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DHAMMA

VOL. VII

No. 4

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THE LIGHT OF THE DHAMMA

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EDITORIAL

ANICCA

(IMPERMANENCE)

*Sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā’
ti yadā paññāya passati,
atha nibbindati dukkhe:
esa maggo visuddhiyā.*

—Dhammapada, verse 277.

(When one realises with wisdom that all conditioned things are impermanent, one gets disgusted with the unsatisfactoriness of life. This is the Path to Purity.)

Anicca is usually translated as “impermanence”, and is one of the three characteristics of existence (ti-lakkhaṇa). The universe is in a state of constant change. Nothing remains the same for two consecutive moments. From the very moment a thing is built, it tends down to destruction with all certainty. The newly erected beautiful building becomes older day by day, till one day it is brought down, and not even a trace of it is to be found. Each beat of our heart brings us nearer to death.

Impermanence is not a philosophical dogma but it is a fact—a reality, which we feel and experience so very strongly in our every day life. It is only due to *avijjā* (ignorance) that we fail to see things as they really are (*yathā bhūta*). We have heard a man say, “I was using a particular motor car for a period of more than twelve years.” During these twelve years he had often to change and replace almost each and every part of it, to get it repaired, overhauled and varnished. Still, he said that it was the same motor car that he had bought twelve years ago. It is so, because his purpose of riding the car was fulfilled all along. And so, he continued to identify it to be the same throughout. Though we have to make such identifications everywhere for our practical mundane purposes, from the standpoint of the ultimate truth, such idea as ‘permanent’ or ‘lasting’ is the outcome of ignorance.

In the ultimate sense the life-moment of living beings is extremely short, being only as much as the occurrence of a single conscious moment. Just as a chariot wheel, when it is rolling, rolls or touches the ground only on one point of the circumference of its tyre, and, when it is at rest, rests only on one point, so too, the life of beings lasts only for a single conscious moment. When that consciousness has ceased, the being is said to have ceased, according as it is said: ‘In the past conscious moment he did live, not he does live, not he will live. In the future conscious moment he will live, not he did live, not he does live. In the present conscious moment he does live, not he did live, not he will live.’

“Life, person, pleasure, pain—just these alone
Join in one conscious moment that flicks by.
Ceased aggregates of those dead or alive
Are all alike, gone never to return.
No (world is) born if (consciousness is) not
Produced; when that is present, then it lives;
When consciousness dissolves, the world is
dead;
The highest sense this concept will allow”.

—Mahā Niddesa 42.

“The five aggregates are impermanent. Why? Because their essence is to rise and fall and change. Impermanence is the rise and fall and change in those aggregates, or it is their non-existence after having been; the meaning is, it is the breaking-up of produced aggregates through their momentary dissolution since they do not remain in the same mode.”¹

The commentaries of Venerable Buddhaghosa elaborate the Sutta definitions further, distinguishing between *anicca* (the impermanent) and *anicca-lakkhaṇa* (characteristic of impermanence). “The five

¹ See Ñāṇamoli’s *Visuddhimagga*, page 313.

categories are impermanent. Why? Because their essence is to rise and fall and change, and because, after having been, they are not. But the characteristic of impermanence (*anicca-lakkhaṇa*) is their state of rise and fall and alteration, or it is their mode-transformation (*ākāra-vikāra*) called non-being after having been.”

“These modes are not included in the aggregates because they are states without individual essence (*asabhāva-dhammā*); and they are not separate from the aggregates because they are unapprehensible without the aggregates. But they should be understood as appropriate conceptual differences (*paññattivīsesa*) that are reasons for differentiation in the explaining of dangers in the five aggregates, and which are allowable by common usage in respect of the five aggregates.”¹

Impermanence is observable empirically and is objectively and publicly evident, always if looked for, and from time to time forcing itself upon our notice. Externally it is found in the inconstancy of ‘things’, which extends even to the periodical destruction of world-systems; and in oneself it can be observed, for instance, in the body’s blemishes (*ādīnava*) because it ages, is prone to sickness, dies and gradually decays after death; life is short. But it would be better for an unskilled lay person to treat as self (*atta*) this body, which is constructed upon the Four Great Primaries (*mahābhūta*), than cognizance (*citta*). Why? Because this body can last one year, two years...even a hundred years; but what is called “cognizance” and “consciousness” (*viññāṇa*) arises and ceases differently through night and day, just as a monkey roaming in a forest from tree to tree seizes a branch, and, letting that go, seizes another.’²

IMPERMANENCE AS A SUBJECT FOR CONTEMPLATION:

*Handa dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo veyadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetha*³

(Indeed, Bhikkhus, I declare to you: all formations are subject to destruction; work out your own salvation with earnestness.) A little earlier He had said ‘Has it not been repeatedly said by me that there is separation, division and parting from all that is dear and beloved? How could it be that what is born, come to being, formed and inseparable from the idea of fall, should not fall? That is not possible.’

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya the Buddha declared:

“Bhikkhus, the eye is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is ill. What is ill, that is impersonal. What is impersonal, that is not mine: I am not it: it is not my personality. That is how to see things, with right knowledge, as they really are.

The ear is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is ill. What is ill, that is impersonal. What is impersonal, that is not mine: I am not it: it is not my personality. That is how to see things, with right knowledge, as they really are.

The nose, ... the tongue, ... the body, ... the mind is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is ill. What is ill, that is impersonal. What is impersonal, that is not mine: I am not it: it is not my personality. That is how to see things, with right knowledge, as they really are. So seeing, Bhikkhus, the well-trained Noble disciple is disgusted with eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Being disgusted with them, he has no craving for them. Having no craving for them, he is set free. In him, thus set free, there arises the knowledge of his freedom, and he realises: ‘Rebirth is no more; I have lived the pure life; I have done what

¹ See Ñāṇamoli’s Visuddhimagga, page 747.

² Suttanta Piṭaka, Saṃyutta-Nikāya, Nidāna-vagga Saṃyutta Pāli 7. Mahā-vagga, Assutavā Sutta, p. 320, 6th Syn. Edn.

³ Suttanta Piṭaka, Dīgha Nikāya. Mahā-vagga Pāli, 1. Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, p. 100, 6th Syn. Edn.

ought to be done; I have nothing more to do for realisation of Arahathship.”¹

“When a man abides thus mindful and fully aware, diligent, ardent and self-controlled, then if pleasant feeling arises in him, he understands: ‘This pleasant feeling has arisen in me; but this is dependent and not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on this body. But this body is impermanent, formed and dependently originated. Now how could pleasant feeling, arisen dependent on an impermanent, formed, dependently arisen body, be permanent? In the body and in the feeling he abides contemplating impermanence and fall and fading and cessation and relinquishment. As he does so, this underlying

tendency to lust for the body and for pleasant feeling is abandoned. Similarly, when he contemplates unpleasant feeling his underlying tendency to resistance (*paṭigha*) to the body and unpleasant feeling is abandoned; and when he contemplates neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feeling his underlying tendency to ignorance of the body and of that feeling is abandoned.”²

¹ Saṃyutta Nikāya, Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta Pāḷi, 1. Saḷāyatana Saṃyutta, 1. Ajjhata Sutta, p. 236, 6th Syn. Edn.

² Saṃyutta Nikāya, Saḷāyatana-vagga, Saṃyutta Pāḷi, 1. Saḡāthā-vagga. 7. Paṭhama-gelaṇṇa Sutta p. 412, 6th Syn. Edn.

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DEVOTION IN BUDDHISM

By

Ven. Nyanaponika Mahāthera.

The Buddha repeatedly discouraged any excessive veneration paid to him personally. He knew that an excess of purely emotional devotion will obstruct or disturb the development of a balanced character, and that it may become a serious obstacle to progress on the path to deliverance. The history of religion has since proved him right, as illustrated by the extravagancies of emotional mysticism in East and West.

There is the story of the monk Vakkali¹ who full of devotion and love for the Buddha, was every desirous to behold him bodily. To him the Buddha said: “What shall it profit you to see this impure body? Who sees the Teaching (Dhamma) sees me.”

Shortly before the Buddha passed away, he said: “If a monk or a nun, a devout man or a devout woman, lives in accordance with the Teaching, is correct in his life, walks in conformity with the Teaching—it is he who rightly honours, reverences, venerates, holds sacred and reveres the Perfect One (*Tathāgata*) with the worthiest homage.”²

A true and deep understanding of the Dhamma, together with a conduct that is in conformity with that understanding—these are vastly superior to any external homage or mere emotional devotion. That is the instruction conveyed by these two teachings of the Master.

It will be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Buddha disparaged a reverential and devotional attitude of mind when it is the natural outflow of a true understanding and a deep admiration of what is great and noble. It

would also be a grievous error to believe that the “Seeing of the Teaching” (spoken of in the first saying) is identical with a mere intellectual appreciation of the doctrine and a purely conceptual grasp of it. Such a one-sidedly abstract approach to the very concrete message of the Buddha all too often leads to intellectual smugness. In its barrenness it will certainly not be a substitute for the strong and enlivening impulse imparted by a deep-felt devotion to what is known as great, noble and exemplary. Devotion being a facet and natural accompaniment of Confidence (*saddhā*), a necessary factor in the ‘balance of faculties’ (*indriya-samatā*) required for final deliverance. Confidence, in all its aspects (and among them, the devotional) is required for resolving any stagnation and other shortcomings resulting from a one-sided development of the intellectual faculties (intelligence, insight, wisdom; *pañña*) which often tend to turn around in circles endlessly, without being able to effect a break-through. Here, Devotion, Confidence, Faith (in whatever way we wish to render the Pāli term *saddhā*) may be able to give quick help.

Though the Buddha refused to be made the object of an emotional ‘personality cult’, he, on the other hand, knew that “respect and homage paid to those who are worthy of it, is a great blessing.” The Buddha made this statement in the very first stanza of one of his principal ethical injunctions, the verses on Blessings (Mahā-Maṅgala Sutta).³ Mentioning the value of a respectful, reverential attitude together with the blessings of “avoiding fools and associating with the wise”, the Buddha obviously regarded such attitude as fundamental for individual and social progress and for the acquisition of any further and

¹ Khuddaka Nikāya Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, 25. Bhikkhuvagga, II. Vakkali Thera Vatthu, p. 380; 6th Syn. Edn.

² Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga Pāli, 3. Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Tathāgatapacchimavācā, p. 127; 6th Syn. Edn.

³ Khuddakapāṭha-Aṭṭhakathā, 5 Maṅgalasutta-vaṇṇanā, p. 75, 6th Syn. Edn.

higher Blessings. One who is incapable of any reverential attitude will also be incapable of any spiritual progress beyond the narrow limits of his present mental condition. One who is so blind as not to see or recognize anything higher and better than the little mud-pool of his own petty self and environment, will for a long time suffer from 'retarded growth'. And he who out of a demonstrative self-assertion, scorns any reverential attitude in himself and in others, is imprisoned in his self-conceit which is a most effective bar to a true maturity of character and to spiritual growth. It is by recognizing and honouring someone or something higher, one honours and enhances one's own inner potentialities.

*"When the high heart we magnify,
And the sure vision celebrate,
And worship greatness passing by,
Ourselves are great."*

Since respect, reverence and devotion are partial aspects of the Buddhist concept of Confidence (*saddhā*), one will now understand, also from this angle, why Confidence has been called the seed of any other beneficial quality.

The nobler the object of reverence or devotion, the higher is the blessing bestowed by it. "Those who have joyous confidence in the highest, highest fruit will be theirs."¹ The supreme object of a Buddhist's reverence and devotion are his Three Refuges, also called the Three Jewels or Ideals: the Buddha, his Teaching (*Dhamma*) and the Community of saintly monks (*Saṅghā*). Here, too, the Buddha is revered not as a personality of such and such a name, nor as a deity, but as the embodiment of Enlightenment. A text often recurring in the Buddhist scriptures, says that a devout lay disciple "has confidence (*saddhā*), he believes in the Enlightenment of the Perfect One." This confidence, however, is not the outcome of blind faith based on hearsay, but it is derived

from the devotee's reasoned conviction based on his own understanding of the Buddha Word which speaks to him clearly with a voice of unmistakable Enlightenment. This derivation of his assurance is emphasized by the fact that, along with Confidence, also Wisdom is mentioned among the qualities of an ideal lay follower.

We may now ask: Is it not quite natural that feelings of love, gratitude, reverence and devotion seek expression through the entire man, through acts of body and speech as well as through his thoughts and unexpressed sentiments? Will one, for instance, hide one's feelings towards parents and other beloved ones? Will not one rather express them by loving words and deeds? Will not one cherish their memory in suitable ways, as for instance, by preserving their likeness in one's home, by placing flowers on their graves, by recalling their noble qualities? In such a way, also one who has become alienated from the devotional aspects of religion, may seek to understand the outward acts of homage which are customary in Buddhist lands: when, with reverential gesture, flowers and incense are placed before a Buddha image and devotional texts are recited which are not prayers but meditation. Provided that such practice does not deteriorate into a thoughtless routine, a follower of the Dhamma will derive benefit if he takes up some form of devotional practice adapting it to his personal temperament and to the social customs of his environment.

Buddhism, however, does not in the least impose upon its followers a *demand* to observe any outward form of devotion or worship. This is entirely left to the choice of individuals whose emotional, devotional and intellectual needs are bound to differ greatly. No Buddhist should feel himself forced into an iron-cast mould, be it of a devotional or a rationalistic shape. As a follower of the Middle Way, a Buddhist should, however, avoid one-sided judgement also in this respect, and should try to appreciate individual needs and preferences of others which differ from those of his own.

¹ Aṅguttara Nikāya. Catukkanipāta Pāḷi, 1. Paṭhamapaṇṇāsaka, 3. Uruveḷa-vagga, 4. Kāḷākārāma Sutta. p. 333. 6th Syn. Edn.

More important and of greater general validity, however, than these outward forms of devotion, are the basic capacity for respect and reverence discussed at the beginning, and the practice of meditations or contemplations of a devotional character. Many benefits accrue from these and hence it was for good reasons that the Enlightened One recommended strongly and repeatedly the meditative Recollection of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*), along with other kindred Recollections.¹ Here, again, the reference is to the embodied ideal; and, therefore, the Buddha as a being freed from all traces of vanity and egotism, could well venture to recommend to his disciples a meditation of the Buddha.

What, then, are the benefits of such devotional meditations? Their first benefit is mental purification: they have been called by the Buddha “efficacious procedures for purifying a defiled mind”² “When a noble disciple³ contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time his mind is not enwrapped in lust, nor in hatred, nor in delusion. At such a time his mind is rightly directed: it has got rid of lust, is aloof from it, is freed from it. Lust is here a name of the five sense desires. By cultivating this contemplation, many beings become purified.”

If, by practising that devotional meditation, one endeavours to live, as it were, ‘in the Master’s presence’ (*sathā sammukhī bhūto*), one will feel ashamed to do or speak or think anything unworthy, one will shrink back from evil; and as a positive reaction, one will feel inspired to high endeavour, in emulation of the Master’s example.

