by the faithful Buddhists.

The Pāli authors were the first to write hagiographies and traditional historical narratives. Some sections of the *Mahāvagga* and the *Cullavagga* contain the earliest examples of what may be called Buddhist historical literature. The *Buddhavaṃsa* presents us with the oldest hagiographies of the Buddhist tradition. Parallel developments of legendary biographies and hagiographies of mythical heroes and sages can be seen in the *Mahābhārata* and the Jaina *Kalpasūtra*. The *Jātakas* and the *Apadānas* (*Sanskrit Avadānas*) remained a constant source of inspiration to future poets and religious authors who wrote in Sanskrit. Kṣemendra (10th century), for example, was first a Saiva and later on he became a Bhāgavata, he was inspired by Buddhist subjects and legends. He wrote the *Bodhisattvā-vadānakalpalatā* in beautiful verse wherein he collected one hundred and eight *avadānas*. Whether it is in the *Vetālapañcaviṃsatikā* or the *Dasakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin (7th century) or the *Kathāsaritasāgara* of Somadeva (11th century), the Buddhist fables and stories, in spite of

changes due to transmission in different versions, retained their psychological appeal, to the learned as well as to the simple folk. The didactic material of the *Purāṇas* and the *Dharmasāstras* contains much that can ultimately be traced to Buddhist moral teachings. This is specially true of the *Mahābhārata*. The beginnings of epic poetry, particularly of dramatic poetry, can possibly be traced to Buddhist *ākhyāna* poetry. The numerous dramatic narrations in the form of dialogues in Pāli verse or in verse mixed with prose present us with the earliest forms of Buddhist *ākhyānas* or so called “ballads.”

The contribution of Buddhism to the psychological literature of ancient India has perhaps never been equalled in the literature of Brahmanical *yoga*. The psychological advances made by the *Abhidhamma* schools of Buddhist thought deserve detailed study in the light of contemporary psychology developed in the west. The problems of *Abhidhamma* psychology have hardly been studied yet in relation to the psychology of *Tāntrika yoga* and the Siddha culture. A study of devotional meditation (*bhakti-yoga*), of its techniques and terminology as revealed in the Hindi literature of medieval saint-poets, is likely to throw important light on the transmission and transformation of the classical Buddhist system of *dhyāna*.

It is well known that first dramatist in the history of Sanskrit literature was a Buddhist poet, Aśvaghoṣa (first century A D.). Fragments of three dramas in Sanskrit, including the fragments of the *Sāriputraprakaraṇa*, a drama by Aśvaghoṣa, have come to light from Central Asian Buddhist ruins. Aśvaghoṣa was the forerunner of classical Sanskrit dramatists like Bhāsa and Kālidāsa. Winternitz states that “the finished form of the epics

together with the perfect technique of the dramas of Aśvaghoṣa proves that they were composed only on some long-standing models. By itself it appears improbable that a thoroughly Buddhist poet should be the first to have composed in this style.<sup>1</sup> This is rather strange to read and no reason is given for assuming that it is improbable for “a thoroughly Buddhist poet” to be the pioniér in ornate style of *kāvya* and the perfect technique of dramaturgy. On the other hand, there are no “models” extant which can be said to have influenced Aśvaghoṣa in the techniques of the Sanskrit drama. At another place the same scholar is obliged to say that “Aśvaghoṣa, however, is the first Indian poet, who is actually known to us as an author of dramas.”<sup>2</sup> Although Vālmīki is traditionally considered the ‘first poet’ in Sanskrit, the extant *Rāmāyaṇa* attributed to his authorship is of composite character and uncertain date. No such uncertainty attaches to Āryaśūra (4th century A. D.) and his authorship of the *Jātakamālā* and other works. He has been described as “the forerunner of the poets of classical, chaste and ornate Sanskrit.” In Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* we find “the loftiest flights of religious poetry.” Būston’s statement that there were one hundred commentaries on this text, out of which only eight were translated into Tibetan,<sup>3</sup> gives an idea of the extent to which the Buddhist ideals were capable of inspiring men of letters.

Buddhist poets were pioneers also in the composition of hymns of praise (*stotra*, *stava*, *stuti*) in Sanskrit. The

1. M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, vol. III Part I, Eng. Tr. by Subhadra Jha (Delhi, 1963) p. 39
2. *Ibid.* p. 198
3. E. Obermiller, *Bu-sTon’s History of Buddhism*, Part II, (Heidelberg, 1931) p. 166



*Prajñāpāramitāstuti* may or may not be the work of Nāgārjuna I (circa 100 A.D.), but he certainly composed the *Catuhstava*. The earliest specimen of a hymn is possibly the *Buddhānusmṛiti* section of the *Mahāvastu*, a canonical text of the Mahāsāṃghika school. The greatest writer of Buddhist hymns was, however, Mātrceta (circa 100 A.D.). The following works ascribed to him, are preserved in the Tibetan bsTan-hGyur: *Varṇārḥavarṇa-stotra* (also called *Catuhśataka*), *Triratnamāṅgalastotra*, *Samyaksaṃbuddhalakṣaṇastotra*, *Ekottarikastotra*, *Sugata-pañcatrīṃśastotra*, *Triratnastotra*, *Satapañcāsatkanā-mastotra*, *Āryatārādevīstotra-sarvārthasiddhi-nāmastotra-rāja*, *Mātrceta-gīti*, and *Āryatārāstotra*. Aśvaghōṣa, perhaps a contemporary of Mātrceta composed the *Gaṇḍīstotragāthā*. *Misrakastava* of Dignāga, *Suprabhāta-stotra* of King Harṣa, and *Sragdharāstotra* of *Sarvajña-mitra*, all these texts are of immense value from the standpoint of religious poetry. The *Bhakti-sataka* of Rāmacandra Bhāratī was perhaps the last hymn in praise of the Buddha composed in Sanskrit by an Indian Buddhist poet.

One of the latest contributions made by the Buddhists to the literature of India was in the form of *dohās* or *gītis* (songs) composed by Buddhist *siddhas* (adepts in Tāntrika culture) in Apabhraṃśa. This language seems to have been the mother of several modern Indian languages including Hindi, Oriya, and Bengali. The terms and concepts of Buddhism were transmitted by the *siddhas* through the medium of their Apabhraṃśa poems to medieval lore of saint-poets. Unfortunately only a small portion of the *siddha* literature has survived to this day.

Finally mention may be made in passing of the contributions of Buddhist writers to Sanskrit grammar

and lexicography. Buddhist scholar named Sarvavarman wrote the *Kātantra*, in which he tried to build a new system of Sanskrit grammar. He possibly lived in or about the second century A.D. In the eighth century a commentary was written on *Kātantra* by one Durgasimha. The Buddhist scholar Candragomin (circa 500 A.D.) wrote the *Cāndravyākaraṇa* with an autocommentary (*vṛtti*) on it. It became the standard grammatical treatise in most Buddhist countries of Asia. Bruno Liebich's researches have shown that an extensive literature developed around the *Cāndravyākaraṇa*. Another early grammarian was Indragomin, possibly a Buddhist scholar, who wrote the *Aindravyākaraṇa*. The text was once famous in Buddhist Nepal, but it has not come down to us. The Buddhist logician Jinendrabodhi wrote the *Kāśikā-Vivaraṇapañjikā* also known as *Nyāsa*, a commentary on the *Kāśikā* of Jayāditya and Vāmana. In the eleventh century seem to have flourished not less than three Buddhist grammarians of Sanskrit. Saraṇadeva wrote a work called *Durghaṭavṛtti* in which he simplified the difficult points in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇinī. It is said that the text of the *Durghaṭavṛtti* was revised by his teacher Sarvarakṣita. Maitreyarakṣita wrote the *Tantrapradīpa*, a critical commentary on the *Nyāsa*. This author also wrote another grammatical work called the *Dhātupradīpa*.

Fragments of a manuscript in eight leaves of a synonymical dictionary in Sanskrit were purchased by F. Weber at Leh in Ladakh. The author of this dictionary is believed to have been a Buddhist scholar and these fragments are supposed to be the oldest fragments of any dictionary in Sanskrit known so far. Another Sanskrit dictionary which seems to have originated in Buddhist literary circles, was the *Utpalinī* compiled by Vyāḍi. The

existence of this dictionary is known from quotations from it in some later commentaries. Vyāḍi may or may not have been a Buddhist by faith but he seems to have drawn largely on Buddhist literary sources. The most famous and earliest extant dictionary is the *Nāmalīṅgānusāsa*, better known as *Amarākosa*, by Amarasimha who possibly flourished in the 6th century A.D. He was a Buddhist, though he did not pay any special attention to Buddhist vocabulary in his dictionary. It is said that there are as many as 50 known commentaries on the *Amarakosa*. Mention may be made in this connection of three important Buddhist Sanskrit texts which are well known lexicographical collections of technical Buddhist terms. The first is the *Dharmasaṃgraha*, attributed to Nāgārjuna (?); it contains valuable lists of technical terms and important names collected under one hundred and forty headings. The other text is the *Arthaviniscayasūtra* which resembles the *Dharmasaṃgraha* to a great extent but contains also explanations of technical terms of Buddhist religion and philosophy. The third is the famous *Mahāvīyutpatti*, a bilingual (Sanskrit-Tibetan) encyclopaedic lexicon of Buddhist proper names and technical terms. It was prepared jointly by Indian and Tibetan scholars in Tibet early in the 9th century. The last Buddhist dictionary writer to be mentioned was Puruṣottamadeva (circa 12th century). As a supplement to the *Amarakosa* he wrote the *Trikāṇḍasesa*. The *Amarakosa* is divided into three parts hence its secondary title ‘‘*Trikāṇḍī*’’. Puruṣottamadeva follows this arrangement in his work which ‘‘contains rare names of the Buddha and many words that are peculiar to Buddhist Sanskrit.’’<sup>1</sup> Another dictionary

1. M. Winternitz *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. III, Part II, Eng. Tr. by Subhadra Jha (Delhi, 1967) p. 457.

by this author, is called the *Hārāvalī*. Before leaving this section we want to mention an interesting work by a great Buddhist poet and abbot of the Jagaddala-Vihāra (District Malda). This is an anthology of *subhāṣitas* selected from the works of 227 authors and containing in all 1739 verses and called the *Subhāṣitaratnakosa*. Its author was Vidyākara who made the anthology in the eleventh century. Among other things this remarkable work proves that Dharmakīrti, the Buddhist logician (7th century), was also a great poet. The anthology reveals the existence of a large number of Buddhist poets whose works are now lost for ever.<sup>1</sup>

### *Social Life*

Many modern scholars maintain that Buddhism is a monastic religion, an ascetic movement, and not a social movement. I have criticised this view elsewhere<sup>2</sup> and pointed out that monasticism is only one aspect of Buddhist religious tradition and we should not mistake one part for the whole. I also hold the view that word *saṃgha* does not mean merely 'the order of monks.' The community of monks is only a part of the *saṃgha*, not the whole of it. *Saṃgha* has to be understood to mean the entire community of those human beings who take refuge (*sarana*) in the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *saṃgha*. *Saṃgha* is the all embracing universal society of humans wedded to the doctrine and method taught by the Sage of the Sākyas.

1. Cf. *The Subhāṣitaratnakosa* of Vidyākara, ed. by D. D. Kosambi and V. V. Gokhale, H. O. S. vol. 42 (Cambridge, Mass. 1957); translated under the title *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry* by Daniel H. H. Ingalls, H. O. S. vol. 44, (Cambridge, Mass. 1965)
2. L. M. Joshi, "Social Perspective of Buddhist Soteriology" in *Religion and Society*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (Bengalore, 1971) pp. 59-68

This universal *saṃgha* includes men as well as women, ascetics as well as householders. In Buddhist words, *bhiksus*, *bhiksunis*, *upāsakas*, and *upāsikās*, all these are members of the *saṃgha*. *Saṃgha* is the third member of the holy triad of the Buddhist tradition. In this spiritual sense *saṃgha* includes all kinds of enlightened beings, viz. the perfectly Awakened Ones, (*saṃyaksambuddhas*), the individually Awakened Ones (*pratyekabuddhas*), the Worthy Ones (*arhats*), the Bodhisattvas, as well as those holy beings who are in different stages of purification (*visuddhi*). This spiritual and ideal *saṃgha* is the true Refuge sought by the faithful disciples of the Buddha. There is however, no denying the fact that in practical life the Buddhists do make distinctions between ascetic members and lay members of the *saṃgha*; for instance, they use the word *bhikṣu-saṃgha* in contradistinction to *upāsaka-saṃgha*, and *bhiksuni-saṃgha* to distinguish it from *bhikṣu-saṃgha*. In some old texts we find the *bodhisattvagaṇa* contrasted with the *srāvaka-saṃgha*. Likewise in the contemporary situation we refer to the *saṃgaas* or communities of different places and countries, for example the *saṃgha* of Sri Lankā the *saṃgha* of Bangladesh or the Nepalese *saṃgha*, and so on. Some times in one and the same country are found *saṃghas* based on geographical separation, sectarian affiliation, etc. But these narrow and restricted meanings of the word *saṃgha* should not be allowed to obscure our vision of the *ariya-saṃgha*, the society of the enlightened beings, which is our ideal, nor should we lose sight of the universal society of human beings who are all united through their common dislike for suffering and common quest of happiness.

To say that Buddhism is a monkish or monastic religion is not true. Even in the Theravāda tradition this has

never been wholly true. The Theravāda tradition did not envisage such an inseparable connection between the path of Purity and the path of social life, as for example, was the case in the Brahmanical tradition through the scheme of *Varṇāśrama-dharma*. In the Theravāda Buddhist view the joys of a homeless life of those who take the ochre robe are declared to be superior to the joys of married and household life. It would, however, be erroneous to suppose that Buddhism neglected the social life altogether.

There are many discourses preserved in the Pāli *suttas* which contain principles and practices to be observed by those who live in society. A division of the *Majjhima-nikāya* is called *gahapati-vagga*. The *Maṅgalasutta*, that we recite daily, is nothing short of a summary of sociologically oriented soteriology. It may be recalled here that a comprehensive picture of the social perspective of Theravāda Buddhism may be gleaned from the *Ambaṭṭhasutta*, the *Sigālovādasutta*, the *Kandarakasutta*, the *Aṭṭhakanāgarasutta*, *Upālisutta*, *Ghaṭṭikārasutta*, and *Mahākammavibhaṅgasutta*. Another authentic picture of the social ethics of early Buddhism is documented in the rock edicts of Emperor Aśoka.

It is true that the Pali texts make a clear distinction between ascetic and lay members of the *saṃgha*. This is as it should be in so far as their ends and means are concerned. Spiritual ends and means differ from social ends and means. Those who aspire to ultimate Freedom (*vimutti*) from *saṃsāra* are certainly superior to and different from those who aspire to rebirth in happy or heavenly abodes. The career of ascetics (*sramaṇas*) is therefore subtle, difficult, and extraordinary. The vast majority of

lay members follow a less subtle, less difficult and ordinary way of life. But this way of life is guided by the teachings of the Buddha and of Buddhist sages. The relationship that has existed between the ascetic and social members of the *saṃgha* through the ages clearly establishes the fact that those who interpret Theravāda Buddhism as ascetic and anti-social are mistaken.

The monks were never supposed to remain indifferent to human beings and their sufferings: the *dhamma-vinaya* was not meant only for those who had 'gone forth' from home-life. Sākyamuni was a perfectly Awakened One and therefore a World Teacher. He was not a teacher of monks only; he was the teacher not only of all human beings, monks as well as the laity, but also of divine beings, *satthā deva manussānam*. He is renowned as the 'Torchbearer of mankind' (*ukkādhāro manussānam*). He was 'born for the good and happiness of humanity' (*manussa loka hita sukhāya jāto*). The beginnings of the Buddhist movement lay in the Buddha's keen concern for the freedom and happiness of human beings living in the world. There would have been no Buddhism had he withheld his great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) which was one of the corner-stones of the Buddhist movement. And compassion is a social emotion, a human virtue. It has to be practised in the world of beings.

A movement which moves society is a social movement. And Buddhism has definitely moved society wherever it spread in the course of its long history. For thousands of years it has moved men and women to a higher life, to noble truths and deeper principles; it has inspired races and peoples and nations to develop art and literature, morals and manners, science and philosophy, and to build patterns

of civilization and forces of peace. The history of Buddhist civilization has been the result of Buddhist social ideas and ideals which are not all ascetic or monastic.

Recently Melford E. Spiro has advanced the view that there are "three systems of Theravāda Buddhism", viz., "*nibbanic Buddhism*", "*kammatic Buddhism*" and "*apotropaic Buddhism*". By the first "system" he means Buddhism of those who aspire direct to Nirvana; by the second "system" he understands Buddhism as practised by those who aspire to a favourable rebirth and happy states in heaven. The third "system", according to him, is "concerned with man's worldly welfare: the curing of illness, protection from demons, the prevention of droughts, and so on."<sup>1</sup> This view is based on his study of Buddhist communities in Burma during the days of U Nu. His standpoint is anthropological and "reductionist". We may observe in passing that these so-called "three systems" are three facets of one system, Theravāda Buddhism. They are interrelated. Those who aim at Nirvana do not, perhaps cannot, remain indifferent to the welfare of those who aim at a favourable rebirth. Contrariwise those who follow the so-called *kammatic* religious life treat those who aspire to Nirvana as the proper 'field of merit.' The worldly welfare of human beings cannot be divorced from transcendental concerns either of the monks or of the laity so that tasks such as curing illness, overcoming droughts and famines, etc. are common concerns of all grades of Buddhists. Even the Buddha is known to have discussed the problems of life with kings, ministers, generals, traders, craftsmen, priests, and all kinds of householders.

1. *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1971) pp. 11-12



As A. K. Warder remarks, "there is a general underlying assumption that beyond the immediate aim of individual peace of mind, or more probably in essential connection with it, lies the objective of the happiness of the whole of human society and the still higher objective of the happiness of all living beings."<sup>1</sup>

It may be pointed out that the lay Buddhist also contributed significantly to the growth of Buddhist ideas and practices. The rise of the powerful schools of the Mahāsāṃghikas and Sarvāstivādins resulted in important secularizing developments. These were matched in the Theravāda tradition by the popularity of the *Apadānas* and *Jātakas*. At the same time *stūpa* architecture and related sculpture presented a fresh area of concrete religious activity in which monks as well as the laity joined. Another area of social life in which this cooperation was meaningfully employed was that of education of the monks as well as the laity. Its centres were monastic schools and colleges in which the monks were the teachers not only of religious doctrines and texts but also of secular arts and letters.

The Buddhist community of casteless and classless monks exerted important influence on Indian society in general. The Brahmanical leaders and authors were obliged to introduce the ascetic life as the fourth stage (*saṃnyāsa-āśrama*) in the theory of *āśramas*. The provision of *vikalpa* or option to embrace *saṃnyāsa* or monastic life even without going through all the preceding three stages was made possibly due to the popularity of *pravrajyā* or 'going forth' in Jaina and Buddhist circles of Indian

1. A. K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, Motilal Banarasi Das, 1971), p. 157

society. The tenet of redeeming one's debt to one's 'fathers' (*pitṛs*) by producing sons was, however, never given up by the Brahmanical tradition.

A fundamental tenet of Buddhist socio-moral ideology was that all beings are bound by their *karma*. It is the deeds of a person which determine his or her fortunes in this and the next life. The doctrine recognized the freedom of every person to select a way of life suitable to his or her equipment. In other words it is one's inner worth and moral excellence, purity of life and nobility of character, control of mind and the senses and an insight into the real nature of things, in short, progress in the triple training: *sīla*, *samāddhi*, and *prajñā* which determine one's superiority over others. No distinction of birth or caste, colour or sex, was of any value so far as one's higher or holier life and its ways and means were concerned. This was a revolutionary doctrine from the standpoint of the Brahmanical tradition which zealously guarded the legend of the divine origin of castes and their duties.

Buddhism made profound impact on Indian social life in several ways. Its leaders and teachers continuously criticized the theory of castes and ridiculed the false claims to superiority based on birth (*jāti*) and colour (*varṇa*). On the other hand, Buddhism opened the doors to higher religious life and the highest goal for all those who sought them, including the members of the lower strata of society. Although Buddhism was not concerned with the abolition of castes, it did oppose the caste-system and repeatedly taught the evils of casteism. Another aspect of Buddhist social contribution was towards the emancipation of women from social inhibitions. Buddhism along with Jainism but unlike Brahmanism gave the

equality of opportunity in religious culture to women. Some of the female members of the earliest ascetic order known to history were the Buddhist *therīs*-whose religious poetry has come down to us in the *Therīgāthā*.

Another aspect of Buddhist contribution in ancient India lay in the area of social harmony and racial integration on a national scale. It was through Buddhist influence and teaching of social harmony and tolerance that foreign invaders such as the Greeks, Sakas, Pahlavas, Kuṣāṇas and Hūṇas who came to India and settled here in the course of centuries immediately preceding and following the Christian era, were assimilated by Indian society. This was a permanent contribution to social integration and national growth and it could not have been so easily accomplished in a strictly Brahmanical scheme of social gradation without the wholesome effects of the Buddhist disregard for *varṇa*-organisation and respect for the liberty of the individual. We are of the view that had Buddhism been a living force at the time of the Turkish invasions, the problems of Hindu-Muslim communal discord in medieval and modern India would not have taken such a strong turn as they did. Because of the revival of the traditional Brahmanical social scheme, reinforced with fresh religious injunctions, and because of the decline of Buddhism in India after the tenth century A. D., the mass of early medieval Islamic followers in India could not be assimilated and digested by Indian society. Arnold J. Toynbee has rightly remarked that "If either Buddhism or Jainism had succeeded in captivating the Indic World, caste might have been got rid of. As it turned out, however, the role of universal church in the last chapter of the Indic decline and fall was played by Hinduism, a parvenu archaistic

syncretism of things new and old; and one of the old things to which Hinduism gave a new lease of life was caste.”<sup>1</sup>

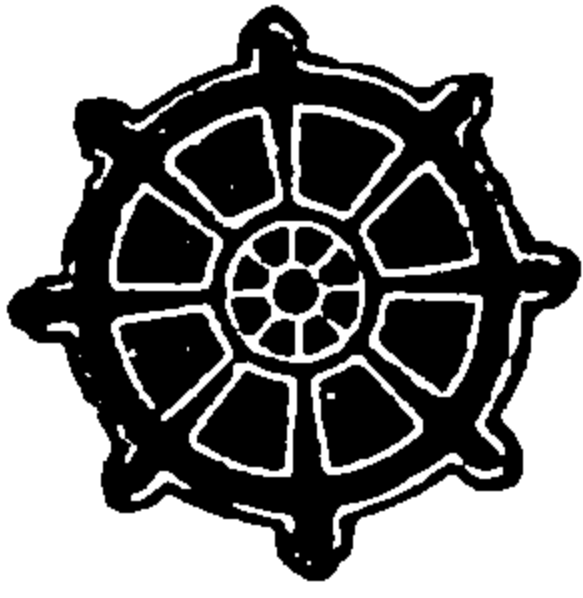
The Buddhist message of social equality and communal harmony had left a deep impression on the mind of the Indian people which continued after the transformation of the classical Buddhist movement. A number of instances in the myths and stories of the *Mahābhārata* reveal that moral and intellectual attainments carried greater prestige than mere birth in a *brāhmaṇa* family. The *Bhagavadgīta*, while stating the theory of the divine origin of four castes (IV. 13) nevertheless teaches that the wise people are impartial towards a learned and disciplined *brāhmaṇa*, the cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcaste (V. 18). The task of fighting the evils of casteism and untouchability was continued by the Buddhist *siddhas*, the adepts in Tāntrika culture, during the early medieval centuries. A large number of these *siddhas* came from lower caste families, but their greatness was assured by their success (*siddhi*) in esoteric culture (*sādhana*). This mission of social reform was then resumed by the saint-poets of the *bhakti* movement throughout the Middle Ages. Though these saint-poets (*sants*) were, generally speaking within the fold of the Brahmanical “Hindu” religious tradition, yet they revolted freely against many fundamental dogmas and authentic customs of traditional Brahmanism. Their social and moral teachings were more in keeping with Buddhism than with Brahmanism. All of them disregarded the rules of the *varṇa-āśrama-dharma* scheme and attacked social distinctions based on birth and profession. Many of them were born in *sūdra* families,

1 *A Study of History* (abridged by D. C. Somervill) vol. I, New York, 1969, p. 350

They became exalted through their pure character, sincere devotion and magnanimity. The saints of Karṇāṭaka and Mahārāshtra, viz, Basaveśvara, Jnāneśvara, Namadeva, Rāmadāsa, Tukārāma, and Ekanātha, were all against casteism and ritualism. Likewise the saint-poets (*sants*) of North India, viz., Caitanya, Rāmānada, Kabīrdāsa, Ravidāsa, Guru Nānak, Dhannā, Sena, Pīpā, Dādu and the Muslim *sufis*, were equally strong critics of the Brahmanical scheme of castes and rituals. The social reforms initiated by the Buddhists and continued by medieval saint-poets were finally legalized and accomplished (at least in theory) by the government of the Indian Republic in 1949.



*Printed for the  
Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy  
at the Supra Printers  
75, Angunawala  
Peradeniya  
Sri Lanka (Ceylon)*



Significance  
of  
**VESAK**

**Prof: K. N. JAYATILLEKE**

**THE WHEEL PUBLICATION No. 178**

**SIGNIFICANCE**  
**OF**  
**VESAK**

*by*

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**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**

**Kandy**

**2516**  
**1972**

**Ceylon**



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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WESAK

Vesak is traditionally associated with the birth, enlightenment and Parinirvāna of the Buddha, who renounced a life of luxury to solve the riddle of the universe and bring happiness to mankind as well as to other beings. As in the case of other religious teachers of antiquity, his birth is enshrouded in myth and legend, the later accounts found in the *Lalitavistara*, for instance, containing descriptions of more miraculous happenings than in the earliest accounts in the Pali Canon. As Buddhists, who have to believe only in things as they are, and therefore in verifiable historical truths we are not obliged to believe in all these myths and legends. The truths of Buddhism stand or fall to the extent to which the Dhamma contains statements which can be verified as true and the veracity of Buddhism, therefore, does not depend on the historical accuracy of legendary beliefs about the birth or death of the Buddha. Besides, the Buddha encouraged self-criticism as well as a critical examination of his own life on the part of his disciples. Even with regard to matters of doctrine or discipline, textual criticism was encouraged. For instance, a monk who claimed to have heard something from the Buddha himself was asked to examine its authenticity in the light of the *Sutta* and *Vinaya*, (a collection of texts regarding doctrinal and disciplinary matters made during the time of the Buddha himself), since his personal recollections and interpretations may not be altogether trustworthy.

## Historical Facts

This does not mean that we need to dismiss all the statements associated with the birth, life and demise of the Buddha as mythical or legendary. Some of us may feel that if we were closer in time to the Buddha we would have had a better opportunity of apprehending the historical facts about him. But in a way we are better placed today for we can study the historical development and expansion of Buddhism and also compare the life of the Buddha and contrast it with that of other great religious teachers and philosophers of mankind. Some of the legends may have a kernel of historical truth. Human imagination seems to have worked in a very similar way with regard to some of the heroes of history. At least a hundred years after the death of the Buddha we find in the *Mahāvastu* the statement that “the Buddha’s body was immaculately conceived” (*na ca maithura-sambhūtaṃ Sugatasya samucchritaṃ*) or, in other words that the Buddha had a virgin birth, but if we trace the origin of this idea to the Pali Canonical texts, we find it stated that the mother of the Buddha had no thoughts of sex after the Buddha-child was conceived, which may quite possibly be historically true.

Some of the claims are certainly historically significant. Everyone would admit today that the Buddha was the first religious teacher in history with a universal message for all mankind and that he was the founder of the concept of a world-religion. Asita’s prophecy that the Buddha was “born for the good and happiness of the human world” (*manussa-loke hita-sukhatāya jāto*) may be seen today in all probability to be true although at the time that it found its way into the text, it was a mere prophecy. It was also a historical fact that the birth of the Buddha was marked by a

spiritual awakening of the whole human race. In Greece, Pythagoras conceives of philosophy as a way of life and establishes a brotherhood. The prophet Isaiah in Israel dreams of the brotherhood of man and an era of universal peace. In Persia, Zoroaster, who conceives of the world as a battleground of the forces of good and evil, is convinced of the eventual victory of good over evil. In China, we find Confucius preaching a new ethic of human relationships and Lao Tse speaks of the necessity of living in conformity with eternal principles and values. In India itself from about 800 B. C., there was a persistent quest for truth, light and immortality :

From the unreal lead me to the real !  
 From darkness lead me to light !  
 From death lead me to immortality !

(*Brhad Āraṇyaka Upanisad*, I. 3. 28)

It is in answer to this quest that the Buddha declares: "Open for them are the doors to immortality" (*apārutā tesam amatassa dvārā*). So when the Prophet Isaiah contemporaneously says that a people who walked in darkness have seen a great light and speaks of a child who shall be called the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace, someone has only to point out that the Buddha claimed or it was claimed of the Buddha that he was the Wonderful Person (*Acchariya-puggala*), the Counsellor of gods and men (*Satthā-devamanussānam*), the God among gods (*Brahmātibrahma*), the Everlasting Father (*Ādhi Pita*) and the Prince of Peace (*Sāntirāja*). Similarly, the Buddhists of China have seen in a text attributed to Confucious a prophetic utterance alluding to the Buddha, which reads: "Among the people of the West there is a Sage. He does not speak

and is yet spontaneously believed, he does not (consciously) convert people and yet (his doctrine) is spontaneously realised. How vast he is!" Are these texts interpolations or do they support the historical veracity of the Buddhist legend that the world at this time was eagerly awaiting the birth of an Enlightened One!

## **Last Days**

Let us now turn to the last days of the Buddha on earth, as reported in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. Here again we find fact with an occasional admixture of legend. Here again, it is difficult at times to distinguish the hard core of fact from legend. The Buddha, it is said, was transfigured just prior to his death. His robes, it is said, were aglow when touching the body. Is this fact or fiction? We do not know. But there are a number of significant statements about the Dhamma whose historicity is self-authenticated. It is said that the Buddha did not want to pass away until he had brought into existence a set of monks who were learned in the Dhamma, had realised its fruits and were competent to deal with any criticisms levelled against it.

When the sal flowers from the twin sal-trees, under which he lay, wafted over his body, it appeared as though nature was paying him homage. Today we Buddhists worship the Buddha by offering flowers before his image. But the Buddha says that one does not really pay homage to the Transcendent One by such offerings. It is the disciple whether he be man or woman, who follows in the footsteps of the Dhamma and lives in accordance with it who truly reveres and pays the highest homage to the Transcendent One. When Ananda is worried as to how the funeral rites should be performed, the Buddha asks him not to worry

about these rituals but to “strive hard to attain the good goal” (*sadattha ghaṭatha*); for Ananda had not as yet become an Arahant.

Most instructive is Buddha’s last sermon, which was to Subhadda the wandering ascetic. The question he asked was very interesting. Did all the six outstanding teachers who were contemporaries of the Buddha understand the truth? Or is it the case that only some understood or none understood? In the order in which they are mentioned, there was Pūraṇa Kassapa, who was an Amoralist because he thought that everything was strictly determined by natural causes, Makkhali Gosāla who was a Theist who believed that everything happened in accordance with God’s will, Ajita Kesakambali the Materialist who denied survival, moral values and the good life. Pakudha Kaccāyana the Categorialist who tried to explain the world in terms of discrete categories, Sañjaya Belatṭhiputta the Agnostic Sceptic or Positivist who held that moral and religious propositions were unverifiable and Nigaṇtha Nātaputta who was a Relativist and an Eclectic. The significance of the question comes to this. Is Amoralism, Theism, Materialism, Categorialism, Agnosticism and Eclecticism all true? Or is none true? Or is one or some of these theories true?

### **The True Religion**

Elsewhere, in the *Sandaka Sutta* there is a clear-cut answer to this question. There Ananda says that in the opinion of the Buddha there are four false religions in the world and four religions which are unsatisfactory though not necessarily totally false, while Buddhism is distinguished from all of them. The word for religion here is used in a wide sense as in modern usage to denote theistic and non-theistic religions as well as pseudo-religions or religions-surrogate, i. e. substitutes for religion such as, say, Marxism,

Existentialism, Humanism etc., The four false religions or philosophies inculcating a way of life are first, Materialism which denies survival, secondly Amoralism which denies good and evil, thirdly any religion which asserts that man is miraculously saved or doomed and lastly theistic evolutionism which holds that everything is preordained and everyone is destined to attain eventual salvation. The four unsatisfactory religions in some sense uphold survival, moral values, moral recompense as well as a relative freedom of the will. They are, first, any religion that claims that its teacher was omniscient all the time and knows the entirety of the future as well. Secondly, any religion based on mere reasoning and speculation, since the reasoning may be unsound and the conclusions false. Fourthly, a pragmatic religion based on purely sceptical foundations and is, therefore, uncertain. Buddhism is to be distinguished from all of them by virtue of the fact that it was realistic and verifiable. Its truths have been verified by the Buddha, verified by his disciples and open to verification (*ehi passika*) by anyone who wishes to do so.

The answer to Subhadda's question, however, is different. There is no examination of the relative claims of Materialism, Theism, Scepticism etc. Instead the Buddha says, leave aside the question as to whether these several religions and philosophies are all true, all false or that some are true. In whatever religion the noble eightfold path is not found, in that religion one would not get the first, second, third or fourth saints and in whatever religion the noble eightfold path is found, in that religion one would get the first, second, third and fourth saints. Finally, there is a very significant remark: "If these monks lead the right kind of life, the world would never be devoid of Arahants"

*(ime ca bhikkhu sammā vihareyyum asuñño loko arahantehi assa).*

The Buddhist view is that any religion is true only to the extent to which it contains aspects of the noble eightfold path. Let us take one of the factors of the path—the necessity for cultivating right aspirations instead of wrong aspirations. Right aspirations consist in the cultivation of thoughts free from lust and sensuous craving and the cultivation of creative and compassionate thoughts. Wrong aspirations consist of the cultivation of lustful thoughts and sensuous craving as well as the cultivation of destructive and malevolent thoughts. Now if any religion asserts that one may indulge in lustful, destructive and malevolent thoughts and yet be saved if one professes faith in the creed, then such a religion, according to the Buddha, is not to be trusted. It is the same with each of the other factors of the path. The net result is that there is no salvation outside the noble eightfold path. It is the one and only way for the salvation of beings and the overcoming of suffering.

### **First Saint (Sotapanna)**

What kind of person is the 'first saint' spoken of here? It is none other than the person who attains the stream of spiritual development (sotāpanna) as a result of which his eventual salvation is assured and he does not fall into an existence below that of a human being. Such a person, it is said, sheds three fetters on attaining his spiritual insight. They are (i) the fetter of believing in a substantial ego somehow related to aspects or the whole of one's psycho-physical personality (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), (ii) the fetter of doubting the veracity and validity of the Dhamma (*vicikicchā*) and (iii) the fetter of clinging to the external



forms of religion (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*). The belief in an ego satisfies a deep-seated craving in us - the craving of our egoistic impulses (*bhava-taṇhā*). Misleading implications of language tend to make us believe that there is an 'I' and a 'me' (which is unchanging) when in fact there is only a constantly changing psychophysical process. We certainly exercise a certain degree of control over ourselves, which makes us believe that there is an 'I' which controls but such control is only an aspect of the conative functions of our conditioned psycho-physical process. A dispassionate analysis would ultimately expose the hollowness of this belief. Shedding our belief in such an ego does not however mean that we get rid of conceit (*māna*) altogether for the 'conceited' view 'I shall try to attain the goal', it is said, is necessary to spur us on up to a point. He gets rid of this 'conceit' (*māna*) only in a later stage of his spiritual evolution. Doubt has to be got rid of in Buddhism not by blind belief but by critical inquiry and by living the Dhamma. Such inquiry and the personal experience of verifying aspects of the Dhamma gives us the inner conviction that we are treading on the right path. Overcoming such doubt through conviction does not, again, mean that we have totally got rid of ignorance (*avijjā*), which we can do only at a later stage in our spiritual evolution. Religion, likewise, becomes for such a person not a matter of conforming to external ritual and forms of worship, not a form of obsessional neurosis (to use Freudian terminology) but a matter of day to day living of the Dhamma. It is such a person who is said to have entered the stream of spiritual development, a state which is within the capacity of any of us to attain.