Images, and not abstract concepts, are the language of the subconscious. If, therefore, the image of the Enlightened One is often created, within one’s mind, as the embodiment of the

Man Perfected, it will deeply penetrate into the subconscious mind, and, if sufficiently strong, will act as an ‘automatic brake’ against evil impulses. In such a way, the subconscious may become a powerful ally in gaining self-mastery while normally it is too often the hidden enemy of such endeavour. For that purpose of ‘*educating the subconscious*’, it will be helpful to use a Buddha image or a picture, as an aid in visualization, and in that way concentration of mind may be attained fairly soon. For evoking and deeply absorbing some features of the Buddha’s mentality, his qualities should be contemplated for instance, in the way described in the ‘Path of Purification’ (*Visuddhi Magga*).

The Recollection of the Buddha, being productive of joy (*pīti*), is an effective way of *invigorating the mind*, of lifting it up from states of listlessness, tension, fatigue, and frustration, which occur during meditation as well as in ordinary life. The Buddha himself advised: “if (in the strenuous practice of a subject of meditation, for instance) in the Contemplation of the Body, bodily agitation (including sense desires), or mental lassitude or distraction should arise in the meditator, then he should turn his mind to a gladdening (or elevating) subject.”⁴ And here the Teachers of old recommend especially the Recollection of the Buddha. When under its influence those hindrances to concentration have vanished, the meditator will be able to return to his original subject of meditation.

For a beginner especially, attempts at gaining concentration are often frustrated by an uneasy self-consciousness; the meditator squints, as it were, back upon himself; he becomes disturbingly aware of his body with its little discomforts, and of his mental state struggling against obstacles and thereby strengthening them. This may, for instance, happen when the subjects of meditation are

¹ The Path of Purification by Ñāṇamoli, page 206.

² Aṅguttara Nikāya, The Threes, No. 71; Channa Sutta, p. 216, 6th Syn. Edn.

³ Aṅguttara Nikāya, The Sixes. No. 25. Anussatiṭṭhāna Sutta, p. 275, 6th Syn. Edn.

⁴ Saṃyutta Nikāya, 3. Satipatṭhāna Saṃyutta, 10, Bhikkhunupassaya-sutta, p. 134, 6th Syn. Edn.

one's own physical or mental processes, but it may also occur with any other subject. In such a situation, it will be profitable to follow the advice given earlier and to turn one's attention from one's own personality to the inspiring visualization of the Buddha and the contemplation of his qualities. The joy thus produced may bring about that self-forgetfulness which is such an important factor for gaining concentration. Joy (*pīti*; 'joyful interest') produces calm (*passaddhi*), calm leads to ease (*sukha*) and ease to concentration (*samādhi*). Thus devotional meditation can serve as a valuable aid in attaining mental concentration which is the basis of liberating insight. This function of devotional meditation cannot be better described than in the words of the Master.

"When a noble disciple contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time his mind is not enwrapped by lust nor by delusion and at that time his mind is rightly directed towards the Perfect One (Tathāgata). And with a rightly directed mind the noble disciple gains enthusiasm for the goal, enthusiasm for the Dhamma, gains the delight derived from the Dhamma. In him thus delighted, joy arises; to one joyfully-minded, body and mind become calm; calmed in body and mind, he feels at ease; and if at ease the mind finds concentration. Such a one is called a Noble disciple who, among a humanity gone wrong, has attained to what is right; who among a humanity beset by troubles, dwells free of troubles." *

* Aṅguttara Nikāya, The Sixes, No. 10, Mahānāma Sutra, p. 252, 6th Syn. Edn.

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BUDDHISM AMONG THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD TODAY

(A talk on the Mahāsamaya Day)

By

U Ba Htu, B.J.S. (Retd.)

There are three Great International Religions in the world today. They are described as international in the sense that their influence is not confined to one particular race or country but extends far beyond racial and geographical boundaries. They are: Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

Although Hinduism is the oldest religion, yet it sought no conversion outside India and perhaps for that reason it was not considered an international religion in the world.

Foundation Principles of Christianity and Islam:

The two fundamental principles on which both Christianity and Islam are built up are God and Soul. In fact, these two factors are also found to be the main pillars in all other systems of faith. They are so closely interrelated that it appears as if one depends upon the other for existence. Inasmuch as God creates the soul of man it becomes necessary for God to salvage the soul from the spiritual consequence of sin.

Salvation in Christianity is contingent upon faith, hope, prayer and grace. In this respect, Buddhism is unique, because it is the only religion that denies the existence of God and Soul. This denial of the existence of both God and Soul is surprisingly striking to the Western student of Buddhist philosophy for any other religion worthy of the name builds up its fundamental doctrines on or around the two themes of God and Soul. In this connection the remarks made by an eminent Western writer may be quoted: "It will seem strange to many that a religion which ignores the existence of God and denies the existence of Soul should be

the very religion which has found most acceptance among men."¹

Western Scholar's Interest in Buddhism:

Western scholars are interested to know what special features there are in Buddhism that stand for God and Soul. After an intensive study of the scriptural texts they find that the entire Cosmos functions at the behests of the Universal Laws of Nature that reign supreme from eternity to eternity. They are described in the texts as "*Niyāma Dhammas*". They exist on their own rights as the Universal Cosmic Order; in this context they are synonymous with the Universal Truths of Nature. And as the Universal Truths they endure for all times. It is quite plain that the entire structure of the Buddha Dhamma stands on the unshakeable foundation of the Universal Truths of Nature. For this reason alone, Buddhism has nothing to fear from the shattering discoveries of Modern Science.

In place of Soul there is in the Buddha Dhamma the continuum of consciousness or life-processes motivated by the moral Law of Cause and Effect. This moral Law of Cause and effect is one of the five Universal Laws of nature² mentioned above. No one can put a stop to the operation of this Law of Cause and Effect. Successive rebirth immediately after the termination of one life is the result of the unrelenting operation of this Law and not due to any creator from outside. Naturally, a true Buddhist does not look up to any agency for liberation from suffering. On the other hand,

¹ T. W. Rhys Davids. Buddhism, 1910, p. 156.

² The Five-fold Niyāma is as follows:— (1) *Utu-niyāma* (The Caloric Order), (2) *Bīja-niyāma* (The Germinal Order), (3) *Kamma-niyāma* (The Moral Order), (4) *Citta-niyāma* (The Psychological Order), (5) *Dhamma-niyāma* (Natural Phenomenal Sequence). See the Light of the Dhamma, Vol. IV. No. I. p. 1.

he is self-reliant on his personal efforts while treading the Middle Way chalked by the Omniscient Buddha. As they come to understand the full significance and inner core of the Teaching, it is easy for foreign students of Buddhist philosophy to find that it is founded on Universal Truths and nothing else.

Past, Present and Future:

The Buddha Dhamma, unlike other systems, speaks about the past, present and future existences. On the basis of the operation of the Universal Laws of Nature, it becomes quite reasonable and justifiable for the Dhamma to speak about the past, present and future. In Buddhism nothing ever comes out of nothing. The Jātaka stories fully explain how the Buddha in his embryonic stages had to pass through millions of lives in the past existences.

The Dhamma not only deals with different stages of time but also speaks about millions of universes that have gone by and are now no more; it speaks about millions of universes that are existing at present in space and it speaks about millions of universes that are to come in the future. This fact about millions of universes existing at present is fully supported and substantiated by modern science. In this connection it may be interesting to point out the instructive discourse in which the exploits of Rohitanatha (God) are explained. This celestial Rohita possessed *iddhi* (supernormal powers) or moving about in the air at tremendous speed and had a desire to go to the end of the Cakkavāḷas (Universes). He tried his utmost for one hundred years when he found that his span of life came to an end and he expired in the midst of adventure.¹ Not only do we have subjects on time and space fully discussed in the Buddha Dhamma, but it also deals with the infinity of beings that are tirelessly travelling to and from this Saṃsāric existence against the immense background of time and space mentioned above.

Inasmuch as there is the infinity of beings one notices also the diversities that distinguish one from the other. Could you, for one moment find any justification or reason for these appalling, nay staggering diversities among creatures if they issued from a single source? The Buddhist answer for those diversities is that all living beings performed multitudinous acts in the past for which they inherit dissimilarities in status both good and bad in this life and as they still continue to perform variegated acts in this life which will in time produce varying resultants in the future. This view satisfies all who advocate rationalism in religion.²

Infinity of Beings:

Now Science reveals that millions of beings are to be found in a drop of water. It also tells us that each grain of sand on the seashore holds a film of water about itself and that inconceivably minute beings swim through the liquid film surrounding a grain of sand as fish would swim through the ocean covering the sphere of the Earth. And in this miniature world of their own round a single grain of sand, the immeasurably small creatures are living, dying, feeding, breathing and reproducing in a way most incomprehensible to ordinary human intellect.³ Surely, this question forces itself upon us: "If there are millions of living creatures in a film of water around a grain of sand, then in all the waters of the seas and oceans, what would be the magnitude of life?" Another query that strikes us is: "If this gigantic magnitude of life is the result of creation, then what is the aim and purpose of it all?" Here the discourse given by the Omniscient Buddha fully answers the question when He asked the monks after taking some grains of sand on the tip of His finger, "Bhikkhus, which is greater in number, the grains of sand on the tip of my finger or all the grains of sand on the Earth?" The Bhikkhus

¹ Saṃyutta Nikāya, Sagāthā Saṃyutta Pāḷi, 2. Devaputta Saṃyutta-vagga, 6. Rohitassa Sutta p. 60, 6th Syn. Edn.

² Readers' Digest. March 1956 Mystery of Life on a Seashore.

³ Majjhima Nikāya, Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta, Uparipañāsa, page 243, 6th Syn. Edn.

replied “Immeasurably greater, Oh Lord, is the number of sands on the Earth.” The Omniscient Buddha continued: “So too, Bhikkhus, are the beings in the heavens and in the human world comparable to sands on my finger tip; the rest of the grains on the Earth represents beings in the four abodes of suffering.” The Buddha speaks about the infinite vastness of space and inordinately huge number of beings which Modern Science supports in this Twentieth Century. Against this background of the immensity of time and space the pettiness of man is apparent. In time of crisis man displays his pettiness to the extreme. It is certain he can rarely rise above the crowd and environment. And if environment lifts him up he is capable of being haughty to the extreme. On the other hand, if his mind is tamed and cultivated, he can rise to the height of nobleness. Man’s position and potentiality cannot be underrated. Unlike adherents of other systems of faith a Buddhist does not look up to an outside agency for liberation from suffering or going to higher abodes of celestial Gods. According to the Buddha Dhamma man’s liberation depends upon the practice of morality, meditation and attainment of intuitive knowledge. It emphasizes the need for personal efforts to improve one’s own mind. The human mind can be brought to the heights of excellence and perfection by following the grand Middle Way prescribed by the Buddha. In the last analysis it is the personal efforts that count on the way to Liberation—to Nibbāna.

Criticism Against Religion:

Eminent men in the West are voicing misgivings against their own religion in the light of modern research. The discoveries of Science have undermined the traditional beliefs of the past. Buddhism is unique in this respect as no responsible criticism has been levelled that its tenets are not tenable in face of scientific progress.

The Buddha Dhamma has not only the answer for solving the riddle of life but also for peace and happiness of all beings. As one

walks the Way, peace and happiness comes by spontaneously and when he reaches the Upper heights on the Way he finds that he is at peace with himself and with the world around him.

The Buddha after attaining Omniscience untiringly preached the Dhamma for forty-five years. His teaching is deep and profound and is meant primarily for the wise. It exhaustively deals with ethics, physiology, psychology and philosophy.

In short, it comprises the entire range of subjects leading to knowledge and wisdom for the attainment of both mundane and ultra-mundane objectives in this life. It may be compared to a deep ocean in which invaluable treasures of centuries lay hidden or it is like a precious mine from which priceless stones and jewels may be dug out and owned.

Current Trends of our Small World:

The present World conditions do not lead anyone to hope or to complacency. On the other hand, all thinking men sense the imminence of the third global War. Just a handful of men on top seem to think that it is time to uphold their pride and prestige. Surely, by their persistence and waywardness they will knowingly throw this world into a state of abomination or annihilation. As citizens of the World we are constrained to ask: “Is it civilization by any standard East or West?” Through the misguided manipulations of a few, this World is again heading for a major catastrophe. The peace-loving peoples of the World should unanimously raise a note of protest and indignation. There is no justification whatsoever, either morally or politically for a small group of men to put an end to life on Earth. At no time in the history of the world is there such a need as now, for the sobering influence of the Buddha Dhamma: Conciliation—Forbearance—Mettā.

With Mettā, May there be peace and happiness to all beings.

THE DHAMMAPADA AND THE PRESENT-WORLD SITUATION

By Myanaung U Tin,

(Broadcast from B.B.S. on 27-6-60 C.E.)

The recent Paris Summit Conference ended before it had scarcely begun. And we are now living in a period which we might call, to use the words of Turgenev, an eminent Russian writer, "that dim, murky period when regrets come to resemble hopes, and hopes are beginning to resemble regrets."

The so-called East and West blamed each other for the break-down. Canon John Collins, Preceptor of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, observed, "Both sides are to blame for the collapse of the Summit, for both sides have built their house upon the sands of fear."

Now what is meant by fear? According to the Buddhist philosophy, fear is a phase of hate or anger. The Buddha teaches us that greed arises through unwise reflection on an attractive object; hate, through unwise reflection on a repulsive object. Thus, greed comprises all phases of attraction towards an object from the faintest trace of personal desire to the grossest egotism, whilst hate comprises all phases of ill-humour up to the highest pitch of hate or wrath. Fear is, obviously, a phase of hate or anger.

The so-called East and West hate each other for reasons that go down deep into history. They have been going all out to dominate, if possible, to destroy each other. And yet, because of increasing atomic power which both possess, they fear each other much more than ever. It appears that this mutual fear is a blessing in disguise.

In 1945, Albert Einstein said, "Since I do not foresee that atomic energy is to be a great boon for a long time, I have to say it is a menace. Perhaps it is well that it should be. It may intimidate the human race into bringing order into its international affairs, which, without the pressure of fear, it would not do so."

Atomic power has now become Frankenstein's monster, a monster that becomes formidable to the person who has created it. A war between the two blocs will certainly bring about not merely mutual destruction, but spell radioactive disaster in the whole world.

Canon Collins further observed, "Yet after the failure of the Summit Conference, we now turn more hysterically than before to the false prophets of fear, who insist that we rely on military strength, espionage, economic warfare, threats, propaganda and the nuclear deterrent. As Christians, we should be more realistic, understanding and sympathetic to both sides."

We, as Buddhists, should like to endorse fully the observations of Canon Collins. The Buddha enjoins upon us to show our loving-kindness and compassion to all without any discrimination. To us Buddhists, the peoples of both sides are our fellow-beings, be they Russians or the Chinese, the Americans, the British or the French. However, we must say that both sides are seized with hate, anger and fear, and they will be well advised to ponder a few verses of the Dhammapada, uttered by the Buddha over 2500 years ago. They are as fresh as ever and relevant to the contentions and disputes between the two sides.

"He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me," the hatred of those who harbour such thoughts is not appeased."—Verse 3.

"He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me," the hatred of those who do not harbour such thoughts is appeased."—Verse 4.¹

¹ For the story relating to Dhammapada, verses 3 and 4, see the Light of the Dhamma, Volume I, No 4, p. 26.

“Hatred never ceases by hatred in this world; by love alone it ceases. This is an ancient law.”—Verse 5.¹

In connection with a dispute that arose between two parties of Bhikkhus or monks, the Buddha said,

“The quarrelsome persons know not that in this quarrel they perish; those of them who realize it have their quarrels calmed thereby.”—Dhammapada, Verse 6.²

On another occasion, when King Pasenadi of Kosala lay writhing in shame and pain because he was defeated in battle by his nephew King Ajātasattu of Rājagaha, the Buddha observed,

“Victory breeds hatred; the defeated live in pain. Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat.”—Dhammapada, Verse 201.

The Buddha gave six discourses to 500 Bhikkhus at Mahāvana forest on a certain Full moon day, which is known as Nayan Full moon in this country. It is recognised as Mahāsamaya, Great Occasion. This year it fell on the 8th day of this month of June. The discourses relate to the six types of character:— (1) The greedy-natured; (2) The hateful-natured; (3) The stupid or dull-natured; (4) The faithful-natured; (5) The intelligent-natured; and (6) The ruminant-natured. The discourses may be read in the Khuddaka Nikāya. Here, it will suffice to point out that the 500 Bhikkhus to whom these six discourses were addressed were drawn, 250 each from among the Sākyas, members of the Buddha’s own clan, and their neighbours the Koliyas, who quarrelled about the use of the water of the Rohini river. The Buddha went and dissuaded both clans from fighting, finally uttering three verses as contained in the Dhammapada.

“Ah! happily do we live without hate among the hateful; amidst hateful men we dwell unhating.”—Verse 197.

“Ah! happily do we live in good health amongst the ailing; amidst ailing men we dwell in good health.”—Verse 198.

“Ah! happily do we live without yearning (for sensual pleasures) amongst those who yearn; amidst those who yearn for them we dwell without yearning.”—Verse 199.

Of the six discourses given on the Mahāsamaya Day, Kalahavivāda Sutta³ deals with the hateful-natured. It is the discourse on Contentions and Disputes. The Buddha teaches thus:

“From dear things rise contentions and disputes,

Grief with laments and envy in their train,

Pride and conceit with slander’s tongue in wake:

Contentions and disputes are envy-linked.

And slander’s tongues born amidst disputes.

“Desire’s the source of dear things in the world.

And all the greed that in the world prevails;

From that is hoping’s and fulfilment’s sources,

Which bring man to the common lot beyond.

¹ For the story connected with Dhammapada, verse 5, see the Light of the Dhamma, Vol II -No. 1 p. 19.

² For the story connected with Dhammapada, verse 6, see the Light of the Dhamma, vol. II-No. 2, p. 30.

³ Khuddaka Nikāya, Suttanipāta Volume I, p. 413. 6th Syn. Edn.

Khuddaka Nikāya, Mahāniddeśa Volume I, p. 196. 6th Syn. Edn.

“‘Tis pleasant, ‘tis pleasant” says the world,
 From trust in such there riseth up desire,
 Man sees in forms becomings and decay,
 And shapes his theories about the world.
 “Anger and falsehood and perplexity,
 These things prevail when those twin states exist.
 Let doubter in the path of knowledge train.
 These things by the recluse are taught—he knows.”

This is exactly what is happening in this world. Delusion breeds greed. Greed leads to hate, anger and fear. Because of these three roots of evil—Delusion, Greed and Hate, so-called Big Powers and little individuals plan and strive for world conquest. Surely, they will not achieve world conquest: world destruction is more likely.

The Jātakas (the Buddha’s Birth Stories) mention that, in the days of yore, the monarchs ruled in righteousness, observing the ten-fold code of the king or ten rules of governing, one of them being non-anger. The Buddha says, “Anger knows no reason or consequences.”¹ Non-anger is ever desirable, more so in a ruler or rulers.

In one of the Jātakas,² the King of Banaras was given a piece of advice to which any ruler of any age should pay attention:

“A monarch should check his anger. Whilst anger in an ordinary person is not so dangerous, anger in a monarch can easily lead to dire consequences. A monarch’s word is a weapon. A monarch’s glance in anger may bring destruction in its wake. A monarch

should be more careful than an ordinary person to check his anger. A monarch should show forbearance, loving-kindness and compassion. An angry monarch is not capable of guarding even his own interests.”

It appears that the destiny of mankind is, at the moment, in the hands of the rulers of five mighty States: Soviet Russia, People’s China, United States of America, United Kingdom and France. May these rulers be able to check their anger. The Buddha remarks:

“Whosoever pulls back rising anger as a driver to a rolling chariot, him I call a charioteer; others merely hold the reins.”³

We, as Buddhists, wish to make an appeal with all the good-will and earnestness to all concerned to pause and ponder the Buddha’s counsels. In the words of the Dhammapada (Verse 223) may they be able to “conquer anger by love; conquer evil by good; conquer the stingy one by giving; conquer the liar by truth!”

APPENDIX

“Victory breeds hatred; the defeated live in pain.

Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat.”

—Dhammapada, Verse 201.

This religious discourse was given by the Master while He was staying at Jetavana monastery with reference to the defeat of King Pasenadi of Kosala.

The story runs as follows:— King Pasenadi of Kosala fought against his nephew Ajātasattu near the village of Kāsika and suffered defeat thrice. As he returned from defeat the third time, he thought to himself, “Since I have not been able to subdue this tender youth, what is the use of my living any longer?” So he refused to eat and took to his bed. The news of

¹ Khuddaka Nikāya, Itivuttaka, p. 252, 6th Syn. Edn.

² Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā, Volume IV, ‘Verses Nos. 227-234, 6th Syn. Edn.

³ Dhammapada, verse 222.

what he had done, spread throughout the city and monastery. The monks reported the matter to the Master, saying, "Reverend Sir, report has it that the king, who thrice suffered defeat near the village of Kāsika and has just now returned from defeat, has refused to eat and has taken to his bed, saying, 'Since I have not been able to defeat this tender youth, what is the use of my living any longer?'" When the Master heard this report, He said, "Monks, by winning a victory, a man produces hatred; and he that is defeated is afflicted with suffering." So saying, the Master uttered the following stanza:

"Victory breeds hatred; the defeated live in pain.

Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat."

—Dhammapada, Verse 201.

A Quarrel Among Bhuddha's Kinsmen

"Ah! happily do we live without hate among the hateful; amidst hateful men we dwell unhating."—Verse 197.

"Ah! happily do we live in good health amongst the ailing; amidst ailing men we dwell in good health."— Verse 198.

"Ah! happily do we live without yearning (for sensual pleasures) amongst those who yearn; amidst those who yearn for them we dwell without yearning."— Verse 199.

This religious discourse was given by the Teacher while He was staying among the Sākyas with reference to the cessation of a quarrel among kinsmen.

The story runs as follows:— The Sākyas and the Koliyas caused the waters of the river Rohini to be confined by a single dam between the city of Kapilavatthu and the city of Koliya, and cultivated the fields on both sides of the river. Now in the month Jetthamūla the crops began to droop, whereupon the labourers employed by the residents of both cities assembled. Said the residents of the city of

Koliya, "If this water is diverted to both sides of the river, there will not be enough both for you and for us too. But our crops will ripen with a single watering. Therefore let us have the water."

The Sākyas replied, "After you have filled your storehouses, we shall not have the heart to take ruddy gold and emeralds and black pennies, and, baskets and sacks in our hands, go from house to house seeking favours at your hands. Our crops also will ripen with a single watering. Therefore let us have this water". "We will not give it to you". "Neither will we give it to you." Talk waxed bitter, until finally one arose and struck another a blow. The other returned the blow and a general fight ensued, the combatants making matters worse by aspersions on the origin of the two royal families.

Said the labourers of the Koliyas, "You who live in the city of Kapilavatthu, take your children and go where you belong. Are we likely to suffer harm from the elephants and horses and shields and weapons of those who, like dogs and jackals, have cohabited with their own sisters?" The labourers employed by the Sākyas replied, "You lepers, take your children and go where you belong. Are we likely to suffer harm from the elephants and horses and shields and weapons of destitute outcasts who have lived in jujube-trees like animals?" Both parties of labourers went and reported the quarrel to the ministers who had charge of the work, and the ministers reported the matter to the royal households. Thereupon the Sākyas came forth armed for battle and cried out, "We will show what strength and power belong to those who have cohabited with their sisters." Likewise the Koliyas came forth armed for battle and cried out, "We will show what strength and power belong to those who dwell in jujube-trees."

As the Teacher surveyed the world at dawn and beheld his kinsmen, he thought to himself, "If I refrain from going to them, these men will destroy each other. It is clearly my duty to go to them." Accordingly, he flew through the air

quite alone to the spot where his kinsmen were gathered together, and seated himself cross-legged in the air over the middle of the river Rohini. When the Teacher's kinsmen saw the Teacher, they threw away their weapons and did reverence to him. Said the Teacher to his kinsmen, "What is all this quarrel about, great king?" "We do not know, Reverend Sir." "Who then would be likely to know?" "The commander-in-chief of the army would be likely to know." The commander-in-chief of the army said, "The viceroy would be likely to know." Thus the teacher put the question first to one and then to another, asking the slave-labourers last of all. The slave-labourers replied, "The quarrel is about water, Reverend Sir"

Then the Teacher asked the king, "How much is water worth, great king?" "Very little, Reverend Sir." "How much are Khattiyas worth, great king?" "Khattiyas are beyond price, Reverend Sir." "It is not fitting that because of a little water you should destroy Khattiyas who are beyond price." They were silent. Then the Teacher addressed them and said, "Great kings, why do you act in this manner? Were I not here present today, you would set flowing a river of blood. You have acted in a most unbecoming manner. You live in enmity, indulging in the five kinds of hatred. I live free from hatred. You live with the sickness of the evil passions. I live free from disease. You live in eager pursuit of the five kinds of sensual pleasure. I live free from the eager pursuit of aught." So saying, he pronounced the following Stanzas:

"Ah! happily do we live without hate
among the hateful; amidst hateful men
we dwell unhating."—Verse 197.

"Ah! happily do we live in good health
amongst the ailing; amidst ailing men
we dwell in good health."— Verse 198.

"Ah! happily do we live without yearning
(for sensual pleasures) amongst those
who yearn; amidst those who yearn for
them we dwell without yearning."—
Verse 199.

The Tree-Spirit and the Monk:

"Whosoever pulls back rising anger as a driver to a rolling chariot, him I call a charioteer; others merely hold the reins."

This religious discourse was given by the Teacher while He was staying at Aggālava Shrine with reference to a certain monk.

For after the Teacher had given permission to the Congregation of Monks to lodge outside the walls of monastery, and while the treasurer of Rājagaha and others were busy providing such lodgings, a certain monk of Ālavī decided to build himself a lodging, and seeing a tree which suited him, began to cut it down. Thereupon, a certain spirit who had been reborn in that tree, and who had an infant child appeared before the monk, carrying her child on her hip and begged him not to cut down the tree saying, "Master, do not cut down my home; it will be impossible for me to take my child and wander about without a home." But the monk said, "I shall not be able to find another tree like this," and paid no further attention to what she said.

The tree-spirit thought to herself, "If he but look upon this child, he will desist," and placed the child on a branch of the tree. The monk, however, had already swung his axe. was unable to check the force of his upraised axe, and cut off the arm of the child. Furious with anger, the tree-spirit raised both her hands and exclaimed, "I will strike him dead." In an instant, however, the thought came to her, "This monk is a righteous man; if I kill him, I shall go to Hell. Moreover, if other tree-spirits see monks cutting down their own trees, they will say to themselves, 'Such and such a tree-spirit killed a monk under such circumstances,' and will follow my example and kill other monks. Besides, this monk has a master; I will therefore content myself with reporting this matter to his master."

Lowering her upraised hands, she went weeping to the Teacher, and having saluted him, stood at one side. Said the Teacher,

“What is the matter, tree-spirit?” The tree-spirit replied, “Reverend Sir, your disciple did this and that to me. I was sorely tempted to kill him, but I thought this and that, refrained from killing him, and came here.” So saying, she told him the story in detail. When the Teacher heard her story, he said to her, “Well done, well done, spirit! you have done well in holding in, like a swift speeding chariot, your anger when it was thus aroused.” So saying, he pronounced the following Stanza:

“Whosoever pulls back rising anger as a driver to a rolling chariot, him I call a charioteer; others merely hold the reins.”

At the conclusion of the discourse the tree-spirit was established in the Fruit of Stream-winner; the assembled company also profited by it.

But even after the tree-spirit had obtained the Fruit of Stream-winner, she stood weeping. The Teacher asked her, “What is the matter, tree-spirit?” “Reverend Sir,” she replied, “my house has been destroyed; what am I to do now?” Said the Teacher, “Enough, tree-spirit; be not disturbed; I will give you a place of abode.” With these words he pointed out near the Perfumed Chamber at Jetavana a certain tree from which a tree-spirit had departed on the preceding day and said, “In such and such a place is a tree which stands by itself, enter therein.” Accordingly the tree-spirit entered into that tree. Thenceforth, because the tree-spirit had received her place of abode as a gift from the Buddha, although spirits of great power approached that tree, they were unable to shake it. The Teacher took this occasion to lay down and enjoin upon the monks the observance of the precept regarding injuring of plants and trees.

Story of Uttarā and Sirimā:

From the day Uttarā went to the house of her husband, she was no longer privileged to approach a monk or a nun, to give alms, or to listen the Dhamma. After two and a half month she asked the maid-servants: "How much of

the rainy season still remains?" "Half a month, your ladyship." So Uttarā sent the following message to her father: “Why have they incarcerated me? It would be far better to put a brand on me and proclaim me as a slave-girl, than to give me over to such a *micchādīṭṭhi* (heretic) household as this. From the day I first entered this house, I have not so much as seen a monk, nor have I had the opportunity to perform any wholesome volitional action.”

When her father received this message, he was displeased, saying: “Oh, how unhappy my daughter is.” And he sent fifteen thousand pieces of silver to his daughter, together with the following message: “There is a concubine in this city-named Sirimā, who receives a thousand pieces of silver a night. With this money have her brought to your husband’s house and install her as your husband’s mistress. Then you can devote your time to perform wholesome volitional actions.

So Uttarā caused Sirimā to be summoned to her house and said to her: “Friend, take this money and minister to your friend during the coming fortnight.” “Very well” replied Sirimā, consenting to the proposal. So Uttarā took Sirimā to her husband. When Uttarā’s husband saw Sirimā, he asked, “What does this mean?” Uttarā replied, “Husband, during the coming fortnight my friend is to be your mistress. For my part, during the coming fortnight I desire to give alms and listen the Dhamma.” When Uttarā’s husband saw Sirimā who was a beautiful woman, he desired to take her as his mistress, and immediately consented to the arrangement, saying, “Very well; so be it”.

Thereupon Uttarā invited the Company of Monks presided over by the Buddha, saying, “Reverend Sir, during the coming fortnight may the Exalted One take morning meals here and nowhere else” On obtaining the Teacher’s consent, she rejoiced at heart and said to herself, “From this day forth, until the Great *Pavāraṇā* (ceremony at the termination of the Vassā), I shall have the privilege of waiting on the Buddha and listening the Dhamma.” And she bustled about the kitchen making the

necessary arrangements, saying, “Cook the porridge thus; cook the cakes thus.”

“Tomorrow will be the Great *Pavāraṇā*,” thought her husband as he stood at his window looking towards the kitchen. “What is that foolish woman doing?” When he saw her going to and fro arranging for the ceremony, her body moist with sweat and sprinkled with ashes and smeared with charcoal and soot, he thought to himself, “Ah, in such a place the fool does not enjoy luxury and comfort.” “I will minister to the *samaṇas* with shaven heads,” thinks she; and her heart rejoices as she goes about. He laughed and left the window.