When we ponder over these admonitions of the Buddha in his last days on earth, we see how far modern Theravāda

tradition in Ceylon has strayed from the true path of the Dhamma. Are we not preserving the Dhamma in its pristine purity only in the books when we try to rationalise our belief in caste, for instance, with the help of opinions which go contrary to the teachings of the Buddha? Are we not rationalising our disinclination to live the Dhamma by fostering false beliefs that Arahantship is not possible today, when this is contrary to the assertions of the Buddha himself?

## Enlightenment

If we turn from the birth and the last days of the Buddha to his enlightenment, it strikes us that it was not a revelation from above but an illumination from within. Part of the realisation was of the nature of causal laws operative in nature and in us.

When we come to the first sermon, we are again confronted with the noble eightfold path as the right path leading to emancipation, happiness and realisation. It is the strait and narrow road between indulgence of our desires and ascetic deprivation. The most obvious way to happiness appears to lie in the gratification of desires but unfortunately there is a law of diminishing returns which operates here. Gratification gives temporary satisfaction but continued gratification gives less and less of it. Besides, we become slaves of our passions and lose our freedom and self-control while our minds become unclear and confused. Ascetic deprivation on the other hand results in repression and self-inflicted suffering. It substitutes one kind of suffering for another. The way out or the way to transcend suffering is by a watchful self-control exercised by a person guided by the noble eightfold path.

Another significant fact about the first sermon is the claim of the Buddha that it was to set up the kingdom or rule of righteousness (*dhammacakkam pavattetum*), which shall in the fulness of time be established on earth and neither Brahmā (God) nor Māra (Satan) nor anyone else in the world could prevent this. In spite of many reverses, truth and justice shall win in the end. As one of the Upaniṣads puts it “truth alone shall conquer and never untruth” (*satyam eva jayate nānrtam*).

It is not possible to measure the enlightenment of the Buddha. As he said in the Sīmsapa forest taking a few leaves into his hand—what he knew but did not teach us was like the leaves in the forest while what he taught amounted to the leaves in his hand. What he taught was only what pertained to man’s emancipation, happiness and understanding.

Since the Buddha’s ministry was spread over forty five years, this teaching in itself is vast as is evident from the Buddhist scriptures. If we take its essence we can see the immense worth of the Buddha’s teaching and hence the true significance of Vesak, which mankind has yet to comprehend.

In these teachings we have a theory of knowledge, a theory of reality giving an account of the nature and destiny of man in the universe, an ethical system, a social and political philosophy and a philosophy of law.

Let us take the most significant teachings in each of these fields.

### **Theory of Knowledge**

Take the theory of knowledge. Nature is conceived as a causal system in which there are to be found non-deter-

ministic causal correlations. The events of nature are not haphazard, nor are they due to the will of an omnipotent God nor again to rigid deterministic causal laws. The Buddhist theory of conditioned genesis (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) steers clear of the extremes of indeterminism (*adhiṇṇa-samuppanna*) on the one hand and of Strict Determinism (*niyati-vāda*), whether theistic or natural, on the other. Understanding, therefore, is the key to salvation and not blind belief in unverifiable dogmas. And for understanding we need an impartial outlook. We must not be influenced by our prejudices for or against (*chandaṁ dosaṁ*) by fear (*bhaya*) whether it be fear of nature or of the supernatural, nor by our erroneous beliefs (*mohaṁ*). To gain personal knowledge, we must not rely on authority—whether it be revelation, tradition, hearsay, conformity with scripture, the views of experts or our revered teachers. We must not rely on pure reasoning alone, nor look at things from just one standpoint nor trust a superficial examination of things nor base our theories on preconceived opinions. Personal verification and realisation was the way to truth.

Here was man's charter of freedom, which makes Buddhism the most tolerant of religions and philosophies. It recommended an outlook, which we today call the scientific outlook. So there have been no Inquisitions, heresy trials or witch-hunts in Buddhism as in the theistic traditions and positively there has been the recognition of human dignity and freedom. The Buddha, again, was the earliest thinker in history to recognise the fact that language tends to distort in certain respects the nature of reality and to stress the importance of not being misled by linguistic forms and conventions. In this respect, he forestalled the modern linguistic or analytic philosophers. He was the first to distinguish meaningless questions and

assertions from meaningful questions and assertions. As in science he recognised perception and inference as the twin sources of knowledge but there was one difference. For perception, according to Buddhism, included extra-sensory forms of perception as well, such as telepathy and clairvoyance. Science cannot ignore such phenomena and today there are Soviet as well as Western scientists, who have admitted the validity of extra-sensory perception in the light of experimental evidence.

### Theory of Reality

If we turn to the theory of reality, the Buddha's achievements were equally outstanding. Buddhism recognises the reality of the material world and its impact on experience. Conscious mental phenomena has a physical basis in one's body. Life (*jīvitendriya*) is a by-product (*upādā-rūpa*) of matter. The economic environment conditions human relationships and affects morality. Like modern psychologists, the Buddha discards the concept of a substantial soul and analyses the human personality into aspects of experience such as, impressions and ideas (*saññā*), feelings or hedonic tone (*vedanā*), conative activities (*sankhārā*) as well as cognitive or quasicognitive activities (*viññāna*). There is a dynamic conception of the mind, and the stream of consciousness (*viññāna-sota*) is said to have two components, the conscious and the unconscious. The first explicit mention of unconscious mental processes and the unconscious (*anusaya*) motivation of human behaviour is in the Buddhist texts. The Buddhist theory of motivation may be compared with that of Freud although it is more adequate than the latter.

Man is motivated to act out of greed, which consists of the desire to gratify our senses and sex (*kāma-taṇhā*, comparable with the *libido* of Freud) as well as the desire to gratify our egoistic impulses (*bhava-taṇhā* comparable with the *ego-instincts* and *super-ego* of Freud). He is also motivated to act out of hatred, which consists of the desire to destroy or eliminate what we dislike (*vibhava-taṇhā* comparable with the *thanatos* or *death-instinct* of Freud) and also out of erroneous beliefs.

Both man and nature are in a state of perpetual flux. As such personal existence is insecure and there is no permanent soul or substance that we can cling to despite our strong desire to entertain such beliefs.

Owing to the causal factors that are operative, man is in a state of becoming and there is a continuity of individuality (*bhava*). Morally good and evil acts are correlated with pleasant and unpleasant consequences, as the case may be. Man is conditioned by his psychological past, going back into prior lives, by heredity and by the impact of his environment. But since he is not a creature of God's will or a victim of economic determinism, he can change his own nature as well as his environment.

There is no evidence that the world was created in time by an omniscient, omnipotent and infinitely good and compassionate God. In fact, the evidence clearly tells against the existence of such a God and the Buddhist texts mention two arguments in this connection. Although evil is logically compatible with the existence of a good God, there are certain evils (such as the suffering of animals and of little children, for instance), which are inexplicable on the assumption of the existence of a merciful God, who is also omniscient and omnipotent. Besides, the universe

created by such a God would be a rigged universe in which human beings were mere puppets devoid of responsibility.

According to the Buddhist theory of the cosmos, it has no origin in time. This Buddhist conception of the cosmos, which is a product of clairvoyance, can only be compared with the modern theories of the universe. The smallest unit in it is said to be the minor world-system (*cūlanikā lokadhātu*), which contains thousands of suns, moons inhabited and uninhabited planets. Today we call this a galaxy. The next unit is the middling world-system (*majjhimikā lokadhātu*), which consists of thousands of such galaxies, as we find in Virgo, for instance. The vast cosmos (*mahālokadhātu*) consists of thousands of such clusters of galaxies. This cosmos is said to undergo periods of expansion (*vivaṭṭamāna-kappa*) and contraction (*saṃvaṭṭamāna-kappa*). So the universe is in a state of oscillation, continually expanding and contracting without beginning or end in time (*anavarāgra*).

Recent findings based on observations made from radio-telescopes have shown that the 'big-bang' theory (fancied by theists) and the oscillating theory are preferable to the steady-state theory, which held the field until now. But of the 'big-bang' and oscillating theories, the latter is to be preferred on scientific and philosophical grounds. It does not involve the concept of the creation of the dense atom out of nothing and it does not have to face the problem of an infinitude of time prior to creation.

While the Buddhist conception of the cosmos forestalls the modern astronomer's conception of it, it goes beyond the latter in speaking of a subtle-material world (*rūpa-loka*) and a non-material world (*arūpa-loka*), which is not accessible to science.

Similarly, Buddhist atheism is not the same as materialistic atheism in that Buddhism speaks of the objectivity of moral and spiritual values and of a transcendent reality beyond space, time and causation. Neither the Buddha nor those who attain Nirvana cease to exist, according to Buddhist conceptions. When the Buddha was asked, whether the person who has attained Nirvana does not exist or exists eternally without defect, his answer was: "The person who has attained the goal is without measure; he does not have that, whereby one may speak about him".

## **Ethics**

If we turn to Buddhist ethics and examine its ethical system, we find that according to Buddhist notions, the propositions of ethics are significant. There can be no ethics without a concept of moral responsibility. But there cannot be moral responsibility unless (i) some of our actions are free (though conditioned) and not constrained, (ii) morally good and evil actions are followed by pleasant and unpleasant consequences, as the case may be and (iii) there is human survival after death to make this possible with justice. Now the question as to whether these conditions are fulfilled or not, is a purely factual question. If there was no free will and human actions were strictly determined, there would be no sense in our talking about moral responsibility for our actions. According to Buddhist conceptions, nature is such that all these conditions are fulfilled and, therefore, moral responsibility is a fact.

Buddhism considers human perfection or the attainment of arahantship as a good in itself and likewise the material and spiritual welfare of mankind. Whatever is good as a means in bringing about these good ends are instrumentally



good and these are called right actions, defined as actions which promote one's welfare as well as those others. Right actions consist in refraining from evil, doing what is good and cleansing the mind. The goal of perfection is also therapeutic in that only a perfect person, it is said, has a perfectly healthy mind. Hence the necessity for cleansing the mind, which consists in changing the basis of our motivation from greed, hatred and ignorance to selfless service, compassion and understanding. The Buddha emphatically pointed out that what he showed was a way, a way to achieve this change in motivation by a process of self-analysis, meditation and self-development. Men and women are classified into different psychological types and different forms of meditation are prescribed for them to achieve this end. The aim of Buddhist ethics therefore is the attainment of personal happiness and social harmony.

The Buddhist theory of reality and its ethics are summed up in the four noble truths.

### **Society, Polity and Law**

The social and political philosophy of Buddhism is equally relevant and enlightening. Again, the Buddha was the first thinker in history to preach the doctrine of equality. Man was one species and the division into social classes and castes was not a permanent or inevitable division of society, although it was given a divine sanction at the time. Historical and economic factors brought about, as the Buddha relates in the *Aggañña Sutta*, the division of people into occupational classes which later became castes. All men are capable of moral and spiritual development and should be afforded the opportunity for this. The doctrine of equality does not imply that all men are physically and psychologically alike for they are obviously not, but that

there is sufficient degree of homogeneity amongst men in terms of their capacities and potentialities as to warrant their being treated equally and with human dignity (*samānattatā*). It is a corollary of the doctrine of equality that there should be equality before the law, equality in educational opportunities and in the enjoyment of other human rights such as the right to employment etc.

Society, according to Buddhism, like every other process in nature was liable to change from time to time. The factors that determined this change were economic and ideological for men were led to action by their desires and beliefs. It was the duty of the state to uphold justice and promote the material and spiritual welfare of its subjects. There is a social contract theory of society and government. Ultimate power, whether it be legislative, executive or judiciary is vested with the people but delegated to the king or body of people elected to govern. If the contract of upholding law and order and promoting the good of the people is seriously violated, the people have a right to revolt and overthrow such a tyrannical government (see, (*Padamānavakusala Jātaka*).

Sovereignty is subject to the necessity to conform to the rule of righteousness. The rule of power has to be dependent on the rule of righteousness (*Dharma-cakram hi nīsrāya balacakram pravartate*). Punishment has to be reformatory and only secondarily deterrent and never retributive. In international relations the necessity for subjecting sovereignty to the rule of righteousness requires that no nation be a power unto itself, while in its dealings with other nations it always has the

good and happiness of mankind at heart. The ideal Just Society is both democratic and socialistic and ensures human rights as well as economic equity and the well-being of the people. It is likely to come into existence after a catastrophic world-war, when the remnant who would be saved will set up a new order based on a change of heart and a change of system.

Such in brief is the message of the glorious religion and philosophy of the Buddha, whose value and full significance the world has yet to realise. Such is the message of Vesak.

**Printed at the Union Printing Works,  
210, Colombo Street, Kandy by  
Miss K. Jayawardana for the  
Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.**

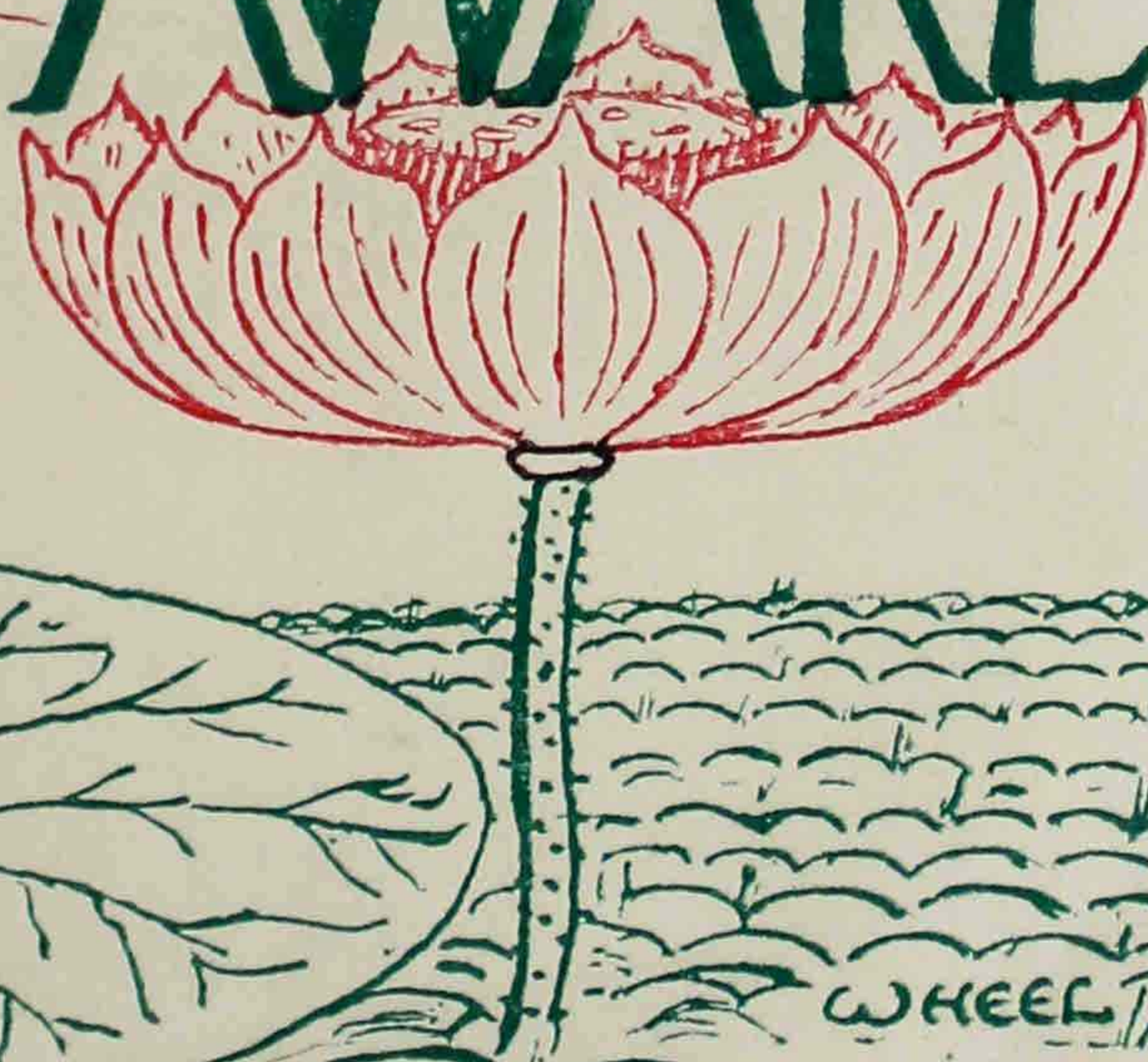


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No. 234/236



# THE MIRACLE OF BEING AWAKE

# A Manual on Meditation for the use of young activists

by  
**THICH NHAT HANH**

**Translated from the Vietnamese**  
**by**  
**MOBI QUYNH HOA**

**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**  
**Kandy 1976 Sri Lanka**

Abridged Version  
CE ISSN 0068 — 3345

14710

THE WHEEL PUBLICATION Nos. 234/235/236

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE lines that follow are meant to introduce, to the readers of 'The Wheel' series, the author of this inspiring essay — my esteemed friend, the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh. He is a Mahayana monk of South Vietnam, residing now for the last several years in the vicinity of Paris.

Thich Nhat Hanh's abilities and activities show the rare combination of his being a scholar and a poet, a meditator and a social worker; and, as far as I can judge, he has not been superficial in any of these. As a scholar he was active as a Professor of Religions and Director of Social Studies at Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon. Sensitive and stirring poems of his have been published in the United States. His meditative bent appears in the present essay, devoted to the everyday application of mindfulness; he also conducts meditation classes in Paris. As a dedicated social worker, he established in South Vietnam the 'School of Youth for Social Service', which was inspired by a deeply Buddhist spirit of compassion and non-violence. Meditation was an integral part in the life of that community. This essay, in fact, has the form of letters addressed to one of its members. Not subscribing to either of the two warring ideologies in Vietnam, Nhat Hanh and the School drew upon themselves the antagonism of both sides.

In 1966, Thich Nhat Hanh was invited to Cornell University (U.S.A.) as a guest lecturer. After concluding his assignment there, he went on lecture tours through the United States and many countries of Europe. In these lectures, he told of the plight of the long-suffering

Vietnamese people, pleading for peace in that country, to be achieved through its neutralisation. While in Paris, he wrote the book which was to have a strong impact on public opinion in the States, widening the circle of those who morally and politically disapproved of America's military involvement in Vietnam. The title of that influential book was "VIETNAM — Lotus in a Sea of Fire" (Hill and Wang, New York). Its Vietnamese version had an edition of 200,000 copies, before it was banned.

It was quite clear to Thich Nhat Hanh that his lecture tours and book had closed the doors against his return to South Vietnam. He then settled in Paris (later in the suburb of Sceaux), where he founded the "Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation", in order to plead the cause of peace in Vietnam among international and inter-religious peace organisations. He and his devoted band of helpers also did splendid work in organising support and sponsorships for a large number of orphans and refugee children in South Vietnam. This compassionate and successful activity lasted for many years, as long as political conditions allowed contact with South Vietnam.

The undersigned Editor is grateful to the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh for his permission to reproduce his essay in 'The Wheel' series, and he is also thankful to him for his consent to abridgements required for this edition.

**Nyanaponika**

March 1976.

# A FEW WORDS

by the translator, **Mobi Quynh Hoa**

THE other day I received a letter from a friend in Saigon saying he was about to be drafted and this letter would probably be the last one he could send me before being forced into the army. 'These last few days I have been full of anxiety, but I am glad that peace is coming soon to our country. I hope that I shall be able to return and devote all my efforts to easing the hatred between brothers of both sides after twenty years in which they have been forced to carry guns against each other.'

At that time, Thay Nhat Hanh and Chi Phuong (Thay means Teacher and Chi means older Sister) were in Thailand for a gathering of young Asian social workers. They were also able to contact friends in Vietnam almost everyday by telephone to find out what work was being done to ease the situation of the refugees. With Thay and Chi Phuong gone, I found it hard to practise mindfulness, yet I knew that practising mindfulness was the only way I could continue to live in those days and have anything to offer to anyone else. The -phone rang constantly, usually insistent persons who wanted to adopt a Vietnamese orphan, I had to explain many times why we felt it was best to help the children in Vietnam where they could remain with an aunt or uncle rather than being torn from their relatives and culture. I never answered the phone on the first or second ring in order to give myself a few seconds to watch my

breath and smile before picking up the receiver. Before saying 'Allo', I tried to give rise to the thought, 'May I be aware of all this person asks and all I answer, treating this conversation as though it is the most important conversation I will ever have.' The doorbell buzzed many times a day. Often it was Vietnamese friends who came to share their worries or sometimes to share news they'd just received from members of their families. Before I opened the door I tried to watch my breath and relax my body. I let a half-smile rise on my face and as I opened the door I tried to keep in mind the thought, 'Let me make this person feel at once welcomed and refreshed when they enter this door.' But without the presence of Thay and Chi Phuong I often forgot to practise these 'methods of mindfulness.'

One evening, several days after I had received my friend's letter, I stood for a long while in front of Thay's window looking out in the night air at the poplar tree which stands there. I thought about my friend and all other young men forced to carry guns. A few weeks previously I had watched a television special on Cambodia which showed young boys and men shooting each other and being shot. Their eyes were still fresh like the eyes of young deer, and their hands were slender as shoots of bamboo. I was filled with anxiety as I stood looking out the window. I began to watch my breath. After a few inhalations and exhalations my breathing was slow and even. I said my friend's name silently and looked at the poplar tree as though looking into my own heart. Its leaves fluttered lightly in the night breeze. A kind of peace arose in me. I knew my friend was not distant. If I looked closely, I could see him in the leaves blown

lightly by the breeze, I could see him in my own heart. My worry did not disappear but I had the feeling that I could see my friend for the first time, could see that he and I were one.

I often speak of trying to be a bridge between Vietnamese and Americans, between Easterners and Westerners, between Buddhists and Christians. But the time I spent in Italy I saw that bridge is perhaps not the best image, for it implies a separation between two shores. While in Italy, the separation between two cultures seems to no longer exist. If both cultures nourish my life, can they really be two and not one? By practising mindfulness, perhaps the worry about being from a different culture disappears. And more importantly, there is no longer any fear to experience the differences in another culture or in another religion. We are free to be nourished by the differences. In fact, they are no longer 'differences' — they are simply another part of our life and experience of the world. Instead of bridges we become like fishes who can swim from one current to another with ease.

Some of you maybe familiar with the work of the School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS) in Vietnam. The workers are mostly young Buddhists who have left the more comfortable life in the cities to share the difficulties of the peasants and refugees in the countryside. For many years, they have been trying to keep hope alive in the people. Once they rebuilt a village 4 times after it had been bombed 4 times. 'Why don't you just move to a safer area or go to the city with the villagers to avoid the bombs?' they were asked. 'We are building more than huts and irrigation ditches', they answered. 'If we abandon the village, we let down the villagers. At least if we stay here, we can demonstrate that hope is still

possible.' Many of you who read Thay's words in this book, identify closely with the SYSS workers. Because you have been trying to keep hope alive in people, too. Perhaps situations differ — for instance the Vietnamese countryside and an American inner city differ greatly, the SYSS workers come from an Eastern and Buddhist culture, whereas most of us come from a Western and Christian culture. But we have recognized each other. When Thay Nhat Hanh began to write this letter on mindfulness for the SYSS workers, he told me, 'You must translate it into English and write a forward. We will give it to friends who are doing work like the SYSS workers in the United States, like the Catholic Workers.' I know that I do not need to write a forward which places Thay's words coming from a Vietnamese Buddhist context into an American Christian context. The language is often different but I know you will understand anyway. For instance, when They says that the half-smile is the smile you see on the face of Buddhas, many of us might also think of the half-smiles we have seen on the faces of Madonnas and Christs. Who smiles it makes no difference, the smile is there. The thing you might find different, however, is that Thay tells us to smile it ourself. Let go of everything except your breath. Then let a half-smile arise.

As I have translated Thay's words I have felt the presence of several friends. One group of friends are a community of young Buddhists in Thailand who have begun the kind of work SYSS workers do in Vietnam. Yesterday a letter came from one of their members named Wisit. When Thay and Chi Phuong came home from Thailand, they told me about Wisit and his friends. Translating Thay's words have helped me to practise mindfulness, and knowing that I also

translate this letter for Wisit and his friends has helped me to translate more mindfully. I have tried to think of my translating as a way of being with our friends in Thailand, which means that I have translated not in order to finish the translation to send to them, but I have translated to live and preserve a Way with them.

Because you friends have been with me as I translate, if you look closely as you read Thay's words, I think you will also see and recognize each other. If we can discover and apply the methods of mindfulness, then whether we live in Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Holland, France or America, I think we will begin to see each other in every action we undertake. Perhaps we will all become bridges to one another (or fishes who swim together!) And whatever we do to preserve life, in the Thai countryside or in an American inner city, will help each other. We will meet each other on the bridge of our service and there share a communal meal.

If we do not practice mindfulness, will be able to continue our work which grows more and more difficult and seemingly more and more invisible in our present world where the violence of partisan conflicts burns everywhere. Let us at least not be invisible to each other. If we do not practise mindfulness we will not be able to see and help each other across the stretches of ocean and land. We will not be able to share humble meals (of coconut and cabbage) with each other in our hearts. If we cannot see each other, if we cannot make our work one for the human family, will any of the seeds we now sow bear fruit?

Sceaux (France), June 18, 1975

## THE MIRACLE OF BEING AWAKE

“Having a lot more time”

Dear Quang,

Yesterday Steve came over to visit with his son Tony. Tony's grown so quickly! He's already seven years old and is fluent in French and English.

I gave him several picture books for children but he barely glanced at them before tossing them aside and interrupting our conversation again. He demands the constant attention of grown-ups.

Later, Tony put on his jacket and went outside to play with a neighbor's child.

Then Steve said, “I've just discovered a way to have a lot more time.” I asked how. He answered, “In the past, I used to look at my time as if it were divided into several parts. One part I reserved for Tony, for helping him with schoolwork, reading him stories, giving him a bath. Another part was for Ann, helping her with Zoe going to the market for her, taking the clothes to the laundromat, talking with her when the children were already in bed. I still see Ann and Zoe as one person because Zoe's breath is Ann's breath, if one of them stopped breathing, the other one would as well. The time left over, I considered my own. I could read, write, do research, go for walks. My work at the office was yet another time. That is the time for the office.

“But now I try not to divide time into parts anymore. I consider my time with Tony and Ann as my own time. When I help Tony with his homework, I try not to keep the thought in the back of my mind that ‘This is the



time I reserve for Tony — afterwards I'll have some time for myself.' I try to find ways of seeing his time as my own time. I go through his lesson with him, sharing his presence and finding ways to be interested in what we do during that time. That way the time for him becomes my own time. The same with Ann. And the remarkable thing is, that now I have unlimited time for myself."

Steve smiled as he spoke. I was surprised. I knew that Steve hadn't learned this by reading any books. This was something he'd discovered for himself in his own daily life.

Over the past few months I've been going through the Sutra on Mindfulness with a small group each Saturday evening. After I explain a section, the young people in the group ask questions about how to apply the principles spoken of in the Sutra to their own daily lives. We've considered the use of time. Although Steve, not speaking Vietnamese, has never attended one of these sessions, he has attained an understanding on his own which those in the group have been discovering by studying the Sutra.

Last Saturday I related what Steve told me to those in the meditation group. One of the young men said, "Steve has discovered the principle, but how do we know he's found the method yet?" I answered, "If you can find the principle, you should be able to find the method as well." If Steve knows how to really share Tony's presence and be interested in Tony's lesson, Steve has already found out how to apply methods of his own. The Sutra on Mindfulness is certainly not the only source which can offer us the methods. Although Steve has studied Buddhism and reads Sanskrit, Steve is not a Buddhist himself. But it's not only the people who

claim to be Buddhist who realize the methods of Buddhism.

One of the young women in the group said, "I think we should invite Steve to come to one of our sessions to share with us some of his own experiences. Maybe we could learn something from him." I think that she recognized something important: a Buddhist can easily learn from the experience of non-Buddhists, and more importantly, can learn a lot about Buddhism through people who are not Buddhists themselves. I remembered a sentence repeated often in the Mahayana tradition, "The methods of Buddhism are the methods of life." We could also say, "The methods in the Sutra of Mindfulness have something in common with Steve's awakening."

If he wishes, Steve could also apply the methods taught in the Sutra of Mindfulness. Probably the methods which Steve has found out on his own are not enough yet to allow him to realize his goal entirely.

I'm sure our workers in the School of Youth for Social Service would like to know, as well, how far Steve's methods have been able to take him. I know that there isn't one worker who doesn't feel that his or her own time is far too lacking. I'm a worker also. As are you, Quang. I know we'd both like to know how Steve has acquired his 'unlimited time.' But has he really acquired 'unlimited time' or is he just beginning to see the principle?

## **Washing the Dishes to wash the Dishes**

In the United States, I have a closed friend named Jim Forest. Last winter, Jim came to visit. I usually wash the dishes after we've finished the evening meal, before sitting down and drinking tea with everyone else. One

night, Jim asked if he might do the dishes. I said, "Go ahead, but if you wash the dishes you must know the way to wash them." Jim replied, "Come on, Thay, you think I don't know how to wash the dishes?" I answered, "There are two ways to wash the dishes. The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes." Jim was delighted and said, "I choose the second way - to wash the dishes to wash the dishes." From then on, Jim knew how to wash the dishes. I transferred the 'responsibility' to him for an entire week. Afterwards, he made a great deal of propaganda for washing the dishes to wash the dishes and published the saying in several journals. Even at home, he brought it up so much that one day, Laura laughed and said to him, "If you really like washing the dishes to wash the dishes so much, there is a cupboard full of clean dishes in the kitchen. Why don't you go and wash them?"

Thirty years ago, when I was still a novice at Tu Hieu Pagoda, washing the dishes was hardly a pleasant task. During the Season of Retreat when all the monks returned to the monastery, two novices had to do all the cooking and wash the dishes for sometimes well over 100 monks. There was no soap. We had only ashes, rice husks, and coconut husks, and that was all. Cleaning such a high stack of bowls was a chore, especially during the winter when the water was freezing cold. Then you had to heat up a big pot of water before you could do any scrubbing. Nowadays one stands in a kitchen equipped with liquid soap, special scrubpads, and even running hot water which makes it all the more agreeable. It is easier to enjoy washing the dishes now. Anyone can wash them in a hurry, then sit down and enjoy a cup of tea afterwards. I even know of a lot of women who have

asked their husbands to buy a dishwashing machine. Quang, I can see a machine for washing clothes, although I wash my own things out by hand, but a dishwashing machine is going just a little too far! I'm sure the women back home would cluck their tongues in disapproval, 'Good grief, how on earth can anyone be so lazy?'

According to the Sutra on Mindfulness, while washing the dishes one should only be washing the dishes, which means that while washing the dishes one should be completely aware of the fact that one is washing the dishes. At first glance, that might seem a little silly: why put so much stress on a simple thing? But that's precisely the point, Quang. The fact that I am standing there and washing these bowls is a wondrous reality. I'm being completely myself, following my breath, conscious of my presence and conscious of my thoughts and actions. There's no way I can be tossed around mindlessly like a bottle slapped here and there on the waves. My consciousness cannot be dispersed like the foam on the tips of waves when the waves dash against the cliffs.

If while washing the dishes, we think only about the cup of tea that awaits us or about anything else which pertains to the future, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way, as if they were a nuisance, then we are not 'washing the dishes to wash the dishes,' and what's more we are not alive during the time we are washing the dishes. In fact, we are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink. If we can't wash the dishes, then chances are, we won't be able to drink our tea either. During our cup of tea, we will only be thinking about other things, barely aware of the cup in our hands. Thus we are sucked away into the future, and what that really means is that we are incapable of living even one minute of life.

## **Finding time for practicing Mindfulness**

More than 30 years ago, when I first entered the monastery, the monks gave me a small book called "The Essential Discipline for Daily Use", written by the Buddhist monk Dōc Thē from Bao Son pagoda and they told me to memorize it. It was a thin book, it couldn't have been more than 40 pages, but it contained all the thoughts Dōc Thē used to awaken his mind while doing any task. For example, when he woke up in the morning, his first thought was, 'Just awakened, I hope that every person will attain great awareness and see clearly in all 10 directions.' When he washed his hands, he used this thought to place himself in mindfulness: 'Washing my hands, I hope that every person will have pure hands to receive Reality.' The book is comprised only of sentences like that. Their goal was to help the beginning practitioner take hold of his own consciousness. The Zen Master Dōc Thē helped all of us young novices to practise, in a relatively easy way, those things which are taught in the Sutra of Mindfulness. Each time you put on your robe, washed the dishes, went to the bathroom, folded your mat, carried buckets of water, brushed your teeth, etc., you could use one of the thoughts from the book in order to take hold of your own consciousness.

The Sutra of Mindfulness says: "When walking, the practitioner must be conscious that he is walking, when sitting, the practitioner must be conscious that he is sitting, when lying down, the practitioner must be conscious that he is lying down... No matter what position one's body is in, the practitioner must be conscious of that position. Practicing thus, the practitioner lives in direct and constant mindfulness of the body..." The mindfulness of

the positions of one's body is not enough, however. The Sutra of Mindfulness says that we must be conscious of each breath, each movement, every thought and feeling, everything in short, which has any relation to ourselves.

But what is the purpose of the Sutra's instruction? Where are we to find the time to practice such mindfulness? If a worker spends all day practicing mindfulness, how will there ever be enough time to do all the work that needs to be done to change and to build an alternative society? How does Steve manage to work, study Tony's lesson, take Zoe's diapers to the laundromat, and practise mindfulness at the same time?

### **The Miracle Is To Walk On Earth**

Steve said that since he's begun to consider Tony and Ann's time as his own, he has 'unlimited time.' But perhaps he has it only in principle. Because, there are doubtless times when Steve forgets to consider Tony's time as his own time while going over Tony's homework with him, and thus Steve may lose that time. Steve might hope for the time to pass quickly, or he may grow impatient because that time seems wasted to him, because it isn't his own time. And so, if he really wants 'unlimited time' (which means more than just in principle), he will have to keep alive the thought, 'this is my time' throughout the time he's studying with Tony. But during such times, one's mind is inevitably distracted by other thoughts, and so if one really wants to keep one's consciousness alive (from now on I'll use the term 'mindfulness' to refer to keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality), then one must practice right now in one's daily life, as well as practice during meditation sessions.

When a worker walks along a red dirt path leading

into a village, he can practice mindfulness. As he walks along the dirt path, surrounded by patches of green grass, if he practices mindfulness, he will know that he is walking along that path, the path leading into the village. He practices by keeping this one thought alive: 'I'm walking along the path leading into the village.' Whether it's sunny or rainy, whether the path is dry or wet, he keeps that one thought. But he doesn't just repeat it like a machine, over and over again. Machine thinking is the opposite of mindfulness. There are some people who recite the name of the Buddha like a machine while in the meantime their mind scatters in a thousand different directions. I think that reciting the name of Buddha like that is worse than not reciting it at all. If we're really engaged in mindfulness while walking along the path to the village, then we will consider the act of each step we take as an infinite wonder, and a joy will open in our hearts like a flower, enabling us to enter the world of reality. I like to walk alone on country paths, rice plants and wild grasses on both sides, putting each foot down on the earth in mindfulness, knowing that I walk on the wondrous earth. In such moments, existence is a miraculous and mysterious reality. People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Everyday we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize. Just think, Quang: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves and the black, curious eyes of your little daughter Hai Trieu Am. Your two eyes, Quang, are also a miracle, like that sky, those clouds, those leaves and her young eyes.

Zen Master Doc The says that when sitting in meditation, one should sit upright, giving birth to this thought, 'Sitting here is like sitting on the Bodhi spot.' The Bodhi spot is

the spot where Lord Buddha sat when he obtained Enlightenment. If any person can become a Buddha, and the Buddhas are without number, that means persons who have obtained enlightenment, who are Buddhas themselves, have sat on the very spot I sit on now. Sitting on the same spot as a Buddha gives rise to happiness and sitting in mindfulness means itself to have become a potential Buddha. The poet Nguyễn Công Tru experienced the same thing when he sat down on a certain spot, and suddenly saw how others had sat on the same spot countless ages ago, and how in ages to come others would also come to sit there:

On the same spot I sit today  
Others came, in ages past, to sit  
One thousand years, still others will come  
Who is the singer, and who the listener?

That spot and the minutes he spent there became a link in eternal reality.

But our workers do not have time to spend leisurely, walking along paths of green grass and sitting beneath trees. A worker must prepare projects, consult with the villagers, try to resolve a million difficulties that arise, work in the fields, and deal with every kind of hardship. During all that, the worker must keep his or her attention focused on the work, he must be alert, ready to handle the situation ably and intelligently. You might well ask: Then how are we workers to practise mindfulness? My answer is: to keep one's attention focused on the work, to be alert and ready to handle ably and intelligently any situation which may arise — this is itself mindfulness. There is no reason why mindfulness should be different from focusing all one's attention on one's work, to be alert and to be using one's best judgement. During the moment one is consulting, resolving and dealing with



whatever arises, a calm heart and self-control are necessary if one is to obtain good results. Any worker can see that. If we are not in control of ourselves but instead let our impatience or anger interfere, then our work is no longer of any value.

*Mindfulness is the miracle by which we master and restore ourselves.* Consider, for example; a magician who cuts his body into many parts and places each part in a different region — hands in the south, arms in the east, legs in the north, etc., and then by some miraculous power lets forth a cry which reassembles whole every part of his body. Mindfulness is like that — it is the miracle which can call back in a flash our dispersed mind and restore it to wholeness so that we can live each minute of life.

### **Taking Hold of One's Breath — Arriving at Mindfulness**

Thus mindfulness is at the same time a means and an end, at the same time the seed and the fruit. When we practice mindfulness in order to build up concentration, mindfulness is a seed. But mindfulness itself is the life of awareness: the presence of mindfulness means the presence of life, and therefore mindfulness is also the fruit. Mindfulness frees us of forgetfulness and dispersion, mindfulness makes it possible to live each minute of life. Mindfulness enables us to live.

The worker should know how to breathe to maintain mindfulness, as breathing is a natural and extremely effective tool which can prevent dispersion. Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites one's body to one's thoughts. Whenever one's mind becomes scattered, the worker should use his breath in order to take hold of his mind again. Breathe in lightly a fairly

long breath, Quang, conscious of the fact that you are inhaling a deep breath. Now breathe out all the breath in your lungs, remaining conscious the whole time of the exhalation. The Sutra of Mindfulness teaches the method to take hold of one's breath in the following manner: 'Ever mindful he breathes in, and mindful he breathes out.

Breathing in a long breath, he knows "I am breathing in a long breath", breathing out a long breath, he knows "I am breathing out a long breath", breathing in a short breath, he knows "I am breathing in a short breath", breathing out a long breath, he knows "I am breathing out a long breath", "Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself. "Calming the activity of the (breath ) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself.

In a Buddhist monastery, everyone learns to use his breath as a tool to stop dispersion and to build up concentration power. Concentration power is the strength which comes from practicing mindfulness. It is the Concentration which can help one obtain the great Awakening. But the Great Awakening is also an awakening — when a worker takes hold of his own breath, he has already become awakened to that extent. In order to maintain mindfulness throughout a long period, we must continue to watch our breath.

It is autumn here and the golden leaves falling one by one are truly beautiful. Taking a 10 minute walk in the woods, watching my breath and maintaining mindfulness, I feel refreshed and restored. Like that, I can really enter into a communion with each golden leaf. Walking alone on a country path, Quang, it is easier to maintain

mindfulness. If there's a friend by your side, not talking but also watching his breath, then you can continue to maintain mindfulness without difficulty. But if the friend at your side begins to ask you questions, it becomes a little more difficult.

If in your mind, you think, "I wish this fellow would quit asking questions, so I could concentrate," you have already lost your mindfulness. But if you can think, instead, "If he wishes to ask questions, I will answer, but I will continue in mindfulness, aware of the fact that we are walking along this path together, aware of the questions he asks and the answers I give. I can continue to watch my breath as well." If you can give rise to that thought, Quang, you will be continuing in mindfulness. It is harder to practise in such situations than when one is alone, but if you continue to practise nonetheless, you will develop the ability to maintain much greater concentration. There is a line from one of our folksongs that says: "Hardest of all is to practice the Way at home, second in the crowd, and third in the pagoda." *It is only in an active and demanding situation that mindfulness really becomes a challenge!*

### **Counting One's Breath and Following One's Breath**

In the Sutras, Buddha usually teaches that one should use one's breath in order to achieve Concentration. There is one particular Sutra which speaks about the use of one's breath to maintain mindfulness, and that is the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*. This Sutra was translated and commentated on by a Vietnamese Zen Master of Central Asian origin, named Khuong Tang Hôi, around the beginning of the third century C. E. *Ānāpāna* means in-and-out breath and *sati* means mindfulness. Tang Hôi

translated it as 'Guarding the Mind.' The Ānāpānasati Sutta is the sutra on using one's breath to maintain mindfulness. The Discourse on Breath to Maintain Mindfulness is the 118th in the Majjhima Nikāya collection of Suttas and it teaches 16 methods of using one's breath.

In the meditation sessions I conduct for non-Vietnamese, I usually suggest various methods that I myself have tried, methods that are quite simple. For example, I suggest to beginners, the method of 'following the length of the breath.' I invite a student to lie down on his back and breathe normally. Then I invite all of the participants to gather around so I can show them a few simple points like:

- 1) Although inhaling and exhaling are the work of the lungs, and take place in the chest area, the stomach area also plays a role. The stomach rises in conjunction with the filling of the lungs. You can see how at the beginning of the breath the stomach begins to push out. But after you've inhaled about 2/3's of the breath, it starts to lower again.
- 2) Why? Between your chest and stomach there is a muscular membrane called the diaphragm. When you breathe in correctly the air fills the lower part of the lungs first, before the upper lungs fill with air. When the lower lungs are filled with air, the diaphragm pushes down on the stomach, causing the stomach to rise. When you have filled your upper lungs with air, the chest pushes out and causes the stomach to lower again.
- 3) That is why, in former times, people spoke of the breath as originating at the navel and terminating at the nostrils.

For beginners, lying down to practise breathing is very helpful. The important thing is to guard against making any kind of effort. Making too great of an effort could be dangerous for the lungs, especially in the case where the lungs are weak from lack of correct breathing. In the beginning, the practitioner should lie on his or her back on a thin mat or blanket, the two arms loosely at the sides. You should not prop your head on a pillow. Focus your attention on your exhalation and watch how long it is. You might measure it by slowly counting in your mind: 1,2,3 . After several times, you will know the 'length' of your breath. Perhaps it is 5. Now try to extend the exhalation for one more count (or 2) so that the exhalation's length becomes 6 or 7. Begin to exhale counting from 1 to 5. When you reach 5, rather than immediately inhaling as before, try to extend the exhalation to 6 or 7. Like that, you will empty your lungs of more air. When you have finished exhaling, pause for an instant to let your lungs take in fresh air on their own. Let them take in just as much air as they want without making any effort. The inhalation will normally be 'shorter' than the exhalation. Keep a steady count in your mind to measure the length of both. The beginner should practise several weeks like this, remaining mindful of all his exhalations and inhalations while lying down. (If you have a clock with a loud tick you can use it to help you keep track of the length of your inhalation and exhalation.) You should continue to measure your breath while walking, sitting, standing and especially whenever you are outdoors. If while walking, you can use your steps to measure your breath, it is a very good method. After a month or so, the difference between the length of your exhalation and inhalation will lessen. Gradually they will even out until they are of equal measure. So if the length of your

exhalation is 6, the inhalation will also be 6. If you feel at all tired while practising, stop at once. But even if you do not feel tired, you should not prolong the practice of long, equal breaths beyond short periods of time. For example, from 10 to 20 breaths is enough. As soon as you feel the least bit of fatigue, return your breath to normal. Fatigue is an excellent mechanism of our bodies and the best advisor as to whether we should rest or continue. In order to measure your breath you can count or you can use a rhythmic phrase that you like. For example if the length of your breath is 6, you might use instead of numbers, the 6 syllables, 'My heart is now at peace,' or 'My being is wondrous.' If the length is 7 you might use, 'I walk on the new green earth,' or 'I take refuge in the Buddha,' etc.

When you are walking, each step should correspond to one syllable.

Your breath should be light, even, and flowing like a thin stream of water running through the sand. Your breath should be very quiet, so quiet that a person sitting next to you cannot hear it. Your breathing should flow gracefully like a river, like a watersnake crossing the water, and not like a chain of rugged mountains or the gallop of a horse. To master our breath is to be in control of our bodies and minds. Each time we find ourselves dispersed and find it difficult to gain control of ourselves by different means, the method of watching the breath should always be used. The instant the practitioner sits down to meditate, he should begin watching his breath. At first he should breathe normally, gradually letting his breathing slow down until it is quiet, even, and the length of the breaths is fairly long. From the moment he sits down to the moment his breathing has become deep and silent, the practitioner

should be conscious of everything that is happening in himself. As the Sutta on Mindfulness says: 'Breathing in a long breath, the practitioner knows, "I am breathing in a long breath," breathing out a long breath, the practitioner knows, "I am breathing out a long breath," breathing in a short breath, he knows "I am breathing in a short breath," breathing out a short breath, he knows "I am breathing out a short breath." "Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Calming" the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself.'

After about 10 to 20 minutes, the practitioner's thoughts will have quieted down like a pond on which not even a ripple stirs.

The method to make one's breath calm and even is called the method of following one's breath. If the method of following one's breath seems hard at first, one can substitute it by the method of counting one's breath. As you breathe in, count 1 in your mind, and as you breathe out count 1. Breathe in, count 2. Breathe out, count 2. Continue counting through 10, then return to 1 again. This counting is like a string which attaches your mindfulness to your breath. This exercise is the starting point in the process of becoming continuously conscious of your breath. Without mindfulness, however, you will quickly lose count. When the count is lost, simply return to one and keep trying until you can keep the count correctly. Once you can truly focus your attention on the counts, you have reached the point at which you can begin to abandon the counting method and begin to concentrate solely on the breath itself.

In those moments when you are upset or dispersed and find it difficult to practise mindfulness, return to your breath. Taking hold of one's breath is itself mindfulness. Your breath is the wondrous method of taking hold of your consciousness. The seventh discipline of the Tiep Hiên order is especially devoted to the use of the breath: 'One should not lose oneself in mind-dispersion or in one's surroundings. Learn to practise breathing in order to regain control of body and mind, to practise mindfulness and to develop concentration and wisdom.'

### **Every Act is a Rite**

I once heard a good simile, Quang, for one's breath. Suppose there is a towering wall from the top of which one can see vast distances — but there is no apparent means to climb it, only a thin piece of thread hanging over the top and coming down both sides. A person who is clever enough will tie a thicker string onto one end of the thread, walk over to the other side of the wall, then pull on the thread, pulling the string to the other side. Then he will tie the end of the string to a strong rope and pull the rope over. When the rope has reached the bottom of one side and is secured on the other side, the wall can be easily scaled.

Our breath is such a fragile piece of thread. But once we know how to use it, it can become a wondrous tool to help us surmount situations which would otherwise seem hopeless. Our breath is the bridge from our body to our mind, the element which reconciles our body and mind and which makes possible one-ness of body and mind. Breath is aligned to both body and mind and it alone is the tool which can bring them both together, illuminating both and bringing both peace and calm.



There are a lot of people and quantities of books which discuss the immense benefits that result from correct breathing. They say that a person who knows how to breathe is a person who knows how to build up endless vitality: breath builds up the lungs, strengthens the blood and revitalizes every organ in the body. They say that proper breathing is more important than food. And all of these statements are correct.

You know, Quang, several years ago, I was extremely ill. After several years of taking medicine and undergoing medical treatment, my condition was unimproved. So I turned to the method of breathing and, thanks to that, was able to heal myself.

What I wish to speak about, Quang, is how breath is a tool and how breath is itself mindfulness. The use of breath as a tool might help one obtain immense benefits but these cannot be considered as ends in themselves. These benefits are only the by-products of the realization of mindfulness.

In Paris, I guide a small class in meditation for non-Vietnamese, among whom are many young people. I've told them, if you can meditate an hour each day that's good, but it's nowhere near enough. You've got to practise meditation when you walk, stand, lie down, sit and work. I have told them how to practise mindfulness while washing their hands, washing the dishes, sweeping the floor, talking to friends, or wherever they are. I said "While washing the dishes, you might be thinking about the tea afterwards, and so try to get them out of the way as quickly as possible in order to sit and drink tea. But that means that you are incapable of living during the time you are washing the dishes. When you are washing the dishes, washing the dishes must be the most important thing in your life. Just as when you're

drinking tea, drinking tea must be the most important thing in your life. When you're using the toilet, let that be the most important thing in your life, and so on." Chopping wood is meditation. Carrying water is meditation. The practitioner must be mindful all through the day, and certainly not just during the one hour allotted for formal meditation or reading scripture and reciting sutras. Each act must be carried out in mindfulness. Each act is a rite, a ceremony. Raising your cup of tea to your mouth is a rite. Perhaps the word "rite" is a bit too solemn, but I use that word in order to jolt people into the realization of the *life-and-death matter of awareness*.

## **The Half Smile**

Every day and every hour, we should be practising mindfulness. That's easy to say, but to carry it out in practice is not. That's why I suggest to those who come to the meditation sessions that each person should reserve one day out of the week to devote entirely to their practice of mindfulness. Although, in principle, everyday should be your day, and every hour your hour, the fact is that very few of us have yet reached such a point: we have the impression that our family, place of work and society rob us of all our time. And so I urge that everyone select one day each week as their own day. Saturday, perhaps. If it is Saturday, then Saturday must be entirely your day, a day during which you are completely the master. Then Saturday will be the lever to hold on to in order to form the habit of practising mindfulness. Every worker in our community of service must also have the right to such a day, for if we do not, we will lose ourselves quickly in a life

full of worry and action. Whatever the day chosen it can be considered as the day of mindfulness.

If you want to set up a day of mindfulness, you should figure out a way to remind yourself at the moment of waking that this day is your day of mindfulness. You might hang something on the ceiling or on the wall, a paper with the word 'mindfulness' or a pinebranch — anything that will suggest to you as you open your eyes and see it that today is your day of mindfulness. Today is your day. Remembering that, you should smile a smile that affirms that you are in complete mindfulness, a smile that nourishes that perfect mindfulness.

While still lying in bed, begin to follow your breath — slow, long and conscious breaths. Then slowly rise from bed (instead of jumping out all at once as usual), and nourishing mindfulness by every motion. Once up, brush your teeth, wash your face, and do all your morning activities in a calm and relaxing way, each movement done in mindfulness. Follow your breath, take hold of it, and don't let your thoughts scatter. Each movement should be done relaxingly. Measure your steps with quiet, long breaths. Maintain a half-smile.

At the very least, you should spend a half hour taking a bath. Bathe relaxingly and mindfully so that by the time you have finished, you feel light and refreshed. Afterwards, you might do household work such as washing clothes, dusting and wiping off the tables, scrubbing the kitchen floor, arranging books on their shelves. Whatever the tasks, they must be done slowly and with ease, in mindfulness. In any case, don't do these tasks in order to get them over with. Resolve to do them relaxingly, all your attention focused on them. Enjoy them, be one with them. If not, then the day of mindfulness will be of no value at all. The feeling that

these tasks are a nuisance will soon disappear if they are done in mindfulness. Take the example of the Zen Masters. No matter what task or motion they undertake they do it slowly and evenly, without reluctance.

For those who are just beginning to practice, it is best to maintain a spirit of silence throughout the day. That doesn't mean that on the day of mindfulness, you shouldn't speak at all. You can talk, you can even go ahead and sing, but if you talk or sing, do it in complete mindfulness of what you are saying or singing, and keep talking and singing to a minimum. Naturally, it is possible to sing and practice mindfulness at the same time, just as long as one is conscious of the fact that one is singing and aware of what one is singing. But one should be warned that it is much easier, when singing or talking, to stray from mindfulness if your meditation strength is still weak.

At lunchtime, prepare a meal for yourself. Cook the meal and wash the dishes in mindfulness. In the morning, after you have cleaned and straightened up your house, and in the afternoon, after you have worked in the garden or watched clouds or gathered flowers, prepare a pot of tea to sit and drink in mindfulness. Allow yourself a good length of time to do this. Don't drink your tea like someone who gulps down a cup of coffee during a workbreak. Drink your tea slowly and reverently as if it were the axis on which the earth revolves — slowly, evenly, without rushing towards the future. Live the actual moment. For only this actual moment is life. Don't be attached to the future. Don't worry about things you have to do. Don't think about getting up or taking off to do anything, don't think about 'departing'. Do you remember the lines in my poem "Butterfly Over the Field of Golden Mustard Flowers"?:

Be a bud sitting quietly in the hedge  
Be a smile, one part of wondrous existence  
Stand here. There is no need to depart.  
This homeland is as beautiful as the homeland of our  
childhood  
Do not harm it, please, and continue to sing...

In the evening, you might read scripture and copy passages, write letters to friends, or do anything else you enjoy outside of your normal duties during the week. But whatever you do, do it in mindfulness. Eat only a little for the evening meal. Later, around 10 to 11 o'clock, when you sit in meditation, you will be able to sit more easily on an empty stomach. Afterwards you might take a slow walk in the fresh night air, following your breath in mindfulness and measuring the length of your breaths by your steps. Finally, return to your room and sleep in mindfulness.

Quang, somehow we must find a way to allow every social worker a day of mindfulness. Once weekly such a day is crucial. Its effect on the other days of the week is immeasurable. Ten years ago, thanks to such a day of mindfulness, Chu Van and our other sisters and brothers in the Tiep Hein order were able to guide themselves through many difficult times. After only three months of observing such a day of mindfulness once a week, I know that you will see a significant change in your life. The day of mindfulness will begin to penetrate the other days of the week, enabling you eventually to live seven days a week in mindfulness. I'm sure you agree with me on the day of mindfulness' importance!

### **Awakening in Plum Village**

Our workers need not only one day out of the week, but

they need one month out of the year. I'm sure you remember the letter I wrote to Thây Châu Toan about the project for Plum Village. Plum Village was to be a spiritual home for social workers, just as Phuong Bôi was a spiritual home for us in the past.

We need a Plum Village to return to after months of work, a place to plant vegetables, grow herbs, walk, play with the children who live in the village, and practice mindfulness and meditation. Thây Châu Toan had written to me about this project, suggesting the name "School of Youth for Social Service Village." He said that he hoped to find a spot in the highlands to build it where the climate might also be suitable for growing plums. Thus I suggested the name Plum Village, a prettier and lighter name for this spiritual homeland than the School of Youth for Social Service Village.

Because Thây Châu Toan was an artist, I anticipated the beauty of the village he would plan and build. I asked him to leave every rock he found in place, whether in the streams or on the hillsides, and to try to leave as many trees, large and small, as he could. The village was to have a community building, groves of trees and many paths for walking. And it was to have gardens of plum, from which it would take its name. You must be smiling at me, Quang, for living in the future. And I am, but I'm also living in the present. Here in France, I also grow several kinds of herbs. (Tuyêt recently sent me several more seeds but I can only plant them once the warm weather returns.) So I have a kind of Plum Village already, and I know that Plum Village has also begun to exist in you.

Quang, you and our friends must go ahead with the project to build Plum Village. Plum Village, a physical reality as well, will be a refreshing and warming

image alive in our hearts. All the workers who get married and have children must also continue to return to Plum Village each year with their families. Plum Village will bring us together. We will take care of our village, organize activities for the children, and create an atmosphere of love and renewal for every person. Each worker, when she or he returns to the village will feel immediately welcomed. During the month of retreat in Plum Village, a worker will be able to play with children (I'm sure the number of Hai Triêu Āms will be sizeable), read, sit in the sun, grow vegetables, meditate, unload oneself of the burdens of worries and anxieties that have built up, replacing them with understanding and love.

### **The Pebble**

Why should a worker meditate? First of all, to be able to realize total rest. You know, Quang, even a night of sleep does not provide total rest. Twisting and turning, the facial muscles tense, all the while dreaming — this can hardly be considered rest. Nor is lying down rest, at least when you still feel restless and so twist and turn. Lying on your back, with your arms and legs straight but not stiff, your head unsupported by a pillow — this is a good position to practise breathing and to relax all the muscles; but this way it is also easier to fall asleep. You cannot go as far in meditation lying down as by sitting. But it is possible to find total rest in a sitting position, and in turn to advance deeper in meditation in order to resolve the worries and troubles that upset and block your consciousness.

I know that among our workers there are many who can sit in the lotus position, the left foot placed on the right thigh and the right foot placed on the left

thigh. Others can sit in the half lotus, the left foot placed on the right thigh, or the right foot placed on the left thigh. In our meditation class in Paris, there are people who do not feel comfortable in either of the above two positions and so I have shown them how to sit in the Japanese manner, the knees bent, resting on their two legs. By placing a pillow beneath one's feet, it is possible to sit that way for more than an hour and a half. Even so, anyone can learn to sit in the half-lotus, though at the beginning it may be somewhat painful. But after a few weeks of practice, the position gradually becomes quite comfortable. During the initial period, when the pain can be bothersome, alternate the position of the legs or change to another sitting position. If one sits in the lotus or half-lotus position, it is necessary to use a cushion to sit on so that both knees touch the floor. The three points of bodily contact with the ground created by this position provide an extremely stable position.

Keep your back straight. This is very important. The neck and head should be aligned with the spinal column, they should be straight but not stiff or wood-like. Keep your eyes focused about 2 meters in front of you. Maintain the half-smile.

Now begin to follow your breath and to relax all of your muscles. Concentrate on keeping your spinal column straight and following your breath. As for everything else, let it go. Let go of everything. If you want to relax the muscles in your face tightened by worry, fear or sadness, let the half-smile come to your face. As the half-smile appears; all the facial muscles begin to relax. The longer the half-smile is maintained, the better. It is the same smile you see on the face of the Buddha Quang.



Place your left hand, palm side up, in your right palm. Let all the muscles in your hands, fingers, arms and legs relax. Let go of everything, like the waterplants which flow with the current, while beneath the surface of the water the riverbed remains motionless. Hold on to nothing but your breath and the half-smile.

For beginners, it is better to sit no longer than 20 or 30 minutes. During that time, you must be able to obtain total rest. The technique for obtaining this rest lies in two things — watching, and letting go: watching your breath and letting go of everything else. Release every muscle in your body. After about 15 minutes or so, it is possible to reach a deep quiet filled with inner peace and joy. Maintain this quiet and peace.

Some people look on meditation as a toil and want the time to pass quickly in order to rest afterwards. Such persons do not know how to sit yet. If you sit correctly, it is possible to find total relaxation and peace right in the position of sitting. Often I suggest to such people that they meditate on the image of a pebble thrown into a river, in order to find joy and rest in the position of sitting.

How does one use the image of the pebble? Sit down in whatever position suits you best, the half-lotus, or lotus, back straight, the half-smile on your face. Breathe slowly and deeply, following each breath, becoming one with the breath. Then let go of everything. Imagine yourself a pebble which has been thrown into a river. The pebble sinks through the water effortlessly. Detached from everything, it slowly sinks down by the shortest distance possible, finally reaching the bottom, the point of perfect rest. You, the practitioner, are like a pebble which has let itself fall into the river, letting go of everything else. At the center of your being is your breath. You don't

need to know the length of time it takes before reaching the point of complete rest on the bed of fine sand beneath the water. When you feel yourself as much at rest as a pebble which has reached the riverbed, that is the point you begin to find your own rest. You are no longer pushed or pulled by anything else. You know that if you cannot find joy and peace in these very moments of sitting, then the future itself will only flow by as a river flows by, you will not be able to hold it back, you will be incapable of living the future when it has become the present. Joy and peace are the joy and peace possible in this very hour of sitting. If you cannot find it here, you won't find it anywhere. Don't chase after your thoughts as a shadow follows its object. Don't run after your thoughts as a stolen soul runs after the magic amulet. Don't postpone it, but find joy and peace in this very moment.

This is your own time, this spot where you sit is your own spot. It is on this very spot and in this very moment that you can become a Buddha and certainly not beneath some bodhi tree off in some distant life. Practise like this for a few months, and you will begin to know what the Delight of Dhyana is. Dhyana Delight is the joy that one experiences while sitting in meditation. (Several years ago when we still had Phuong Bôi, Thầy Thanh Tu constructed a small meditation hut on the top of Phuong Bôi's hill and named it the Hut of Dhyana Delight.)

You know, the ease of sitting depends on whether one practises mindfulness a little or a lot each day. And it depends on whether or not one sits regularly. At Phap Văn Pagoda we should organize an hour of sitting each night for the workers, say from 10 to 11. Whoever wishes could come to sit for a half hour, or if they like, for the entire hour.

## Recognition

Someone might well ask, is relaxation then the only goal of meditation? In fact the goal of meditation goes much deeper than that. While relaxation is the necessary point of departure, once one has realized relaxation, it is possible to realize a tranquil heart and clear mind. To realize a tranquil heart and clear mind is to have gone far along the path of meditation.

We should remember that the mindfulness of one's breath is a wondrous method at all times. It isn't only a method for beginners. In the third century, Zen Master Tang Hōi wrote in his commentary on the Anapanasati Sutta, "*The mindfulness of one's breath is Buddha's great vehicle to save all beings caught in the cycle of birth and death.*" Measuring, following and taking hold of the breath are the wondrous methods to take hold of your own mind.

Of course, to take hold of our mind and calm our thought, we must also practise mindfulness of our feelings and perceptions. To take hold of your mind, you must practise mindfulness of the mind. You must know how to observe and recognize the presence of every feeling and thought which arises in you. The Zen Master Thuong Chiêu, near the end of the Ly dynasty, wrote, "If the practitioner knows his own Mind clearly he will obtain results with little effort. But if he does not know anything about his own Mind, all of his effort will be wasted." If you want to know your own Mind, there is only one way: to observe and recognize everything about it. This must be done at all times, during your day to day life no less than during the hour of meditation.

During meditation, various feelings and thoughts may arise. If we do not practise mindfulness of the breath,

these thoughts will soon lure us away from mindfulness. But the breath isn't simply a means by which to chase away such thoughts and feelings. Breath remains the vehicle to unite body and mind and to open the gate to wisdom. When a feeling or thought arises, one's intention should not be to chase it away, even if by continuing to concentrate on the breath the feeling or thought passes naturally from the mind. The intention isn't to chase it away, hate it, worry about it or be frightened by it. So what exactly should one be doing concerning such thoughts and feelings? Simply acknowledge their presence. For example, when a feeling of sadness arises, immediately recognize it: "A feeling of sadness has just arisen in me." If the feeling of sadness continues, continue to recognize "A feeling of sadness is still in me." If, for example, a thought like, 'It's late but the neighbours are sure making a lot of racket,' appears, recognize that the thought "It's late but the neighbors are sure making a lot of racket," has appeared. If the thought continues to exist, continue to recognize it. If a different feeling or thought arises, recognize it in the same manner. The essential thing is not to let any feeling or thought arise without recognizing it in mindfulness, like a palace guard who is aware of every face that passes through the front corridor.

If there are no feelings or thoughts present, then recognize that there are no feelings or thoughts present. Practising like this is to be mindful of one's feelings and thoughts. By practising so, you will soon arrive at taking hold of your Mind. One can join the method of mindfulness of the breath with the mindfulness of feelings and thoughts.

### **Deluded Mind Becomes True Mind**

Quang, let me stress that while practising mindfulness,

one should not be dominated by the distinction between good and evil, thus creating a battle within oneself.

Whenever a wholesome thought arises, acknowledge it: "A wholesome thought has just arisen." And if an unwholesome thought arises, acknowledge it as well: "An unwholesome thought has just arisen." Don't dwell on it or try to get rid of it, even if you don't like it. To acknowledge it is enough. If you have departed, then you must know that you have departed, and if you are still there, you must know that you are still there. Once you have reached such an awareness, there will be nothing you need fear anymore.

When I mentioned the guard at the emperor's gate, Quang, you might have imagined a front corridor with 2 doors, one entrance and one exit, with your Mind as the guard. Whatever feeling or thought enters, you are aware of its entrance, and when it leaves, you are aware of its exit. But the image has a shortcoming: the idea that those who enter and exit the corridor are different from the guard, whereas our thoughts and feelings are us, are a part of us. There is a temptation to look upon them, or at least some of them, as an enemy force which is trying to disturb and lay siege on the concentration and understanding of your Mind. But, in fact, when we are angry, we ourselves are anger. When we are happy, we ourselves are happiness. When we have certain thoughts, we are those thoughts. We are both the guard and the visitor at the same time. We are both the Mind and the observer of the mind. Therefore, chasing away or dwelling on any thought isn't the important thing. The important thing is to be aware of the thought. This observation is not an objectification of the Mind: it does not establish distinction between subject and object. Mind does not grab on to Mind, Mind does not push

Mind away. Mind can only observe itself. This observation isn't an observation of some object outside and independent of the observer.

Remember the koan of the Zen Master Bach An who asked, 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?' Or take the example of the taste the tongue experiences: what separates taste and tastebud? The mind experiences itself directly within itself. This is of special importance, and so in the Sutra of Mindfulness, Buddha always uses the phrasing "mindfulness of feeling in feeling, mindfulness of Mind in Mind." Some people have said that the Buddha used this phrasing in order to put emphasis on such words as feeling and Mind, but I don't think they have fully grasped the Buddha's intention. Mindfulness of feeling in feeling is mindfulness of feeling directly in feeling directly while experiencing feeling, and certainly not contemplation of some image of feeling which one creates to give feeling some objective, separate existence of its own outside of oneself. Mindfulness of mind in mind is the mind experiencing mindfulness of the mind in the mind. The objectivity of an outside observer to examine something is the method of science, but it is not the method of meditation. Therefore the image of the guard and the visitors entering and leaving the front corridor of Mind fails to adequately illustrate the mindful observation of Mind.

The mind is like a monkey swinging from branch to branch through a forest, says the Sutra. In order not to lose sight of the monkey by some sudden movement, we must watch the monkey constantly. The Sutra says to be one with it. Mind contemplating mind is like an object and its shadow — the object cannot shake the shadow off. The two are one. Wherever the mind goes, it still lies in

the harness of the mind. The Sutra sometimes uses the expression 'bind the monkey' to refer to taking hold of the Mind. But the monkey image is only a means of expression. Once the Mind is directly and continually aware of itself, it is no longer like a monkey. There are not two minds, one which swings from branch to branch and another which follows after to bind it with a piece of rope.

The person who practises meditation usually hopes to 'see into his own nature,' in order to obtain awakening. But if you are just beginning, don't wait to "see into your own nature." Better still, don't wait for anything. Especially don't wait to see the Buddha or any version of "ultimate reality" while you are sitting. In the first six months, try only to build up your power of concentration, to create an inner calmness and serene joy. The social worker must practice like that. You will shake off anxiety, enjoy total rest and quiet your Mind. You will be refreshed and gain a broader, clearer view of things, and deepen and strengthen the love in yourself. Sitting in meditation is nourishment for your spirit and nourishment for your body, as well. Through sitting, our bodies obtain harmony, feel lighter and are more at peace. The path from the observation of your mind to seeing into your own nature won't be too rough. Once you are able to quiet your Mind, once your feelings and thoughts no longer disturb you, at that point your mind will begin to dwell in Mind. Your mind will take hold of Mind in a direct and wondrous way which no longer differentiates between subject and object. Drinking a cup of tea, the seeming distinction between the one who drinks and the tea being drunk evaporates. Drinking a cup of tea becomes a direct and wondrous experience in which the distinction between subject and object no longer

exists.

Dispersed mind is also Mind, just as waves rippling in water are also Water. When mind has taken hold of Mind, deluded Mind becomes True Mind.

### **One Is All, All Is One**

Quang, I'd like to devote a few lines here to talk about the methods a worker might use in order to arrive at liberation from narrow views, and to obtain the fearlessness and great compassion of the Bodhisattvas. These are the contemplations on interdependence, impermanency and compassion.

While you sit in meditation, after having taken hold of your Mind, you can direct your concentration to contemplate on the interdependent nature of certain objects. This meditation is not a discursive reflection on a philosophy of interdependence: it is a penetration of mind into Mind itself, using one's concentration power to cause the objects contemplated to reveal their real nature.

Those who have studied the teaching of Vijñānavāda know that the term Vijñāna (Consciousness) denotes both the subject and object of Knowledge. The subject of Knowledge cannot exist independently from the object of Knowledge. To see is to see something, to hear is to hear something, to be angry is to be angry over something, to hope is hope for something, thinking is thinking about something, and so forth. When the object of Knowledge (the something) is not present, there can be no subject of Knowledge. The practitioner meditates on Mind and, by so doing, is able to see the interdependence of the subject of Knowledge and the object of Knowledge. When we practise mindfulness of breath, then the Knowledge of breath is Mind, when we practise mindfulness of the body, then the Knowledge of body is Mind; when we



practice mindfulness of objects outside ourselves, then the Knowledge of these objects is also Mind. Therefore the contemplation on the nature of interdependence of all objects is also the contemplation of the Mind.

Every object of the Mind is itself Mind. In Buddhism, the objects of Mind are called the dharmas. Dharmas are usually grouped into five categories:

1. bodily and physical forms
2. feelings
3. perceptions
4. mental functionings
5. consciousness

These five categories are called the five aggregates. The fifth category, consciousness, however, contains all the other categories and is the basis of their existence.

Contemplation on interdependance is a looking deep into all dharmas in order to pierce through to their real nature, in order to see them as parts of the great body of reality and in order to see that the great body of reality is indivisible. It cannot be cut into pieces with separate existences of their own.

The first object of contemplation is our own person, the assembly of five aggregates in ourselves. The practitioner contemplates right here and now on the five aggregates which make up him or hereself.

In his or her own body the practitioner is conscious of the presence of bodily form, feeling, perception, mental functionings and consciousness. He observes these 'objects' until he sees that each of them has intimate connection with the world outside himself: if the world did not exist then the assembly of the five aggregates could not exist either. Consider the example of a table. The table's existence is possible due to the existence of things which we might call the

non-table world: the forest where the wood grew and was cut, the carpenter, the iron ore which became the nails and screws, and countless other things which have relation to the table, from the parents and ancestors of the carpenter, to the sun and rain which made it possible for the trees to grow. If we grasp the table's reality then we see that in the table itself are present all those things which we normally think of as the non-table world. If you took away any of those non-table elements and returned them to their sources — the nails back to the iron ore, the wood to the forest, the carpenter to his parents — the table would no longer exist.