As he left the window, Sirimā who stood near him, thought to herself, “What did he see to make him laugh?” Looking out of the same window, she saw Uttarā. “It was because he saw her that he laughed”, thought Sirimā; “doubtless an intimacy exists between them.” Although Sirimā had lived in this house for a fortnight as a concubine, in the enjoyment of splendour and luxury, she did not realize that she was only a concubine, but thought that she was the mistress of the house.

Sirimā immediately conceived hatred towards Uttarā and said to herself, “I will make her suffer.” So descending from the palace-terrace, she entered the kitchen; and going to the place where the cakes were being fried, she took some boiling ghee in a spoon and advanced towards Uttarā. Uttarā saw her, advancing and said, “My friend has done me a great service. This universe may be narrow, and the World of Brahmā low; but the goodness of my friend is great indeed, in that through her help I have received the privilege of giving alms to the monks and listening the Dhamma. If I cherish anger and hatred towards her, may this ghee burn me. If not, may it not burn me.” So saying she suffused her enemy (Sirimā) with thoughts of *mettā* (loving-kindness). When Sirimā flung the boiling ghee on her head, it felt like cold water. “The next spoonful will feel cool,” said Sirimā sarcastically. And filling the spoon again, she

advanced towards Uttarā with the second spoonful of boiling ghee in her hand.

When Uttarā’s maid-servants saw her, they tried to frighten her away, crying out, “Get away you benighted heathen. What right have you to fling boiling ghee on the head of our mistress?” And springing to their feet in every part of the kitchen, they beat her with their fists and kicked her with their feet and flung her to the ground. Uttarā although she tried to stop them, was unable to do so. Finally, she stood over Sirimā, pushed all of her servants away, and admonished Sirimā, saying, “Why did you do so wicked a deed?” So saying, she bathed her with hot water and anointed her with oil a hundred times refined.

At that moment Sirimā realized that she was only a concubine. And straightaway she thought to herself, “It was indeed a most wicked deed I committed when I flung boiling ghee on the head of this woman, merely because my master laughed at her. As for this woman, instead of ordering her maidservants to seize me, she pushed them all away when they tried to harm me, and then did for me all that could possibly be done. If I do not ask her to pardon me, my head is likely to split into seven pieces.” And forthwith Sirimā fell at the feet of Uttarā and said to her, “Pardon me, my lady.”

Uttarā replied, “I am a daughter and my father is living. If my father pardons you, I will also pardon you.” “Very well, my lady, I will also ask pardon of your father the treasurer Puṇṇa.” “Puṇṇa is my father in this round of rebirths. If my father to whom rebirth is no more will pardon you, then I will also pardon you.” “But who is your father to whom rebirth is no more?” “The Buddha, the Supremely Enlightened One.” “I am not acquainted with him.” “I shall introduce you to Him. Tomorrow the Teacher will come here with his company of Bhikkhus; bring such offerings as you can and come right here and ask His pardon.”

“Very well, my lady”, replied Sirimā And rising from her seat, she went home and

ordered her five hundred companions to keep ready to accompany her. Then she procured various kinds of foods and curries, and on the following day, taking these offerings with her, she went to Uttarā's house. Not daring to place her offerings in the bowls of the company of Bhikkhus headed by the Buddha, she stood waiting. Uttarā took all of her offerings and made proper use of them, and after the Teacher had taken the meal, Sirimā together with her retinue prostrated herself at the Teacher's feet. Thereupon the Teacher asked her, "What offence have you committed?" "Reverend Sir, yesterday I did this and that. But my friend only made her servants stop beating me, thereby showing a turn of kindness to me. Recognizing her goodness, I asked her to pardon me. But she said to me, "If the Teacher will pardon you, I will also pardon you." "Uttarā, is this true." "Yes, Reverend Sir. My friend flung boiling ghee on my head." "What thoughts do you then entertain?" "Reverend Sir, I suffused her with *mettā*, thinking to

myself, 'This universe may be narrow, and the World of Brahma low; but the goodness of my friend is very great indeed, in that through her help I have received the privilege of giving alms to the Bhikkhus and listening to the Dhamma. If I cherish anger and hatred towards her, may this ghee burn me. If not, may it not burn me.'" The Teacher said. "Well done, well done Uttarā That is the right way to overcome anger. Anger should be overcome with loving-kindness He that utters abuse and slander may be overcome by him who refrains from uttering abuse and slander. An obstinate miser may be overcome by the giving of one's own. A liar may be overcome by speaking the truth." So saying, he uttered the following stanza:

"Conquer anger by love; conquer evil by good; conquer the stingy one by giving; conquer the liar by truth."

—Dhammapada 223.

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THE BUDDHA'S MESSAGE IS SIMPLE

By

Dr. G.P. Malalasekera, Ceylon's Ambassador in Moscow.

To all those who put the question, "Has the Buddha any message that can be of use to the modern world?", I have one answer. The Buddha stated that His teachings were timeless, that they were true, that they were effective for all peoples in all places.

Perhaps I can amplify this statement. When we Buddhists go to our temples for worship, we utter three formulas of adoration. One of these deals with the Buddha Himself, with his personal qualities as teacher, as sage, as guide, philosopher and friend of mankind. Our worship consists not in prayer but in the hope that by striving to practise those qualities in our own lives we too may acquire those virtues which the Buddha embodies. So we hold the Buddha before our minds as an exemplar, and we show our respect to Him by lighting a lamp, offering flowers and burning incense. In the formula which is uttered last, we enunciate the qualities that should be found in a follower of the Buddha, in order that he may in the end reach the goal of Nibbāna.

But it is the second of these formulas which I should like to speak of especially; an expression of the qualities of the Buddha's own teaching. This formula, like the others, is stated in Pāli:

*Svakkhāto Bhagavatā dhammo saṅgīṭhiko
akāliko ehipassiko opanayiko paccattam
veditabbo viññūhi'ti.*

Translated, this means that we honour the Buddha's teaching, first, because it is plainly stated; it contains nothing hidden or esoteric. Just as the palm of one's hand can be clearly seen and understood, so are the Buddha's teachings plain, explicable, understandable. This established a tradition quite different from the custom of teaching in ancient India called

*guru musthi*¹. This term indicated that there was something which the teacher held in reserve, as in his closed fist, because he felt that if the pupil were told everything he might lose respect for the teachers, or he might not understand it. Therefore the knowledge had to be given in small doses. The teaching of the Buddha was not of this kind; the whole was there for all to see.

That is the first characteristic of the Buddha's teaching. The second is that it is *saṅgīṭhiko*, that is, its efficacy is direct and immediate. "Is it a good thing," the Buddha asked, "to show greed?" The answer comes at once: "No, it is not a good thing to be greedy." "Is it a good thing to practise anger and ill-will and hatred?" "No, it is not a good thing to show anger, ill-will and hatred." "Therefore the Buddha would say, "Do not have greed or ill-will or hatred or anger in your hearts, because, as you yourself admit it is a bad thing." "Is it a good thing to practise compassion and friendliness and good-will to everybody?" The answer comes immediately, "Yes it is a good thing." And then the Buddha says, "Therefore practise good-will and compassion and sympathy." The efficacy of the Buddha's teaching can be shown, it can be demonstrated at once. It is self-evident.

The Buddha's teaching is, as I mentioned, *akāliko*; it is timeless and universal; it is true of all places and all people. It is also *ehipassiko*, that is, it is the come-and-see doctrine. The Buddha's teaching invites investigation: it is not something to be accepted and believed on faith or authority. Rather, the seeker is asked to examine the teaching for himself, to consider it in all its details, and then accept it or reject it.

¹ Ācariya-muṭṭhi; "Close-fistedness in teaching." Suttanta Piṭaka,, Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga Pāli, 3. Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, p.85, 6th Syn. Edn.

Acceptance by the individual is predicated only upon his own conviction that the teaching is meaningful and valid for him. This is the proper basis for acceptance. Once a group of men told the Buddha, “There are many wise men who try to convert us to their points of view, which are often contradictory and in conflict with one another. What are we to do in such cases?” The Buddha said, “The only thing you can do is to examine what each man says and accept what you think is reasonable and correct. But when you feel you cannot accept something, do not condemn it outright. Never say, ‘I do not accept this, and therefore it cannot be right.’ That is not the path of wisdom. Put it by, saying, ‘I do not understand this thing and therefore it is not for me, but perhaps I shall come back to it later.’ In this way no idea is rejected arbitrarily.”¹

The teaching of the Buddha is also *paccattam veditabbo*; it must be realised by each man for himself. It is also *opānāyiko*, i.e., it has a definite goal. The goal which the Buddha set for Himself and for every man is the discovery of truth. And what is truth? He defined truth as that which is as it is. When we understand truth, then we see things as they really are, then we possess knowledge of what is—not as what we would like it to be, not as other people say things are, but reality as it is. And this reality has to be appreciated by each man for himself. It is like the curing of a disease. If I am ill, I go to a physician. The physician diagnoses my ailment and gives me a prescription for its cure. I take this prescription to a chemist, have it made up, and then I must drink the medicine. It is not enough for the physician to be clever and to understand my difficulty. I can never be cured by singing his praises and saying what a wonderful man he is, or holding festivals in his honour, or trying to persuade others that he is the one they should consult. None of this would cure my disease; Nor is it enough for me to accept his written prescription, put it in a

casket, place it on the back of an elephant and carry it in a procession to the accompaniment of music and dancing. That is not going to cure my disease either. Nor is it enough for me to obtain the medicine from the chemist, put it on a shelf and place before it a vase of flowers, burn incense and light candles to it, and say “How wonderful is this prescription given by a great and wise physician, may my disease thereby be cured.” That is not enough. Nor is it enough for my wife, anxious to spare me trouble, to say, ‘This man, my husband, has been sick; he is old and feeble and weak and it is very unpleasant for him to take this bitter medicine. Therefore I will swallow it for him.’ None of these things will cure me. I myself must make the effort and swallow the medicine. I must follow the directions given with regard to my diet and conduct. Then it is that I will be cured, and when at last I have become whole and healthy, I shall have done it myself, by my own action.

It is the same with the realization of truth,² that is to say, the attainment of *Nibbāna*. Each must achieve it for himself. But the Buddha qualifies this statement: the realization of truth is possible only for the wise. That is why the teaching is called Buddhism; it is designed to

² The four-fold Noble Truth comprises the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering, The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

Now at the times of penetrating to the truths each one of the four Path knowledges is said to exercise four functions in a single moment. These are full-understanding, abandoning, realizing, and development. Just as a lamp performs four functions simultaneously in a single moment—it burns the wick, dispels darkness, makes light appear, and uses up the oil—, so too, Path knowledge penetrates to the four Noble Truths simultaneously in a single moment—it penetrates to suffering by penetrating to it with full-understanding, penetrates to origination by penetrating to it with abandoning, penetrates to the Path by penetrating to it with developing, and penetrates to cessation by penetrating to it with realizing.

See *Ñāṇamoli's Visuddhimagga*, p. 808.

Visuddhimagga, Vol. II, 22. *Ñāṇadassana-visuddhi-niddesa*, p. 331, 6th Syn. Edn.

¹ Cf. *Dīgha Nikāya. Sīlakkhandha, Brahmajāla Sutta*. See *The Light of the Dhamma*, Vol. III, No. 2., p. 29.

attain *bodhi*, or wisdom. And what is wisdom? It is awakening. And what is awakening? It is the realization of the truth. It is *Nibbāna*.

When the Buddha was asked to define *Nibbāna* He gave his answers in many different ways to suit the capacities and the temperaments of His hearers. But one of the commonest answers He gave was that *Nibbāna* is the attainment of *bodhi*, and *bodhi*¹ is enlightenment.

The Buddha is unlike other religious teachers, in that He did not make any claims to personal uniqueness. Rather, in calling Himself the Awakened One, He spoke of Himself as a pioneer whose task was to discover the way to enlightenment and to point it out for others to follow. He said that He did not create this way, He only rediscovered it. This is the ancient road which has been trodden for thousands of years by countless men and women in their unending search for enlightenment, and others before Him achieved their goal of *Nibbāna* and became Buddhas. Just so, also, many who follow after the Buddha will so achieve.

But for the task of winning enlightenment, wisdom is necessary. The opposite of wisdom is folly or ignorance, and according to Buddhism, this ignorance is the root cause of all unhappiness, of all sorrow, of all misery. Therefore, for happiness wisdom is necessary. That is why Buddhism became the religion of enlightenment, and that is why Buddhism encourages men to pursue all the ways that they can find for the acquisition and development of wisdom. Throughout the history of Buddhism wherever the teachings have spread, every possible encouragement has been extended to fostering all the ways of knowing that would deepen and broaden men's minds, that would make them learned and wise, skilful and accomplished. To be wise one must have skills, and skills are acquired by practice. If the skills are good and the practices are good, then wisdom will follow. That is why in Buddhism the word for good is *kusala*,

which means skill, and the word for evil is *akusala*, which means lack of skill. If one wants to acquire wisdom and attain *Nibbāna*, one must cultivate skill—those things that make the attainment possible. Herein resides the ethics of Buddhism, which enunciates the skills whose attainment leads to the goal of enlightenment.²

How did the Buddha discover these things? Those who have read His life will remember how, as He sat at the foot of the Bodhi tree, enlightenment came to Him. The story is an interesting one, which the Buddha has given in His own words. He said, "As I sat there on the last watch of the night in the month of the full moon of May—the month when all nature is beautiful—the moon shone bright in the blue sky and all was still, for the whole world was awaiting this great event which it had expected for centuries. Knowledge appeared in me, the eye of wisdom appeared in me, light appeared in me, vision appeared in me." This wisdom *bodhi*, comes as what might be described as a vision of transparency. Just as in a mountain pool of crystal water, shells and pebbles on the bottom are to be seen, and the fish floating in the water, and the plants that grow therein appear through the limpidness and clarity of the water, so in the transparency of the awakened mind the facets of truth are perceived.

¹ Knowing the four Noble Truths.

² One should establish himself in *sīla* (Morality) and then practise *samata bhāvanā* (Mental Concentration). When one's mind becomes tranquil and purified, one should practise *vipassanā bhāvanā* (Insight practice) such as *nāmarūpa-paricchedañāna* (Knowledge determining Mind and Body), *paccaya-pariggahañāna* (Knowledge determining the relations of one phenomenon to another), etc., so as to accomplish the seven *visuddhis* (Paths of Purification) step by step, and finally attain to Deliverance.

BUDDHIST MEDITATION

By

Anāgārika Sugathananda

(Former Mr. Francis Story)

The mental exercise known as meditation is found in all religious systems. Prayer is a form of discursive meditation, and in Hinduism the reciting of slokas and mantras is employed to tranquillise the mind to a state of receptivity. In most of these systems the goal is identified with the particular psychic results that ensue, sometimes very quickly, and the visions that come in the semi-trance state, or the sounds that are heard, are considered to be the end-result of the exercise. This is not the case in the forms of meditation practised in Buddhism.