A person who looks at the table and can see the universe is a person who can see the Way. The practitioner meditates on the assembly of the five aggregates in himself in the same manner. He meditates on them until he is able to see their presence in himself, and can see that his own life and the life of the universe are closely interrelated. If the five aggregates return to their sources, the self no longer exists. Each second, the world nourishes the five aggregates. The self is no different from the assembly of the five aggregates themselves. The assembly of the five aggregates plays, as well, a crucial role in the formation, creation and destruction of all things in the universe.

### **Liberation from Suffering**

People normally cut reality into sections and divide it into compartments, and so are unable to see the interdependence of all phenomena. To see one in all and all in one is to break through the great barrier which narrows one's perception of reality, a barrier which Buddhism calls the attachment to the false view of self. Attachment to the false view of self means belief in

the presence of unchanging entities which exist on their own. To break through this false view is to be liberated from every sort of fear, pain and anxiety. The Prajna-paramita hrdaya Sutra says that when the Bodhisattva Quan-the-Am saw into the reality of the five aggregates giving rise to emptiness of self, he was liberated from every suffering, pain, doubt and anger. The same applies to you, Quang, to me and to all the workers. If we contemplate the five aggregates in a stubborn and diligent way, we, too will be liberated from suffering, fear and dread. The Bodhisattva Avalokita is recognized as the one who offers the gift of fearlessness to others. The nature of this gift should not be foreign to us. It is realized through contemplation of the interdependant nature of the five aggregates. We must realize however that if the giver gives with all his or her heart, the receiver must also receive with all his or her heart. Only thus can the gift be received.

The practitioner must strip away all the barriers in order to live as part of the universal life. A person is not some private entity travelling unaffected through time and space as if sealed off from the rest of the world by some thick shell. Living for 100 or for 100,000 lives sealed off like that, not only isn't living, but it isn't possible. In our lives are present a multitude of phenomena, just as we ourselves are present in many different phenomena. We are life, and life is without limits. Perhaps one can say that we are only alive when we live the life of the world, and so live the sufferings and joys of others. The suffering of others is our own suffering, and the happiness of others is our own happiness. If our lives have no limits, the assembly of the five aggregates which makes up our self also has no limits. The impermanent character of the universe, the successes and failures of life can no longer

manipulate us. Having seen the reality of interdependence and penetrated deeply into its reality, nothing can oppress you any longer.

The meditation on interdependence is to be practiced constantly. We might naturally devote time to meditate on it while sitting, but it must become an integral part of our involvement in all ordinary tasks. We must be able to see that the person in front of us as oneself and that we are that person. We must be able to see the process of inter-origination and interdependence of all events, both those which are happening and those which will happen.

### **A Ride on the Waves of Birth and Death**

Quang, if I talk to the workers, I cannot leave out the problem of life and death. Serving in a situation like Vietnam right now, we encounter death daily. How many of our brothers and sisters have already given their lives? Lien, Vui, Tuan, Tho, Lanh, Mai, Hung, Hy, Toan and our eight brothers who were kidnapped nine years ago... While working in the fire zones, while burying the bodies of children and adults, it is impossible to ignore death.

Many young people and many monks and nuns have come out to serve, through their love for those who are suffering. They are always mindful of the fact that the most important question in Buddhism is the question of life and death. Once having realized that life and death are but two faces of one reality, we will have the courage to encounter both of them. When I was only 19 years old, I found the meditation on the corpse in the cemetery, a meditation to which I was assigned, very hard to take. And I resisted meditating on it. But now I no longer feel that way. I thought that such a meditation

should be reserved for older monks, 'say 35 or 40. But since then, I have seen many young soldiers lying motionless beside one another, some only 13, 14 and 15 years old. They had no preparation, no readiness for death. And now I see that if one doesn't know how to die, one can hardly know how to live. Because Death is a part of Life. Just two days ago, Quynh Hoa told me that she thought at 20 one was old enough to contemplate on the corpse. Quynh Hoa is able to say that because she has only turned 21 herself. We must look death in the face, recognize and accept it, just as we look at and accept life.

The Sutra on Mindfulness speaks about the meditation on the corpse: meditate on the decomposition of the body, how the body bloats and turns violet, how it is eaten by worms until only bits of blood and flesh still cling to the bones, meditate up to the point where only white bones remain which in turn are slowly worn away and turn into dust... Meditate like that, knowing that your own body will undergo exactly the same process. Meditate on the corpse until you are calm and at peace, until your mind and heart are light and tranquil and a smile appears on your face. Thus, overcoming revulsion and fear, life will be seen as infinitely precious, every second of it worth living. And it is not just our own lives that are recognized as precious, but the lives of every other person, every other being, every other reality. We can no longer be deluded by the notion that the destruction of others' lives is necessary for our own survival. We see that life and death are but two faces of Life and that without both, life is not possible, just as two sides of a coin are needed for the coin to exist. Only now is it possible to rise above birth and death, and to know how to live and how to die. The Sutra says that

the Bodhisattvas who have seen into the reality of interdependence have broken through all narrow views, and have been able to enter birth and death as a person takes a ride in a small boat without being submerged or drowned by the waves of birth and death.

Quang, some people have said that if you look at reality with the eyes of Buddhist, you become pessimistic. But to think in terms of either pessimism or optimism oversimplifies the truth. The problem is to see reality as it is. A pessimistic attitude can never create the calm and serene smile which blossoms on the lips of the Bodhisattvas and all others who obtain the Way.

### **The Sound of the Rising Tide**

When your mind is liberated, your heart floods with compassion. Compassion for yourself, for having undergone countless sufferings because you were not yet able to relieve yourself of false views, hatred, ignorance, and anger. Compassion for others because they do not yet see and so are still imprisoned by false views, hatred and ignorance and continue to create suffering for themselves and for others. Now you know how to look at yourself and at others with the eyes of compassion. *“Look at every being with the eyes of compassion.”*

Practice looking at all beings with the eyes of compassion: this is the meditation called ‘the meditation on compassion.’

The meditation of compassion must be realized during the hours you sit and during every moment you carry out service for others. No matter where you go, where you sit, remember the call of the Bodhisattva Quan-the-Am in the Lotus Sutra (Saddharma Pundarika): ‘Look at all beings with the eyes of compassion.’

Quang, there are many subjects and methods for meditation, so many that I could never hope to write them all down for our friends. I've only mentioned a few, simple but basic methods here. A social worker is like any other person. She or he must live her own life. Work is only a part of life. And work is life only when done in mindfulness. Otherwise, one becomes like the person 'who lives as though he were dead.' Each of us needs to light his own torch in order to carry on. But the life of each one of us is connected with the life of those around us. If we know how to live in mindfulness, if we know how to preserve and care for our own mind and heart, then thanks to that, our brothers and sisters will also know how to live in mindfulness.

### **Meditation Reveals and Heals**

When we sit in mindfulness both our body and mind can be at peace and total relaxation. But this state of peace and relaxation differs fundamentally from the lazy, semiconscious state of mind that one gets while resting and dozing. Sitting in such lazy semi-consciousness, far from being mindfulness, is like sitting in a dark cave. In mindfulness we are not only restful and happy, but alert and awake. Meditation is not evasion; it is a serene encounter with reality. The person who practices mindfulness should be as awake as the driver of a car: if he is not awake he will be possessed by dispersion and forgetfulness, just as the driver who is not awake could easily cause a grave accident. You should be as awake as a person who walks on high stilts — any mis-step could fling him to his death. You should be like a medieval knight walking weaponless in a forest of swords. You should be like a lion, going forward in slow, gentle and

firm steps. Only with this kind of vigilance can you realize total Awakening.

For beginners, the method of pure recognition is recommended. I have said that this recognition should be done without judgement: both feelings of compassion and irritation should be welcomed, recognized and treated on a absolutely equal basis, because both are us.

When we are possessed by a sadness, an anxiety, a hatred or a passion or whatever, we may find the method of pure observation and recognition difficult to practice. In that case, it is helpful to turn the method of Meditation on a Fixed Object, using our very state of mind as the subject of meditation. This meditation reveals and heals. The sadness or anxiety, hatred or passion, under the gaze of our concentration and meditation, reveals its own nature. That revelation leads naturally to healing and emancipation. The sadness or whatever, having been the cause of pain, can be used as a means of liberation from torment and suffering. We call this using a thorn to remove a thorn. We should treat our anxiety, our pain, our hatred and passion gently, respectfully, not resisting it, but living with it, making peace with it, penetrating into its nature by the meditation on interdependence. A thoughtful practitioner knows how to select subjects of meditation that fit the situation. Subjects of meditation like interdependence, compassion, self, emptiness, non-attachment, all these belong to the categories of meditation which have the power to reveal and to heal.

Meditation on these subjects, however, can only be successful if we have a certain power of concentration. We get this power of concentration by the practice of mindfulness in everyday life, by the observation and



recognition of all that is going on. The object of meditation should be a reality that has real roots in yourselves; it can't be just a subject for philosophical speculation. It should be like a kind of food that must be cooked for a long time over a hot fire. We put it in a pot, cover it and light the fire. The pot is ourselves and the heat used to cook is the power of concentration. The fuel comes from the continuous practice of mindfulness. Without enough heat the food will never be cooked. But once cooked, the food reveals its true nature and helps lead us to liberation.

### **The Water is Clearer, The Grass is Greener**

Quang, the Buddha once said that the problem of life and death is itself the problem of mindfulness. Whether or not one is alive depends on whether one is mindful. In a Samyutta Nikaya Sutra (47.20), he tells a story which took place in one village: a famous dancer had just come to the village and the people were swarming the streets to catch a glimpse of her. At that same moment, a condemned criminal was obliged to cross the village carrying a bowl of oil filled to the very brim. He must concentrate all his might on keeping the bowl steady; for if even one drop of oil were to spill from the bowl to the ground, the soldier directly behind him had orders to whip his sword out and cut off the man's head. Having reached this point in the story, Gautama asked: "Now, brothers, do you think our prisoner was able to keep all his attention so focused on the bowl of oil that his mind did not stray to steal a glimpse of the famous dancer in town, or to look up at the throngs of villagers making such a commotion in the streets, any of whom could bump into him at any moment?"

Another time the Buddha recounted the following story, which made me suddenly see the supreme importance of practising mindfulness by one's own self -- that is, to protect and care for one's self, not worrying about the way another looks after himself, a habit of mind which gives rise to resentment and anxiety. The Buddha said, 'There once was a couple of acrobats. The teacher was a poor widower and the student was a small girl, named Medakathalika. The two of them performed in the streets in order to earn enough to eat. They used a tall bamboo pole. The teacher balanced it on the top of his head while the little girl slowly climbed to the top. There she remained balanced while the teacher continued to walk along the ground.

"Both of them had to devote all their attention to maintain perfect balance and to prevent any accident from occurring. One day the teacher instructed the pupil: "Listen, Medakathalika, I will watch you and you watch me, in order for us to help each other maintain concentration and balance so that no accident will occur. That way we will be sure to earn enough to eat." But the little girl was very wise and answered, "Dear Master, I think that it would be more correct to say that each of us must watch himself. To look after oneself means to look after both of us. That way I am sure we will avoid any accidents and will earn enough to eat." The Buddha said: "The child spoke correctly." (Samyutta Nikaya Sutra 47-19)

In a family, if there is one person who practices mindfulness, the entire family will be able to do likewise thanks to that one person. Because of the presence of one member who lives in mindfulness, the entire family will be reminded to live in mindfulness. If in one class, one student lives in mindfulness, the entire class will be

influenced, thanks to the constant reminder of that one student. The presence of such a person can be considered as the presence of a Buddha.

In the School of Youth family, we must follow that principle. Don't worry that those around you aren't doing their best. Only worry about how to make yourself worthy. If you do your best, that is the surest way to remind those around you to do their best. If we want to be worthy, we must practise mindfulness. That is a certainty. Only by practising mindfulness will we not lose ourselves and will we acquire a bright joy and peace. Only by practising mindfulness will we be able to look at every one else with the open mind and eyes of love.

I was just invited downstairs for a cup of tea, into an apartment where a friend who helps us has a piano, to wet my throat before coming back upstairs to continue writing. As Kirsten poured the tea for me, I looked at her pile of work and said, "Why don't you stop translating orphan applications for a minute and play the piano for me?" Kirsten was glad to put down her work for a moment and sat down at the piano to play a selection of Chopin she has known since she was a child. The piece has several measures which are soft and melodic but others which are loud and quick. Her pet dog was lying beneath the tea table and when the music became excited, it began to bark and whine. I knew that it felt uneasy and wanted the music to stop. Kirsten's dog is treated with the kindness one treats a small child, and perhaps it is much more sensitive to music than most ordinary children. Perhaps because its ears can pick up certain vibrations that human ears cannot. Kirsten continued to play while trying to console the dog at the same time, but it continued to bark and protest. She finished the piece and began to play another one by

Mozart which was light and harmonious. During this piece, the dog lay quietly and appeared to be content and at peace. When Kirsten had finished she came over and sat down beside me and said, "Often when I play a piece of Chopin that is the least bit loud, the dog comes and grabs hold of my pants' leg trying to force me to leave the piano. Sometimes I have to put it outside before I can continue playing. But whenever I play Bach or Mozart, it lies quietly and content."

Kirsten read somewhere that in Canada people tried playing Mozart for their plants during the night. The plants thus grew quicker than normal, and the flowers inclined towards the direction the Mozart was played from. Others played several tracks of Mozart every day in wheat and rye fields and were able to measure that the wheat and rye in these fields grew quicker than the wheat and rye in other fields.

As Kirsten spoke, I thought about conference rooms where people argue and debate with each other, where angry and reproachful words are thrown back and forth. If one placed flowers and plants in such rooms, chances are they would not continue growing if the angry words continued to fly day after day.

I thought about the garden tended by a monk living in mindfulness. His flowers are fresh and green, nourished by the peace and joy which emanate from his mindfulness. One of the ancients said, "When a great Master is born, the water in the rivers turns clearer and the plants grow greener." At the beginning of any gathering to study or discuss our work, we ought to listen to music or sit and practise breathing, don't you think, Quang?

### **Three Wondrous Answers**

To end this letter, I'd like to retell a short story of

Tolstoy's which you and our friends in the School will enjoy. It is the story of the emperor's three questions. Tolstoy did not know the emperor's name .. One day it occurred to a certain emperor that if he only knew the answers to the following three questions, he would never stray in any matter. The questions were :

What is the most opportune time to do each thing?

Who are the most important people to work with?

What is the most important thing to do at all times?

The emperor issued a decree throughout his kingdom announcing that whoever could answer these three questions would receive a great reward. Many who read the decree made their way to the palace at once. Each person had a different answer to offer to the emperor.

In reply to the first question, one person advised that the emperor make up a thorough time schedule, consecrating every hour, day, month and year for certain tasks and then follow the schedule to the letter. Only then could he hope to do every task at the right time. Another person replied that it was impossible to plan in advance and that the emperor should put all vain amusements aside and remain attentive to everything in order to know what to do at what time. Someone else insisted that by himself, the emperor could never hope to have all the foresight and competence necessary to decide when to do each and every task and what he really needed was to set up a 'Council of Wise Men' and then to act according to their counsel.

Yet someone else said that certain matters require immediate decision and could not wait for consultation, but if he wanted to know in advance what was going to happen he should consult magicians and soothsayers.

The responses to the second question also lacked

accord. One person said that the emperor needed to place all his trust in administrators, another urged reliance on priests and monks, while others recommended physicians. Still others put their faith in warriors.

The third question drew a similar variety of answers. Some said science was the most important pursuit. Others insisted on religion. Yet others claimed the most important thing was military skill.

Because all the answers were different from one another, the emperor was not pleased with any of them and no reward was given.

After several nights of reflection, the emperor resolved to visit a hermit who lived up on the mountain and was said to be an enlightened man. The emperor wished to find the hermit to ask him the three questions, though he knew the hermit never left the mountain and was known to receive only the poor, refusing to have anything to do with persons of wealth or power. So the emperor disguised himself as a simple peasant and ordered his attendants to wait for him at the foot of the mountain while he climbed the slope alone to seek the hermit.

Reaching the holy man's dwelling place, the emperor found the hermit digging a garden in front of his small hut. When the hermit saw the stranger, he nodded his head in greeting and continued to dig. The labour was obviously hard on him for he was an old man, and each time he thrust his spade into the ground to turn the earth, he heaved heavily.

The emperor approached him and said, "I have come here in order to ask your help with three questions:

When is the most opportune time to do each thing?

Who are the most important people to work with?

What is the most important thing to do at all times?"

The hermit listened attentively but did not reply. He

only patted the emperor on the shoulder and then continued digging. The emperor said, "You must be tired, here, let me give you a hand with that." The hermit thanked him and handed the emperor the spade and then sat down on the ground to rest.

After he had dug two beds, the emperor stopped and turned to the hermit and repeated his three questions. The hermit still did not answer, but instead stood up and pointed to the spade and said, 'Why don't you rest now? I can take over again.' But the emperor did not hand him the spade and continued to dig. One hour passed, then two hours. Finally the sun began to set behind the mountain. The emperor put down the spade and said to the hermit, "I came here to ask if you could answer my three questions. But if you can't give me any answer, please let me know so that I can get on my way home,"

The hermit lifted his head and asked the emperor, "Do you hear someone running over there?" The emperor turned his head and suddenly they both saw a man with a long white beard emerge from the woods. He ran wildly, pressing his hands against a bloody wound in his stomach. The man ran towards the emperor before falling unconscious to the ground, where he lay groaning. Opening the man's clothing, the emperor and hermit saw that the man had received a deep gash. The emperor cleaned the wound thoroughly and then used his own shirt to bandage it, but the blood completely soaked it within minutes. He rinsed the shirt out and bandaged the wound a second time and continued to do so until the flow of blood had stopped.

The wounded man regained consciousness and asked for a drink of water. The emperor ran down to the stream and brought back a jug of fresh water. Meanwhile, the sun had disappeared and the night air had begun

to turn cold. The hermit gave the emperor a hand in carrying the man into the hut where they lay him down on the hermit's bed. The man closed his eyes and lay quietly. The emperor was worn out from a long day of climbing the mountain and digging the garden. Leaning against the doorway, he fell asleep. When he woke up, the sun had already risen over the mountain. For a moment he forgot where he was and what he had come here for. He looked over to the bed and saw the wounded man also looking around him in confusion. When he saw the emperor, he stared at him intently and then said in a faint whisper, "Please forgive me."

"But what have you done that I should forgive you?" the emperor asked.

"You do not know me, your Majesty, but I know you. I was your sworn enemy, and I had vowed to take vengeance on you, for during the last war you killed my brother and seized my property. When I learned that you were coming alone to the mountain to meet the hermit, I resolved to surprise you on your way back and kill you. But after waiting a long time there was still no sign of you, and so I left my ambush in order seek you out. But instead of finding you, I came across your attendants who recognized me and grabbed me, giving me this wound. Luckily, I escaped their hold and ran to here. If I hadn't met you I would surely be dead by now. I had intended to kill you, but instead you saved my life! I am ashamed and grateful beyond words. If I live, I vow to be your servant for the rest of my life, and I will bid my children and grandchildren to do the same. Please grant me your forgiveness, your Majesty."

The emperor was overjoyed to see that he was so easily reconciled with a former enemy. He not only forgave the man but promised to return all the man's property



and to send his own physician and servants to wait on the man until he was completely healed. After ordering his attendants to take the man home, the emperor returned to see the hermit. Before returning to the palace the emperor wanted to repeat his three questions one last time. He found the hermit sowing seeds in the earth they had dug the day before.

The hermit stood up and looked at the emperor. "But your questions have already been answered."

"How's that?" the emperor asked, puzzled.

"Yesterday, if your Majesty had not taken pity on my age and given me a hand with digging these beds, you would have been attacked by that man on your way home. Then you would have sorely regretted not staying with me. Therefore the most important time was the time you were digging the beds, the most important person was myself, and the most important pursuit was to help me. Later when the wounded man ran up here, the most important time was the time you spent dressing his wound, for if you had not cared for him he would have died and you would have lost the chance to be reconciled with him. Likewise, he was the most important person, and the most important pursuit was taking care of his wound. Remember that there is only one important time and that is Now. The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion. The most important person is always the person with whom you are, who is right before you, for who knows if you will have dealings with any other person in the future. The most important pursuit is making that person, the one standing at your side, happy, for that alone is the pursuit of life."

Quang, Tolstoy's story is like a story out of Buddhist scripture: it doesn't fall short of any sutra. We talk about social service, service to the people, service of humanity, service

for others who are far away — but often we forget that it is the very people around us that we must live for first of all. If you cannot serve your wife, Muoi, and little Hai Triêu Am, how are you going to serve society? If you cannot make Hai Triêu Am happy, how do you expect to be able to make anyone else happy? If all our friends in the School of Youth do not love and help one another, whom can we love and help? Are we working for other humans, or are we just working for the name of our organisation?

Social service. The word service is so immense. The word social is just as immense. Let's return first of all to a more modest scale: our families, our classmates, our friends, our own community. We must live for them, for if we cannot live for them who else do we think we are living for?

Tolstoy is a Bodhisattva. But was the emperor himself able to see the meaning and direction of life? How can we live the present moment, live right now with the people around us, helping to lessen their sufferings and making their lives happier? How? The answer, Quang, is this: We must practise mindfulness. The principle that Tolstoy gives appears easy; but if we want to put it into practice we must use the methods of mindfulness in order to seek and find the Way of the Buddha. Quang, I've written these pages for our friends to use. There are many people who have written about these things without having lived them, but I've only written down those things which I have lived and experienced myself. I hope you and our friends will find these things at least a little helpful along the path of our seeking: the path of our return.

Alkmaar, February 1975

## THIRTY EXERCISES TO PRACTISE MINDFULNESS

**Note :** Here are a number of exercises and methods in meditation which I often have used, adapting them from various methods to fit my own circumstances and preferences. Select the ones you like best and find the most suitable for your own self. The value of each method will vary according to each person's unique needs. Although these exercises or are relatively easy, they form the foundations on which everything else is built.

### 1. *The Half-Smile*

a) *Half-smile when you first wake up in the morning :* Hang a branch or any other sign, or even the word "smile" on the ceiling or wall so that you see it right away when you open your eyes. This sign will serve as your reminder. Use these seconds before you get out of bed to take hold of your breath. Inhale and exhale three breaths gently while maintaining the half-smile. Follow your breaths.

b) *Half-smile during your free moments :* While in a waiting room, or on a bus, standing in line at the post office, or anywhere you find yourself sitting or standing, half-smile. Look at a child, a leaf, a painting on the wall, anything which is relatively still, and smile. Inhale and exhale

quietly three times. Maintain the half-smile and consider the spot of your attention as your own true nature.

- c) *Half-smile while listening to music:* Listen to a piece of music for two or three minutes. Pay attention to the words, music, rhythm and sentiments. Smile while watching your inhalations and exhalations.
- d) *Half-smile when irritated:* When you realize you are irritated, half-smile at once. Inhale and exhale quietly, maintaining the half-smile for three breaths.

## 2. *Letting Go — Relaxation*

- a) *Letting go in a lying down position:* Lie on your back on a flat surface without the support of mattress or pillow. Keep your two arms loosely by your sides and your two legs slightly apart, stretched out before you. Maintain a half-smile. Breathe in and out gently, keeping your attention focused on your breath. Let go of every muscle in your body. Relax each muscle as though it were sinking down through the floor or as though it were as soft and yielding as a piece of silk hanging in the breeze to dry. Let go entirely, keeping your attention only on your breath and half-smile. Think of yourself as a cat, completely relaxed before a warm fire, whose muscles yield without resistance to anyone's touch. Continue for 15 breaths.
- b) *Letting go in the sitting position:* Sit in the half or full lotus, or cross-legged, or your two legs

folded beneath you, or even on a chair, your two feet touching the floor. Half-smile. Let go as in 2a.

### 3. *Breathing*

- a) *Deep breathing:* Lie on your back (as in 2a): Breathe evenly and gently, focusing your attention on the movement of your stomach. As you begin to breathe in, allow your stomach to rise in order to bring air into the lower half of the lungs. As the upper halves of your lungs begin to fill with air, your chest begins to rise and your stomach begins to lower. Don't tire yourself. Continue for 10 breaths. The exhalation will be longer than the inhalation.
- b) *Measuring your breath by your footsteps:* Walk slowly and leisurely in a garden, along a river or on a village path. Breathe normally. Determine the length of your breath, the exhalation and the inhalation, by the number of your footsteps. Continue for a few minutes. Begin to lengthen your exhalation by one step. Do not force a longer inhalation. Let it be natural. Watch your inhalation carefully to see if there is a desire to lengthen it. Continue for 10 breaths. Now lengthen the exhalation by one more footstep. Watch to see whether the inhalation also lengthens by one step or not. Only lengthen the inhalation when you feel that it will give delight. After 10 breaths return your breath to normal. About 5 minutes later, you can begin the practice of lengthened breaths again. When you feel the least bit tired, return to normal.

After several sessions of the practice of lengthened breath, your exhalation and inhalation will grow equal in length. Do not practise long, equal breaths for more than 10 to 20 breaths before returning to normal.

- c) *Counting your breath:* Sit in the half or full lotus or take a walk. As you inhale, be mindful that "I am inhaling, one." When you exhale, be mindful that "I am exhaling, one." Remember to breathe from the stomach (3a). When beginning the second inhalation, be mindful that "I am inhaling, two." And slowly exhaling, be mindful that "I am exhaling, two." Continue one up through 10. After you have reached 10, return to one. Whenever you lose count, return to one.
- d) *Following your breath while listening to music:* Listen to a piece of music. Breathe long, light and even breaths. Follow your breath, be master of it while remaining aware of the movement and sentiments of the music. Do not get lost in the music, but continue to be master of your breath and yourself.
- e) *Follow your breath while carrying on a conversation:* Breathe long, light and even breaths. Follow your breath while listening to a friend's words and to your own replies. Continue as in 3d.
- f) *Following the Breath:* Sit in a full or half lotus or go for a walk. Begin to inhale gently and normally (from the stomach), mindful that "I am

inhaling normally.” Exhale in mindfulness, I am exhaling normally.” Continue for three breaths. On the fourth breath extend the inhalation, mindful that “I am breathing in a long inhalation.” Exhale in mindfulness, “I am breathing out a long exhalation.” Continue for 3 breaths.

Now follow your breath carefully, aware of every movement of your stomach and lungs. Follow the entrance and exit of air. Be mindful that “I am inhaling and following the inhalation from its beginning to its end. I am exhaling and following the exhalation from its beginning to its end.”

Continue for 20 breaths. Return to normal. After 5 minutes, repeat the exercise. Remember to maintain the half-smile while breathing. Once you have mastered this exercise, move on to 3g.

- g) *Breathing to Quiet the Mind and Body to Realize Joy:* Sit in the full or half lotus. Half-smile. Follow your breath (3d). When your mind and body are quiet, continue to inhale and exhale very lightly, mindful that, “I am breathing in and making the breath-body light and peaceful. I am exhaling and making the breath-body light and peaceful.” Continue for three breaths, giving rise to the thought in mindfulness, “I am breathing in and making my entire body light and peaceful and joyous.” Continue for 3 breaths and in mindfulness give rise to the thought, “I am breathing in while my body and mind are peace and joy. I am breathing out while my body and mind are peace and joy.”

Maintain this thought in mindfulness from five to thirty minutes, or for an hour, according to your ability and to the time available to you. The beginning and end of the practice should be relaxed and gentle. When you want to stop, gently massage your eyes and face with your two hands and then massage the muscles in your legs before returning to a normal sitting position. Wait a moment before standing up.

4. *Mindfulness of the position and movements of the body*

- a) *Mindfulness of the positions of the body*: This can be practised at any time and place. Begin to focus your attention on your breath. Breathe quietly and more deeply than usual. Be mindful of the position of your body, whether you are walking, standing, lying or sitting down. Know where you walk; where you stand; where you lie, where you sit. Be mindful of the purpose of your position. For example, you might be conscious that you are standing on a green hillside in order to refresh yourself, to practise breathing or just to stand. If there is no purpose, be mindful that there is no purpose.
- b) *Mindfulness of the preparation of tea*: Prepare a pot of tea to serve a guest or to drink by yourself. Do each movement slowly, in mindfulness. Do not let one detail of your movements go by without being mindful of it. Know that your hand lifts the pot by its handle. Know that you are pouring the fragrant warm tea into the cup. Follow each step in mindfulness. Breathe gently and more deeply than usual.



Take hold of your breath if your mind strays.

- c) *Mindfulness while washing the dishes:* Wash the dishes relaxingly as though each bowl is an object of contemplation. Consider each bowl as True-Reality. Follow your breath to prevent your mind from straying. Do not try to hurry to get the job over with. Consider washing the dishes the most important thing in life. Washing the dishes is meditation. If you cannot wash the dishes in mindfulness, neither can you meditate while sitting in silence.
- d) *Mindfulness while washing clothes:* Do not wash too many clothes at one time. Select only three or four articles of clothing to wash at any one time. Find the most comfortable position to sit or stand so as to prevent a backache. Scrub the clothes relaxingly. Hold your attention on every movement of your hands and arms. Pay attention to the soap and water. When you have finished scrubbing and rinsing, your mind and body should feel as clean and fresh as your clothes. Remember to maintain the half-smile and take hold of your breath whenever your mind wanders.
- e) *Mindfulness while cleaning house:* Divide your work into stages: straightening things and putting away books, etc., scrubbing the toilet, scrubbing the bathroom, sweeping the floors and dusting, etc. Allow a good length of time for each task. Move slowly, three times more slowly than usual. Fully focus your attention on each task. For

example, while placing a book on the shelf, look at the book, be aware of what book it is, know that you are in the process of placing it on the shelf, intending to put it in that specific place. Know that your hand reaches for the book and picks it up. Avoid any abrupt or harsh movement. Maintain mindfulness of the breath, especially when your thoughts wander.

- f) *Mindfulness while bathing*: Allow yourself 30 to 45 minutes to take a bath. Don't hurry for even one second. From the moment you prepare the bathwater to the moment you put on clean clothes, let every motion be light and slow. Be attentive of every movement. Place your attention to every part of your body, without discrimination or fear. Be mindful of each stream of water on your body. By the time you've finished, your mind should feel as peaceful and light as your body. Follow your breath. Think of yourself as being in a clean and fragrant lotus pond in the summer.
- g) *Mindfulness on the Pebble*: Sit in the full or half lotus. Regulate your breath as in 3c. When your breathing is slow and even, begin to relax all your muscles while maintaining the half-smile as in 2a. Think of yourself as a pebble which is falling through a clear stream. While sinking, there is no intention to guide your movement. Sink towards the spot of total rest on the gentle sand of the riverbed. Continue meditating on the pebble until your mind and body are at complete rest: a pebble resting on the sand. Maintain this

peace and joy half an hour while watching your breath. No thought about the past or future can pull you away from your present peace and joy. The universe exists in this present moment. No desire can pull you away from this present peace, not even the desire to become a Buddha or the desire to save all beings. Know that to become a Buddha and to save all beings can only be realized on the foundation of the pure peace of the present moment.

- h) *Plan a Day of Mindfulness:* , Select one day of the week, any day that accords with your own situation. Forget the work you do during the other days. Do not organize any meetings or have friends over. Do only such simple work as house cleaning, cooking, washing clothes and dusting. Follow the methods described in 4e. Once the house is neat and clean, and all your things are in order, take a bath as described in 4c. Afterwards, prepare and drink tea (4b). You might read scripture or write letters to close friends. Afterwards take a walk to practise breathing (3b, 3c, and 3e). While reading scripture or writing letters, maintain your mindfulness, don't let the sutra or letter pull you away to somewhere else. While reading the sacred text, know what you are reading; while writing the letter, know what you are writing. Follow the same procedure as listening to music or conversing with a friend. (3d, 3e) In the evening prepare yourself a light meal, perhaps only a little fruit or a glass of fruit juice. Sit in meditation for an hour before you go to bed.

Follow the method described in 4g, 3e, or 3g. During the day, take two walks of a half hour to 45 minutes. Do not read before you go to sleep. Instead of reading, practise total relaxation (2a) for 5 to 10 minutes. Be master of your breathing. Breathe gently (the breath should not be too long), following the rising and lowering of your stomach and chest, your eyes closed. Every movement during this day should be at least two times slower than usual.

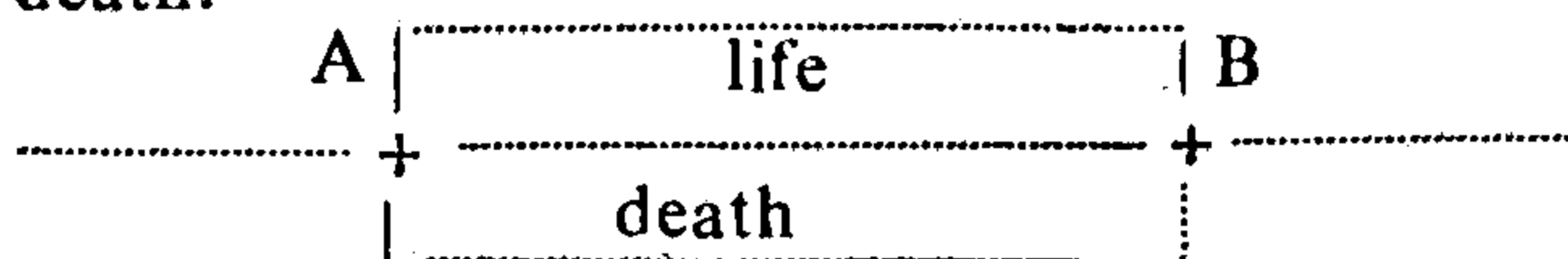
## 5. *Contemplation on Interdependence*

- a) *Contemplation on the five aggregates*: Find a photo of yourself as a child. Sit in the full or half lotus. Begin to follow your breath as in 3e. After 20 breaths, begin to focus your attention on the photo in front of you. Recreate and live again the 5 aggregates of which you were made up at the time the photo was taken: the physical characteristics of your body, your feelings, perceptions, mind functionings and consciousness at that age. Continue to follow your breath. Do not let your memories lure you away or overcome you. Maintain this contemplation for 15 minutes. Maintain the half-smile. Turn your mindfulness to your present self. Be conscious of your body, feelings, perceptions, mind functionings and consciousness in the present moment. See the five aggregates which make up yourself. Ask the question, "Who am I?" The question should be deeply rooted in you, like a new seed nestled deep in the soft earth and damp with water. The question "Who am I?" should not be

an abstract question to consider with your discursive intellect. The question "Who am I?" will not be confined to your intellect, but to the care of the whole of the five aggregates. Don't try to seek an intellectual answer. Contemplate for 10 minutes, maintaining light but deep breath to prevent being pulled away by philosophical reflection.

- b) *Contemplation on your own skeleton*: Lie on a bed, or on a mat or on the grass in a position in which you are comfortable. Don't use a pillow. Begin to take hold of your breath. Contemplate that all that is left of your body is a white skeleton lying on the face of the earth. Maintain the half-smile and continue to follow your breath. Imagine that all your flesh has decomposed and is gone, that your skeleton is now lying in the earth 80 years after burial. See clearly the bones of your head, back, your ribs, your hip bones, leg and arm bones, finger bones. Maintain the half-smile, breathe very lightly, your heart and mind serene. See that your skeleton is not you. Your bodily form is not you. Nor even feelings, thoughts, actions and knowledge. Maintain this contemplation from 20 to 30 minutes.
- c) *Contemplation on your true visage before you were born*: In the full or half lotus follow your breath. Concentrate on the point of your life's beginning. (A). Know that it is also the point of beginning of your death. See that both your Life and Death are manifested at the same time: *this* is because *that* is, this could not have been if that

were not. See that the existence of your life and death depend on each other: one being the foundation of the other. See that you are at the same time your life and your death; that the two are not enemies but two aspects of the same reality. Then concentrate on the point of ending of the twofold manifestation (B) which is wrongly called death. See that it is the ending point of the manifestation of both your life and your death.