There is still comparatively little known about the mind, its functions and its powers, and it is difficult for most people to distinguish between self-hypnosis, the development of mediumistic states, and the real process of mental clarification and direct perception which is the object of Buddhist mental concentration. The fact that mystics of every religion have induced in themselves states wherein they see visions and hear voices that are in accordance with their own religious beliefs indicates that their meditation has resulted only in bringing to the surface of the mind and objectifying the concepts already embedded in the deepest strata of their subconscious minds. The Christian sees and converses with the saints of whom he already knows; the Hindu visualises the gods of the Hindu pantheon, and so on. When Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Bengali mystic, began to turn his thoughts towards Christianity, he saw visions of Jesus in his meditations, in place of the Hindu Avatars of his former visions. The practised hypnotic subject becomes more and more readily able to surrender himself to the suggestions made to him by the hypnotiser, and anyone who has studied this subject is bound to see a connection between the mental state of compliance he has reached and the facility

with which the mystic can induce whatever kind of experiences he wills himself to undergo. There is still another possibility latent in the practice of meditation: the development of mediumistic faculties by which the subject can actually see and hear beings on different planes of existences, the *Devalokas* and the realm of the unhappy ghosts, for example. These worlds being nearest to our own are the more readily accessible, and this is the true explanation of the psychic phenomena of Western Spiritualism.

The object of Buddhist meditation, however, is none of these things. They arise as side-products, but not only are they not its goal, but they are hindrances which have to be overcome. The Christian who has seen Jesus, or the Hindu who has conversed with Bhagavan Krishna may be quite satisfied that he has fulfilled the purpose of his religious life, but the Buddhist who sees a vision of the Buddha knows by that very fact that he has only succeeded in objectifying a concept in his own mind, for the Buddha after his Parinibbāna is, in His own words, no longer visible to gods or men.

There is an essential difference, then, between Buddhist meditation and concentration and that practised in other systems. The Buddhist embarking on a course of meditation does well to recognise this difference and to establish in his own conscious mind a clear idea of what it is he is trying to do.

The root cause of rebirth and suffering is *Avijjā* conjoined with and reacting upon *Taṇhā*. These two causes form a vicious circle: on the one hand, concepts, the result of ignorance, and desire arising from concepts. The world of phenomena has no meaning beyond the meaning given to it by our own

interpretation. When that interpretation is conditioned by *Avijjā* we are subject to the state known as *Vipallāsa*, or hallucination. *Saññā-vipallāsa*, hallucination of perception, *Ciṭṭa-vipallāsa*, hallucination of consciousness, and *Diṭṭhi-vipallāsa*, hallucination of views, cause us to regard that which is impermanent (*Anicca*) as permanent; that which is painful (*Dukkha*) as a source of pleasure, and that which is unreal (*Anattā*), or literally, without any self-existence, as being a real, self-existing entity. Consequently, we place a false interpretation on all the sensory experiences we gain through the six channels of cognition, that is, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, sense of touch and mind (*Cakkhu, Sota, Ghāna, Jivhā, Kāya* and *Mano āyatanas*). Physics, by showing that the realm of phenomena we know through these channels of cognition does not really correspond to the physical world known to science, has confirmed this Buddhist truth. We are deluded by our own senses. Pursuing what we imagine to be desirable, an object of pleasure, we are in reality only following a shadow, trying to grasp a mirage. It is *Anicca, Dukkha, Anattā*—impermanent, associated with suffering, and insubstantial. Being so, it can only be the cause of impermanence, suffering and insubstantiality, since like begets like; and we ourselves, who chase the illusion, are also impermanent, subject to suffering and without any persistent ego-principle. It is a case of a shadow pursuing a shadow.

The purpose of Buddhist meditation, therefore, is to gain a more than intellectual understanding of this truth, to liberate ourselves from the delusion and thereby put an end both to Ignorance and Craving. If the meditation does not produce results tending to this consummation—results which are observable in the character and the whole attitude to life—it is clear that there is something wrong either with the system or with the method of employing it. It is not enough to see lights, to have visions or to experience ecstasy. These phenomena are too common to be impressive to the Buddhist who really understands the purpose of Buddhist

meditation. There are actual dangers in them which are apparent to one who is also a student of psycho-pathology.

In the Buddha's great Discourse on the practice of mindfulness, the Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta ¹, both the object and the means of attaining it are clearly set forth. Attentiveness to the movements of the body, to the ever-changing states of the mind, is to be cultivated in order that their real nature should be known. Instead of identifying these physical and mental phenomena with the false concept of "Self", we are to see them as they really are: movements of a physical body, an aggregate of the Four *Mahā bhūtas* ², subject to physical laws of causality on the one hand, and on the other a flux of successive phases of consciousness arising and passing away in response to external stimuli. They are to be viewed objectively, as though they were processes not associated with ourselves but belonging to another order of phenomena.

From what can selfishness and egotism proceed if not from the concept of "Self" (*Sakkāyaditṭhi*)? If the practice of any form of meditation leaves selfishness or egotism unabated, it has not been successful. A tree is judged by its fruits and a man by his actions; there is no other criterion. Particularly is this true in Buddhist psychology, because the man is his actions. In the truest sense they, or the continuity of *Kamma* and *Vipāka* which they represent, are the only claim he can make to any persistent identity, not only through the different phases of this life but also from one life to another. Attentiveness with regard to body and mind serves to break down the illusion of self, and not only that; it also cuts off craving and attachment to external objects, so that ultimately there is neither the "self" that craves nor any object of craving. It is a long and arduous discipline, and one that can only

¹ Suttanta Piṭaka. Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga Pāli, 9. Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta, p. 231, 6th Syn. Edn.

² Four Great Primaries. 1. Element of extension, 2. Element of cohesion or liquidity, 3. Element of kinetic energy, 4. Element of motion or support.

be undertaken in retirement from the world and its cares. Yet even a temporary retirement, a temporary course of this discipline, can bear good results in that it establishes an attitude of mind which can be applied to some degree in the ordinary situations of life. Detachment, objectivity, is an invaluable aid to clear thinking; it enables a man to sum up a given situation without bias, personal or otherwise, and to act in that situation with courage and discretion. Another gift it bestows is that of concentration—the ability to focus the mind and keep it steadily fixed on a single point (*Ekagattā*, or one-pointedness), and this is the great secret of success in any undertaking. The mind is hard to tame; it roams here and there restlessly as the wind, or like an untamed horse, but when it is fully under control it is the most powerful instrument in the whole universe. He who has mastered his own mind is indeed master of the Three Worlds.¹

In the first place he is without fear. Fear arises because we associate mind and body (*Nāma-Rūpa*) with ‘Self’, consequently any harm to either is considered to be harm done to oneself. But he who has broken down this illusion by realising that the Five *Khandhā* process is merely the manifestation of cause and effect, does not fear death or misfortune. He remains equable alike in success and failure, unaffected by praise or blame. The only thing he fears is demeritorious action, because he knows that no thing or person in the world can harm him except himself, and as his detachment increases he becomes less and less liable to demeritorious deeds. Unwholesome action comes of an unwholesome mind, and as the mind becomes purified, healed of its disorders, bad *Kamma* ceases to accumulate. He comes to have a horror of wrong action and to take greater and greater delight in those deeds that are rooted in *Alobha*, *Adosa* and *Amoha*—generosity, benevolence and wisdom.

One of the most universally-applicable methods of cultivating mental concentration is *Ānāpānassati*, attentiveness on the in-going and out-going breath. This, unlike the Yogic systems, does not call for any interference with the normal breathing, the breath being merely used as a point on which to fix the attention, either at the tip of the nostrils [or the area at the entrance to the nostrils]. The attention must not wander, even to follow the breath, but must be kept rigidly on the selected spot. In the initial stages it is advisable to mark the respiration by counting, but as soon as it is possible to keep the mind fixed without this artificial aid it should be discontinued, and only used when it is necessary to recall the attention. As the state of mental quiescence (*Samatha*) is approached the breath appears to become fainter and fainter, until it is hardly discernible. It is at this stage that certain psychic phenomena appear, which may at first be disconcerting. A stage is reached when the actual bodily *Dukkha*, the sensation of arising and passing away of the physical elements in the body, is felt. This is experienced as a disturbance, but it must be remembered that it is an agitation that is always present in the body but we are unaware of it until the mind becomes stabilised. It is the first direct experience of the *Dukkha* which is inherent in all phenomena—the realisation within oneself of the first of the Four Noble Truths, *Dukkha Ariya Saccā*. When that is passed there follows the sensation of *Pīti*, rapturous joy associated with the physical body. The teacher of *Vipassanā*, however, is careful never to describe to his pupil beforehand what he is likely to experience, for if he does so there is a strong possibility that the power of suggestion will produce a false reaction, particularly in those cases where the pupil is very suggestible and greatly under the influence of the teacher.

In *Kammaṭṭhāna* it is permissible to use certain devices, such as the earth and water *Kasiṇa*, as focal points for the attention. A candle-flame, a hole in a wall, or some metal object can also be used, and the method of using them is found in the Pāḷi Texts and the

¹ 1. World of beings, 2. World of space, 3. World of *kamma*-activities.

Visuddhi Magga. In the texts themselves it is to be noted that the Buddha gave objects of meditation to His Disciples in accordance with their individual characteristics, and His unerring knowledge of the right technique for each came from His insight into their previous births. Similarly with discursive meditation, a subject would be given which was easily comprehensible to the pupil, or which served to counteract some strong unwholesome tendency in his nature. Thus, to one attracted by sensual indulgence, the Buddha would recommend meditation on the impurity of the body, the “cemetery meditation”. Here the object is to counterbalance attraction by repulsion, but it is only a “skilful means” to reach the final state, in which attraction and repulsion both cease to exist. In the Arahāt there is neither liking nor disliking: he regards all things with perfect equanimity, as did the Thera Mahāmoggallāna when he accepted a handful of rice from a leper.

The use of the rosary in Buddhism is often misunderstood. If it is used for the mechanical repetition of a set formula, the repeating of so many phrases as an act of piety, as in other religions, its value is negligible. When it is used as a means of holding the attention and purifying the mind, however, it can be a great help. One of the best ways of employing it, because it calls for undivided attention, is to repeat the Pāli formula of the qualities of Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅghā, beginning “*Iti 'pi so Bhagavā—*” with the first bead, starting again with the second and continuing to the next quality: “*Iti 'pi so Bhagavd, Arahaṃ—*” and so on until with the last bead the entire formula is repeated from beginning to end. This cannot be carried out successfully unless the mind is entirely concentrated on what is being done. At the same time the recalling of the noble qualities of Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅghā lifts the mind to a lofty plane, since the words carry with them a meaning that impresses itself on the pattern of the thought-moments as they arise and pass away. The value of this in terms of Abhidhamma psychology lies in the wholesome nature of the

Cittakkhaṇa, or “consciousness-moment” in its *uppāda* (arising), *thiti* (static) and *bhaṅga* (disappearing) phases. Each of these wholesome *Cittakkhāna* contributes to the improvement of the *Saṅkhāra*, or aggregate of tendencies; in other words, it directs the subsequent thought-moments into a higher realm and tends to establish the character on that level.

Samatha bhāvanā, the development of mental tranquillity with concentration, is accompanied by three benefits: it gives happiness in the present life, a favourable rebirth, and the freedom from mental defilements which is a prerequisite for the attainment of insight. In *Samatha* the mind becomes like a still, clear pool completely free from disturbance and agitation, and ready to mirror on its surface the nature of things as they really are, the aspect of them which is hidden from ordinary knowledge by the restlessness of craving. It is the peace and fulfilment which is depicted on the features of the Buddha, investing His images with a significance that impresses even those who have no knowledge of what it means. Such an image of the Buddha can itself be a very suitable object of meditation, and is in fact the one that most Buddhists instinctively use. The very sight of the tranquil Buddha image can calm and pacify a mind distraught with worldly hopes and fears. It is the certain and visible assurance of *Nibbāna*.

Vipassanā bhāvanā is realisation of the Three Signs of Being, *Anicca*, *Dukkha* and *Anattā*, by direct insight. These three characteristics, Impermanence, Suffering and Non-self, can be grasped intellectually, as a scientific and philosophical truth, but this is not in itself sufficient to rid the mind of egoism and craving. The final objective lies on a higher level of awareness, the direct “intuitional” plane, where it is actually experienced as psychological fact. Until this personal confirmation is obtained, the sphere of sense-perceptions (*Āyatana*) and sensory-responses remain stronger than the intellectual conviction: the two function side by side on

different levels of consciousness, but it is usually the sphere dominated by *Avijjā* which continues to determine the course of life by volitional action. The philosopher who fails to live according to his philosophy is the most familiar example of this incompatibility between theory and practice. When the direct perception is obtained, however, what was at its highest intellectual level still merely a theory become actual knowledge, in precisely the same way that we “know” when we are hot or cold, hungry or thirsty. The mind that has attained it is established in the Dhamma, and *paññā*, wisdom, has taken the place of delusion.

Discursive meditation, such as that practised in Christian devotion, is entirely on the mental level, and can be undertaken by anyone at any time. It calls for no special preparation or conditions. For the more advanced exercises of *Samatha* and *Vipassanā*. however, the strictest observance of *Sīla* becomes necessary. These techniques are best followed in seclusion, away from the impurities of worldly life and under the guidance of an accomplished master. Many people have done themselves psychic harm by embarking on them without due care in this respect. It is not advisable for anyone to experiment on his own; those who are unable to place themselves under a trustworthy teacher will do best to confine themselves to discursive meditation. It cannot take them to

Enlightenment but will benefit them morally and prepare them for the next stage.

Mettā bhāvanā is the most universally beneficial form of discursive meditation, and can be practised in any conditions. Thoughts of universal, indiscriminating benevolence like radio waves reaching out in all directions, sublimate the creative energy of the mind. With steady perseverance in *Mettā bhāvanā* a point can be reached at which it becomes impossible even to harbour a thought of ill-will. True peace can only come to the world through minds that are at peace. If people everywhere in the world could be persuaded to devote half an hour daily to the practice of *Mettā bhāvanā* we should see more real advance towards world peace and security than international agreements will ever bring us. It would be a good thing if, in this new era of the *Buddha Sāsana*, people of all creeds could be invited to take part in a world-wide movement for the practice of *Mettā bhāvanā* and pledge themselves to live in accordance with the highest tenets of their own religion, whatever it may be. In so doing they would be paying homage to the Supreme Buddha and to their own particular religious teacher as well, for on this level all the great religions of the world unite. If there is a common denominator to be found among them it is surely here, in the teaching of universal loving-kindness which transcends doctrinal differences and draws all beings together by the power of a timeless and all-embracing truth.

There are five groups of clinging, *Rādhā*. What five? They are the group of body-clinging, the group of sensation-clinging, the group of perception-clinging, the group of mental-formation-clinging, the group of consciousness-clinging.

Now *Rādhā*, when the Noble disciple understands in their true nature the arising, and the passing away, the satisfaction in, the misery of, the escape from these five groups of clinging, this Noble disciple, *Rādhā*, is called “steam-winner”, “saved from disaster”, “assured”, “bound for enlightenment”.

—*Samyutta Nikāya*, Bk. III, XXIII-9.

THE FOUR GREAT OMENS

Being a broadcast talk from B.B.S. by U Sein Nyo Tun, I.C.S. (Retd.)

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-sambuddhassa.

Every devout Buddhist knows the story of the Four Great Omens—the omens or signs that appeared to Prince Siddhattha, the Future Gotama Buddha, and which led Him on to make the Great Renunciation. These omens are landmarks which are full of meaning and import in the illustrious and inimitable life of *Sammāsambuddha*.

When the young prince, Siddhattha, was born, there was a prophecy that he would become either an Universal Monarch—a Cakkavattin, a powerful King of Kings—or an Universal Teacher—an All Enlightened Buddha, a Teacher of *brahmās*, *devas*, and men. It was foretold that in the latter eventuality, He would decide to become a Buddha after seeing four omens, namely, an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a *bhikkhu* or recluse. As is the case with mundane men endowed with earthly power, luxuries, and riches, the prince's father, King Suddhodana of Kapilavatthu, desired to see his son become an Universal Monarch, and was extremely anxious to prevent the possibility of the prince becoming an Universal Teacher.

The King therefore gave the prince in marriage to his beautiful cousin, Princess Yasodhara, at the early age of sixteen, and surrounded him with a surfeit of worldly luxuries and worldly sensual pleasures. On the other hand, he placed strong guards and patrols within the city and its environments to see that the omens did not and could not appear to the prince. Thus did Siddhattha live in the lap of luxury, ease, sensuality, and forgetfulness, surrounded and guided by vigilant watchmen and protectors.

But this state of affairs could not last indefinitely. The *pāramīs* or perfections that had been attempted and fulfilled by this Man of great destiny during four *asaṅkheyyas* and a hundred thousand world-cycles could not

forever remain dormant. Soon after He entered his twenty-ninth year, the *devas* of the Tusita *deva* world took it upon themselves to penetrate the elaborate precautions and guards, and to show the four Great Omens to the pleasure and luxury wrapped prince.

The prince was greatly disturbed by the sight of the omens. On the first occasion, when He saw the omen of the decrepit old man while on a pleasure drive in the Royal Park, He asked His charioteer, “Who is this strange man? He appears to be so full of misery and is unlike any man I have seen before.” “He is an old man, Sir,” replied the charioteer. “Shall I also become like him one day?” again asked the prince. “Without a doubt, Your Royal Highness,” said the charioteer, “Where there is birth, old age follows inevitably.” The prince was greatly upset and turned back immediately to his palace. He asked similar questions on the second and third occasions when he saw the sick man and the dead man, and received similar replies. Again, on each of these occasions, he was greatly upset and returned immediately to his palace.

On the fourth occasion when the prince saw the yellow robed recluse, he asked, “Who is this man who looks so composed, dignified, and serene?” “He is a recluse, a holy man. Sir,” replied the charioteer. “And who is a recluse?” again asked the prince. “He is a man who has renounced the world in order to seek a way of escape from the suffering that exists in the world,” replied the charioteer.

The charioteer was further inspired to embark on a lengthy praise of the many excellent qualities of a recluse. The prince was greatly pleased with this inspired eloquence and listened to it with a willing ear. He thereupon resolved that he too would forthwith renounce the world and become a recluse for the purpose of seeking a way of escape from

worldly miseries, not only for himself, but also for the sake of the whole of animate nature, and agitations of the mind that had assailed him on the occasions when he saw the first three omens now became appeased, and he experienced a new-won happiness and serenity unlike any he had felt before.

This, in short, is the story of the Four Great Omens.

Now, if we pause to consider the nature and intensity of Prince Siddhattha's reactions to the sight of the four omens, we cannot but be struck by the contrast between them and those of the countless millions of men and women that we know and see around us in this modern world. Despite the fact that He lived amidst the mental-vacuum-inducing atmosphere of distracting pleasures and luxuries, the intrinsic thoughtful nature of the prince immediately produced in him a fear and an agitation in regard to the fundamental nature of all worldly life. The pleasures and luxuries that were at his beck and call were transformed in a moment from attractive pursuits to empty, chimerous, and falsely alluring pitfalls when faced with the prospect of the inevitableness of decaying old age, distressing disease, and the vast uncertainty that lay beyond death.

On the other hand, the infinite number of ordinary humans who are born into this world, live their humdrum unthinking lives and untimely die—from day to day, year to year, and generation to generation—are unmoved by these meaningful omens which are common sights they see practically every day of their lives. In their work as in their leisure, the realisations that they also are subject to old age, decay, disease, and death, do not occur to them. And, if they do, they are fleeting flashes that exercise little effect on the decisions and acts which they make and perpetrate every waking moment of their lives.

In their absorption and pre-occupation with present events, their daily acts seemingly emerge from the standpoint that they themselves would never become old, nor decay, nor be subject to disease, nor to death.

It is as if they labour continually under the strongly wishful delusion that they are the exceptions to the inexorable natural law that whoever is born into this world is subject to old age, decay, disease, and death. And these remarks apply not only to the men in the street but also to the many leaders of men in every walk of life—in politics, religion, commerce, education, etc. The world would be a vastly changed place for the better, if the man and women who inhabit it are continually mindful and alert to the inevitability of old age, decay, disease, and death.

There is nobody in this world who can avoid old age, disease, and death, or who can in the future be able to avoid old age, disease, and death, and yet there are very few persons who live under the continual realisation that these are sure and certain eventualities to which they are willy-nilly subject. Everybody tries in his or her own way to postpone the occurrence of these banes of mankind with varying degrees of failure, and behind the facade of this attempt they build a wishful fools' paradise wherein they tacitly believe that old age, disease, and death can be indefinitely deferred. Even science is hopeful in this particular, for there have been scientifically sponsored attempts throughout the last few centuries of scientific advancement not only of deferring old age, disease and death for a time but also of preventing their occurrence altogether. The fallacy of science in this context consists not in the belief that there is a way of avoiding old age, disease and death altogether, but in the assumption that this way can be found within the vicious circle of worldly life.

Prince Siddhattha, at the age of twenty-eight, was in the prime of his life when he saw the four Great Omens. He was as hale and healthy as any human being could wish to be, and he was as remote from death as any human being could possibly be. And yet, the moment he saw the omens, he was immediately shaken out of his forgetfulness, which the sedatives of ease and pleasure had induced, and his realisation of the inevitability of old age,

disease, and death was so strong that he felt that he would be afflicted by them at the very moment.

Therein lies the difference between men of great destiny who have aeons of work towards greatness behind them and the common place men and women whose future after death is enshrouded in anxious uncertainty. While in the case of these great men their sensibilities are so sharp and delicate that the prospect of old age, disease, and death becomes imminent the moment they see signs of them; in the case of the mass of ordinary humans of uncertain destiny their senses are so gross and undeveloped that even repeated sights of such signs day-in and day-out every day of their lives do not produce any impression.

The ability to acquire an internal realisation of the Truth, a realisation which is more than an intellectual or logical acceptance, comes out of a lengthy process of specifically directed work which comprises more than one lifetime, in fact it involves an infinite number of lifetimes or rebirths. It is because individuals vary in this foundation of previously attempted specific work that there exists in this present world infinite varieties and degrees of reactions to the portents that they see around them every day of their lives. In the Buddhist teachings, five extremely difficult acquisitions are mentioned. Of them, *saddhamma savanaṃ dullabhaṃ* means “Hard is it to hear the

doctrine of the good” and *dullabha saddhā sampatti* means “hard is it to acquire a fullness of faith in the doctrine of the good.” They imply that the opportunity to have the way to truth presented is not easily acquired but is the result of an infinite number of years of hard work, while having obtained the opportunity to hear the presentation of the way to truth; it is a still more difficult task to acquire a realisation—an internal realisation—of the truth of that way.

In the Buddhist teachings, the realisation of the truth is a personal concern. Truth cannot be taught or otherwise conveyed from one person to another. All that can be done is to show the way to truth—the method of how truth can be achieved—and each individual will have to put forth effort according to that method in order to obtain a realisation of that truth. That is why the Buddha said, “Buddhas only show the way.”* Buddha embodied Truth in the word Nibbāna. Let us therefore take heed and put forth unrelenting effort in order to realise Nibbāna. As human beings we have a certain amount of previous effort to sustain us. Let us continue the good work in this life and persevere in that effort so that Nibbāna may be ours before long.

Sabbe sattāsukhitā hontu!

* Dhammapada, verse 276.

“*Appamāda* (earnestness), O king, is the one quality by which you can acquire and keep welfare both in this life and in life to come. As the elephant, of such creatures as can walk, combines all pedal characters in its foot, and as the elephant’s foot in point of size is the chief among all kinds of feet, even so, O king, this one quality acquires and keeps welfare both in this life and in life to come.”

—Saṃyutta Nikāya, Bk. I, III. 2-6.

BUDDHISM AND THE VITAL PROBLEMS OF OUR TIME

By

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Buddhism venerates as its founder the Indian Prince Siddhattha of the family of the Sakyas (c. 560-480 B.C.), whom his contemporaries were accustomed to call by his surname Gotama or by the honorific "Buddha". The word Buddha means the Awakened, the Enlightened, and was applied to the Indian men of those times who were believed to have fathomed the mystery of the world and to have discovered the way to salvation, by their own efforts and not through revelation. The gospel of Gotama spread quickly over the whole of India in his lifetime and after his death, but fell into decay by about 1000 A. D., and had to give way, in the country of its origin, to Hinduism and Islam.

But Buddhism found ample recompense for this loss in Ceylon and Further India, in China, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia. The number of Buddhists in the Far East is estimated at 500 to 600 million, but this figure does not give a clear idea of its extension, since the acceptance of some of its doctrines or the observance of Buddhist customs is not incompatible with adherence Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto and the various popular cults. For it has always been foreign to the spirit of Buddhism to claim exclusive validity. On the contrary, in its all-embracing tolerance, it has always lived peacefully side by side with other religions, and has absorbed ideas originally foreign to it, trying to permeate them with its own spirit.

Present-day Buddhism flourishes in two different forms. In Ceylon and Further India the original doctrine prevails, which is called the Lesser Vehicle, or *Hinayāna*; in the Far East and the Tibetan cultural area this "simple doctrine" has undergone a significant broadening as regards philosophy and ceremonial. This is called the Great Vehicle to salvation, *Mahāyāna*. But the basic ideas of all

forms of Buddhism have remained more or less the same, so that in our survey we need take no notice of the differences in detail.

Among the world religions, Buddhism is the one whose area of influence lies farthest from the West, and also that which is most different in its doctrine from the teachings of Christianity and Islam.

God

First and foremost, Buddhism does not teach the existence of any personal god who created and rules the world. It admits the existence of many gods; but these are only transitory beings with limited powers. They are born and pass away; they can exert no influence on the world process as a whole. Also the great saints and saviors, the *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattavas* do not have the position which the Western religions ascribe to their one God. They can enlighten individuals, and according to the Great Vehicle can lead them by their grace to the path of salvation. But they are not able to interfere with the cosmic process or change the world.

The Universe follows its own unalterable natural and moral laws. The most important of these is the law of *Kamma*, the law of retributive moral causality. This brings it about that every ethically good or bad action inexorably finds its rewards or punishment, because the doer of the deed is born again after his death as a new being, and in that life reaps what he has sown in the previous life.

The Soul

Another point which differs from Christianity and Islam is this: both Western religions assume immortal souls created by God, which after death continue to exist in heaven or hell. Buddhism however denies that there can be anything in the world which

persists unchanged. According to its theory, life is a stream of elements which are always coming into existence and ceasing to exist, which influence each other according to certain laws. The life-stream of man continues after his death as a new being which has to pursue its happy or unhappy existence, as god, man, animal or inhabitant of hell, in accordance with the good or evil nature of his deeds. A life continues until the kamma, the power of the deeds which called the being into existence, is exhausted. Then, on the basis of the actions performed in that life, a new being comes into existence which is the heir of the previous life, and so on.

Since each life is the consequence of the actions of a previous life, no beginning of the world can be conceived. Since in each life new actions are performed which produce *kamma*, there can in the natural course of things be no end of the world. A few beings, however, succeed, through knowledge of truth, in getting rid of the passions which are the root cause of the *kammic* process. They withdraw from the world; they enter into *Nibbāna*, into the great peace. But, however many beings may enter into *Nibbāna*, the cosmic process will never come to an end. For the number of beings who inhabit the infinitely vast number of worlds as animals, men, spirits, gods and inhabitants of hell, is infinitely great.

Thus as little can be said about an end of the world as about a beginning. And with this we come to a third important point where Buddhism differs from Islam and Christianity. Both of these teach that the world was created by God out of nothing, that it remains under his governance for some thousands of years and that on the Last Day it will come to a definite end, when the dead will rise again, all men will receive their eternal reward or eternal punishment, and a new earth of eternal duration and splendor will be created. The ideas of a primordial creation and a definite end of the world are as foreign to Buddhism as that of a providential direction of cosmic events in accordance with a divine plan. It will be evident that, because of these divergences

from the conceptions and dogmas of theistic religions, Buddhism must arrive at different answers concerning many of the questions which concern us here.

Before I proceed to discuss these questions, I must say a word about my own personal attitude towards Buddhism. I am not a Buddhist, but one engaged in Buddhist research. I have concerned myself for over thirty years with the Buddhist scriptures in the Indian languages, and have studied the principal Buddhist countries (except Tibet and Mongolia) at first-hand on three prolonged visits. In view of my knowledge of the Buddhist sacred writings, and the many discussions I have had with Buddhist monks and laymen. I believe I can answer these questions objectively and correctly in the spirit of Buddhism. I hope that in this way I shall be able to add to the understanding of a doctrine the study of which has been my life's work, and a knowledge of which, in my opinion, is necessary for anybody who seriously concerns himself with the various solutions which the riddle of existence puts before us.

The Meaning of Life

(1). The first question which has been addressed to me is: "So far as we can see, both the life of the individual, and the history of mankind as a whole, proceed according to definite laws and indefinite phases. Apart from such causal regularities, has life any meaning which is comprehensible to us? Has man any definite task within this world? Or does this task merely consist in preparing himself to leave the world?"

"Regarded from the religious standpoint, is it ultimately unimportant how man behaves in this world? If not, where can he find directions as to his behaviour, and how can he know the validity of these directions? If the world has a comprehensible meaning, how is the suffering of innocent people to be explained?"

As I see it, there are in this group of questions no fewer than six separate questions. I shall answer them one by one.

(a) What is the goal of the cosmic process? According to the Buddhist view, which I have already outlined, this question cannot be answered. For Buddhism does not believe in a final state of things towards which history progresses. The cosmos is in eternal movement, and the numerous world systems of which it consists, pass periodically through the four phases of coming into being, existence, dissolution and non-existence.

Cosmology

Buddhist cosmology usually starts by describing how an existing world which is ripe for dissolution, is emptied of its inhabitants. These beings, after death, are born again in another world, and the uninhabited world is destroyed completely by fire, water or wind. The world thus destroyed disappears for an enormous period of time, and there exists in its place only empty space. When the lawfully fixed period of nonexistence comes to an end, there arises a new world system by virtue of the latent *kammic* power of the beings of the world which was destroyed. In empty space there first springs up a faint breeze which grows ever stronger finally the heaven worlds, earth and hell are formed. These are then populated with the beings who have had to live through the intervening period in other worlds.

At the beginning of such a newly arisen world, men are without sex. They are endowed with a radiant body, they hover over the earth's surface, and they need no physical nourishment. But because of curiosity they feed on the finer substance of the earth, they become earth-bound creatures with gross and perishable bodies. Desire which grows ever stronger in them, causes them gradually to lose their original purity and virtue; they give themselves to bodily pleasures and quarrel with each other over their possessions which had so far been held in common. So that order may be re-established, property is introduced, and one man is installed as king. The need for a division of labor then leads to the formation of special callings and castes.