See that there is no difference before A and after B. Look for your true face in the periods before A and after B.

- d) *Contemplation on a loved one who has died:* On a chair or bed, sit or lie in a position you feel comfortable in. Begin to take hold of your breath as in 3e. Contemplate the body of a loved one who has died, whether a few months or several years ago. Know clearly that all the flesh of the person has decomposed and only a skeleton remains lying quietly beneath the earth. Know clearly that your own flesh is still here and in yourself are still combined the five aggregates of bodily form, feeling, perception, mental functionings and consciousness. Think of your interaction with that person in the past and right now. Maintain the half-smile and take hold of your breath. Contemplate this way for 15 minutes.

## 6. *Contemplation on Compassion*

- a) *Contemplation on the person you hate or despise*

*the most*: Sit in the full or half lotus. Breathe and smile the half-smile as in 2b. Contemplate the image of the person who has caused you the most suffering. Use this person's image as the subject of your contemplation. Contemplate on the bodily form, feelings, perceptions, mind functionings and consciousness of this person. Contemplate on each aggregate separately. Begin with bodily form. Contemplate the features you hate or despise the most or find the most repulsive. Continue with the person's feelings. Try to examine what makes this person happy and suffer in his daily life. When contemplating perception, try to see what patterns of thought and reason this person follows. As for mind functionings, examine what motivates this person's hopes and aspirations and what motivates his actions. Finally consider his consciousness. See whether his views and insights are open and free or not, and whether or not he has been influenced by any prejudices, narrow-mindedness, hatred or anger. See whether or not he is master of himself. Contemplate like this until you feel compassion rise in your heart like a well filling with fresh water, and your anger and resentment disappear. Practise this exercise many times on the same person.

- b) *Contemplate on the suffering caused by the lack of wisdom*: Sit in the full or half lotus. Begin to follow your breath as in 3e. Choose the situation of a person, family or society which is suffering the most of any you know. This will be the object of your contemplation.

In the case of a person, try to see every suffering which that person is undergoing. Begin with the suffering of bodily form (sickness, poverty, physical pain) and then proceed to the suffering caused by feelings (internal conflicts, fear, hatred, jealousy, a tortured conscience). Consider next the suffering caused by perceptions (pessimism, dwelling on his problems with a dark and narrow viewpoint). See whether his mind functionings are motivated by fear, discouragement, despair or hatred. See whether or not his consciousness is shut off because of his situation, because of his suffering, because of the people around him, his education, propaganda or a lack of control of his own self. Meditate on all these sufferings until your heart fills with compassion like a well of fresh water, and you are able to see that that person suffers because of circumstances and ignorance. Resolve to help that person get out of his present situation through the most silent and unpretentious means possible.

In the case of a family, follow the same methods as above. Go through all the sufferings of one person and then on to the next person until you have examined the sufferings of the entire family. See that their sufferings are your own sufferings. See that it is not possible to reproach even one person in that group. See that you must help them liberate themselves from their present situation by the most silent and unpretentious means possible.

In the case of a society, take the situation of a country suffering war or any other situation of injustice. Try to see that every person involved



in the conflict is a victim. See that no person, including all those in warring parties or in what appear to be opposing sides, desire the suffering to continue. See that it is not only one or a few persons who are to blame for the situation. See that the situation is possible because of the clinging to ideologies and to an unjust world economic system which is upheld by every person through ignorance or through lack of resolve to change it. See that the two sides in a conflict are not really opposing, but two aspects of the same reality. See that the most essential thing is life and that killing or oppressing one another will not solve anything. Remember the Sutra's words: "In the time of war

Raise in yourself the Mind of Compassion  
Helping living beings  
Abandon the will to fight.  
Wherever there is furious battle  
Use all your might  
To keep both sides' strength equal  
And then step into the conflict to reconcile"  
(Vimalakirti Nirdeśa)

Meditate until every reproach and hatred disappears, and compassion and love rise like a well of fresh water in your heart. Vow to work for awareness and reconciliation by the most silent and unpretentious means possible.

- c) *Contemplation on Detached Action*: Sit in the full or half lotus. Follow your breath as in 3e. Take a project in rural development or any other project which you consider important, as the subject of your contemplation. Examine the

purpose of the work, the methods to be used, and the people involved. Consider first the purpose of the project. See that the work is to serve, to alleviate suffering, to respond to compassion, not to satisfy the desire for praise or recognition. See that the methods used encourage cooperation between humans. Don't consider the project as an act of charity. Consider the people involved. Do you still see in terms of ones who serve and ones who benefit? If you can still see who are the ones serving and who are the ones benefiting, your work is for the sake of yourself and the workers, and not for the sake of service. The Prajnaparamita Sutra says, "The Bodhisattva helps row living beings to the other shore but in fact no living beings are being helped to the other shore." Determine to work in the spirit of Prajnaparamita, the spirit of detached action.

- d) *Contemplation on Detachment*: Sit in the full or half lotus. Follow your breath as in 3e. Recall the most significant achievements in your life and examine each of them. Examine your talent, your virtue, your capacity, the convergence of favorable conditions that have led to success. Examine the complacency and the arrogance that have arisen from the feeling that you are the main cause for such success. Shed the light of interdependence on the whole matter to see that the achievement is not really yours but the convergence of various conditions beyond your reach. See to it that you will not be bound to these achievements. Only when you can relinquish them can you really be free and no

longer assailed by them.

Recall the bitterest failures in your life and examine each of them. Examine your talent, your virtue, your capacity and the absence of favorable conditions that led to the failures. Examine to see all the complexes that have arisen within you from the feeling that you are not capable of realising success. Shed the light of interdependence on the whole matter to see that failures cannot be accounted for by your inabilities but rather by the lack of favorable conditions. Contemplate to see that you have no strength to shoulder these failures, that these failures are not your own self. See to it that you are free from them. Only when you can relinquish them can you really be free and no longer be assailed by them.

- e) *Contemplation on Non-abandonment*: Sit in the full or half lotus. Follow your breath as in 3e. Apply one of the exercise 5a, 5b, or 5c. See that everything is impermanent and without eternal identity. Contemplate to see that although things are impermanent and without lasting identity, they are nonetheless wondrous. While you are not bound by the conditioned, neither are you bound by the non-conditioned. Contemplate that the bodhisattva, though not caught by the five aggregates and by conditioned dharmas, neither does he get away from the five aggregates and conditioned dharmas. Although he can abandon the five aggregates and conditioned dharmas as if they were cold ashes, still he can dwell in the five aggregates and all conditioned dharmas

and not be drowned by them. He is like a boat upon the water. Contemplate to see that awakened people, while not being enslaved by the work of serving living beings, never abandon the work of serving living beings.

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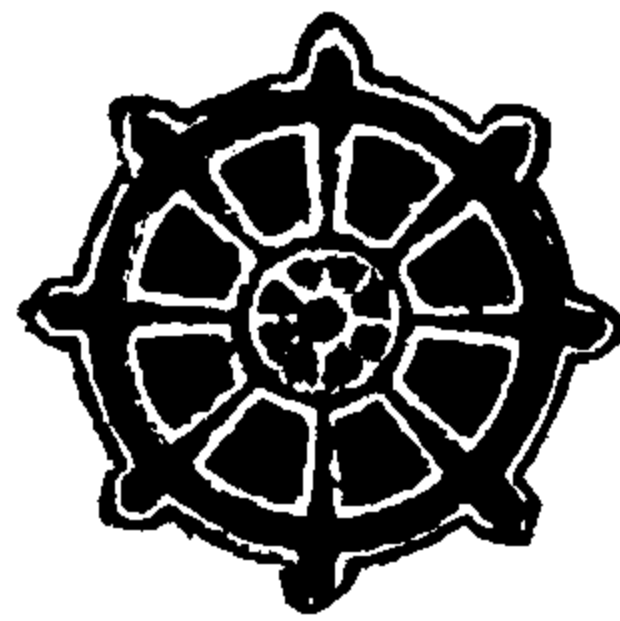
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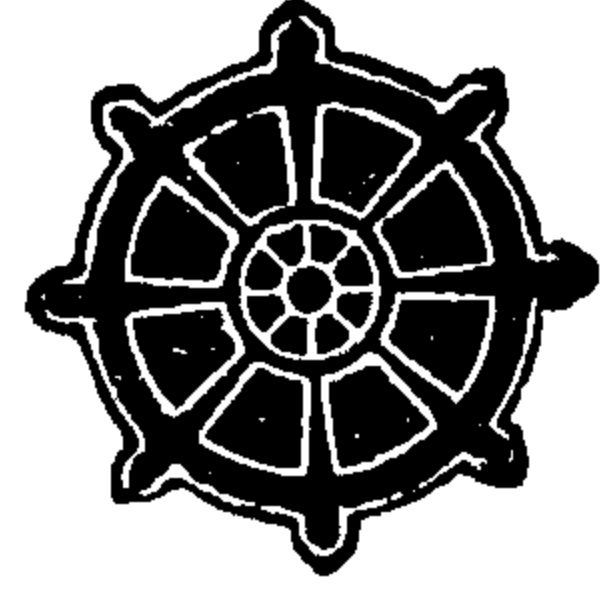
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# **The Girimananda Sutta**

**Ten Contemplations**

**With Commentary**

**Translated by .**

**Nanamoli Bhikkhu**

**THE WHEEL PUBLICATION No. 177**

# The Girimananda Sutta

## Ten Contemplations

with the Commentary  
from the Sārattha Samuccaya

**Translated from Pāli**

by

# Nanamoli Bhikkhu

**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**  
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## INTRODUCTION

*“I seek only the science that treats of the knowledge of myself and that teaches me how to die well and how to live well” (Montaigne).*

The Girimānanda Sutta is the 60th discourse in the “Tens” of the Anguttara Nikāya. But in the commentary to that Nikāya there will be found nothing about this discourse beyond some brief notes on one or two of the diseases mentioned in the fourth contemplation. The subjects dealt with in the discourse are, in fact, all explained either in the Visuddhi Magga (the keystone of the commentarial system) or elsewhere in the main Nikāya commentaries.

However, from a very early period the sutta has been popular as a “paritta” (protection) discourse for recitation, and it was included in an ancient anthology of such discourses called the “*Catubhāna-vāra*”. In the 13th Century A. C., or thereabouts, a Ceylon thera, whose name is not known and who is referred to as “a pupil of Ānanda Vanaratna Thera”, compiled a commentary to the *Catubhānavāra*, in order to save hunting up commentarial explanations scattered among many books. It is called the “*Sārattha samuccaya*” (Collection of Essential Meanings)”. In it are collected and linked together the relevant passages, mostly taken verbatim from their sources. In the case of this discourse, the material comes mainly from the Visuddhi Magga with some additions from the sub-commentary to that work, the Paramattha mañjusā and from other main Nikāya commentaries.

In this translation one or two short passages have been left out, either because their sense has been incorporated in the translation of the discourse itself, or because they concern word derivations of such a kind as lose their point in translation. On the other hand one or two passages abbreviated in the *Sārattha sumuccaya* have been restored, for the sake of clearness, to their original length by referring to the sources from which they were taken.

**Bhikkhu Nanamoli**

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa .*

**THE GIRIMANANDA SUTTA**  
*Anguttara Nikāya, Dasaka Nipāta 60*

Thus I heard. At one time the Blessed One was living at Sāvatti, in Jeta's grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's Park.

But on that occasion the Venerable Girimānanda was afflicted, suffering and gravely ill. Then the Venerable Ānanda went to the Blessed One and after paying homage to him sat down at one side. When he had done so, the Venerable Ānanda said to the Blessed One.

“Venerable Sir, the Venerable Girimānanda is afflicted, suffering and gravely ill. It would be good, Venerable Sir, if the Blessed One were to go to the Venerable Girimānanda, out of compassion.”—

“If, Ānanda, you go to the bhikkhu Girimānanda and tell him the ten contemplations, it is possible that the bhikkhu Girimānanda's affliction may be immediately cured.

What are the ten ?

They are contemplation of impermanence, contemplation of no-self, contemplation of foulness, contemplation of danger, contemplation of abandoning, contemplation of fading away, contemplation of cessation, contemplation of disenchantment with the whole world, contemplation of impermanence in all formations, mindfulness of in - and out - breathing.

(i) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of impermanence?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, or to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, considers thus: Matter is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, formations are impermanent, consciousness is impermanent. Thus he dwells contemplating impermanence in these five aggregates as objects of clinging. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of impermanence.

(ii) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of no-self?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, considers thus: The eye is not self, visible objects are not-self; the ear is not-self, sounds are not-self, the nose is not-self, odours are not-self; tongue is not-self, flavours are not-self; the body is not-self, tangible objects are not-self; the mind is not-self, mental objects are not-self. Thus he dwells contemplating no self in these internal and external bases. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of no-self.

(iii) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of foulness?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu reviews this body, up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair and contained in the skin, as full of many kinds of filth: In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, midriff, spleen, lights, bowels, entrails, dung, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil-of-the-joints, and urine. Thus he dwells contemplating foulness in this body. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of foulness.



(iv) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of danger ?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, considers thus: This body is the source of much pain and many dangers; for all sorts of afflictions arise in this body, that is to say, eye-disease, ear-disease, nose-disease, tongue-disease, body-disease; headache, mumps, mouth-disease, tooth-ache, coughs, asthma, colds, heart-burn, fever, stomach-ache, fainting, bloody-flux, gripes, cholera, leprosy, boils, plague, consumption, falling-sickness, itch, ringworm, small-pox, scab, pustule, jaundice, diabetes, piles, cancer, fistula; and afflictions due to bile, due to phlegm, due to wind, consisting in conflict of the humours, produced by change of climate, by unaccustomed activity, by violence, by Kamma-result; and cold, heat, hunger, thirst, excrement, and urine. Thus he dwells contemplating danger in this body. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of danger.

(v) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of abandoning ?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu does not tolerate a thought of lust when it arises, he abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, annihilates it. He does not tolerate a thought of ill-will when it arises, he abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, annihilates it. He does not tolerate a thought of cruelty when it arises, he abandons it, dispels it, makes an end of it, annihilates it. He does not tolerate evil, unprofitable states when they arise, he abandons them, dispels them, makes an end of them,

annihilates them. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of abandoning.

(vi) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of fading away?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, considers thus: This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is to say the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of every substratum of becoming, the destruction of craving, fading away, nibbāna. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of fading away.

(vii) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of cessation?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, considers thus: This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is to say the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of every substratum of existence, the destruction of craving, cessation, nibbāna. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of cessation.

(viii) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of disenchantment with the whole world?

Here, Ānanda, by abandoning any concern and clinging, any mental prejudices and beliefs, any inherent tendencies, regarding the world, by not clinging, he becomes disenchanted. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of disenchantment with the whole world.

(ix) And what, Ānanda, is contemplation of impermanence in all formations?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu is horrified, humiliated, and disgusted, by all formations. This, Ānanda, is called contemplation of impermanence in all formations.

(x) And what, Ānanda, is mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing?

Here, Ānanda, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down, having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, established mindfulness in front of him, just mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.

Breathing in long, he knows, 'I breathe in long'; or breathing out long, he knows, 'I breathe out long'.

Breathing in short, he knows, 'I breathe in short'; or breathing out short, he knows, 'I breathe out short.'

'Experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself; 'experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself.

'Calming the bodily formation, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself; 'Calming the bodily formation, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself.

'Experiencing rapture, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself; 'experiencing rapture, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself.

'Experiencing the mental formation, I shall breathe in,' he trains himself; 'experiencing the mental formation, I shall breathe out,' he trains himself.

‘Calming the mental formation, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘calming the mental formation, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Experiencing the mind, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘experiencing the mind, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Gladdening the mind, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘gladdening the mind, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Concentrating the mind, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘concentrating the mind, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Liberating the mind, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘liberating the mind, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Contemplating impermanence, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘contemplating impermanence, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Contemplating fading away, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘Contemplating fading away, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Contemplating cessation, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘Contemplating cessation, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

‘Contemplating relinquishment, I shall breathe in,’ he trains himself; ‘Contemplating relinquishment, I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.

This, Ānanda, is called mindfulness of breathing.

If, Ānanda, you go to the bhikkhu Girimānanda and tell him these ten contemplations, it is possible that the bhikkhu Girimānanda's affliction may be immediately cured on hearing them."

Then, when the Venerable Ānanda had learnt these ten contemplations from the Blessed One, he went to the Venerable Girimānanda and told them to him. Then, when the Venerable Girimānanda had heard these ten contemplations, his affliction was immediately cured. The Venerable Girimānanda rose from that affliction, and that is how his affliction was cured.

## COMMENTARY

(i) **CONTEMPLATION OF IMPERMANENCE** is the contemplation (perception) of impermanence in the five aggregates, which grasps rise and fall and alteration in them. "Rise" is their characteristic of being produced, "fall" is their characteristic of changing, "alteration" is ageing. For the characteristic of impermanence is seen by grasping rise and fall and alteration; and the five aggregates are called impermanent because of their arising and falling and altering. Again, the characteristic of impermanence is that, owing to the presence of which in the five aggregates, they are called impermanent; for it is owing to it that they are characterised as impermanent. And the characteristic of impermanence fails to be apparent because it is concealed by continuity owing to rise and fall not being kept in mind. But when continuity is disrupted by grasping rise and fall, then the characteristic of impermanence becomes apparent in its true nature. For when one is correctly observing rise and fall, and continuity has been exposed by observing the separateness of states, which occur in succession, then the characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent to him through the connectedness of states, but rather it becomes fully evident through their disconnectedness, as though they were iron darts.

Contemplation of suffering is implied, too, because the various aspects of the foul (No. 3) come under the characteristic of suffering, because the various aspects of danger (No. 4) are a cause of suffering, and because of the words, "what is impermanent is painful" (*Samyutta* xxxv, 4). So the aspect of perpetual oppression is the characteristic of suffering. The fact that formations are

unceasingly oppressed and afflicted by the rise and fall already grasped is what is called "oppression." And the characteristic of suffering fails to be apparent because it is concealed by the succession of postures owing to perpetual oppression not being kept in mind. But when the hiddenness of the suffering encountered in the postures is exposed by becoming aware of perpetual oppression, then the characteristic of suffering becomes apparent in its true nature. And it is owing to not keeping perpetual oppression in mind that the postures are able to conceal it. For when pain arises in one posture the next posture adopted shifts the pain, concealing it, as it were. And so from one posture to another. But once it is correctly known how the pain in each posture is shifted by changing that posture for another, then their concealment of the pain is exposed; because it has become evident that formations are all the time being overwhelmed by suffering. That is why suffering becomes apparent in its true nature, once the ability, encountered in the postures, to conceal pain is destroyed by one's becoming aware of perpetual oppression.

(ii) CONTEMPLATION OF NO SELF is the contemplation (perception) of no-self, which grasps the characteristic of no-self, called insusceptibility of mastery, in the five aggregates. These are shown in the form of the bases, and they are suffering in the sense of oppression. But the characteristic of no-self fails to be apparent because it is concealed by compactness owing to resolution of compactness not being kept in mind. But the resolution of compactness is effected by resolving it into its various elements and distinguishing each one thus: The earth (solidity) element is one, the water (cohesion)

element is another, and so on; and by recognising that there is compactness as a mass, compactness as a function, and compactness as an object. When this has been done, the characteristic of no-self becomes apparent in its true nature. But when material and immaterial states (states of mind and matter) have arisen mutually supporting each other, their *compactness as a mass* is assumed through failure to subject formations to compression owing to belief in their unity. And likewise *compactness of function* is assumed when, although differences in the functions of such states exist, they are taken as one. And likewise *compactness of object* is assumed when, although differences in the ways in which states that have objects make them their objects exist, they are taken as one. But when these compactnesses have been resolved by means of knowledge into their elements, they are seen to disintegrate, like foam subjected to pressure by the hand. They are mere phenomena that occur due to conditions, and are void. Thus it is that the characteristic of no-self becomes fully evident. (Visuddhi Magga p. 640 and Paramattha mañjūsā).

(iii) CONTEMPLATION OF FOULNESS is the contemplation (perception) that takes up the foul (unbeautiful, ugly) aspect in the parts of the body beginning with the head hairs.

(iv) CONTEMPLATION OF DANGER is the contemplation (perception) that takes up this disagreeable aspect in the body thus, "This body is liable to many dangers."

(v) CONTEMPLATION OF ABANDONING is the contemplation (perception) that makes the five kinds of abandoning, as given in the Sutta, its object.



(vi) **CONTEMPLATION OF FADING AWAY** is the contemplation (perception) that makes fading away its object.

(vii) **CONTEMPLATION OF CESSATION** is the contemplation (perception) that makes cessation its object.

(viii) **CONTEMPLATION OF DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE WHOLE WORLD** is the contemplation (perception) of dissatisfaction with all the world consisting of the three elements (i. e. the sense-desire world, the fine-material world and the immaterial world).

(ix) **CONTEMPLATION OF IMPERMANENCE IN ALL FORMATIONS** is the contemplation (perception) of all conditionally arisen things as impermanent.

(x) **MINDFULNESS OF IN-AND OUT-BREATHING** is the contemplation (perception) which grasps in-and out-breaths.

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(i) In the description of the Contemplation of Impermanence, **HERE, ĀNANDA** means, “Ānanda, here in this dispensation.” For this word “here” indicates the dispensation which is necessary for anyone to produce the contemplation of Impermanence, and it denies that any such state exists in other dispensations. For this is said, “Bhikkhus, only here is there a recluse, a second recluse, a third recluse, a fourth recluse; devoid of recluses are the teachings of other sectarians” (Majjhima sutta II, which refers to the four parts of saintship).

He said GONE TO THE FOREST and so on in order to show an abode suitable for mental development. Herein, GONE TO THE FOREST means any kind of forest offering the bliss of seclusion among the kinds of forests defined thus, "Having gone out beyond the boundary post, all that is forest" (Patisambhidā i, 176; Vibhanga 251), and "A forest abode is 500 bow-lengths distant" (Vinaya, iv, 183). TO THE ROOT OF A TREE: to the vicinity of a tree. TO AN EMPTY PLACE: to an empty, secluded space. And here it may be said that he has gone to an empty place if, instead of the forest or the root of a tree, he has gone to any of the other seven, that is, a rock, a hill-cleft, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a woodland solitude, an open space, a heap of straw (see Majjhima sutta 27). Thus he indicates an abode suitable to the three seasons, to humour, and to temperament, and one favourable to mental development (Visuddhi Ch. viii).

CONSIDERS THUS: reviews as follows.

MATTER: is any matter (*rūpa*) that has the characteristic of being molested (*ruppana*) because of the passage "It is molested (*ruppati*) that is why it is called matter (*rūpa*). By what is it molested? By cold, by heat, hunger, by thirst, by contact with gadflies, flies, wind, sun, and creeping things" (Saṃyutta xxii, 79). IS IMPERMANENT: is not permanent, not to be treated as permanent, because it has destruction and fall as its nature.

FEELING: Whatever has the characteristic of being felt as pleasant, painful, or neither-pleasant-nor-painful, is feeling. It is impermanent in the sense of its destruction.

**PERCEPTION:** Whatever has the characteristic of perceiving is perception. It is impermanent in the sense of its destruction.

**FORMATIONS:** Whatever have the characteristic of forming are formations. They are impermanent in the sense of their destruction.

**CONSCIOUSNESS:** Whatever has the characteristic of cognizing is consciousness. It is impermanent in the sense of its destruction.

**THUS . . . IN THESE:** in these as just stated; for the aggregate of matter is taught first in order, so that people may grasp it easily because, being the objective field of the eye etc., it is gross. Next is taught feeling, which feels matter as desirable or undesirable. Next the perception which grasps the aspects of the objective field of feeling, because of the words "what he feels, that he perceives" (Majjhima vol. i, 293). Next volitional formations which form volitions according to what is perceived. And lastly consciousness, on which feeling and so on depend, and which dominates them (Visuddhi-477).

**FIVE:** they are five because of the grouping together of all formed things, that resemble each other; and because that is the widest possible limit as the basis for the assumption of self and what belongs to self; and because they include all other kinds of so-called aggregates (Visuddhi 478).

**AGGREGATES AS OBJECTS OF CLINGING:** aggregates that are the resort of the several kinds of clinging.

**HE DWELLS CONTEMPLATING IMPERMANENCE :** he is one who observes the characteristic of impermanence as general characteristic. Also the characteristics of suffering and no-self are included, too, according to the method of the Category of Characteristics (in the *Nettipakarana*).

The similes for these aggregates are as follows. The matter aggregate as object of clinging is like a sick-room because it is the dwelling place, as the physical basis, sense-door, and sense-object, of the sick man, namely consciousness. The feeling aggregate as object of clinging is like the sickness because it afflicts. The perception aggregate as object of clinging is like the provocation of the sickness because the presence of feeling associated with greed etc. is due to perception of lust etc. The formations aggregate as object of clinging is like having recourse to what is unsuitable because it is the source of the feeling which is the sickness; for it is said, "Feeling as feeling is the formed that they form" (*Saṃyutta* xxii, 79), and likewise, "Because of unprofitable kamma having been done and stored up, resultant body-consciousness is arisen accompanied by pain" (*Dhammasaṅgani* § 556). The consciousness aggregate of clinging is like the sick man because it is not free from feeling, which is the sickness.

Also they are respectively like the prison, the punishment, the offence, he who inflicts the punishment and the offender. And they are respectively like the dish, the food, the curry sauce poured over the food, the server, and the eater.

Collectively they should be regarded as an enemy with drawn sword, as a burden, as a devourer, as

impermanent, as painful, as no-self, as formed as murderous.

Individually, matter should be regarded as a lump of froth because it will not stand squeezing; feeling as a bubble on water because it can only be enjoyed for an instant; perception as a mirage because it causes illusion; formations as a plantain trunk because they have no core; consciousness as a conjuring trick because it deceives.

And in particular, internal (corporeal) matter however sublime, should be regarded as foul; feeling should be regarded as painful because it is not free from the three kinds of suffering (i.e. suffering of pain, suffering of change and suffering of formations); perception and formations should be regarded as no-self because they are unmanageable; and consciousness should be regarded as impermanent because it is subject to rise and fall (Visuddhi 478-9).

One who regards the aggregates collectively thus, is not concerned for them. Regarding them individually thus he does not see a core in what has no core, and regarding them in particular thus he fully understands the different kinds of nutriment. Seeing internal materiality as foul he fully understands the body's nutriment that consists in solid food; seeing feeling as pain he fully understands feeling's nutriment that consists in contact; seeing perception and formations as no-self he fully understands their nutriment as consisting in volition; and seeing consciousness as impermanent he fully understands its nutriment as consisting in consciousness. He fully understands the four perversions of perception, that is the perception of the foul as beautiful, of the

painful as pleasant, of what is not-self as self, and the impermanent as permanent. He crosses the floods (see Visuddhi 480).

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(ii) In the description of the Contemplation of no-self, **THE EYE** has as its characteristic the sensitivity of the primary elements of matter that is ready for the impact of visible objects; or its characteristic is sensitivity of primary elements originated by kamma sourcing from desire to see (Vis. 444); or the eye is what enjoys and makes manifest a visible object. **IS NOT-SELF**: it is not-self, nor is it possessed of a self. Why? Because it does not come from anywhere, nor does it go anywhere after its fall. But rather, before its rise it had no individual reality; and after its fall its individual reality is completely broken up. And it occurs without any creator since it occurs between the past and the future in dependence on conditions (Vis. 484). The reason for no-self in each case should be understood in the same way.

**VISIBLE OBJECTS** have the characteristic of impinging on the eye (Vis. 446). It is the visible-object base that evidences the state of what is in the heart when that is undergoing a change of colour (Vis. 481). **IS NOT-SELF**: it is not-self, nor is it possessed of a self, because it is not susceptible of mastery and because of the absence of any core of self in it.

**THE EAR** has as its characteristic the sensitivity of primary elements that is ready for the impact of sounds; or its characteristic is sensitivity of primary elements originated by kamma sourcing from desire to hear (Vis. 444). **IS NOT-SELF** has the meaning given already.

**SOUNDS** have the characteristic of impinging on the ear (Vis. 446).

**THE NOSE** has as its characteristic the sensitivity of primary elements that is ready for the impact of odours; or its characteristic is sensitivity of primary elements originated by Kamma sourcing from desire to smell (Vis. 444). **ODOURS** have the characteristic of impinging on the nose (Vis. 447).

**THE TONGUE** has as its characteristic the sensitivity of primary elements that is ready for the impact of flavours; or its characteristic is sensitivity of primary elements originated by Kamma sourcing from desire to taste (Vis. 444). **FLAVOURS** have the characteristic of impinging on the tongue (Vis. 447).

**THE BODY** has as its characteristic the sensitivity of primary elements that is ready for the impact of tangible objects; or its characteristic is sensitivity of primary elements originated by kamma sourcing from desire to touch (Vis. 444). **TANGIBLE OBJECTS** are what can be touched that is reckoned as the three out of the four primary elements of matter (i. e. earth or solidity, fire or heat, air or mobility), excluding the water or cohesion element. They have the characteristic of impinging on the body.

**THE MIND** (*mano*) has the characteristic of measuring (*manana*). **MENTAL OBJECTS** (*dhamma*) bear (*dharati*) their own specific characteristics.

The bases are given as twelve in number because the six groups of consciousness each determine their own objects. In the order in which they are taught, the eye

comes first among the internal bases, being the most obvious since it has as its objective field what is visible and accompanied by impact. After that the ear base etc., which have as their objective fields what is invisible and accompanied by impact. Or alternatively, the eye base and ear base are taught first among the internal bases because they are specially helpful owing to their respective pre-eminence in seeing and hearing. After them, the three beginning with the nose base. And the mind base is taught last because it has the objective fields of the other five as its resort. But as regards the external bases, each one is taught next to its corresponding internal base because they are the respective resorts of the eye base and so on. Furthermore their order may be taken as defining the reasons for the arising of consciousness, for this is said, "Due to eye and visible objects eye consciousness arises . . . . . due to mind and mental objects mind consciousness arises" (Majjhima vol. i, 111).

Now the mind base and one part of the mental-object base are mentality; the remaining ten and a half bases are materiality (Vis. 483).

Here all formed things should be regarded as having no provenance and no destination, as inactive and unoccupied. Furthermore the internal bases should be regarded as an empty village, because they are destitute of lastingness, beauty, pleasure, and self; and the external bases as village-raiding robbers because they impinge on (attack) the internal bases (Vis. 484).

It is because of the vigour of the world's assumption that there is unbroken continuous occurrence of matter, feeling etc., that contemplation of impermanence is



taken in respect of the aggregates for the purpose of combatting that. And it is because of the vigour of its assumption that there is in the eye, ear etc., what belongs to a self, that contemplation of no-self is taken in respect of the bases. And here the character of no-self should be construed with those of impermanence and suffering according to the Netti method of the category of characteristics mentioned above.

IN THESE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL (literally, “in these bases which are in himself and external”). There being in conventional usage the assumption of a self (*attā*), they exist in that self; or belonging to that self of theirs they exist as its doors—is the meaning of “internal” (*ajjhata* = “in himself”). The “external” ones are visible objects etc., whether living or not, which are external to that.

BASES (*āyatana*), each of the states of consciousness and conscious concomitants (i. e. contact, feeling etc.) belonging to such and such a door-cum-object (e. g. eye-cum-visible object), owing to its own function of experiencing etc., extends over (*āyatati*), is active in, exerts itself in, strives in, some one among the pairs of bases beginning with eye-cum-visible-object. What is said is that these doors-cum-objects provide the range for (*tanonti*), stretch out, those states which are origins (*āya*); and as long as this suffering of the round of rebirths, which has been going on throughout the beginningless round of becoming and is extended over (*āyata*) the past, does not recede, so long do they lead on (*nayanti*) and cause occurrence of states of consciousness etc.—that is why they are called “bases” (*āyatana*) (Vis. 481).

HE DWELLS CONTEMPLATING NO-SELF: he dwells continuously seeing the state of no-self, the characteristic of no-self.

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(iii) In the description of the contemplation of the foul, THERE ARE: there are presently existing. IN THIS: is this which is described by the words “up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair and contained in the skin, as full of many kinds of filth” BODY: the physical body; for the physical body is called “body” (*kāya*) because it is a heap of filth, or because for such vile (*kucchita*) things as head hairs etc. it is the origin (*āya*). (By adding the brain as is done in the Patisambhidā these come to thirty-two parts beginning with head-hairs.) Herein, the construction is, “There are in this body head-hairs, there are in this body body-hairs.” What is meant by this? It is that any one who reviews this “fathom-long carcase” in all its extent starting from the soles of the feet upwards, from the top of the hair downwards, from the skin which contains it all round never sees anything in the least beautiful in it such as a pearl, a gem, a beryl, aloes, saffron, camphor, scented powder, etc., but he sees only the many extremely ill-smelling, disgusting, drab-looking, kinds of filth consisting of the assortment of head-hairs, body-hairs, and so on (Vis. 240-1)

For the descriptions of the individual parts and the method of developing concentration by contemplation of them see Visuddhi Magga ch. viii.

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(iv) In the description of the contemplation of Danger, **THIS BODY** is this physical body. **THE SOURCE OF MUCH PAIN**: the reason for many sorts of pain. **AND MANY DANGERS**: many troubles; the aspect of being very unenjoyable. **AFFLICTIONS**: afflictions because of of bringing pain; that is why cold, heat, hunger, thirst, excrement, and urine, are included as afflictions. **EYE-DISEASE** should be understood as disease of the physical basis of sight, for sensitivity when produced is not subject to disease. So eye-disease is a disease arisen in the physical eye, So too with those that follow. **DUE TO BILE** is what has bile as its reason, condition, and cause; aroused by bile, is what is said. So also with **DUE TO PHLEGM** and so on. **CONSISTING IN CONFLICT OF HUMOURS**: aroused by the disturbance of the three humours, bile, phlegm, and wind. **PRODUCED BY CHANGE OF CLIMATE** is a disease arisen through change from a very hot to a very cold climate; for jungle dwellers who go to live on marshy lands, or marsh-land dwellers who go to live in jungles, find the climate unsuitable. Likewise with the contrast between the climates of the jungle and the sea coast. **BY UNACCUSTOMED ACTIVITY**, produced by bodily behaviour, such as standing, sitting, burden-carrying, etc., that is different from one's normal habit. **BY VIOLENCE**: produced by other's violence, by torture, etc. **BY KAMMA RESULT**: produced by kamma done in the past, without any of these other reasons. Those arisen owing to the first seven of these reasons can be warded off, but no medicine, no protection, suffices to keep away that produced by kamma result. **CONTEMPLATING DANGER**: seeing with knowledge of danger, or seeing the body as a danger.