Over a period of millions of years, the natural and moral condition of the world deteriorates from generation to generation, so that human beings who in the beginning had an unimaginably long life, now never live beyond a hundred years. This position, in which we find ourselves now, will in the future become still worse. At last Armageddon, "the time of the swords", breaks out, which lasts for seven days, during which the greater part of mankind is killed.

During this period of horror a few men have gone back to live in the forest, and subsist peacefully on fruit and roots. Taught by catastrophe, they determine for the future to live a peaceful, moral life. Henceforth, conditions improve so that men become good and happy. This better state of things again lasts only for a time and then decline sets in.

Twenty periods of this kind, of falling and rising culture, follow in succession. When in the last, the twentieth period, the optimal point is reached; an emptying of the world from all living beings takes place, and finally its destruction, as described before. In this manner the cosmos undergoes continuous change, as in accordance with eternal laws, many worlds, one after another, come into existence and pass away.

(b) Thus Buddhism knows no ultimate goal of world evolution. Nevertheless the world has a meaning. It is the ever-changing scene of the retribution of good and evil deeds (*Kamma*).

(c) The duty of man consists in the first place, to see to it that, through leading a moral life, he is reborn in a good environment with a happy future. As a distant and supreme goal, Nibbāna beckons to the religious man, but it can be attained only after long purification. Hence the final task of man is to prepare himself to leave the world.

(d) From the foregoing it follows that according to the Buddhist view the present conduct of man is of fundamental importance for his future fate. The entire Buddhist teaching is based on a belief in the moral structure of the universe. Such a belief rests

not only on the conviction that everything good and evil will have its retribution and that it is possible for man continually to perfect himself; it also presupposes that there exists an objective criterion of what helps man on the way to perfection and of what obstructs his progress.

The Buddha proclaimed an ethics of intention. What decides whether an action produces good or bad *kamma* is the intention with which it is performed. Therefore actions which are not performed as the result of a moral decision, positive or negative have no *kammic* results.

It is understandable that this lofty philosophical view has not been preserved for long. In the course of its history Buddhism has developed, in many different forms, the theory that the giving of gifts to monks, and the performance of certain sacred rites, produce a store of meritorious works. Indeed in many of the schools of the Great Vehicle, ritualism has obtained such importance, that the performance of magical rites, like the mechanical turning of prayer-wheels or the muttering of certain sacred formulae, has become a principal activity of the devotees. This is a regrettable though understandable, degeneration, which indeed is not unknown in other religions.

Rebirth

(e) For the doctrine that good or evil deeds receive their reward or punishment in a new existence, Buddhists find empirical confirmation in this, that according to their opinion, men who have reached a certain height of spiritual development are able to look upon their own previous lives and rebirths, of other beings. Since only a few individuals have reached so high a stage of spiritual maturity, the rest of us must rely on the testimony of these saints, just as those who have not visited a foreign country have to put their trust in the statement of reliable travelers.

First among possessors of such knowledge come the Buddhas, i.e., men to whom, by virtue of the enlightenment they have attained

the connection between natural events and the moral realm has become evident. The word of a Buddha therefore ranks as the highest authority for all conduct; and from sayings of Gotama preserved in the Holy Scriptures, a Buddhist derives guidance for his life.

(f) The doctrine of moral causality offers the Buddhists an explanation why one man is distinguished, rich and happy, and the other lowly, poor and miserable. The fact that good men often fare badly, while evil men are happy, is explained according to the doctrine by assuming that the good men have still to expiate in this life the sins of a previous existence, while a bad man who has done good deeds in his previous life is now getting the reward for them. For the whole of the circumstances in which anyone now lives is a consequence of the actions of his previous existence, while on the other hand what he does now is done by the free decision of his will.

It can be objected against this theory that in his behavior, man is very largely determined by his predispositions, and that it is therefore difficult to establish the freedom of his moral decisions. Buddhism replies on this point that, against the fatalistic teachings of his time, the Buddha always emphasized: "I teach (the efficacy of) action and energy," and that the workings of the law of *kamma* are beyond the grasp of the ordinary man.

(2) The second question which I have to answer from the standpoint of Buddhism runs thus; "If man has a normative ideal to which he has to conform, what are the conditions of life which guarantee him the quickest fulfillment of this task?"

According to the Buddhist view, man occupies an exceptional position among beings. He alone is in a position to question life itself and to achieve a transcending of it. Animals cannot do so, since they are wholly absorbed by the life of the senses. The heavenly beings also cannot do so, since because of their long life and the happiness they enjoy, the idea never occurs to them that

life is transient and therefore unsubstantial and unsatisfactory.

In consequence of this middle position in the hierarchy of living forms which man occupies, existence as a man is always praised as a rare piece of good fortune. On this point it is said: "The chance is as small as that a blind turtle, emerging from the sea once in a hundred years, should put its head straight into a single-necked basket—so small is the chance that being in the course of his repeated rebirths should once become a man (Majjhima, 159).

Man should, therefore, make use of the precious boon which has fallen to his lot, and take care that he improves himself morally, in order gradually to attain perfection. A famous saying in the Dhammapada (v. 183) shows the way to the fulfillment of this task: "Shun all evil, do good, and purify your own heart: that is the teaching of the Buddhas". The avoidance of evil consists in not killing, not stealing, not lying, not committing fornication and not using intoxicating drinks which reduce man's mental capacity or deaden his sense of responsibility. He should, therefore, follow no calling in which he is bound to come into conflict with these postulates: he cannot be a hunter, a butcher, an executioner, a publican, and so on. It is easiest for him if he detaches himself from the world, and thus avoids its temptations. But only a few are mature enough to enter the monastery or to live as a pious hermit.

Thus the Buddhist ought not to be content with conditions as he finds them; he must try wherever he can, to change them in accordance with Buddhist principles. Where that is not possible, his effort must be to make himself inwardly free from his environment so that he may detach himself from it and rise above it.

(3) We now come to the third question which raises the following problem:

"Are all men equal? If not, in what do they differ? In what respects is equality of all men desirable, and how far should existing differences be preserved?"

Since not even twins are completely alike in their abilities and their destiny, there can be

in practice no complete equality of all men. Buddhism has therefore never tried to make all men alike. According to Buddhism mankind as a whole resembles to a certain extent a great pyramid. the broad base of which consists of the crude worldlings who are still far removed from the light of truth, while the narrow summit comprises only the few perfected ones. And between these two extremes, men are ranged in infinitely many degrees of virtue and knowledge. But for all of them, Buddhism tries to show the way to spiritual progress, by prescribing for them a spiritual diet to their individual needs. And just as it answers to the many different levels of comprehension of men, it also tries to adapt itself to the peculiarities of various cultures and races.

The Amitabha Cult

In its eagerness to satisfy the most varied needs of people, the Great Vehicle in particular has taken over many features and conceptions which were originally foreign to Buddhism. Thus in East Asia today, the cult of Buddha Amitabha is very widespread. This mythical saviour calls to his heavenly paradise all those who, in their hour of death, in faith seek refuge in him; so that, being protected there from all evil influences, they can prepare themselves for Nibbāna. Here Buddhism has adopted modes of thought from the theistic religions of divine grace. But in doing, so it has not abandoned its principle of an eternal cosmic law which governs everything, for Amitabha is only the bringer of good tidings into this sorrowful world. He has no part in creating or ruling it, for how could an omniscient spiritual being bring into existence this world full of pain, or hurl the wicked down into the abyss of hell for their misdeeds, or condemn them to reincarnation in miserable forms of life ?

Thus Buddhism acknowledges the differences among men in spiritual-religious matters, and has therefore presented its doctrine of salvation in the most variegated forms. On the other hand, it attaches no weight to differences of race, nationality, class or caste. In contrast to Brahmanism it has not excluded wide sections of the people from its

gospel of salvation, and entry into its order is open to all strata of society.

(4) The fourth question which has been put to me is this; "Which social institutions belong to the foundations of mankind and which are susceptible of alteration and development without harm to what is truly human? How does it stand in this regard with marriage, the family, the State, property, the right of self-determination of the individual, and so on?"

According to its doctrine that all things are in a continual process of change, Buddhism recognizes no social institution as eternal or unalterable. While the Chinese consider the State an institution belonging to mankind from its earliest times, Buddhism holds that it arose at a definite period of the cosmic process and will later disappear. Caste, which for the Hindus rests on God-given foundations, is for Buddhism a system arising from needs of the time, and having value only for India. Likewise marriage, the family, and property are obligatory only for worldly men of a limited historical period. With the giving up of the worldly life all these institutions lose their significance. The monk, who has renounced worldly life, has at least in theory, risen above these obligations.

It is not surprising that this standpoint, adopted by the Buddha and by the authoritative fathers of the Buddhist church, has been much modified in the course of history. Under the pressure of outside forces, Buddhism had to make concessions to the state in several countries, and the prevailing ideal of nationalism is not without influence on the thought of many Buddhists. It is well-known that in Japan among many sects loyalty to the monarch and patriotism have become articles of religious faith, and that in Tibet a kind of theocratic state has arisen.

No Central Authority

All these facts in no way alter the basic position which Buddhism adopts in relation to all earthly institution. They have their value and their sphere of application at a certain stage; but for those who can see everything

from a higher plane, they are in themselves only temporary means whereby order is maintained in the world.

As I understand it, Buddhism is, all throughout a doctrine of salvation for the individual; the idea of a human collectivity, which has sinned and can be redeemed, is alien to it. Therefore it has no central authority which claims the right of issuing orders or proclaiming dogmas binding on all the Buddhists of the world. When the Buddha lay on his death bed and was asked who henceforth would lead the community, he said "In future the dhamma will be your master."

It is clear that this pronouncement of the Exalted One had various unfortunate consequences for the community. For the absence of a generally acknowledged supreme spiritual authority had the result that very soon after the Nibbāna of the Perfect One dissensions arose over the interpretation of controversial points in the doctrine or over individual cases of monastic discipline, and that again and again new sects appeared.

Buddhism has accepted this with open eyes, for the right of self-determination of the individual and of the local congregation represented by the monastic chapter, have always seemed to it to outweigh these disadvantages. How far-reaching this right of self-determination is can be seen from the fact that it not only was, and is open to the layman, under certain conditions, to enter at any time into the circle of devotees of the Exalted One, and to leave it again but it was and is even possible to belong at the same time to other religious communities and cults. The monk was always free to leave the order, and it often happened that people repeatedly during their lives became monks and returned to the world again.

In the twenty five centuries of the history of Buddhism one naturally comes across instances in which the conditions described here have undergone modification for a time. But in general both the Lesser and the Great

Vehicle have maintained the basic principle of the right of self-determination.

Buddhism and Politics

(5) The fifth question addressed to me runs as follows:

“As far as it appears possible and necessary to alter institutions, how far and by what means is it permissible to act against the existing system and its defenders? When may cooperation be refused in the undertakings carried on by the current holders of power? When is obedience to the conventions of the society into which one was born, obligatory?”

The answer to this can be given briefly, Since Buddhism tried to establish a spiritual order, which is not for this world, it does not claim to be a protagonist of social reforms. It is a common error to believe that the Buddha wished to destroy the caste system in India; he did not interfere with the social order as it existed, when he laid down that caste differences should no longer be observed within his order. This was no innovation, for this principle was observed among other Indian ascetics.

To change existing conditions by violence must appear to all Buddhists completely opposed to the teaching of the Master. For any exercise of brute force is alien to the merciful spirit of the pure doctrine. The Buddha condemned any thought of hate-inspired retaliation (Dhammapada 3-5).

Certainly, departures from this hallowed principle occurred, but in the whole course of the history of Buddhist history they play no important part. It has, therefore, never known either a social revolution, nor crusades, nor wars of religion. The struggle against conditions which were found to be oppressive, and against the unrighteous claims of the mighty, was therefore mostly conducted in a peaceful manner by way of passive resistance.

The Perfectibility of Man

(6) The answer to the sixth question will also not occupy us long. It is as follows:

“Is man capable of changing, transforming himself, induced by instruction or revelation, and has he perhaps that capacity even to an unlimited extent? And which are the limits of his capacity to become good and wise?”

Buddhism does not recognize any fundamental difference between the children of light and children of darkness, foreordained to eternal bliss or to eternal damnation. On the contrary, it assumes that there are infinitely many stages in spiritual development, and in the achievement of them, beings rise or fall in accordance with their actions performed in the course of their rebirths. The story of the robber-chief Aṅgulimāla who had committed many murders, shows that a man may by virtue of right instruction, evolve from a criminal to a saint in the course of one existence. Converted by the Buddha, Aṅgulimāla became an Arahāt and entered into Nibbāna.

That even the worst sinner can finally attain perfection is also shown by the story of the Buddha's cousin Devadatta. This man committed the two worst sins known to Buddhism: he had sought, inspired by ambition, to murder the Buddha, and he had brought about a schism in the order. As punishment he died of a hemorrhage and went to hell. When he will have atoned for his misdeeds by staying in hell for a hundred thousand aeons, he will be purified of evil, and finally attain enlightenment and become a Solitary Buddha. The belief in man's unlimited capacity for change could hardly go farther than that.

The related question, whether all beings have the capacity, in the course of their rebirths, to become wise and good and thereby finally attain deliverance, was not answered by the Buddha. Later teachers expressed themselves on this subject in various ways. While many seem to have accepted such a belief, others thought that there are beings who are by nature incapable of assimilating the highest knowledge, and therefore must remain forever subject to the cycle of rebirths.

Buddhism and Modern Science

(7) I now turn to the seventh and last question. It runs: "How far is what contemporary science has to say about man and world, in harmony with the teaching of Buddhism, or in contradiction to it?"

Buddhism originated 2500 years ago in India, and until the beginning of the last century it was confined to countries which were entirely untouched by modern science. It, therefore, goes without saying that many of its doctrines, so far as they touch upon scientific, cosmological, and geographical matters, are irreconcilable with the results of modern Western science. It was born and grew in an era when an unlimited credulity prevailed; if we read the Holy Scriptures as we should read works of later times, in the spirit of literal history, we shall find things which do not fit into our modern picture of the world. We read that the Buddha was conceived by his mother miraculously, that he was able to fly through the air to Ceylon three times, that he increased food by magic, walked on water, and so on. And similar miracles are reported of his followers and of later saints; visions, magical cures, fantasies and the like, in short almost all those things which were natural to the mode of thought of antiquity and mediaeval times in all parts of the world.

A Law-governed Universe

Notwithstanding many such features, so strange to us, which like a thick undergrowth over spread more especially the later literature, we do, on the other hand, find much, even in the old texts, which strikes us as quite modern.

(a) First and above all is to be noted the principle of general and thoroughgoing conformity to natural law which rules the whole Buddhist system. Again and again it is said:

"This basic principle stands firm, this universal conformity to law, the conditioning of one thing by another." (Sāmyutta, 12-20-4) "Profound is this law of dependent origination. Since it does not know, understand or grasp this law, this generation has become confused,

like a ball of thread." (ib. 12. 4) But a well-trained disciple ponders thoroughly the dependent origination, for he knows thus: "When that is, this comes into being; through the destruction of that, this is destroyed." (ib. 12. 41-51, etc.)

(b) A further point of agreement is its positivistic character. For the Buddhist doctrine denies the existence of eternal substances: matter and spirit are false abstractions; in reality there are only changing factors (dhamma) which are lawfully connected and arise in functional dependence of each other. Like Ernst Mach, the Buddha therefore resolves the ego into a stream of lawfully co-operating elements, and can say with him: "The ego is as little an absolute permanent entity as the body. The apparent permanence of the ego consists only in its continuity."