(v) In the contemplation of abandoning, DOES NOT TOLERATE A THOUGHT OF LUST: having wisely reviewed the danger in a thought of lust in the way beginning "This thought is unprofitable, this thought is reprehensible, this thought results in suffering" (see Majjhima Sutta 20), and "It leads to affliction for oneself" (see M. 19), he does not endure a thought of lust that has arisen, has come into being, has been produced, in regard to such and such an object; he does not let his mind reflect and dwell on it, or he does not let it dwell within. is the meaning. Not enduring it, what does he do? He ABANDONS IT, throws it out. What, with a basket like rubbish? No. Rather he DISPELS IT, prods it, pokes it, drives it out. What, with a goad like an ox? No. Rather he MAKES AN END OF IT, he causes it to be without any end remaining, he so acts that no end of it shall remain, not even in the life-continuum consciousness (subliminal consciousness). But how does he do so? HE ANNIHILATES IT; he so acts that it is completely arrested by the kind of abandoning consisting in arresting. So, too, with the other thoughts. WHEN THEY ARISE: as and when they arise; as soon as they arise, is what is said. When they have arisen once and have been dispelled, he does not look on with indifference when they arise a second time; he dispels them even though they arise a hundred times. EVIL, UNPROFITABLE STATES are those same thoughts beginning with the thought of lust; or they are all the nine principal worldly thoughts of which only these three are stated here, the rest being thoughts of relatives, country, immortality, ingratiating oneself with others, gain, honour and renown, avoiding other's contempt. (Papañca sūdanī i, 81-2)

(vi) In the description of the contemplation of fading away, this FADING AWAY (*virāga*) is nibbana, for, on coming to that, greed (*rāga*) etc. fade away (*virajjanti*). The contemplation makes that its object. And here it is the element of complete extinction with the fundamental five aggregates remaining that is meant, because the words “fading away of greed” point to the complete extinction of defilements.

He said THIS IS PEACEFUL THIS IS SUBLIME, indicating nibbana; for nibbana is peaceful because of the pacification of the defilements. And when one sits even for a whole day absorbed in the attainment of the fruition of the path, experiencing nibbana as peaceful, he only has the thought “peaceful.” But, besides “peaceful”, nibbana is called “sublime” in the sense of non-excitement; and when one sits even for a whole day absorbed in the attainment of fruition, experiencing nibbana as sublime, he only has the thought “sublime”; so it is also called “sublime”.

THE STILLING OF ALL FORMATIONS etc. are synonyms for that. For when one sits even for a whole day absorbed in the attainment of fruition, experiencing nibbana as the stilling of all formations, he has only the thought “stilling of all formations” . . . likewise when he sits absorbed in the attainment of fruition consisting in what has come to be called “nibbana” owing to the absence of craving for the three kinds of becoming that is called “*vaṇṇa*,” he has only the thought “nibbana, nibbana (no craving, no craving).” So it has acquired these names beginning with “the stilling of all formations.” The Text construes as follows: Not only is nibbana simply peaceful and sublime, but it is also the stilling etc.

The unformed state that has got the names “Stilling of all formations” and so on is to be treated as a state of fading away of greed. Where all formations are stilled, is the stilling of all formations.

There are four substrata for becoming; they are the substratum of sense-desire, that of the aggregates, that of defilements, and that of Kamma volitions. For sense-desires are called a “substratum” (*upadhi*) in the following word-sense: because of the fundamentalness of sense-desires either for pleasure that is described thus, “The pleasure and joy that arise owing to the five cords of sense desire is the satisfaction of sense desires”, or for pain that has the lack of satisfaction of them as its sign, pleasure therefore, has sense desires as its foundation (*upadhīyati*) here. And the aggregates are a substratum because of their fundamentalness for the the pain that has them as its roots. And the defilements are a substratum because they are fundamental for the states of woe. And kamma volitions are a substratum because they are fundamental for the suffering of becoming. THE RELINQUISHMENT OF ALL SUBSTRATA is where there is the relinquishing of all such substrata. That, on coming to which, craving is entirely destroyed, is THE DESTRUCTION OF CRAVING.

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(vii) In the description of the contemplation of Cessation, CESSATION is that by means of which formations cease here. The contemplation makes cessation its object. And here the word “Cessation” points to the fact that there is cause for the cessation of the aggregates, even those that are resultant, and so the element of complete extinction without remainder of the

five fundamental aggregates is included. The rest is as already stated.

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(viii) In the description of Disenchantment with the whole world, as regards ANY CONCERN and so on, CONCERN (*upāya*) is reckoned as craving and views. For craving and views “are concerned with” (*upenti*—lit. “go towards”) happy and unhappy destinies, thus they are called “concern”, because of the passage, “for one of perverted views, bhikkhus, one of two destinies is to be expected: hell or the animal world” (Anguttara, Duka Nipāta), and because the Contemplation of Disenchantment with the Whole World arises through the abandoning of the perverted view that causes the differentiation of the kamma that leads to unhappy destinies, and of the craving that causes the differentiation of the kamma that leads to happy destinies. For, like a cow to be slaughtered, when she is in the grip of the torment due to being burnt with fire and belaboured with cudgels, and is sick with it, she starts drinking the hot water although it hurts her and brings about her ruin, so the ordinary man who has perverted views undertakes kamma of the various kinds beginning with killing living things. But just as that same cow, through her craving for cold water, starts drinking cold water, which is entirely pleasant and eases her tortures, so the ordinary man who has craving for becoming starts kamma of the various kinds beginning with abstention from killing, which leads to a happy destiny (Vis. 525). Or the various kinds of concern are concerned with, occur in respect of, all states accompanied by cankers, because they only arise in thoughts accompanied by

greed. And the words, "In one, bhikkhus, who dwells seeing satisfaction in states productive of clinging, craving increases, and clinging with craving as its condition," indicate that they are included as conditions for the several kinds of clinging.

**CLINGING:** The four kinds of clinging are meant, that is clinging of sense-desire, of views, of rites and rituals, and of self theories. They firmly cling to, grasp, an object as a snake does a frog. They are given as four because of difference in mode of occurrence; but as craving and views they are two only. Owing to the abandoning of clinging, which is the condition for the various kinds of future becoming, there arises the Contemplation of Disenchantment with the Whole World.

As to the state consisting in mental prejudices (resorts) and beliefs, it is the beliefs in eternity and annihilation that are prejudices (resorts) of the mind. Just as where lions and so on, when they have been wandering elsewhere, return regularly to sleep, and places such as caves etc., are called their lairs (resorts), so too the eternity and annihilation views are called the resorts (prejudices) of the ordinary man's mind. For ordinary men mostly have eternity or annihilation as their prejudice (resort).

Or alternatively, **MENTAL PREJUDICES** only are the prejudices (resorts) of the mind as eternity and annihilation; **BELIEFS** are the view about self.

**INHERENT TENDENCIES:** (*anusaya*) continually inhere (*anu anu senti*), they occur, in a living being's continuity. This is the name for those defilements that have become firmly implanted and are ready to arise



when there is a reason.

ABANDONING is dispelling by substitution of opposite qualities etc. NOT CLINGING is not grasping with the mind. REGARDING THE WORLD.....HE BECOMES DISENCHANTED: as regards the whole world of the three elements, the sense-desire, fine-material, and immaterial, elements, he has no delight, is not enchanted, not attracted, nor attached, he does not hold to it; he seeks only nibbana, towards that he leans, tends, and inclines.

\* \* \*

(ix) In the description of the Contemplation of Impermanence in All Formations, BY ALL FORMATIONS means by all conditionally-arisen states, which are possessed of momentary dissolution. HORRIFIED: has horror, is oppressed. HUMILIATED: feels shame, is abashed. DISGUSTED: arouses disgust as though having seen something filthy.

\* \* \*

(x) In the description of Mindfulness of In- and Out-Breathing, GONE TO THE FOREST refers to an abode suitable to the development of mindfulness of breathing. SITS DOWN points out a posture that favours quiet energy and tends neither to idleness nor to agitation. FOLDED HIS LEGS and so on shows a firm way of sitting and easy occurrence of breathing, as well as the means for grasping the object. Herein, CROSS-WISE means sitting with the thighs fully locked. FOLDED is fixed. SET HIS BODY ERECT: having placed the upper part of the body erect, the eighteen backbones resting end to end. For the skin, flesh, and sinews, of one so

seated are not twisted; then feelings that would arise at every moment if they were twisted do not arise and the mind becomes one-pointed; the meditation subject does not collapse but it attains to growth and increase.

ESTABLISHED MINDFULNESS IN FRONT OF HIM (*parimukhaṃ satim̐ uppattḥapetvā*): having placed (*ṭhapa-yivā*) mindfulness (*satim̐*) facing (*abhimukhaṃ*) the meditation subject. Or alternatively, “‘*pari*’ has the sense of grasping, ‘*mukhaṃ*’ has the sense of outlet from obstruction, ‘*sati*’ has the sense of establishing; hence ‘*parimukhaṃ satim̐*’ is said” (*Paṭisambhidā* i, 176), which is the method in the *Paṭisambhidā*, to be understood here, too. Its meaning briefly is: “having made the outlet, which has been grasped, the establishment of mindfulness.”

JUST MINDFUL HE BREATHES IN, MINDFUL HE BREATHES OUT: having thus seated himself and established mindfulness, without abandoning that mindfulness, just mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out, he is a mindful worker is what is said.

Now, in order to show the ways in which he is a mindful worker, “HE BREATHES IN LONG” and so on is said. For in the *Paṭisambhidā*, in the analysis of the clause, “mindful he breathes in mindful he breathe out,” it is said, “He is a mindful worker in thirty-two ways. In one who knows one-pointedness of mind and non-distraction by means of long in-breathing mindfulness is established; owing to that mindfulness and that knowledge he is a mindful worker. In one who knows one-pointedness of mind and non-distraction by means of long out-breathing . . . by means of breathing in contemplating

relinquishment . . . . by means of breathing out contemplating relinquishment mindfulness is established; owing to that mindfulness and that knowledge he is a mindful worker” (Patisambhidā i, 176-7).

Herein, BREATHING IN LONG is producing a long in-breath. “*Assāsa*” is the breath issuing out; “*passāsa*” the breath entering in; so the Vinaya Commentary has it, but in the Suttanta commentaries it is the other way around. Herein, at the time when a child comes out from the womb, first the wind from within goes out and subsequently the wind from without enters in with fine dust, strikes the palate, and is extinguished. Thus firstly should “*assāsa*” and “*passāsa*” be understood.

But their length and shortness should be understood by way of extent. For just as water or sand spread over a spatial extent is called a “long water”, a “long sand”, a “short water” a “short sand,” so, in the case of elephants’ or snakes’ bodies, in and out-breaths distributed in minute quantities slowly fill the long extent called their physical structures and slowly go out of them. That is why they are called long. They quickly fill the short extent called the physical structure of a dog, a hare, or such creatures, and quickly go out; that is why they are called short. And in the case of humans, some breathe in and out long by way of time and spatial extent like elephants and snakes; others short like dogs, hares, and so on. Of these, therefore, the breaths that come out and go in over a long extent of space are called long in time, and those that come out and go in over a brief extent of space short in time.

Herein, this bhikkhu knows “I breathe in, I breathe out long” while breathing in and breathing out long in

nine ways. And in him who knows thus it should be understood that the development of the foundation of mindfulness consisting in the Contemplation of Body is perfected in one aspect, according to what is said in the *Paṭisambhidā*: “How, breathing in long, does he know, ‘I breathe in long,’ breathing out long, does he know, ‘I breathe out long’? He breathes in a long in-breath reckoned by extent; he breathes out a long out-breath reckoned by extent; he breathes in and breathes out long in-breaths and out-breaths reckoned by extent. As he breathes in and breathes out long in-breaths and out-breaths reckoned by extent, zeal arises. Through zeal he breathes in a long in-breath more subtle than before reckoned by extent; through zeal he breathes out a long out-breath . . . Through zeal he breathes in and breathes out long in-breaths and out-breaths more subtle than before reckoned by extent. As, through zeal, . . . reckoned by extent, joy arises. Through joy he breathes in a long in-breath more subtle than before reckoned by extent; Through joy he breathes out . . . . Through joy he breathes in and breathes out . . . As, through joy, he breathes in and breathes out long in-breaths and out-breaths more subtle than before reckoned by extent, his mind turns away from the long in-breaths and out-breaths, and equanimity is established. Long in-breathings and out-breathings in these nine ways are the ‘body;’ the establishment (foundation) is mindfulness; the contemplation is Knowledge; the body is the establishment (foundation) but it is not the mindfulness; the mindfulness is both the establishment (foundation) and the mindfulness. By means of that mindfulness and that knowledge he contemplates that ‘body.’ Hence it is called ‘the development of the foundation

(establishment) of mindfulness consisting in contemplation of the body in the body' ” (Ps. i, 177).

So also in the case of **SHORT** breaths. But there is this difference: while in the former case “a long in-breath reckoned by extent” is said, here “a short in-breath reckoned by brevity” has been handed down. So it should be construed with the word ‘short’ as far as the phrase “Hence it is called ‘the development of the foundation (establishment) of mindfulness consisting in Contemplation of the body in the body.’ ” So it should be understood that it is when he knows in-breaths and out-breaths in these nine ways by “extent” and by “brevity” that this bhikkhu, breathing in long, knows, “I breathe in long, . . . breathing out short, knows “I breathe out short”.

The long kind and the short as well,  
 The in-breath and the out-breath, too—  
 Such are the four kinds that happen  
 At the nose-tip of the bhikkhu who knows thus.

“**EXPERIENCING THE WHOLE BODY I SHALL BREATHE IN . . . . . SHALL BREATHE OUT,**” HE TRAINS HIMSELF: making known, making plain, the beginning, middle, and end, of the entire in-breath body, I shall breathe in, he trains himself; making known, making plain, the beginning, middle, and end, of the entire out-breath body, I shall breathe out, he trains himself. Making them thus known and plain, he both breathes in and breathes out with consciousness associated with knowledge. That is why “‘I shall breathe in . . . . . I shall breathe out,’ he trains himself” is said. For to one bhikkhu the beginning of the in-breath

body or the out-breath body distributed in minute quantities is plain but not the middle or the end; he is only able to grasp the beginning and is worried about the middle and the end. To another the middle is plain, not the beginning or the end; he is only able to grasp the middle and is worried about the beginning and the end. To another the end is plain, not the beginning or the middle; he is only able to grasp the end and is worried about the beginning and the middle. To yet another all stages are plain; he is able to grasp them all and is nowhere worried. Pointing out that one should be like the last-mentioned, he said “‘experiencing the whole body, I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out,’ he trains himself.”

Herein, HE TRAINS HIMSELF means that he strives, endeavours, thus. Restraint in one such as this is training in the Higher Virtue; his consciousness is training in the Higher Consciousness; his understanding is training in the Higher Understanding. So he trains in, cultivates, develops, repeatedly practises, these three courses of training in respect of that object, by means of that mindfulness, by means of that bringing-to-mind. Thus should the meaning be regarded here. •

Herein, because he should, in the early stage, only breathe in and out, and should not do anything else at all, and after that should apply himself to the arousing at knowledge and so on, therefore only the present tense, “he *knows*, ‘I breathe in,’ . . . he *knows* ‘I breathe out’ ” is used in the text here. But in what follows, the future tense, “‘experiencing the whole body I *shall breathe in*’ ” and so on, is used in order to show the aspect of arousing knowledge etc. that has to be undertaken subsequently.

“‘CALMING THE BODY FORMATION, I SHALL BREATHE IN . . . . SHALL BREATHE OUT,’ HE TRAINS HIMSELF.” Calming, completely calming, causing to cease, quieting, the gross bodily formation, I shall breathe in, shall breathe out, he trains himself (The ‘bodily formation’ is a term for in - and out-breaths). And here both the gross and subtle state, and the progressive calming, should be understood. For previously, at the time when the bhikkhu has not grasped them, his body and his mind are disturbed and gross. And when the grossness of body and mind is not quieted the in-and out-breaths are gross; they occur so strongly that his nostrils are inadequate and he keeps breathing in and out through his mouth. But when the body and the mind have been grasped, then they become quite quiet. When they are quiet the in- and out-breaths eventually occur so subtly that he wonders whether they exist or not. Suppose a man stands still, after running, or descending from a hill, or putting down a large burden from his head, then his in-and out-breaths are gross, his nostrils are inadequate, and he keeps breathing in and out through his mouth. But when he has got rid of his fatigue and bathed and drunk and put a wet cloth on his heart, and he lies in the cool shade, then his in- and out-breaths eventually occur so subtly that he wonders whether they exist or not. So previously, at the time when the bhikkhu has not grasped them . . . that he wonders whether they exist or not. Why is that? Because previously, at the time when he has not grasped them, he has no such idea, consideration, awareness, or reflection, as “I am calming each bodily formation;” but when he has grasped them he has. So his body formation is subtle at the time when he has grasped them compared with the time when he has not. Hence the Ancients said :

“When mind and body are disturbed,  
 Then in excess it occurs;  
 When the body is undisturbed,  
 Then with subtlety it occurs.”

When grasping them the bodily formation is gross, and it is subtle in the first jhāna access; also it is gross in that and subtle in the first jhāna; in the first jhāna and second jhāna access it is gross, and in the second jhāna subtle; in the second jhāna and third jhāna access it is gross and in the third jhāna subtle; in the third jhāna and fourth jhāna access it is gross, and in the fourth jhāna it is exceedingly subtle and even reaches suspension. This is the opinion of the Dīgha and Saṃyutta Reciters. But the Majjhima Reciters have it that it is more subtle in the access than in the jhāna immediately below, saying: in the first jhāna it is gross, and in the second jhāna access it is subtle, and so on. But it is the opinion of all that the bodily formation occurring at the time of not grasping becomes calmed at the time of grasping; the bodily formation occurring at the time of grasping becomes calmed in the access to the first jhāna . . . The bodily formation occurring in the access to the fourth jhāna becomes calmed in the fourth jhāna. This, firstly is the method in the case of serenity (concentration).

But as regards insight, the bodily formation occurring when not grasping the meditation subject is gross, and in grasping the four great primary elements of matter it is subtle; that too is gross, and in grasping derived materiality it is subtle; that too is gross, and in grasping the immaterial (i. e. consciousness and conscious concomitants) it is subtle; that too is gross, and in grasping the conditions of mind and matter it is subtle;



that too is gross, and in seeing mentality-materiality with its particular conditions it is subtle; that too is gross, and in insight that makes the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and no self its object it is subtle; that too is gross in weak insight, and in strong insight it is subtle. Herein, the calming of each subsequent one in comparison with the one preceding should be understood in the way already stated. Thus should both the gross and subtle state, and the progressive calming, be understood here.

But in the *Paṭisambhidā* its meaning is given as follows with objection and reply. "How, thinking 'calming the bodily formation, I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out,' does he train himself? What are the bodily formations? They are long in-breaths . . . out-breaths; these things, belonging to the body, being bound up with the body, are bodily formations. Calming, tranquillizing, causing to cease, quieting those bodily formations, he trains himself . . . Such bodily formations whereby there is bending backwards, sideways, all ways, forwards and shaking, trembling, moving, of the body,—calming the bodily formation, I shall breathe in, he trains himself, calming the bodily formation I shall breathe out, he trains himself. Such bodily formations whereby there is no bending backwards, sideways, all ways, forwards, no shaking, trembling, moving of the body, peacefully, subtly, calming the bodily formation I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out, he trains himself.

"If it is thus (it is objected) that calming the bodily formation, I shall breathe in, he trains himself, calming the bodily formation, I shall breathe out, he trains himself"—then this being so, there is no production of

awareness of wind, there is no production of in-and out-breathings, there is no production of mindfulness of breathing, and there is no production of concentration through mindfulness of breathing, and so the wise neither enter into, nor emerge from, that attainment.

“Yet since it is thus, (it is replied) that ‘calming the bodily formation. I shall breathe in, he trains himself, calming the bodily formation, I shall breathe out, he trains himself’—then this being so, there is production of awareness of wind, there is production of in-and out breathings, there is production of mindfulness of breathing, and there is production of concentration through mindfulness of breathing, and so the wise enter into, and emerge from, that attainment.

“Like what? Just as when a metal gong is struck; at first gross sounds occur, and consciousness occurs because the sign of the gross sounds is well grasped, well-brought-to-mind, well considered; and when the gross sounds have ceased, then afterwards faint sounds occur, and consciousness occurs because the sign of the faint sounds is well-grasped, well-brought-to mind, well-considered; and when the faint sounds have ceased, then afterwards consciousness occurs, because it has the sign of the faint sounds as object; so indeed, if first gross in-breaths and out-breaths occur and consciousness does not become distracted because the sign of the gross in-and out-breaths is well-grasped, well-brought-to-mind, well-considered; and when the gross in-and out-breaths have ceased, then afterwards faint in-and out-breaths occur and consciousness does not become distracted because the sign of the faint in-and out-breaths is well-grasped, well-brought-to mind, well-considered; and

when the faint in-and out-breaths have ceased, then afterwards consciousness does not become distracted, because it has the sign of the faint in-and out-breaths as object.

“This being so, there is production of awareness of wind . . . and so the wise enter into, and emerge from, that attainment.

“Breathings in and out calming the bodily formation are the ‘body’; the establishment (foundation) is ‘mindfulness’; the contemplation is ‘knowledge’; the body is establishment (foundation), but it is not mindfulness; the mindfulness is both establishment (foundation) and mindfulness. By means of that mindfulness and that knowledge he contemplates that ‘body.’ Hence it is called ‘the development of the establishment (foundation) of mindfulness consisting in contemplation of the body in the body’ ” (Ps. i, 184-6).

This, in the first place, is the word - commentary here, following the order of the first tetrad, which is set forth as contemplation of the body. The first tetrad is given as a meditation subject for a beginner; but the other three tetrads are set forth respectively as contemplation of feeling, mind, and mental objects, for one who has attained the first jhāna. If, therefore, a meditator who is a beginner wants to develop this meditation subject and reach arahatship with the four kinds of discrimination through insight that has as its basis the fourth jhāna produced through mindfulness of breathing, he should undertake the practice as directed in the Visuddhi Magga (ch. viii).

But as regards the other three tetrads, EXPERIENCING RAPTURE means making rapture known, making it plain, I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out, he trains himself. Herein, rapture is experienced in two ways, that is, as object and as non-delusion. How is it experienced as object? He attains the first two jhānas, in which rapture is present. At the moment of attainment rapture is then experienced by him as object through the obtaining of jhāna because the object is experienced. How as to non-delusion? Having attained the two jhānas in which rapture is present and emerged from them, he treats the rapture associated with the jhāna as destructible and subject to fall. At the moment of insight rapture is then experienced by him as non-delusion by penetrating the characteristics. For this is said in the *Paṭisambhidā*, “In one who knows one-pointedness of mind and non-distraction through breathing in long, mindfulness is established; by means of that mindfulness and that knowledge that rapture is experienced. In one who knows one-pointedness of mind and non-distraction through breathing out long . . . breathing in short . . . breathing out short . . . breathing in experiencing the whole body . . . breathing out experiencing the whole body . . . breathing in calming the bodily formation . . . breathing out calming the bodily formation, mindfulness is established. By means of that mindfulness and that knowledge that rapture is experienced. It is experienced by one who adverts, knows, sees, reviews, directs the mind, resolves with faith, exerts energy, establishes mindfulness, concentrates the mind, understands with understanding, directly knows what is to be directly known, fully knows what is to be fully known, abandons what is to be abandoned,

develops what is to be developed, realizes what is to be realized. Thus is that rapture experienced" (Ps. i, 187).

The remaining clauses in this tetrad, that is EXPERIENCING BLISS, EXPERIENCING THE MENTAL FORMATION, and CALMING THE MENTAL FORMATION, should be understood as to their meaning in the same way. But this is the difference here. EXPERIENCING BLISS should be understood by way of three jhānas and EXPERIENCING THE MENTAL FORMATION by way of four. The mental formation consists in the two aggregates of feeling and perception. And here in order to show the plane of insight, it is said in the Paṭisambhidā regarding the clause "experiencing bliss" as follows, "bliss: there are two kinds of bliss, bodily bliss and mental bliss." (Ps. i, 188). CALMING THE MENTAL FORMATION means calming the gross mental formation, causing it to cease. And this should be understood in detail in the same way as for the bodily formation. Moreover here, in the "rapture" clause, feeling is stated under the heading of rapture; but in the "bliss" clause it is stated in its own form. In the two "mental-formation" clauses it is feeling associated with perception because of the passage "perception and feeling, these states belong to the mind, being bound up with the mind, they are the mental formation" (Ps. i, 188). So this tetrad should be understood stated by way of contemplation of feeling.

In the third tetrad, EXPERIENCING THE MIND should be understood by way of four jhānas.

GLADDENING THE MIND: heartening, gladdening, pleasing, delighting, the mind, I shall breathe in, shall breathe out, he trains himself. Herein, there is

gladdening in two ways: through concentration and through insight. How through concentration? He attains the two jhānas in which rapture is present. At the moment of attaining he pleases, gladdens, the mind with the associated rapture. How through insight? Having attained the two jhānas in which rapture is present and having emerged from them, he treats the rapture associated with the jhāna as destructible and subject to fall. Thus at the moment of insight he pleases, gladdens, the mind by making the rapture associated with the jhāna the object. So “‘gladdening the mind, I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out,’ he trains himself” is said of one who practises thus.

CONCENTRATING THE MIND means centering the mind evenly, placing it evenly, on the object by means of the first jhāna etc. But in one who, having attained those jhānas and emerged from them, treats the consciousness associated with jhāna as destructible and subject to fall, there arises momentary one-pointedness of mind owing to penetration of these characteristics at the moment of insight. When he centers the mind evenly, places it evenly on the object too by means of the momentary one-pointedness of mind arisen thus, it is said of him “‘concentrating the mind, I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out.’”

LIBERATING THE MIND: setting free, releasing, the mind from the five hindrances by means of the first jhāna; from applied and sustained thought by means of the second jhāna; from rapture by means of the third jhāna; from pleasure and pain by means of the fourth jhāna. Or, having attained those jhānas and emerged from them, he treats the consciousness associated with

the jhāna as destructible and subject to fall. At the moment of insight he breathes in and breathes out setting free, releasing, the mind from the perception of permanence by means of the contemplation of impermanence, from the perception of pleasure by means of the contemplation of suffering, from the perception of self by means of the contemplation of no-self, from delight by means of the contemplation of revulsion, from greed by means of the contemplation of fading away of greed, from origination by means of the contemplation of cessation, from clinging by means of the contemplation or relinquishment. Hence it is said "liberating the mind, I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out, he trains himself."

But in the fourth tetrad, as regards CONTEMPLATING IMPERMANENCE, firstly, here the impermanent should be understood, and impermanence, and the contemplation of impermanence, and one contemplating impermanence. Herein, the five aggregates are "*impermanent*." Why? Because of rise and fall and alteration. "*Impermanence*" is the state of the rise and fall and alteration in those same aggregates; or it is their absence after having been; it is the break-up of produced things owing to their continuous momentary dissolution consisting in their not remaining the same, is the meaning. "*Contemplation of impermanence*" is contemplation of matter etc. as impermanent owing to that impermanence. "*One contemplating impermanence*" is one possessed of that contemplation. So it is one such as this breathing in and breathing out who should here be understood thus "contemplating impermanence I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out, he trains himself."

CONTEMPLATING FADING AWAY: but here there are two kinds of fading away, that is fading away as destruction, and absolute fading away. Herein, "*fading away as destruction*" is the continuous momentary dissolution of formations; "*absolute fading away*" is nibbāna. "*Contemplation of fading away*" is both insight and the path, occurring as seeing both kinds. And one who breathes in and breathes out possessed of that twofold contemplation should be understood thus, "contemplating fading away, I shall breathe in . . . . shall breathe out, he trains himself "

Likewise as regards the clause CONTEMPLATING CESSATION.

In the case of CONTEMPLATING RELINQUISHMENT, relinquishment is here of two kinds, that is, relinquishment as giving up and relinquishment as entering into. Relinquishment itself as contemplation is contemplation of relinquishment; this is a term for insight and the path. For it is by means of substitution of opposite qualities that insight gives up defilements together with aggregate-producing volitions, and through seeing the unsatisfactoriness of what is formed and through inclining towards the opposite of that, which is nibbāna, it enters into nibbāna; thus it is called both "relinquishment as giving up" and "relinquishment as entering into." It is by means of cutting off that the path gives up defilements together with aggregate-producing volitions, and it enters into nibbāna by making it its object; thus it too is called both "relinquishment as giving up" and "relinquishment as entering into." And both of these are called "contemplation" because of the continuous seeing of each preceding kind of knowledge.



And one who breathes in and breathes out possessed of that twofold contemplation of relinquishment should be understood thus, "contemplating relinquishment I shall breathe in . . . shall breathe out, he trains himself."

This tetrad is stated by way of pure insight only. But the preceding three are by way of concentration and insight. Thus should the development of mindfulness of breathing in and out with its sixteen clauses be understood according to the four tetrads (*Visuddhi Magga* Ch. viii).



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Miss K. Jayawardana for the  
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**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**  
**Kandy 1976 Sri Lanka**

Reprinted from  
THE MAHA BODHI (Calcutta)  
Vol. 82, Nos. 3, 10, 11/12 (1974)

14712

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**Kandy.**

## THE VALUE OF BUDDHISM FOR THE MODERN WORLD

“EVERY living and healthy religion,” Santayana has said, “has a marked idiosyncrasy. Its power consists in its special and surprising message and in the bias which that revelation gives to life.” What is the special and surprising message of Buddhism? What is the lasting revelation of its leader, Gautama Buddha? We are concerned here not merely with Gautama’s utility for past generations (though that has been great) but with the truth of his moral vision for all human times and hence for modern times.

Let us consider first his conception of the problem of human life, and second his conception of its solution.

### I

The problem of our lives begins in the fact that we are always beset by problems. Human life is problematic. Scarcely do we achieve settlement and certainty than we are unsettled by new difficulties. Fixities and finalities elude us. In the words of Gautama’s younger contemporary, Heraclitus of Ephesus, “All things flow; nothing abides.” Heraclitus, like Gautama, must have been caught in that “urban ‘revolution’” that swept ancient civilizations, and he must have seen that no perspective, no culture, no standard ultimately stands: “we are and we are not.”

The problem of human life can be expressed otherwise. Man is born without a fixed identity. He is born without instincts — except, if you will, the instinct to live and to



learn and to grow. Man is indeterminate at birth. In consequence, his life is a quest; man is a wanderer and a pilgrim, seeking an identity, a role, and a home. Man's symbolism is both cause and result of this quest. For in virtue of the fact that he acquires and invents languages the continuous choice among many alternatives and roles forces itself upon him, and he lives, unlike the animals, in a tower of Babel; and his attempt to find a determination for his own life in the midst of myriad possibilities drives him to adopt this or that symbolic role for himself. Thus we go through life seeking, asking and knocking — trying to discover who we are — trying to fulfill our natures. The ultimate problem of life, which man has sought to solve through his religious activity, is just this: Who am I? How might I and others achieve the most abundant fulfillment possible?

This problem expresses itself at two levels. First of all, man is incomplete in so far as the basic hungers of his body and personality go unmet. The power of these needs is coercive; and when they are not fulfilled man experiences pain. Primitive religion is primarily an attempt to cope with such pain, through various techniques. But man is incomplete and consequently questing at another level. Not only do his appetites lack completion; something else cries out for fulfillment. Not only does man seek food, crops, game, a mate, children, a long and approved life; man wants an identity and a fulfillment greater than any of these particular fulfillments. Not only does man undergo privation and pain and eventual death; he *knows*, as Pascal says, that he dies. And so he enters into the realm of suffering. Suffering arises out of a sense of the difference between what is and what might be. It is the tragic sense. It is

the realization that creative possibilities have not or will not be fulfilled: that man can never fully "find" or complete himself; that time is greater than one moment, and eternity vaster than time; that death conquers individual life, but that collective life transcends individual death; that no matter how rich or full a single life may be, it cannot begin to encompass the richness and fullness of the multiform cosmic life around it, and is destined to be singular and lonely in the midst of that great abundance. Even the primitive religions represent inchoate efforts to deal with this problem and to find a fully satisfying identity. The advanced religions of mankind give overt expression to this side of man's problem — his suffering — and endeavour to cope with it, in thought and action; and Gautama must be seen as one of those who thus struggled with the problem of suffering.

There is a secondary aspect to the problem of human suffering. Our deep desire to find an identity leads to the adoption of some role which at the outset seems to satisfy the need for identity yet at the same time frustrates that very need; for we are often not fully satisfied with one particular role, yet our very adoption of it, necessitated by our need, has led us to take it up with fervent loyalty and, perhaps, with idolatry. We continuously seek closure in our meanings and identities, yet we cannot tolerate the constrictions they lay upon us, for we demand newer and deeper identities. Moreover, if we live long enough, the processes of living crack open the closures we have built and force us to construct new meanings and roles. Thus our roles come to dominate us; we fain would let them go, yet we cannot. So we find that we are enslaved by our own desire for freedom. Our quest for identity seems doomed. For this inveterate desire for identity issues in habits and in character-structure

which is well nigh impossible to break and which must yet be broken if we are to be liberated and saved from constriction and death. In Paul's language, "the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

We are doomed to this kind of death in life because we are caught up in a partial commitment and in the domination of a demonic good. This death is not physical annihilation but is on the contrary the torture which one must suffer who cannot die; it is, in the language of Gautama's India, karma and rebirth; it is the perpetuation of compulsive passion and the continuation of that fatal winding of a chain (*nidānas*) of events which begins in indigenous ignorance and issues always in suffering. For while in a sense we do die when the object of our devotion and the symbol of our identity changes or passes away — since "decay is inherent in all compound things" — yet our dispositions (*gunas*, as the Sankhya calls them) persist and continue to give rise to the same old structures of habit of the same old Adam.

The whole doctrine of the non-existence of the soul (Anattā-vāda) and that of "dependent origination" are designed to deal with the age-old problem of the past and to do so in a way that lends the problem to moral solution. To say that rebirth takes place without anything substantial migrating (after the manner of a seal being pressed upon wax) is to say that a man's past character is his fate but that he can moment by moment *change* his character. These doctrines have both a metaphysical and moral advantage, because they avoid the tyranny of eternalism and the hopelessness of nihilism. To describe our suffering as caused by dispositions and habits is to take the first step toward their removal.

Buddha's personal success and widespread appeal lie partly in the directness of his approach. He begins with the prime fact of unhappiness. Pain and suffering are recurrent and unceasing. We crave and yearn for what is or what is not; and when we obtain it, we yet yearn for more. We, like all things, change: health passes into sickness, youth into old age, and life into death. But we insist on setting our hearts or minds on something that does not seem to change — and we always suffer disappointment. Yet, even to have what we want is pain; for no matter what we want or what we get, we are never satisfied. Man oscillates, as Schopenhauer says, between the restlessness of need and the boredom of satiety, and his will is forever uneasy. Lacking a generic sense of satisfaction, man cannot help feeling that his life is a mistake and a miscarriage; he suffers, in Spinoza's language, the sadness that is deeper than any specific disappointment or *ennui*; that is the sadness of the life-urge itself, the sadness of impotence.

If we suffer, what are we, and what are the sources in us that lead to suffering? Much of traditional religious and philosophical thought directly contradicts the answer that Gautama gives to this question. That thought holds that in the midst of untruth, darkness, death, incompleteness, change, and time, there abides a truth, light, life, completion, permanence, and eternity to which man must turn if he is to be saved from suffering; man's primal error, therefore, consists in his "fall" from this domain of permanence into the domain of change, which he mistakes for the permanent. But Gautama's analysis is different. He does agree with traditional Hindu thought in asserting that man's first major mistake is to take as real and important what is at bottom illusory, namely, the empirical self. But he radically

departs from that tradition and indeed all the great religious traditions by holding, like Hume, that the self is nothing more than a complex of ingredients, a bundle or a stream of matter and of perception, a collection of body, mind, and formless consciousness. Here he typically rejects two logical extremes, materialism and idealism (and their uneasy compromise, dualism). Not only is there no permanent self; there is no permanent *ātman*, within or beyond, human or super-human; there is *nothing* permanent, here or here-after, to which man can turn for guidance, succor or refuge.