In the philosophy of the Great Vehicle, Buddhism goes to the point of denying the reality of the external world. It is characteristic of the philosophical spirit of Asia that such epistemological doctrines do not, as with us, remain without close relation to the true religious life, but enter deeply into it and occupy the thought of wide circles. The consistent idealism of the theory of 'Consciousness only' forms the basis of the Zen sect, widespread in China and Japan, which tries through meditation to realize the "void" which is above contradictions; and is also the basis of the priestly magic and mysticism of Tibet.

(c) It resembles modern modes of thought when the Buddha teaches that there are many problems that man, with his limited intellectual capacity, will never be able to solve, but in his cogitations about them entangles himself again and again in contradictions concerning problems such as the workings of kamma, the nature of the world, the question whether the world is eternal or not, finite or infinite, how the vital principle connects with the body, and what is the state of the saint who has entered into Nibbāna.

(d) Buddhism also agrees with modern science in its picture of a universe of a vast spatial extent and unending time. The Buddha taught that there exist side by side infinitely many world systems which continually come into existence and perish again. It is not that he anticipated Copernicus; for each world system has an Earth at the centre, and sun, moon and stars revolve round it. It is rather that the conception of a multiplicity of worlds appears in his teaching as the natural consequence of the principle of retributive causality of actions. The number of actions which have to find reward or punishment is so infinitely great, that the appropriate retribution could not be comprised within one world, with its regular alternation of rising and falling cultural levels.

(e) Buddhism finds itself again in agreement with modern biology in that it acknowledges no essential difference, but only a difference of degree, between man and animal. However, it is far from the Darwinian line of thought.

(f) Finally, it can also be said that the Indians discovered the unconscious earlier than the Western psychologists. For them the unconscious consists in the totality of the impressions which slumber in the individual as the inheritance from his previous existence. The Buddhist technique of meditation, which is concerned with these latent forces, is thus a forerunner of modern psychoanalysis, of autogenic mental training, etc.

The attitudes of present-day Buddhists towards modern science vary. So far as I can see, three attitudes can be distinguished:

(a) The great mass of Buddhist laymen and monks in Asia are still untouched by the modern natural sciences. For them the words of the Buddha and the commentaries on them are still the infallible source of all knowledge of the universe and its phenomena.

(b) Many Buddhists try to prove that the cosmological ideas and miraculous stories of the Canon conform to fact, and for his purpose interpret the texts in an artificial sense or draw

upon the assertions of modern occultism as proofs. It is noteworthy that they do not consider miracles to be violations of the law of nature brought about by a supernatural power, but assume that there are unknown forces and laws which cause events that to us appear as miracles but are really not.

(c) Other Buddhists again, regard the statements of the text on natural phenomena as conditioned by the ideas prevailing in those times and therefore no longer authoritative. They say that the Buddha was not concerned to put forward a scientific world view valid for all time, but that the essential core of Buddhism is rather its practical doctrine of salvation. The Buddha always maintained that everything of this earth is transitory, unreal and therefore unsatisfactory and that so long as man is still under the subjection of the three cardinal vices of hatred, greed and ignorance he will never attain to inner peace and serene clarity of vision. Only through the purification from all desires and the complete realisation of absolute selflessness, though a moral conduct of life and constant practice of meditation, can he approach a state in which he lives in peace with himself and with the world. Man can elevate himself and raise his stature by emulating the great example of the Buddha seated in calm meditation, whose face shines in triumphant peace. Then man can lift himself above the fierce current of time, up to the imperishable state that is beyond all the unrest of the inexorable nexus of Becoming and Suffering. And the ideal that presents itself here is that unshakable composure of mind which a Buddhist verse describes:

He whose mind is like a rock,
Firmly anchored, shakes no more,
Who has escaped from all passion,
Is no more angry and no more afraid,
He whose mind is thus without equal,
How can sorrow defeat him?

(Udāna 4.4)

SOME SALIENT FEATURES OF BUDDHISM

By

Venerable Nārada Mahāthera

The foundations of Buddhism are the four Noble Truths, namely, Suffering (the *raison d'être* of Buddhism), its cause, i.e. Craving, its end, i.e. Nibbāna (the *summum bonum* of Buddhism), and the Middle Way.

What is the Noble Truth of Suffering?

“Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, to be united with the unpleasant is suffering, to be separated from the pleasant is suffering, not to receive what one craves for is suffering; in brief the five Aggregates of Attachment are suffering.”

What is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering?

“It is the craving which leads from rebirth to rebirth accompanied by lust of passion, which delights now here, now there; it is craving for sensual pleasures (*kāma taṇhā*), for existence (*bhava taṇhā*) and for annihilation (*vibhava taṇhā*).

What is the Noble Truth of the Annihilation of Suffering?

“It is the remainderlessness, total annihilation of this very craving, the forsaking of it, the breaking loose, fleeing, deliverance from it.”

What is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Annihilation of Suffering?

“It is the Noble Eightfold Path which consists of Right Understanding, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.”

Lay Hidden:

Whether the Buddhas arise or not these four Truths exist in the universe. The Buddhas only reveal these Truths which lay hidden in the dark abyss of time.

Scientifically interpreted, the Dhamma may be called the law of cause and effect. These two embrace the entire body of the Buddha's Teachings.

The first three represent the philosophy of Buddhism; the fourth represents the ethics of Buddhism based on that philosophy. All these four Truths are dependent on this body itself. The Buddha states: “In this very one-fathom long body along with perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim the world, the end of the world, and the path leading to the end of the world.” Here the term world (*samsāra*) is applied to suffering.

Pivot of Sorrow:

Buddhism rests on the pivot of sorrow. But it does not thereby follow that Buddhism is pessimistic. It is neither totally pessimistic nor totally optimistic, but on the contrary, it teaches a truth that lies midway between them.

One would be justified by calling the Buddha a pessimistic if He had only enunciated the Truth of suffering without suggesting a means to put an end to it. The Buddha perceived the universality of sorrow and did prescribe a panacea for this universal sickness of humanity. The highest conceivable happiness, according to the Buddha is Nibbāna, which is the total extinction of suffering.

The author of the article on Pessimism in the Encyclopaedia Britannica writes:

“Pessimism denotes an attitude of hopelessness towards life, a vague general opinion that pain and evil predominate in human affairs. The original doctrine of the Buddha is in fact as optimistic as any optimism of the West. To call it pessimism is merely to apply to it a characteristically Western principle to which happiness is impossible without personality. The true Buddhist looks

forward with enthusiasm to absorption into eternal bliss.”

Ordinarily the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is the highest and only happiness of the average man. There is no doubt a kind of momentary happiness in the anticipation, gratification and retrospection of such fleeting material pleasures, but they are illusive and temporary. According to the Buddha non-attachment is a greater bliss.

The Buddha does not expect His followers to be constantly pondering on suffering and lead a miserable unhappy life. He exhorts them to be always happy and cheerful, for rapture (*pīti*) is one of the factors of Enlightenment.

Real happiness is found within, and is not to be defined in terms of wealth, children, honors or invasions. If such possessions are misdirected, forcibly or unjustly obtained, misappropriated or even viewed with attachment, they will be a source of pain and sorrow to the possessor.

Seek the Cause:

Instead of trying to rationalize suffering, Buddhism takes suffering for granted and seek the cause to eradicate it. Suffering exists as long as there is craving. It can only be annihilated by treading the Noble Eightfold Path and attaining the supreme bliss of Nibbāna.

These four Truths can be verified by experience. Hence the Buddha Dhamma is not based on the fear of the unknown, but is founded on the bedrock of facts which can be tested by ourselves and verified by experience. Buddhism is, therefore, rational and intensely practical.

Such a rational and practical system cannot contain mysteries or esoteric doctrines. Blind faith, therefore, is foreign to Buddhism. Where there is no blind faith there cannot be any coercion or persecution of fanaticism.

To the unique credit of Buddhism it must be said that throughout its peaceful march of 2,503 years no drop of blood was shed in the

name of the Buddha, no mighty monarch wielded his powerful sword to propagate the Dhamma, and no conversion was made either by force or by repulsive methods. Yet, the Buddha was the first and greatest missionary that lived on earth.

Aldous Huxley writes: “Alone of all the great world religions Buddhism made its way without persecution, censorship or inquisition.”

Lord Russell remarks: “Of the great religions of history, I prefer Buddhism, especially in its earliest forms; because it has had the smallest element of persecution.”

In the name of Buddhism, no altar was reddened with the blood of a Hypatia, no Bruno was burnt alive.

Intellectual:

Buddhism appeals more to the intellect than to the emotion. It is concerned more with the character of the devotees than with their numerical strength.

On one occasion Upāli,¹ a follower of Nigaṅṭha Nāṭaputta,² approached the Buddha and was so pleased with the Buddha’s exposition of the Dhamma that he instantly expressed his desire to become a follower of the Buddha. But the Buddha cautioned him, saving:

“Of a verity, O householder, make a thorough investigation. It is well for a distinguished man like you to (first) make a thorough investigation.”

Upāli, who was overjoyed at this unexpected remark of the Buddha, said: “Lord, had I been a follower of another religion, its adherents would have taken me round the streets in a procession proclaiming that such and such a millionaire had renounced his former faith and embraced theirs.”

¹ See the Light of the Dhamma, Vol. V. No. 1, p. 57.

² See the Light of the Dhamma, Vol. V. No. 1, p. 25, and also Sāmaññaphala Sutta published by the Union Buddha Sāsana Council.

“But, Lord, Your Reverence advises me to investigate further. The more pleased am I with this remark of yours. For the second time, Lord, I seek refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha.”

Buddhism is saturated with this spirit of free enquiry and complete tolerance. It is the teaching of the open mind and the sympathetic heart, which, lighting and warming the whole universe with its twin rays of wisdom and compassion, sheds its genial glow on every being struggling in the ocean of birth and death.

Tolerance:

The Buddha was so tolerant that He did not even exercise His power to give commandments to His lay followers. Instead of using the imperative, He said: “It behooves you to do this: it behooves you not to do this.” He commands not, but does exhort.

This tolerance the Buddha extended to men, women and all living beings.

It was the Buddha who first attempted to abolish slavery and vehemently protested against the degrading caste system which was firmly rooted in the soil of India. In the words of the Buddha it is not by mere birth one becomes an outcast or noble, but by one’s actions.¹

Caste or colour does not preclude one from becoming a Buddhist or from entering the Order. Fishermen, scavengers, courtesans, together with warriors and Brahmins were freely admitted to the Order and enjoyed equal privileges and were also given positions of rank.

Upāli, the barber, for instance, was made in preference to all others the chief in matters pertaining to Vinaya discipline. The timid Sunita,² the scavenger, who attained Arahatsip, was admitted by the Buddha

Himself into the Order. Aṅgulimāla,³ the robber and criminal, was converted into a compassionate saint. The fierce Āḷāvaka⁴ sought refuge in the Buddha and became a saint. The courtesan Ambapāli⁵ entered the Order and attained Arahatsip.

Such instances could easily be multiplied from the Tipiṭaka to show that the portals of Buddhism were wide open to all, irrespective of caste, colour or rank.

Women:

It was also the Buddha who raised the status of downtrodden women and not only brought them to a realisation of their importance to society but also founded the first celibate religious order for women with rules and regulations.

The Buddha did not humiliate women, but only regarded them as feeble by nature. He saw the innate good of both men and women and assigned to them their due places in His teaching. Sex is no barrier to attaining Sainthood.

Sometimes the Pāḷi term used to denote women is *mātugāma* which means mother-folk or society of mothers. As a mother, woman holds an honourable place in Buddhism. Even the wife is regarded as “the best friend” (*parama sakha*) of the husband.

Hasty critics are only making *ex parte* statements when they reproach Buddhism with being inimical to women.

Although at first the Buddha refused to admit women into the Order on reasonable grounds, yet later He yielded to the entreaties of His foster-mother, Pajāpati Gotamī, and founded the Bhikkhūnī Order.

³ Theragātha, 8. Aṅgulimāla Thera Gātha, p. 333, 6th Syn. Edn.

⁴ Saṃyutta Nikāya, 12. Āḷāvaka Sutta, p. 216, 6th Syn. Edn.

¹ Dhammapada, verse 393.

² Khuddaka Nikāya, Theragātha Pāḷi, 2. Sunītatheragātha, p. 310, 6th Syn. Edn.

⁵ Dīgha Nikāya, Ambapāliḡaṇikā, p. 81, 6th Syn. Edn.

Just as the Arahats Sāriputta and Moggallāna, were made the two chief disciples in the Order of monks¹, even so He appointed Arahats Khemā and Uppalavaṇṇa as the two chief female disciples.² Many other female disciples were named by the Buddha Himself as His distinguished and pious followers.

Free Atmosphere:

On one occasion the Buddha said to King Kosala who was displeased on hearing that a daughter was born to him:

“A woman child, O Lord of men, may prove

Even a better offspring than a male.”

Many women, who otherwise, would have fallen into oblivion distinguished themselves in various ways and gained their emancipation by following the Dhamma and entering the Order.

In this new Order, which later proved to be a great blessing to many women, queens, princesses, daughters of noble families, widows, bereaved mothers, destitute women, pitiable courtesans—all, despite their caste or rank, met on a common platform, enjoyed perfect consolation and peace, and breathed that free atmosphere which is denied to those cloistered in cottages and palatial mansions.

It was also the Buddha who banned the sacrifice of poor beasts and admonished His followers to extend their loving-kindness (*mettā*) to all living beings—even to the tiniest creatures that crawl at one’s feet.

No man has the power or the right to destroy the life of another as life is precious to all.

A genuine Buddhist would exercise his loving-kindness towards every living being and identify himself with all, making no

distinction whatsoever with regard to caste, colour or sex.

It is this Buddhist *mettā* that attempts to break all the barriers which separate one from another. There is no reason to keep aloof from others merely because they belong to another persuasion or another nationality. In that noble toleration Edict which is based on Culla-Vyuha and Mahā-Vyuha Suttas, Asoka says: “Concourse alone is best, that is, all should harken willingly to the doctrine professed by others.”

Buddhism is not confined to any country or any particular nation. It is universal. It is not nationalism which, in other words, is another form of caste system founded on a wider basis. Buddhism, if it be permitted to say so, is super-nationalism.

To a Buddhist there is no far or near, no enemy or foreigner, no renegade or untouchable, since universal love realized through understanding has established the brotherhood of all living beings. A real Buddhist is a citizen of the world. He regards the whole world as his motherland and all as his brothers and sisters.

Buddhism is, therefore, unique, mainly owing to its tolerance, non-aggressiveness, rationality, practicability, efficiency and universality. It is the noblest of all unifying influences and the only lever that can uplift the world.

These are some of the salient features of Buddhism, and amongst some of the fundamental doctrines may be said to be *Kamma* or the Law of Moral Causation, the Doctrine of Rebirth, *Anattā* and *Nibbāna*.

¹ Vinaya Piṭaka. Mahākhanda, 14.

Sariputtamoggallāna-pabbajjākaṭṭhā, p. 50, 6th Syn. Edn.

² Khuddaka Nikāya, Therī Gāthā Pāḷi, 1. Uppalavaṇṇā Gāthā, p. 404, 6th Syn. Edn.

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