The term "self", therefore, has no fixed referent, for what it commonly denotes is, in time, a changing stream, and, in space, an aggregate of five *skandhas* or "graspings" bound together in an interaction that forever changes. These graspings — the body, feelings, ideas based on sense-perception, instinctual and subconscious drives, and conscious evaluations — are the essence of the organism and its individuality, if we may speak of that. The organism and its parts clutches, selects, and organizes; it prehends, in Whitehead's sense, its world; it lays hold of, completes, forms, transforms, and retains its world. These *skandhas* are the seat of our loves and hates, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows; for they are polar, and as such participate in the pervasive and ceaseless opposition in the world. To act on the presupposition that our self is identical with these *skandhas* is to be clutched by their clutchings and to be caught up in their oscillations and to suffer the sadness or disappointment or the outworn satisfactions which they undergo. Man's problem is that, in the midst of incomplete meanings and values, he is driven to find and assert some form of completion, but his assertions, however satisfying and complete they seem to be, never

ultimately satisfy and always remain partial and mutable. No matter what the self identifies itself with, it cannot seem to find a final and sovereign identity.

In time, the self is a stream, and with great penetration Gautama analyzes the causal chain that leads him backward from suffering to its ultimate source. We should not suffer had we not first been born as a result of our predisposition to birth and, behind that, our mental clinging to objects. Clinging is due to thirst or *tanhā*—the consequence, in turn, of sense experience, sense-object-contact, and the organs of knowledge. These led us back to the embryo and its cause in some incipient awareness—the product of experiences in some past life, which derive at last from ignorance or *avidyā*. *Avidyā* is the blindness of all organismic striving; it is the Greek *eros*, Hobbes' "appetite" and "aversion," Spinoza's "power," Schopenhauer's "will to live," Nietzsche's "will to power," and Bergson's *elan vital*. We suffer. Why? We are driven blindly to hold what we have and to obtain what we have not. In our consciousness we keep and cling to what we are and have; in the depths of our unconsciousness we return to what we have lost or have imperfectly kept, and seek to grasp it firmly, re-enacting the tragic temptation of Faust: "Ah, still delay, thou art so fair." And why? We know not why. And this ignorance of ours is the root of the whole matter.

In a word, it is our own illusory habit-structure, taken as real and all-important, that destroys us. Behind that lies our tendency to grasp things and fasten upon them as final—our ignorance. We believe in the wrong things because we blindly grasp at any image that seems to promise closure, meaning, satisfaction, and fulfillment. For Gautama "what is impermanent is suffering, what is

suffering is not I; what is not I is not mine, it is not I, it is not myself.” Salvation is achieved by both an intellectual and active conquest over the craving or thirst that bedevils man. It is achieved by non-attached work, work which no more elicits self-destructive loyalties than the sowing of fried seeds elicits plants. Such work carries a double blessing. It saves the doer from involvement, and it ministers objectively and hence effectively to the person or situation.

Man “hankers” after the world, says the Buddhist literature, and as a result is “tainted” by lusts, by the desire for continued sensuous experience, and by ignorance. Passion, aversion, and confusion beset him. In the vivid words of the *Dhammapada*, “The thirst of a thoughtless man grows like a creeper; he runs from life to life, like a monkey seeking fruit in the forest.” He is on fire with the fiery movement of the world.

Buddhism has been criticized because in its attack on the “self” and “selfish” craving it has appeared to contradict its contention that the self is illusory and, further, that the self enjoys *nirvāṇa*. But this criticism springs from the failure to understand that when Buddhism attacks selfish craving it attacks something partial, self-limiting, and demonic. The self of our desires and values *does* have power so long as we delegate it that power. The center of this partial and illusory “self” is man’s basic biotic tenacity as conditioned by culture — his craving for the things and values of the world. But “the world,” as the Idealists have insisted, is always “my world;” the world which I have and cherish in apperception and action is my ego; it comprizes my loyalties, my source of support and affection, my role, my identity. To crave, love, preserve, protect, and defend one’s world, therefore, is to crave,

love, preserve, protect, and defend one's self. Trespass on a man's property and you trespass on *him*; ridicule a man's ideas and his world-conception, and you ridicule *him*.

Craving entails clinging, and the root of clinging is demand. We not only want what we want; we demand it. We move heaven and earth to get it; we turn reason into rationalization, honor into chicanery, people into means, and opportunity into expediency, in order to get what we want. We cannot live without it, and if we must go without it we see to it that others will share our misery and go without it too. Why do we not only demand things but also demand that, once had, they must be kept? Here, Gautama's answer, by implication, is close to that of Jesus; we feel anxious for our life. Gautama put it positively: we are driven by an ignorant impulse to live and to build our lives around the forms of our values. Thus we tend to elaborate and integrate our way of life as though it were the be-all and the end-all of existence, and when it is threatened we fight desperately in its defense. We tend to weave the loose threads of meaning in our lives into some pattern of personal identification. We tend to bring into closure the qualities and forms of our experience and to endow that closure with some character of finality in importance. The closures we choose will vary with body-type, temperament, cultural tradition, and socio-economic condition. They will be predominantly personal and idiosyncratic or will reflect the dominant ideology of environment: idealism, vitalism, or materialism; aristocracy, or democracy; the authority of law, force, or sensuous satisfactions. We tend to invest such meanings with impervious or charismatic powers; at last it becomes difficult to undo our belief and loyalty toward them.



Anyone who has sought to change himself or others or the social order which sustains us knows the truth of the view expressed in *The Authoritarian Personality*: "The transformation of our social system from something dynamic into something conservative, a status quo, struggling for its perpetuation, is reflected by the attitudes and opinions of all those who, for reasons of vested interests or psychological conditions, identify themselves with the existing set up. In order not to undermine their own pattern of identification, they unconsciously do not *want* to know too much and are ready to accept superficial or distorted information as long as it confirms the world in which they want to go on living." Thirst, craving, *taṇhā*, not only expresses itself in the demand to have and to keep; it involves the "great refusal" to consider alternatives to one's beliefs and way of life and indeed positive *resistance* against what encroaches on what one views as all-important, namely, one's world, one's world view, one's self. And this stubbornness persists often in the face of great suffering.

## II

What is the solution? We may mention four (among others) responses that are required on the part of man if he is to be delivered from the continuous wheel of unhappiness and to find fulfillment in this life. They are: understanding, renunciation, resolution and compassion.

(1) An indispensable attitude is *understanding*. This is indicated by the nature of our malady, *avidyā*, which is literally lack of vision or insight. Where there is no vision — spiritual vision — the people perish. For

without vision we are blind, and our efforts to save others become the blind leading the blind. Blindness is the brute, unconsidered belief that what lies before us as the object of our appetite or aversion is real; that the whole complex of our sensuous experience is ultimate; that this complex comprizes our being and that nothing more exists; that when this goes all goes; that our whole duty consists in preserving that complex of perception and self against change and decay; and that we ought properly to fear for its passing. Ignorance, in short, is not only impulsiveness, "a perpetual and restless desire of power which ceaseth only in death," in Hobbes' phrase; it is the blind demand for the sustenance and preservation of that impulsiveness.

To understand, therefore, is to understand this primal fact of the primate creature. To understand is to delay immediate response and belief; to check readiness and tendency to clutch; to transmute stimuli into signs and signals into symbols; in short, to see the world and ourselves for what they are, namely, appearances in passage. In detail, right understanding or right views involves a knowledge of the four noble truths: the problem of suffering, the cause of suffering, the solubility of the problem, and the solution or eightfold path. Understanding, therefore, is the master-key which unlocks the door to liberation. But it is also a watchful eye which must be ever vigilant, since passion, aversion, and confusion ever dog our steps. For lest we be destroyed by ignorance and the craving and clinging which come from it, we must ourselves, with active understanding, destroy the source of our destruction.

Understanding is thus not to be theoretical or speculative; is not even to be theological, nor to develop the subtleties of psychology. It is to be directed to

the immediate problem of the removal of the cause of suffering, as a physician would seek immediately to remove an arrow from a wounded man. This practicality characterizes many of the great religious founders and prophets; and this is why it is impossible to ascribe a definitive theology or creed to them; they plunged ahead, to sweat it out on the job before them. This is why, too, diverse theologies and psychologies have followed in their train: the same set of human values may be justified by a variety of theoretical schemes. The problem of human life is not to grasp the metaphysical secret of the world, as Gautama knew from personal experience, or to transcend it by mortification of the flesh. The problem is not merely to understand it, but, as Marx would say, to change it through understanding it. The problem, as Henry N. Wieman has put it, is for one to probe beneath the conscious beliefs and habits of the mind to the concrete reality that in fact sustains and fulfills one, and indeed to "relinquish every belief *as the basis of his security*", finding "what operates in human life with such character and power that it will transform man as he cannot transform himself, saving him from evil and leading him to the best that human life can ever reach, provided that he meet the required conditions." Thought, therefore, must pass beyond its abstract task of analysis and synthesis to the practical task of saving man from his suffering and carrying him over into fulfillment. This task of thought has not always been consistently or effectively pursued in Buddhism; it has tended to overestimate the power and importance of the conscious mind. But certainly its original aim was pragmatic, and the spirit of Gautama is existential rather than intellectual.

The importance of thought in the viewpoint of Buddhism,

cannot be minimized. It is stated in the very first verse of the *Dhammapada*: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage." The source of our lives and hence of our happiness or unhappiness is, in Buddhism, entirely within our power; were this not at least partially so, then we should all be victims of personal karma or the arbitrary power of historical and natural processes. And the source of our lives is our thought. Since a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit, and since we all seek the good, the moral for human action is plain.

Understanding brings mastery and a sense of inner strength, not alone in the consequences it produces but also in its intrinsic quality. To understand is to see that "all forms are unreal . . . all created things are grief and pain . . . all created things perish;" it is to trace out the lineaments of things in their internal structure and their relations to other things in space and time; it is to acknowledge the paths of necessitation which things pursue as they come into being, change, and pass away. Truth in this sense induces tranquillity and strength in him who possesses it and whose mind is molded and purified by a selfless acquiescence in the nature of things. For truth, as Spinoza observed, expels and purges that sense of impotence and sadness, that fear and hatred, which come when we are made slaves to the forces and fates of the world. Truth, by its power to lift us above what is circumstantial and passing, also lifts us free of those "passive" emotions which play upon our affections willy-nilly and undermine our

integrity. When we can be like a Buddha who "by himself, thoroughly knows and sees, as it were, face to face this universe — including the worlds above, the gods, the Brahmas, and the Maras, and the world below with its recluses and Brahmans, its princes and peoples," then we will indeed be liberated from human bondage and know what it means to speak of the truth as "lovely in its origin, lovely in its progress, lovely in its consummation." Understanding can issue in that fortitude which expresses itself as strength of mind and generosity (as Spinoza said) because it is an *active* attitude that clears up the confusion of blind impulse and its passion. While to some Western minds, influenced by the spirit of experimental science, understanding in this sense may seem to be passive and quiescent, it is in fact a tremendous act of labor, involving a penetration into the nature of human life, a continued mindfulness of what it has learned, discipline in speech, conduct, and livelihood, great resolve and effort, and concentration.

Not only is thought an inescapable ingredient in all action; it is necessary to man's salvation, for, as we have observed, man is born indeterminate, and salvation is not automatic. Some guide is needed, over and beyond the dispositions of the plastic body and the idiosyncrasies of culture. Buddhism is aware of this condition of man. There are no supernatural gods, *a priori* principles, or pre-existent, permanent souls on which man might, in his extremity, rely. But there is an observable psychic law of cause and effect; and there is the power of man's thought, whereby man determines who he is, what his world is, and whether he suffers hell or enjoys bliss. But thought (presumably the Buddhists here mean to include unconscious thought, or imagery)

guides action; and since only positive action can neutralize negative actions, a change in man's thought is the one thing needful. In a similar way, man's emotions must be changed by him, that is, by his own thought. For hatred does not cease by inert passivity any more than it ceases by hatred; it ceases by love, and love arises out of man's truthful relation to his world.

Buddhism's emphasis on understanding may seem like a truism until one considers the vast numbers of people who labour under superstition and have never moved out of its half-light to face, progressively, the emergent truth about themselves and their world. They blindly and passionately pursue their objects and goals; they toil at their tasks with the brute patience of a bullock harnessed to a well wheel; and they become blind to the puniness, precariousness, and impermanency of their lives and objects of satisfaction. "A social system," said Whitehead, "is kept together by the blind force of instinctive actions, and of instinctive emotions clustered around habits and prejudices."

To understand this fact, in the Buddhist sense, is to be lifted above the level of the brute, and initiate a transformation that leads to liberation. Most of the time the mass of us live under the spell of the immediate, appetitive, and sensate, as if what is and has value for us always has been and always must be. We will fight to keep what we have; and if we have surplus time and energy, we may even go out of our way to impose our way of life on others. But to understand is to see that things are not thus necessitated. This misery, this suffering, this poverty, this oppression — they need not be! Things are everlastingly changing; it is *man* who saddles them with habit and custom and so, blindly and tyrannically, destroys himself and others. But as man has made

himself, so he can, by unmaking himself, re-make himself. By the intellectual realization of this truth, with its hope, man can begin to get out from under the burden of anxious compulsion, resignation, and despair. He can acquire a sense of community with his fellow-men, and a sense of the possibility for human good. Neither social oppression nor personal unhappiness need to be; they can be undone and the blindness of animal passion and habit can be transcended. In the words of the *Dhammapada*, "The world does not know that we must all come to an end here; but those who know it, their quarrels cease at once."

Understanding has several aspects. It is, first, the perception of the world as flux and impermanence, and, with that, the realization that suffering comes in consequence of our attachments to the impermanent. It is, second, the detachment that arises with that realization—the release from the tyranny which our values exercise over us. The *skandhas* are essentially valuational processes, gripping or letting go of the world, and holding us in their grip so long as we identify ourselves with their processes and their products. To understand is to see, with detachment, that no single achievement, of ourselves, our families, our nations, our cultures, our race, is final, in fact or in value. Some interpreters of Buddha and Buddhism are inclined to rest their interpretation there; in such cases Buddha's lesson is at best a negative one. But beyond these meanings there is yet another, if only implicit in Buddha's teachings. That is not merely what E. A. Burtt calls "continuity of moral growth toward liberated integrity," though it includes and presupposes that. It is a whole-hearted commitment to a way of life that is characterized by *continuous and progressive transformation of understanding, surrender,*

*courage, and compassion.* It involves detachment from specific goods but also an appreciation of the unique particularity of each good as it appears. This is the whole doctrine of "enjoyment without possession" lifted to its height. Understanding has its own value and power; but beyond that it fully humanizes us by releasing our emotional, active, and social powers from the dominations and dependencies of the world and enabling us to live richly through time with strength and joy.

Understanding requires a kind of resolute renunciation of itself. It must be touched by what the Ch'an masters called cultivation through non-cultivation. The intellect must not take itself too seriously. It must be sobered and softened by the realization that underneath all metaphysical or religious solemnity there is the sportive, child-like play of things; and that behind every square corner in the geometric world of the intellect, lurks the imp of particularity to upset every cart of a System. Yet often more than one "nasty little fact" (as Thomas Huxley put it) is needed to destroy "a beautiful theory" or a social system; an intellectual or social revolution may be required. We lead ourselves into traps of our own making because of our tendency to form stimulus-response bonds; and this tendency to habit gets ratified and fixed by the response of the intellect. Habits of body and of mind entrap us because they blind us to the unique quality of goodness inherent in every person, thing, and situation. Whitehead's advice, "Seek simplicity (of abstractions), but distrust it," finds favour with a Buddhist. For the Buddhist is a nominalist,\*

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\* For a "Nominalist" abstract and general terms do not have objective existence, but are regarded as mere words and names (nomina) —(Ed.)



and with Husserl cries, "To the things themselves!" Indeed, a Buddhist is only a nominalist "in name," for while we may name things, things are not the final realities. How effective might man's mind become, and how happy might man be, if he could form the habit that would free him from the tyranny of habituation.

For may we not ask ourselves: What remains after our emotional habits of distress, ill-temper, anxiety, and the rest have spent the greater part of our energies, and we have ground away our intellectual lives in the groove of wasteful habit? Understanding alone is not sufficient for liberation; as Gautama said, we must detach ourselves from detachment itself. We must be liberated from the repetitiveness of habit, which easily uses up our powers to respond sensitively and creatively. We must open ourselves to the forces of rejuvenation. We must cease taking the recurrent trifles of life seriously, and not consider that every cross-road is a major crisis. Our attachment needs must be to something deeper than the customary, the familiar, the established, and the known. It must be to those uncompelling leaves of grass that spring up between our feet as we walk. We must, as William Ernest Hocking has said, "combine an unlimited attachment with an unlimited detachment".

(2) This means that a second response man must make for his deliverance is *renunciation*. Renunciation occurs in the act of understanding. For understanding is an *ascesis* of awareness; it is a disciplining of our responses by the free manipulation and ordering of terms and symbols. It is the intellectual cleansing that produces moral integrity. When we understand we renounce the impulsive and the utilitarian attitudes toward things; we renounce the immediate and the technical for what is abiding and is an end in itself.

Specifically, what is renounced is sensuous attachment to the world (and hence to our "selves"), malice toward others, and our tendency to do harm to others. Is our love of the world so great that we can renounce it in order that the world might return to us, as the *Gita* puts it, in a transfigured way? Anyone who doubts that man's pride in his sensuous enjoyments and possessions hardens his heart as a miser's heart is hardened by his greed for his gold, and thus destroys that tenderness and plasticity needed for creative relations with others—anyone who doubts that should observe the world today. Many of the leaders of the imperialistic nations and evangelistic religions of the West, and many of the landlords, owners, and local authorities in Asia and Africa, are so obsessed with the threat of their loss of power that they cannot see clearly the situation that confronts them or the things they must do in order to deal with it and to be saved. They are blinded by the diffuse reactions of a deep anxiety — anxiety that stems from their attachment to their power, their satisfactions, their structure of beliefs, in a word, their whole way of life, and from an awareness that these values might be impaired or removed. They cannot adjust to change, let alone promote change, because they have staked their lives on the *status quo*.

There was a time when egoism was relatively harmless. Prior to the age of technological and industrial power, the roots of the self could not sink very deeply or widely into human affairs. The harm of ego-involvement was limited to the range of materials and of culture which the ego could command. But now a man's "world" may be very wide. A Hitler or Krupp, a Hearst or Rockefeller, can exercise control over millions: his word is their law, because the tentacles of his self and his world reach down into their lives and enwrap them like giant vines in

a tropical forest. In this way the egoistic values of one man or a few men are imposed on a multitude, and in this way tenacious attachment to the ego can lead to mischief and disaster on a wide scale.

The evil that such men do is not merely the blind execution of the demands of some "system." Systems operate through individuals. To be sure, the system of imperialism is a set of exploitive relations: but it is only because men willingly or blindly submit themselves to those relations that the system continues. And that submission is possible because men do not understand their situation as human beings and cannot renounce the egoistic values to which they desperately cling. Such desperation is born of anxiety and panic, and is akin to the desperation of a man who, in his haste to get into a lifeboat, drowns his fellow-passengers as well as himself.

For certain persons to renounce their established values of capitalism, colonialism, white superiority, economic and military exploitation, and all the rest, would be to renounce their very gods. But they cannot, because they have invested too much of their lives in worship at the shrine of those gods, and they love them too dearly. The recent battle-cries of the West — "get tough," "massive retaliation," "operation killer," "war of extermination," "positions of overwhelming strength" — express the arrogance of certain people bent on defending and imposing their own values as well as their desperation in the face of a throat to those. Marx observed that successful and oppressing classes always blindly and violently defend what they have and are: they have become smitten by the power of their golden calves.

But the oppressed class has nothing to lose but its chains, and because its temptations and attachments are

fewer it is apt to be more realistic and more disposed to relinquish the values of the present in favour of something greater in the future. Yet the oppressed class is possessed by a passion too, different in expression but similar in origin to that of the oppressors. A deprived man, once he has had a glimpse or a taste of goods, is apt to be overcome by hatred, indignation, contempt, envy, anger, and vengeance toward the ruling class. These attitudes are not evil in so far as they issue in action which rights wrongs; but they tend to become evil by a distortion of the power and the understanding which a man might wield. There is some indication that the social transformations now being wrought in Asia have been carried forward by men and women more realistic and less violent than those who conducted western revolutions. One of the reasons for this, I think, is the emphasis on detachment and renunciation propagated by Buddhism. Personal animosity, springing from oppression, and focussed on specific persons, is not as effective as an intelligent understanding of the long-range causes and consequences of man's actions in history, and a diligent attempt with others to correct the causes of oppression. Personal animosity thus focussed wastes one's fire and blinds one to the basic task that is to be done.

There is, moreover, the ever-present human problem : how may we all live most effectively once the wide gap between the haves and the have-nots is bridged. All of us are tempted to live by the world we "have" (be it expressed in tangible goods or the symbols of the psyche) rather than by the process of creative growth bringing with it the advance of understanding, mastery, and fellow-feeling. Failing to do so, we find the tables turned, and the world we have then has us. Never has

the problem of possession and renunciation been so urgent as it is today; for as the domain of human wealth increases, men are more insistently forced to choose between freedom and suicide. Many Americans are sick with a satiety of goods, physical and mental; they refuse to be selective; they have, as Alan Watts says, a kind of omnivorous attitude toward the world: consumers and nothing more. They had best go back to their ancestor, Thoreau, who knew how to choose, reject, and simplify — who knew that the way to inner strength is renunciation and freedom from all that the world can give or take away. I read the other day of a wealthy American woman who took her own life and those of her children because, as she wrote, she was “second to TV and comic books.” She is symbolic of the suicide that a whole nation can bring upon itself when it cannot renounce its wealth and control its leisure. So, also, are the many delinquents, criminals, neurotics, and psychotics of this and certain other wealthy lands. People will cheat, rob and kill in an economy of abundance. While such crimes are sharpened by the insecurities of local and world economies, they are also the consequences of a spiritual failure in the minds and hearts of men. The triumph of “property values” over “human values” does not mean that we must scorn materialistic advance, but it does mean that we will destroy ourselves with such advance if we are not prepared to produce and control material values for the benefit of what is best in human beings.

It may be asked, “What about the great mass of the world’s population, who know only deprivation? Surely their problem is not renunciation.” Their problem is and always will be renunciation, which is an integral aspect of human fulfilment. For they cannot achieve

fulfillment if in the process of liberating themselves from physical poverty, starvation, and disease, they only fall victim on the other side to the depredations of accedie\*, greed, vanity, covetousness, violence, and all the other 'civilized' illnesses that beset modern, industrialized man. What about over-propulation? Is it not produced by ignorance, lust, and an unbridled attachment to the appetites? What about prejudice? What about violent racism, religion, and nationalism? While certainly influenced by man's physical environs, these are problems that are recurrently human ones, arising from man's outlook upon himself and his world, and they cannot be settled until man settles himself. Whether man is rich or poor, skilled or unskilled, educated or ignorant, well or ill, his problem is always uniquely this: how to manage his will in relation to what he has or does not have. Every man, if he would be a man, must be able to sweat it out, like the gods of earth, and to laugh, like the distant gods.

Is it so strange that in explaining renunciation Buddhism has coupled malevolence and harm to others with attachment to sensuous things? He who loves his world and his self over-much always strives to keep it intact. He resists and resents its breakage, or the threat of its breakage. This entails a resistance to the transforming influences of the world, both consciously known and unconsciously felt. The egoist loves his *status quo*. Because this attachment prevents him from seeing that he could in fact open the way to much greater good for himself and others if he would renounce it, it also prevents

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\* i.e. Sloth, torpor, stagnation (Ed.)

him from creatively relating himself in sympathetic, appreciative, and cooperative ways to others. But the egoist is not just isolated. The very presence of others, vaguely apprehended, is a threat to him. Therefore, in his unconscious compulsion to relieve his anxiety and protect his interests, he feels an urge to eliminate the gulf which separates him from others, and may do so by techniques of domination or submission. Differences are always a threat to the egoist, and he deals with them by attempts to obliterate them. This involves treating others as fragments, as types, as stereotypes, as lifeless members of classes, as things, as commodities, as means to one's own ends. It involves ill-will toward others. An egoist necessarily "rejoices in iniquity" and not in the truth because the truth arises and grows in the interchange of diverse particulars, and the communal source of truth is a threat to the egoist who claims to have the whole truth and who can secure himself in that conclusion only by denying or undermining the existence and the perspectives of others. The total truth, in short, is the totality of mutually consistent, empirically correct perspectives, and we cannot really approach unto it unless we come to the realization that our own perspective with its values is one among a multitude, and are able to view it with the renunciation that is born of a detached mind and sane emotions. "If we think of our existence," said C. W. Holmes, Jr., "not as that of a little god outside, but as that of a ganglion within, we have the infinite behind us." When we give up speaking for or playing God, we can have the kindness of kinship with our fellow creatures, and the magnanimity of being one among (rather than over) many. If one has humility, is devoid of an overweening care for one's own life, and genuinely respects oneself, then one can have the strength to care

about others. But if one hates oneself so completely that one must abnegate oneself in order to be more than one, then one must also hate others and do harm to them. In this way renunciation leads to true conquest, and weakness, in the words of Taoism, leads to strength. This is a profound truth in Buddhism, developed in the Mahayana tradition.

Psychologically, the *status quo* of a man is his established state of being; it is his "world" as he is able to feel, respond to, and find meaning in things. Our psychic "worlds" are the structures of belief and value selected out of our gross experiences by our sensitivities, needs, dispositions, and innumerable environmental factors. Thus what a man "is," at a given moment, is this structure; he is indeed a complex of such structures, cumulative, and hierarchical. Western psychoanalysis and Hindu psychology have shown that man consists of many such layers, or "sheaths", acquired by his experiences throughout time. But man is something more than these established structures: he is at the core of such layers a dynamic of "becoming", a continuous fountain of creativity which (in Bergson's figure) is forever throwing off its products. Man's "world" grows up around this dynamic center and ever threatens to engulf it or to encase it in rigid walls; and so man, to retain his nature, must be vigilantly on guard against such self-strangulation. He must be always peeling away his created "worlds", separating himself from the constrictive bonds of his past, and giving heed to that faint and tender voice of creativity in the depths of his many-levelled "worlds." As Goethe said: "Would you live the happy way, keep the past out of today."

Egoism springs from a false belief in the permanence of one's self, a belief that masks the fear of its downfall and



dissolution. More accurately, egoism is the secret desire for permanence, and the realization that this cannot be; and so the egoist, who seems so assured, is wrecked by this unresolved conflict. Precisely because he wishes to keep everything the egoist has nothing. But the opposite attitude is the relinquishment of one's self-concept and cherished values as final; and this brings home to one more than one could possibly ask for or imagine. "The way to get, is to forget." The honest facing of our transience carries us out of our egoistic illusions into bonds of fellowship which embrace us with a love in whose keeping transience seems acceptable, or unimportant.

One may ask: Does egoism spring from ignorance or from a deliberate refusal to acknowledge one's own finitude? Is "the illusion of individuality" — as a modern psychiatrist, Harry Stack Sullivan, calls it — something that is inherent or acquired? We have been assuming implicitly that it is both, as Buddhists seem to do: man has tendencies which can be turned in the direction of rigidity and isolation, and his psychological, social, and ecological situation can be decisive in this turning. The logic of Buddhism precludes that man is born totally bad; for Buddhism holds that man can be saved from evil, and if he can be saved from evil then he must possess at birth both the materials and the means for salvation. What is it that comprizes the goodness of the new-born baby? It is the baby's capacity for transformation by way of the increase of linkages of meaning generated between its responses and the things and persons around it; it is the baby's capacity for continuous self-transcendence, for leaving, like the chambered nautilus, its "low-vaulted past," for spiralling out into progressive identity with the vast universe of qualities. Man's spirit'

as Berkeley observed, moves, and, unlike those static perspectives to which it gives succession, cannot be perceived in the same way. The fabric of meanings woven on the moving loom of spirit is such that the strand which is my life is inseparable from the strands that constitute other lives and existences; and sharp boundaries are obliterated. But faults and disruptions in the machinery of weaving may occur: the parent communicates to the child its own anxieties, hostilities, and conflicts; the youth senses the ambiguities and injustices of the economy in which he lives and must make a living. What is the result? Retreat, separation, crystallization, individuality. The result is the isolationism and hidden terror which, in the Western world, reached its climax in World War II. The freezing of the spiritual fluids of love was thus described by W. H. Auden:

And the living nations wait,  
Each sequestered in its hate  
And the seas of pity lie  
Locked and frozen in each eye.

In consequence of social orders which pit each against all and all against each — or, at best, pits the few against the many — men develop an unnatural concern with themselves. They “grasp” for particular securities instead of opening themselves to that one grand Security, that Supreme Identity, which can alone save. “Life is so short!” is our anguished cry, in this age of abundance and of promise of abundance. And when we experience sickness, injury, premature ageing, or the imminence of death, we are apt to protest, “Why me, why me?” Buddhism deals with this problem by turning the question around: if the meaning of life cannot be found in length of days, perhaps it lies in the death of the individual

through his intellectual recognition of his transience and his emotional tenderness toward all suffering things. Life is surely short, measured against the movement of sidereal or cosmic time; but physical time is only one dimension of that quality and the qualitative rapport we may have with one another. We probably do not discover this dimension in its fullest richness until we have been separated from our loved ones or nearest possessions; then it is, with the realization of transience, that a deeper and freer love can possess us and woo and win us to its way of living.

In the place of clinging, therefore, Buddhism proposes to put the attitude of letting go; in the place of dominance, it proposes to put the attitude of non-interference. Such proposals are not mere dreamy idealism. There is a certain economy of nature that allows life to advance by the conditions of freedom and separation. The three factors that combine to produce progressive organic evolution, as Alfred E. Emerson has said, are "genetic variation, reproductive isolation, and natural selection." Similar factors are required for advance at the psychological and sociological levels in the affairs of men. Novelty, solitude, and the selectivity of interaction are all necessary for human creativity. Novelty and solitude mean that we must let each other alone; and selectivity means that we must deal with them compassionately and considerately. This implies, too, that the U. N. principles of the self-determination of the nations and the non-interference by one nation in the internal affairs of another nation, are not abstractions but are rather rooted in the nature of human societies.

Renunciation arises from understanding, and understanding is confirmed in renunciation. To see one's self as a temporary thing means to detach one's deepest

desires from the structure and aims of the self. Self-knowledge always leads to humility; it is disenchantment with what is all leaf and illusion, and a return to the root of reality. What is the alternative to this relinquishment of the illusory self? It is either resignation or mania. Men either "live lives of quiet desperation", as Thoreau says, or they ride rough-shod over others and leave the wrecks and ruins of history behind them. They either worship the external gods of a blind Nature, Fate, or Chance, or they create their own internal god out of their Self. But understanding can put in its proper perspective both the possibilities of the external situation and the limitations of man himself. Man is neither a passive pawn nor an autonomous king. His effective way is neither complete dependence nor complete dominance. It is rather the middle way between these: a way that can seek without finding, desire without having, have without keeping, renounce without despairing, and understand without withdrawing. In this process man must give himself to the creative transformation if he is to be given unto; he must forgive himself and others if he is to receive forgiveness. To be able to live in the present and yet live above the present, to suck the juice from immediate fruits and yet see both the roots of the past and the seeds of the future, to acknowledge one's presence and predicament in the world as important but not all-important: this is the most important thing. It is the meaning of intelligent renunciation, and it leads to the joy of *nirvana*.

Renunciation clears the ground for understanding. For it is our egoistic attachments which block our vision of what the world is and of who we are. "When a thing is not loved," says Spinoza, "no quarrels will arise concerning it — no sadness will be felt if it perishes — no envy

if it is possessed by another — no fear, no hatred, in short no disturbances of the mind.” Pain-provoking attachments arise from our anxieties, and our anxieties force us into beliefs which momentarily allay the unrest of those anxieties but at the same time prevent us from the transformation that might eradicate that unrest. Thus we come to adopt and hold fast certain illusions: “idealized images” about ourselves, and an unduly glorified or darkened picture of the working of the universe. Our egoism, blinding us to ourselves and to things, makes us prone to believe that stock of popular superstitions which impinges on us from all sides from birth to death. In this way our basic anxiety takes, as Epicurus observed, two fundamental forms: the fear of death, and the fear of the retribution of the gods. Then we wander about in the cave of our ignorance, guided only by shadows, frightened by them, and unsure of their reality. Once, however, we renounce our overweening sense of importance, we are freed to open our eyes to what lies within us. The phantasms of private and public sources fall away like ghosts at dawn; the universe ceases to be peopled with anthropomorphisms; and the way is cleared for the liberating venture of seeking, and of finding. It is self-absorption which prevents this initial step in our liberation; and once the step is taken, then it is courage that is required to carry us along the pathway to fulfillment.

(3) A third attitude needful to man is *resolution*. This embraces the act of aspiration, purposiveness, and earnestness, on the one hand; and the determination of one’s destiny on the other. Man must be saved by his own efforts; he has none else as his refuge. If modern man is to have the Utopia of abundance and world peace

which now beckons him from the future where atomic power will do all his physical labor, he must achieve that freedom and security for himself; no rulers, no parliament of man, no United Nations, no gods from on high, no act of fate, will present it to him on a silver platter. The actualization of such an ideal, moreover, will not come to pass apart from man's wholehearted striving and unrelenting vigilance. A steadfastness and stubbornness of what is known in the West as "faith" is called for. "Those who are in earnest do not die; those who are thoughtless are as if dead already." Those brave and reassuring words of the *Dhammapada* have nerved the efforts of millions long before Goethe penned a similar sentiment in his *Faust*. To aspire in the right direction without wearying is the ultimate act that is required of man. What else could be asked? And "a good man" says Goethe, "in his dim urgency is still conscious of the right way." Buddhism holds that this urgency must be enlightened and directed into right mindfulness and other disciplines of the eight-fold path.

To aspire earnestly and to determine one's own destiny are entailed by both understanding and renunciation. To be willing to know, to face the brute propensity of possessiveness which lies at the base of our distorted natures, to analyze and resolve our habits into their constituent parts — this requires great courage and steadfast faith. In the same way renunciation is an act of courage, for it means abandoning one's self and relinquishing one's hold on cherished values.

One cannot fully grasp the moral implications or the fervent hope of Buddhism, I think, unless one first understands the stark existential predicament of man which lies at the center of its concern and thought. What is man? He is nothing. He may *think* he is

something; but when carefully analyzed everything that he thinks he is — fire-maker, tool-user, shaper of symbols, creator of culture, sublime intellect, immortal soul, son of God, Brahman Himself; or doctor, lawyer, merchant, thief, or John Q. Jones — he is not. For “nothing is but what is not.” Man’s myriad series of “selves” comes and goes, and no substantial thread binds the selves together; the pattern of karma alone endures. “Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as asleep.”

But while this is man’s extremity, puzzle, and tragedy, it is also his opportunity. Precisely because he is not bound to a permanent self bearing down on him oppressively from the past, man can and must *make and re-make himself*. In the interstices of becomings, man has the opportunity for re-directing the past and freeing himself from its blind thrust. Buddhist philosophy was consistent with the intent of Gautama when it developed the doctrine that a given event does not pre-exist in its causes, and the subtle doctrine of momentariness. From moment to moment we are different, and the success of life is to see this and make the most of it. Not to see it is to be caught in the clutch of craving, habit, illusion, and suffering.

The doctrine of momentariness is implicitly the doctrine of creativity. Gautama rejects the common-sense view of substance, which lends itself easily to the lazy and irresponsible religious notion of an immortal “soul-substance.” He also rejects the nihilistic view that things are utterly empty or illusory. What is illusory is the substantial appearance of events. (This is the point that Mādhyamika philosophy has taken up and developed.) What is real is the qualitative creativity of experience — the *nirvāṇa* to be appreciated in and through the passage of experience. Viewed in the dynamic span

of the creative self, any given, achieved self is an abstraction. The substantive "I," accordingly, cannot be real; it cannot really "pass through" an experience, for to pass through means to be affected and to be changed, but by definition such an "I" cannot change. The fact is that our selves *become*. A child *becomes* an adult; the adult does not (contrary to Aristotle and others) pre-exist in the child. Similarly, a person becomes a mother by mothering, a farmer by farming, a writer by writing; the mother, the farmer, or the writer does not pre-exist and suddenly reveal himself. The self must be achieved, won, created. Anyone who has lived, i. e., has grown up progressively into new forms of reality, knows this. Earnestness is the moral attitude enjoined on us by the whole universe, since the whole universe in a sense is earnest. It is a popular saying that we should love people for what they *are* and respect them in their true *being*. But what is the being of man? Is it not that he forever changes and *becomes*, and that his character is the *way* he becomes—the energetic quality of his striving, in heart and mind, the courage and clarity of his aspiring, the depth of his compassion in helping others in their striving and aspiring? The courage to be is the courage to become. And this requires infinitely more courage than would be needed if our natures were already prepared and completed prior to experience. The emptiness of the universe is vast; and to fill our little portion of it with a creative act, moment after moment, and to find our immortality in that, is a large and noble task for finite man.

Creative becoming, as a norm for human life, represents an answer to David Hume's proposition that we have no direct evidence for the existence of the world, the soul, or God, and Hume's search for a guide to human life.



Gautama's analysis is very similar to Hume's; and his answer is similar too; Kant, who was profoundly influenced by Hume, stated the nature of the self more clearly. The "self" or "soul" is only a regulative ideal, he maintained, for we have not lived out its full potentialities. We know it, as a dynamic process, only in part; it is forever becoming and incomplete. Moreover, the soul is an inner thing, hidden from sensuous perception.

Kant's view moves in the same direction as Buddhist thought. Ultimate reality or value is not confinable to any given experience or achievement of the self. It is not a created structure but is instead a power of creation. In this sense it is "void", non-sensuous, and indescribable. It is the *source* of our specific qualities, forms, values, and "selves". Our suffering, therefore, lies in our ignorant, tenacious attachment to what is created; and our liberation, happiness, and fulfilment lie in living for that creative source. Salvation begins when we make the shift from one mode of orientation to the other. Sudden insight into the difference between these two modes is what Zen calls *satori*. To aspire for this kind of transformation and this kind of orientation is the highest aspiration one can undertake.

It would be impossible to re-capture or state the deep reaction of gratitude and hope with which people in India must have first received the message of Buddha. To learn that the miseries of life need not be; that one's history or past could not doom one to eternal suffering; that regardless of one's place or condition one could, by one's own efforts and intelligence, achieve freedom: what a sense of liberation and hope this must have generated among vast numbers of people! Buddha's was a call for resolute courage and self-reliance. It was a reaction against religion as an opiate of the people,

and against all of man's self-made opiates which permit corruption, parasitism, empty ritual, and superstition to flourish in religion and outside of religion.

Resolution entails understanding and renunciation. We cannot really live lives of courage unless we understand the ultimate issues of life and hold clearly in our vision the right path. Nor can our action be effectual unless we strip ourselves of useless impediments and run with patience the race that is set before us. Two-thirds of the world's population live in hunger, poverty, and disease; the other third enjoy the abundance of modern technology and industry. Aside from its general emphasis on understanding and compassion, Buddhism lacks the socio-economic perspective and method which can minister directly and curatively to the problem of hunger, though it has been alleviative in its mental effects. But Buddhism has a profound insight relevant to the age of material abundance. For as Lewis Mumford has pointed out, man has become overmastered and mechanized by the multitude of material processes and things which his technology has produced. His means have become ends in themselves; and man, as an integrative, creative spirit, has ceased to be the center of his persona: life and his culture. The cure for this is Thoreau's simplify, simplify, simplify. This is a Buddhistic principle, for to simplify means to renounce and to put first things first, to restore man's attitude of self-mastery to the driver's seat. The spirit of Gautama's thought is that man ought to be the determiner of his destiny, so far as he can, and that to abdicate control of his life to kings, cartels, armies, editors, advertizers, pathogenic organisms, or any other force other than his own mind and spirit is slavery and needless suffering. This does not mean retirement from the world, nor does it mean mere action

under the illusion that to act on one's world is to be self-determining. It means rather that man must act resolutely to organize his life so as to increase progressively what he can think, feel, control, and communicate.

(4) A fourth attitude, already implied in the previous three, is *Compassion*. Understanding implies compassion, for to understand is to comprehend, to see suffering and mortality as the common condition of all, to be familiar with the family of living creatures. One cannot really and completely know all unless one knows that all are saved, and assist in that enterprize. Renunciation implies compassion too, for to give up one's attachments means to open oneself to the multifarious needs and perspectives of the huge world-community. Resolution implies compassion, for one cannot seek to determine one's own destiny and aspire to what is right without considering the tragedy and the struggle of innumerable others. The earnest man, purged of lust and self-seeking, surely cannot interfere with the lives of others; and at his purest state, having helped himself, he will have the overflowing strength to help others. This is expressed in the magnificent Bodhisatva ideal of selfless love, "infinite compassion," and "universal redemption."

At all costs I must bear the burdens of all  
beings.....The whole world of living beings  
I must rescue, from the terrors of birth,  
of old age, of sickness, of death and rebirth,  
of all kinds of moral offence, of all states  
of woe, of the whole cycle of birth-and-death,  
of the jungle of false views, of the loss of  
wholesome dharmas, of the concomitants of  
ignorance — from all these terrors I must  
rescue all beings... And why? Because it is

surely better that I alone should be in pain than that all these beings should fall into the states of woe..... There has arisen in me the will to win all-knowledge, with all beings for its object, that is to say, for the purpose of setting free the entire world of beings.

Compassion is the opposite of sensuous attachment and illusion, of craving and lust, ignorance and confusion. Compassion has a depth which carries it beyond the beguilements of surface appearance. In the same way that knowledge penetrates beneath the changing phenomena of things, and seeks to discover the real nature of things, so compassion seeks to go below the level of smiles or tears which people may wear, the masks of position and repute which are taken as real by so many, the characters which they have built, the habits which dominate them, the desires which determine their habits, and, ultimately, the potential means of their liberation. Compassion is a fellow-feeling for the plight and possibilities which we share with others. Such a feeling is not mere sympathy; it is sympathy qualified by a positive sense of clear distance between ourselves and others; it is what Nietzsche called "the pathos of distance." Compassion is impossible unless we ourselves have been purified of egocentric drives and obsessive cravings: otherwise what passes as compassion is only an attempt on the part of the self to embrace, dominate, and swallow up the object of our interest. Compassion then is mistaken for what is only the extension of the ego's needs; the object of interest is not seen for what it is, in itself, as a living, suffering, and striving subject; it is not seen with genuine "respect" but becomes only an item in a perceptual field to be organized and used. Compassion

of that kind is only the velvet glove for the iron hand or the acquisitive palm. This is why "love," in the West, has been called "blind;" it is passion and lust, devoid of the detachment which can emerge only when we have conquered our own desires and freed ourselves from the distortions in knowledge caused by coercive needs.

Compassion begins at home. "Let each man first direct himself to what is proper, then let him teach others." To reverse this is to have the blind leading the blind. When we grow in our own integrity to a greatness and magnanimity of soul; when we can scorn personal injury and death as incidents in the destined progression of man; when we can cast off the fetters of fear and hatred of our enemies; when we shed like a heavy burden the unmet demands we make upon others and the world, and are able to have all that is worth having because we want nothing; when we live in each moment grateful for its blessings and responsive to the unmerited wealth of value left in the wake of time as it passes: then we are truly free, and are able to discover others and help them because we have first discovered and helped ourselves. This is something which our "other-directed" cultures tend to forget.

Compassion begins in solitude — in that "sweetness of solitude" that is the distillation of inner victory. "We must be our own," says Emerson, "before we can be another's." Compassion arises out of a clarified trust of one individual for another. But man is a huddling animal. He huddles, not because he is solitary, like some animals, but because he is lonely. Loneliness is the felt isolation from the object of some desire; and man, being conscious, is able to desire many things — the moon, the sun, the cosmos, and eternal life — and hence to experience deep loneliness. The pathology of human life is to be

seen in man's efforts to overcome this loneliness; and most of those efforts are social. Man seeks to exact recompense from his fellows. He believes not only that the world owes him a living, but also that it should provide for him a cure for his loneliness. So he forces himself into communion with others, and gains a vague sense of assurance there. But as loneliness arises in the self it must find its essential cure in the self. While the self takes its origin and data from a social context, it is also, on the other side, a solitary thing. What we do, what we think, what we become, are consequences of personal acts. After we have received the insights of a providential grace, the ultimate decisions are ours alone to make; the ultimate freedom is ours alone to fashion. And these decisions, this creative freedom, must be achieved in solitude. When this is accomplished, then we can see others for what they are and can see the loveliness that lies in them. This clear-eyed perceptiveness, from which the subtleties of exploitation have been expunged, carries us then on to compassion.

A vast majority of men live under the dominance of food, sex, other material goods, and money. This is true in Los Angeles no less than in Lucknow. It is a fact which ruling economic groups, politicians, advertisers, and charlatans of various kinds universally recognize and tend to exploit for their own selfish ends. But we could not be victimized by others if we were not first our own victims. Men are lured and betrayed by gold and pleasures, by social power and arms, because in the first instance they set up and assert those values. Such traps are of their own making; and it requires both predator and prey to spring the trap. A sociologist of knowledge, however, might say that man is not entirely made by his own habits or decisions, since these are influenced by his

social context; and that is a truth that needs to be added to Buddhism. At the same time, it is men who help to make their social context.

Compassion is the opposite of self-indulgence. It should be distinguished from the mystical feeling which one may have in being identified with a family, a nation, a culture, or a mob. Such exaltations or phobias are a far cry from genuine sympathy. They are egoistic sentiments expanded, projected, and glorified on a social scale. One does not really see or understand others as individuals: what one sees is one's own inner world, filled with needs and ideals. and one then gives oneself the illusion of objectivity and charity. Indeed, it is necessary for men driven by cravings to seek this sort of security; any other sort they could not tolerate. The egoist is devoted to the *status quo*; he could not bear to have it broken down by the intrusion of other personalities with their problems. This is why, as Dr. Elsa A. Whalley has recently discovered, gregarious and active persons who take a "live and let live" attitude are often "inflexible at the core." Their many social contacts and gay *camaraderie* are only false fronts for an unregenerate individualism.

We cannot exercise compassion until this self-concern is broken; we cannot give ourselves to others until we first have given up ourselves. The story of Kisa Gotami illustrates this. When we weep at the passing of others, do we not weep for ourselves, or a portion of ourselves? Yet this kind of painful separation of the self from itself is a recurrent thing that has no cessation. "Decay is inherent in all compound things." We may, however, reply: "No, I weep for life that might have been, that might have enjoyed itself, that might have grown up and fulfilled itself." Even so death is a final

fact from which there is no reprieve. The past is done, and the present ever presses upon us and presents itself before us, as a continuing gift. The only satisfying response to death is to lose oneself in a new life—to find, as Kisa Gotami did, an end of sorrow through an open-heartedness to all her fellow-sufferers, whereby her own private grief is transformed into deeper understanding, more sacrificial renunciation, braver resolution, and broader compassion. The only effective way to cope with individual disappointment, diminution, and death is to find new affirmations; for death is not overcome by mourning any more than hatred is overcome by hatred—it is overcome by life and by love. If one's child dies, one must find new children, now living, who need the ministrations of a humble, wise, and compassionate heart. If one's self and its ideals, loyalties, and attachments die, as indeed they must, one must find another self, chastened by the lesson that what is deeper and more dear than any individual self is the process that progressively transforms the self toward new levels of integrity in understanding, power, sympathy, courage, and faith. In this process, in time, one may find a qualitative peace and assurance that endures through time.

Buddhism is not *simply* a religion of compassion. For its compassion is not ignorant, passive, or selfish, but is guided by understanding, carried out by earnest action, and directed toward all sentient creatures. Buddhism is just the opposite of self-indulgence; and if anyone believes that man is "naturally selfish," he should consider how Buddhism over a period of 2500 years has profoundly influenced millions of people. Self-indulgence has two sides, apathy and license, and Buddhism opposes the first by its emphasis on "receptivity and sympathetic



concern," and the second by its "self-control." Both of these attitudes involve understanding and renunciation. Some Buddhists have stressed the first attitude (the Bodhisattva ideal) and others the second (the Arahatta ideal). Thus Buddhism is simple in that it comes to grip with the basic, recurrent tendencies and attitudes of human nature: but it is complex because it considers that one must counter dependence with the attitudes of understanding and resolute action; dominance, with the attitude of non-interference or renunciation; and detachment, with the attitude of compassion. All of these attitudes, along with their opposites, must, in Buddhism, be transcended by the Maitreyan ideal, described by Charles Morris as "detached-attachment:" one must live within, but rise beyond, all bonds, all cravings, all thoughts; one must find liberation in and through the creative transformation of experienced qualities. This is the whole meaning of "the middle way" and its consequence and reward, *nirvāṇa*.

### Conclusion

Buddhism has shaped the lives of countless millions through the centuries because what people need is compassion; they need to give it no less than to receive it, for unless we can receive it we cannot achieve the self-acceptance of maturity, with its full capacity to feel, think, and act, and unless we can give it we cannot know the full significance of a life devoted to something higher than itself. In referring to this lesson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., has said that a man

"may put it in the theological form of justification by faith or in the philosophical one of the continuity of the universe. I care not very much

for the form if in some way he has learned that he cannot set himself over against the universe as a rival god, to criticize it, or to shake his fist at the skies, but that his meaning is its meaning, his only worth is as a part of it, as a humble instrument of the universal power."

Compassion, cleansed of provincialism and the drive for power, gives man a sense of such super-personal participation. Indeed, it may be questioned whether without an initiating and continuing sense of compassion man may rise to any worthy philosophy, religion, or heroism at all. For compassion is the most intimate and primary binding power which we can experience; if we cannot feel a sense of atoneness with our fellow beings, surely we cannot feel the same toward the universe. And, conversely, communion with our kind radiates out into every detail of our experience and communicates its assurance and good feeling to the whole of history, the creatures of nature, and the universe itself. This sense is very powerful in the full flowering of Buddhism.

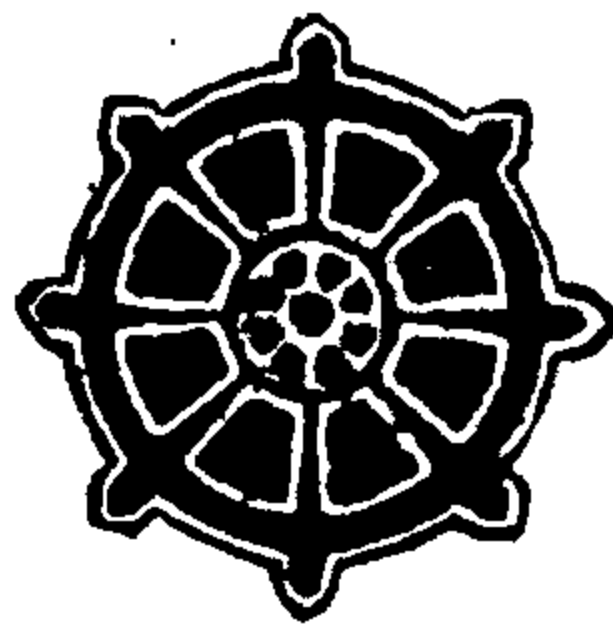
More important, Buddhism has realized only implicitly that man is *more* than what he thinks, that his thought cannot be the only thing therefore that will save him, and that unconscious powers lying below and beyond the reach of his conscious mind (in the psyche and society) must continuously transform his conscious mind to release it from its limitations and from the suffering which man undergoes when he lives by its structures. Buddhism acknowledges the ultimate fact of change; it conceives of its problem as that of breaking the grip of the causal series which forms our self and the apperceptive world. This is to be accomplished by knowledge, conduct, and concentration.

Suffering itself is an experience that comes to us and stimulates us to change, in spite of our conscious efforts to prevent it; and we cannot cope with it completely, once it has come, by mere understanding, resolution, or any other conscious attitude. Indeed, to explain the transformation in the lives of many Buddhists we should have to look below the level of conscious belief to a creative power into whose keeping these persons were led to give themselves, and which led to a qualitative poise in passage that no mere belief could generate. The Buddhist emphasis on renunciation of all clingings would carry a person part of the way in that self-giving, but it does not indicate explicitly the positive creativity that easily transforms man once the grip of his devotion upon created form has been relinquished and other conditions have been provided.

The effects of Buddhism, like those of all religions, go far beyond its explicit doctrines. These effects have not depended on the literal truth of the doctrines. The doctrine of universal change, whether or not it is the whole truth about the world, is humanistically useful in opening up the possibility for men to change themselves. Similarly, the doctrine that the soul does not exist, while in dispute among philosophers, has functioned to facilitate nonegoistic thought, feeling, and action; if you really believe that the soul is illusory, then you are not apt to lust, drink, lie, cheat, steal, fight, and kill in its behalf. Again, if you believe that the only *karma*, which you carry is the causal law of *Dhamma*, whereby your present state arises from the conditioning of some past state, then you are simultaneously freed of the yoke of Determinism and the gambling of Chance; you can undertake to change your state with resolution, confidence, and hope. Moreover, the Buddhist doctrine

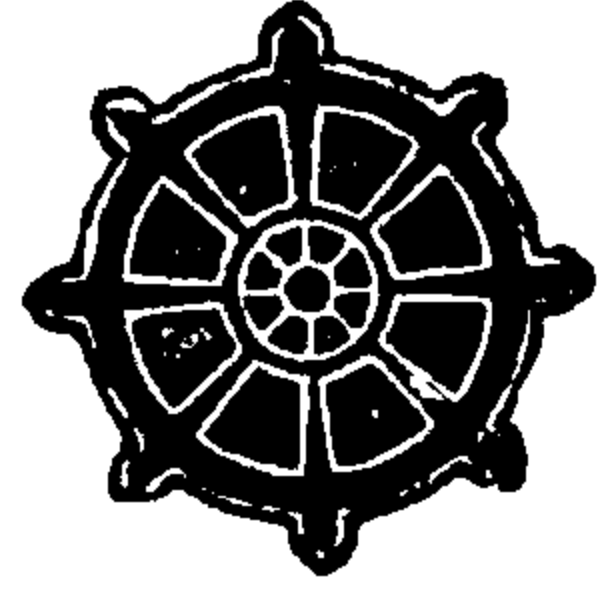
of rebirth, while difficult to understand as the mental or dispositional inheritance that passes from one body to another save as we inherit our constitutions and hence our temperaments from our parents — has undoubtedly generated in men a deep sense of kinship and communion with all creatures. It has given men a “world loyalty”. Gautama Buddha himself is “one of an endless line of Enlightened Beings, reaching from remotest times into immeasurable cycles of futurity.” Likewise, every Buddhist can think of himself as having been incarnated in an indefinite number of races of men and conditions of life, and as one participant now in dynamic spiritual evolution.

Through its teachings of understanding, renunciation, resolution, and compassion, Buddhism has helped large numbers of people to deal effectively with the problems of change and suffering, anxiety and identity. It has given them a sense of identity with something important, in a world that undermined their identity. It has enabled men to live with equanimity in a world of time and disappointment and to live creatively in a world of transience and destruction. This has been its contribution to man, and this is Buddha’s and Buddhism’s value for the modern world.



Printed  
**SUPRA PRINTER**  
75, Angunaw  
Peraden  
Sri Lan

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# **RAYS OF THE DHAMMA**

**JOHN ANDREW STOREY**

**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY.**

# **RAY S O F T H E D H A M M A**

Poems by

**JOHN ANDREW STOREY**

**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY**

Kandy                      Vesak  
                                 1973                      Sri Lanka (Ceylon)

For my wife, Sylvia,  
and for my children  
Jonathan, Alison and  
Jeremy.



Acknowledgements are made  
to The Inquirer; The Middle  
Way; World Faiths and The  
Bulletin of the Japan Society  
for poems already printed,

\* \* \* \* \*

Other works by the same author.

The Festival of Vesak.  
Meditation – The Inward Journey.  
Rebirth.

Published by  
The Buddhist Publication Society.  
P. O. Box 61,  
Kandy, Sri Lanka.

## INTRODUCTION.

The poems in this slim volume are of two basic kinds, haiku – a traditional Japanese verse form – and longer poems of a more familiar Western pattern. About the latter little need be said beyond commenting that a number of these were originally written to be sung and this has determined their shape and structure which some may now regard as rather old-fashioned. Poems however are vehicles to convey ideas, and the value of these poems – if any – should be looked for not in their structure but in the ideas and ideals they attempt to convey. The aim of these simple verses is to present in an easily assimilated form some of the basic principles and beliefs of Buddhism. Not all of the poems are specifically 'religious', though all have been inspired by the spirit of Buddhism.

About the haiku verses rather more needs to be said. These short poems – which originated in Japan – consist of only seventeen syllables, and should be arranged in three lines of five, seven and five syllables respectively. Within this tiny structure the poet seeks to evoke a response so that the reader too participates in the poem and becomes aware of a certain mood or experience. As in all forms of Japanese art the aim is to arouse the active participation of the beholder. It is the source of haiku poetry, and though the subject of the poem often seems small and mundane – a frog jumping into a pond, a bird on a twig etc. – there is beyond the apparently trivial event a deep awareness of Life and of the nature of things. There should be an unforced naturalness about a haiku poem. As Alan Watts observed:

‘The artificial haiku always feels like a piece of life which has been deliberately broken off or wrenched away from the universe, whereas the genuine haiku has dropped of all by itself, and has the whole universe inside it.’ The haiku – as the Japanese would say – is like ‘a finger pointing at the moon’; one should look not at the finger (poem) but at that to which it points. Thus does the haiku reflect the spirit of Zen from which it originated and from whence its inspiration comes.

Any work on a religion such as Buddhism which had its origins in an alien culture is bound to contain words which will be unfamiliar to the non-specialist reader. Where necessary foot-notes have been added to make the meaning of such words clear, and I have consulted Mr. Christmas Humphrey’s standard work ‘A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism’ in an effort to be accurate in my definitions.

Finally I would like to place on record my grateful thanks to my wife for her encouragement and many helpful suggestions.

**JOHN ANDREW STOREY**

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## DEDICATION.

(A poem to be read before Meditating.)

With earnest mind I venture now  
My labours to review ,  
To high endeavour I will vow  
To give myself anew.

For purity I cannot bring  
May striving suffice,  
For holiness my offering  
Shall be self's sacrifice.

That wisdom that I cannot claim  
I will make haste to learn,  
And this shall be my constant aim  
All folly hence to spurn.

So may this hour testify  
The earnest of my will,  
My noblest yearnings gratify,  
My inner needs fulfill.

"Noise is not in the market-place, nor quiet in the hills, but in the ever-changing hearts of men."

*A Chinese Proverb.*

"The Light is within thee, let the Light shine."

*The Egyptian Hierophants.*

## MELANCHOLY.

On a sunless day

My sad body tries in vain

To make shadows play.

## VANITY.

Seeking to be grand

The empty mirage mocks me

And I clutch at sand.

## REAPING.

(Thoughts on karma suggested by the Harvest.)

The ancient cries of 'Harvest-Home'  
Once more with gladness fill the air,  
The fullness of the year has come  
And brought rejoicing everywhere.

In hope the seeds were sown in Spring  
And Nature does her promise keep  
That what is sown at last shall bring  
A harvest rich for us to reap.

Our lives are like an open field  
Where day by day we sow our seeds,  
And they in time shall bring their yield,  
A harvest from our thoughts and deeds.

Then Nature's lesson let us learn,  
Sow wisely for the days to come,  
That we may reap the good we yearn  
And bring a happy harvest home.

\* \* \* \* \*

**KARMA:** The law of cause and effect, through the operation of which a man "reaps what he sows", builds his character, makes his destiny, and works out his salvation.



## NIRVANA.

A man born blind can never know  
The beauty of the sunset glow,  
No words can make him understand  
The splendour of the vision grand.

Nirvana cannot be defined  
Or comprehended by the mind,  
For what is Ultimately Real  
No creed is able to reveal.

The Teacher can but point ahead  
Along the road that we must tread,  
Who walks the Path at last shall see  
With inward eyes, Reality.

**NIRVANA :** The supreme Goal of Buddhist endeavour; release from the limitations of existence. A state attainable in this life by right aspiration, purity of life, and the elimination of egoism.

## SACRIFICE.

Self-forgetfully

The candle gives us its light  
Sacrificially.

## REBIRTH.

From the dying wick

A new candle takes the flame  
And teaches rebirth.

## LIBERATION.

The departing flame

Unfed by further fuel  
Enters Nirvana.

## THE WHEEL

Turning, ever turning,  
 the world, the seasons and the Wheel  
 to which I'm bound by chains of my own making.  
 Returning, ever returning,  
 again and yet again to wear out bodies  
 like suits of clothes and fill a thousand  
 graves with useless bones—  
 Is there no end to this,  
 no way to find the bliss of Liberation?  
 I will unyoke the chariot, make the stallions flee,  
 and from the halted Wheel at last break free—

“If both wife and husband wish to behold each other in this very life and the life to come, if both are matched in faith, in virtue, in generosity and in wisdom, then do they behold each other in this very life and in the life to come.”

*The Buddha: From the Anguttara Nikāya.*

## LOVE'S HOPE.

Another age, another shore,  
 Incarnate in another frame,  
 My heart's true love I've known before  
 Though called by now forgotten name,  
 Together we again shall be,  
 For ties that bind our hearts remain,  
 My true love shall return to me  
 And I will claim her once again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Since the so-called "soul" or "personality" is nothing more than a constantly changing "stream of consciousness" this poem, on the face of it, is a nonsense. However, even "streams of consciousness" can flow together again when a karmic link has been forged between them, and future lives and relationships will be no less "real" than the ones we know now. The romantic slant given to the doctrines of karma and rebirth in this poem will not appeal to the earnest Buddhist, whose aim — quite rightly — is nothing less than that of breaking free from the Wheel of Rebirth altogether. For the less advanced — still bound by attachments — it offers some comfort, and is in keeping with the practical approach of Buddhism which recognises that for most people Nirvana will remain, for a long time to come, a far distant Goal.

\* \* \* \* \*

## FAR MEMORY.

(An haunting impression of something experienced long ago.)

Moonlight on watar,  
Beauty's perfection left its reflection  
Mirrored in my heart.  
The stream flowed on\*  
And yet,  
I did not forget  
That haunting scene which was to be  
So lastingly a part of me.

---

\* A reference to the stream of consciousness which becomes incarnate in successive earth lives.

## CAPTIVE.

Caught between branches

The bright moon chained to the tree

My heart entrances.

## REFLECTION.

With introspection

Watching moonlight on water

Time for reflection.

## ILLUMINATION.

Only the moonlight

Illuminating my path

Takes away the dark.

## LOTUS BLOSSOM.

Mud, slime, and from the gloom  
 Triumphantly a perfect bloom  
 Breaks through to greet the sun.  
 And we are taught the Way that saves,  
 The Path to tread,  
 That we may raise above the waves  
 A lotus-head.

\* \* \* \* \*

**THE LOTUS SYMBOL:** The beauty and purity of the lotus flower' contrasts strikingly with the mud and slime which is its habitat; and it is therefore taken by Buddhists as a symbol of how to live a pure life in spite of foul surroundings.

**THE WAY:** Short for 'The Middle Way' which avoids all extremes and leads to Enlightenment.

**THE PATH:** Short for the 'Noble Eightfold Path' which means having Right Understanding, Right Thought or Motive, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration or Meditation.

**THE WAVES:** Used here to symbolise hatred, ignorance and greed, and unwholesome craving for transient things.

## CLOUDS.

Against the blue sky  
Pink clouds are tossed by the wind.  
The cherry blossom.

## INTERACTION.

The falling raindrops  
Help the sun to paint the sky  
With rainbow colours.

## BLACKBIRD.

Blackbird on a rock  
Stands as still as a statue  
Denying he lives.



## VESAK.

'May peace be in the hearts of men',  
Our Vesak hopes once more arise,  
The wistful season brings again  
Its yearly hopes of paradise.

The fabled stories still endear  
And recollections call to mind  
Of one who sought to banish fear  
By preaching love for all mankind.

That timeless message still we spurn  
And to his call no heed we pay,  
This Vesak-time may all men turn  
And tread at last the Middle Way.

\* \* \* \* \*

VESAK: The month corresponding to April-May, on the Full Moon Day of which is celebrated the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbana (passing away never again to be reborn on earth) of the Buddha. Vesak marks the beginning of the Buddhist year.

THE MIDDLE WAY: The Path between all extremes which leads to Enlightenment.

“Brethren, he who would wait on me, let him  
wait on the sick.” *The Buddha*

“To live to benefit mankind is the first step  
on the way.” *The Voice of the Silence.*

## KARUNA.

The world is full of poverty,  
The world is full care,  
And people in extremity  
Are driven to despair;  
The poor are ever with us still  
The hungry we must feed,  
We cannot do the Master's will  
Until we meet their need.

The lonely and companionless,  
The prisoner in his cell,  
The sick and dying in distress  
With fears they can't dispell;  
The homeless and the destitute  
For whom our hearts should bleed,  
We cannot do the Master's will  
Until we meet their need.

\* \* \* \* \*

KARUNA: Active compassion.

The second of the four sublime states – See Wheel No. 6

## THE YELLOW ROBE.

Not all can wear the Saffron Robe,  
 But each can share the truth he knows,  
 Though not a Bhikkhu, one may point  
 Towards the Goal which ends life's woes,  
 The layman too must play his part  
 By helping others to begin,  
 And thinking what it represents  
 The Yellow Robe should wear within.

\* \* \* \* \*

**THE YELLOW ROBE:** The Yellow or Saffron Robe has been worn by Bhikkhus (monks) since the time of the Buddha. The respect paid to monks in Buddhist lands—which has so often surprised Western observers—is given not so much to the man as to the Robe he wears and all that it represents.

“The best of all gifts is the gift of Truth.”

*The Dhammapada.*

“There is no religion higher than Truth.”

*The Theosophist Motto.*

## TRUTH.

Than Truth no faith can higher be  
Nor any creed more right,  
It is our one authority  
Our only guiding light.

Its knowledge ever points the way  
To freedom's larger shore,  
For Truth does ever sweep away  
All false confining lore.

To Truth, the golden heresy,  
Our loyalty we'll give,  
Its sacred flame guard zealously  
So long as we shall live.

Than Truth there is no higher faith  
There is no nobler way,  
We'll follow ever in its path  
And never from it stray.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The past is like a dream  
The future as a mirage."

"Life is a bridge, pass over it, but build no house  
upon it." *The Buddha*

### THE ETERNAL NOW.

The ceaseless flow of endless time  
No man can check or stay,  
We'll view the past with no regret  
Nor future with dismay.

The present slips into the past  
And dream-like melts away,  
The creaking of tomorrow's dawn  
Begins a new today.

The past and future ever meet  
In the eternal now,  
To make each day a thing complete  
Shall be our constant vow.

## DAWN.

Only a pink blush  
On the sky-line's icy cheek  
Tells me it is Dawn.

## SPRING.

A bird on a twig  
Pecking off the infant buds  
Does not halt the Spring.

## IMPERMANENCE.

Springtime renewal  
Morning dew-drop in the sun  
Transient jewel.

## IMPARTIALITY.

The wind – impartial  
Flutters the flags of both sides  
Mocking the martial.

## AUTUMN.

The petals falling  
An end of Autumn warning  
Of Winter's coming.

## DANCE.

Beneath the bare trees  
The dry leaves dance in the breeze  
Their Autumn farewell.

## SILHOUETTES.

The distant horses  
Nibble at the horizon  
Making silhouettes.

## NIGHTFALL.

Swallowing the sun  
The horizon sucks down day  
Nightfall has begun.

## TRANSFORMATION.

It ventured too near  
The snowflake kissing my cheek  
Becoming a tear.



“Parents should restrain their  
children from vice. Train them  
in virtue.”

*From the ‘Sigalovada Sutta’*

“A child’s behaviour is a mirror  
of the parent’s character.”

*A Chinese Proverb.*

## MIRRORED LIVES.

The child will mirror how we live,  
Reflect the lives we lead,  
Of the example which we give  
Our little ones take heed.

Reflected in the way they live  
Our lives are clearly shown,  
And by the things for which they strive  
Our character is known.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Let a man . . . conquer the stingy by a gift, Let him give when asked, even from the little he has."

*The Buddha*

"He is truly generous who does not remember what he has given to others. He is truly grateful who does not forget what others have given him. To have true generosity and true gratitude is the mark of a virtuous man."

*Li Shu Kung.*

## GIVE AND TAKE

True generosity is shown  
When we forget the gifts we make,  
Our charity must not be known  
If exercised for other's sake.

Yet grateful hearts should never shrink  
From showing thanks to those who gave,  
But of their kindness often think  
And take their memory to the grave.

The way we give, the way we get,  
Reveals our character to all,  
We truly give when we forget,  
And nobly take when we recall.

\* \* \* \* \*

"As in the ancient torch-races, which seemed to Lucretius to be the symbol of all life, we press forward torch in hand along the course. Soon from behind comes the runner who will outpace us. All our skill lies in giving into his hands the living torch, bright and unflickering, as we ourselves disappear in the darkness."

*Havelock Ellis.*

"Our daily work must be done for the glory of the dead and for the good of those who are to come after."

*Joseph Conrad.*

## TORCH-BEARERS

The chain of history is long,  
We link the past and future age,  
Our generation must keep strong  
The golden thread of heritage.

Into our hands the living flame  
For our safe keeping now has come,  
Like runners in the ancient game  
We clutch the torch and hand it on.

We work for glory of the dead,  
For children of the coming age,  
Soon we shall pass, and in our stead  
New men shall join life's pilgrimage.

The blazing torch we keep alive  
In honoured tribute to the past,  
Into their waiting hands we'll give  
Bright and unflickering at last.

"The light of stars that were extinguished ages ago still reaches us. So it is with great men who died centuries ago, but still reach us with the radiations of their personality."

*Kahlil Gibran.*

## UNDYING ECHOES.

The lives which touch our own each day  
Are influenced unconsciously  
By views we hold, the things we say,  
Our simple deeds of charity.

On Earth we still receive the light  
Of stars burnt out in aeons past,  
The lives of those who serve the right  
Shines with a lustre that will last.

This life of ours can never end,  
Its influence still perseveres,  
And by our deeds we ever send  
Undying echoes down the years.

\* \* \* \* \*

“He who knoweth the precepts by heart, but faileth to practice them, is like unto one who lighteth a lamp and then shutteth his eyes.”

*Tibetan Proverb.*

## GUIDING LIGHT.

Our Dharma study lit the lamp  
Of precepts wise and true,  
And we must never close our eyes  
To shut it from our view;  
Its radiance from other men  
We must not cloak or hide,  
But raise it high that it may then  
Become their daily guide.

\* \* \* \* \*

DHARMA: A word with several meanings. Here used simply as indicating Buddhist Doctrine.

## WORDLESSNESS.

(Upon contemplating the Buddha and his Teaching)

Words!

They cannot convey

Nor yet reveal

All that I feel.

What can I say?

Vain are my efforts to impart

The inner feelings of my heart.

## INWARDNESS.

Seek not for quiet in the hills  
Nor shun the market-place,  
Tumult or peace are in the heart,  
Their presence there we trace.

Return within, Buddha-wisdom  
Is found within,  
That inward centre in overselves  
Where truth abides in full.

Who inwardly with patience delves  
Shall find the spark divine,  
The Light that is within overselves  
May we let ever shine.

\* \* \* \* \*



