

A THOUSAND LIVES AWAY

BUDDHISM IN
CONTEMPORARY
BURMA

Winston L. King

FOREWORD BY EDWARD CONZE



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Appendix

Scanned from the New Paperback Edition, 1990

ASIAN HUMANITIES PRESS

Jain Publishing Company

www.jainpub.com

First edition in hardcover from

Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

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'The Journal of Religion Vol. 41', 1961.

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APPENDIX

AN EXPERIENCE IN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

IF THERE is any one phrase that a foreigner studying Buddhism in Burma hears more than another it is: "But you can't understand Buddhism without practicing it." This does not quite mean that one must become a Buddhist to understand anything about Buddhism; or exactly that if one practices Buddhist moral virtues in his daily life, he will know whereof he speaks. "Practice" means the practice of meditation, which is held both to be the central discipline of the true Buddhist path and to provide the supreme, firsthand proof of the truth of Buddhism.

I

There are some two or three hundred meditation centers in Burma at the present to which layman or monk may resort—many of them government supported. Most of them are conducted by monks, since meditation is their professional calling, but a very few are run by laymen. Of these the International Meditation Center in a Rangoon suburb is the outstanding one. It is conducted by U Ba Khin, Accountant General of Burma, retired. Here a ten-day course in Buddhist meditation is held each month, with special regard to the foreigner. So here it was that my wife and I came for our experience in meditation.

The present center was built in 1952, though the *Gurugyi* (goo-roo-jee), or head teacher, U Ba Khin, had been using a room in his governmental office for such purposes for some years before. It is a pagoda-like structure about 30 feet high, built on a little knoll in Golden Valley. The exterior is octagonal at the base, with a double door leading from each of the eight surfaces into a meditation cell which is in the shape of a truncated triangle, wide end out, small end in, radial to the central and circular shrine room. The base of the triangle is about 9 feet, the sides about 7 feet, and the truncated tip about 3 feet or just wide enough for a single door into the shrine room. This latter is a step up from the cell (or cave) floor and is about 12 feet in diameter. (One of the 8 cells is occupied by a small Buddha image; another serves as entrance for the Gurugyi to the shrine room.) At a lower level on the hillside, but concentric to the dome, is an arc of 17 additional cells soon to be connected with the shrine room by a telecommunications system.

The purpose of this arrangement is obvious. The shrine room is the headquarters of the Gurugyi. Here he may sit and meditate in silent fellowship with those in the adjoining cells, be available to them in case of need for counsel, and look in on them through the adjoining doors at his discretion. My wife and I were each favored with a private meditation cell, though there were two meditators in some of the others. Even thus, privacy in the Western sense was not complete, since the sound of coughs, sneezes, and body movements, as well as the Gurugyi's counseling, carried into all the other cells through the shrine-room doors. However, in time, one learned to disregard most of this.

The sole purpose of the center is "promoting the practice of Buddhist Meditation according to the teachings of the Lord Buddha." It is open to any "who are really anxious to experience the Nibbānic Peace Within." Though Buddhist in teaching and conception, no effort is made to coerce the non-religious or other religious into a Buddhist profession. As a mark of its tolerance, the Jew or Christian may say "Amen," the Moslem "*Alm*," and the Hindu "*Aum*" to the in-breath, out-breath rhythm of the *samādhi* practice.

There has been criticism of the center, particularly by the monks and the more conservative laity. This is in part because a layman

presumes to “give the Dhamma,” or Buddha-teaching, to disciples. It is also in part because of the seeming promise of quick results in spiritual attainment implicit in the ten-day course. It is true that in some of the literature emanating from the center there are suggestions that some candidates *are* encouraged to believe that they have reached a *Sotāpanna* or Stream-Winner stage, i.e., a stage of advancement from which they can never be reborn on the lower-than-human planes of existence. Yet in our time there, after we were assured that we had reached sufficient one-pointedness of attention (*samādhi*) to go on to a higher stage of meditation, no further claims were made as to our specific attainments. It was indicated that we had made only a beginning in the true method of meditation which, if continued and perfected, would bring us to Nibbānic peace.

The Gurugyi believes that many Buddhists (monks and laity alike) are dawdling along at the business of gaining *Nibbāna*. Through ignorance of true meditative methodology or because of sloth they are making slow progress. Hence with typical lay impatience at traditional doctrinal complexities, he proposes to cut the Gordian knot and pierce through to Nibbānic peace, even here and now, by the fastest method possible. Though there are forty traditional meditation subjects in Buddhism, and many methods in Burma U Ba Khin believes that immediate intensive Concentration on breath-flow at the upper lip is the key to the most rapid attainment of the necessary one-pointedness of mind. At least two honored sayadaws (senior monks) after hearing his version of “giving the *Dhamma*” and feeling his vibrations, i.e., his spiritual quality, have given him their blessing.

The center and its work are entirely supported by voluntary contributions. No campaign is made for its support, though the Gurugyi is always willing to speak with enthusiasm of the work he carries on; and, quite unusual in Burmese Buddhism, no public credit is ever given in any way for gifts, except a business-like receipt to the individual donor. There is a devoted following of those who have experienced the benefits of meditation at the center, both physical and psychic; among them are many prominent Burmese and not a few foreigners.

II

The center is actually the projection of the personal life and faith of its founder, U Ba Khin, who is its director and Gurugyi also. He is now a vigorous man, just over sixty, who in addition to the center work—where he spends all his out-of-office hours during the courses—holds two major government responsibilities.

By any standards, U Ba Khin is a remarkable man. A man of limited education and orphaned at an early age, yet he worked his way up to the Accountant-Generalship. He is the father of a family of eight. As a person, he is a fascinating combination of worldly wisdom and ingenuousness, inner quiet and outward good humor, efficiency and gentleness, relaxedness and full self-control. The sacred and the comic are not mutually exclusive in his version of Buddhism; and hearing him relate the canonical Buddha stories, with contemporary asides and frequent salvos of throaty “heh, heh, heh’s,” is a memorable experience.

The program of the center grew out of his own personal experience of inner peace and physical healing gained through meditation. Some fourteen years ago he was afflicted with a cancerous growth on the bone and in the flesh immediately below his right eye. In the course of some years of meditational discipline, sandwiched in between his working hours, he cured himself completely. To him the moral was obvious: a calm, pure spirit produces a healthy body and furthers efficiency in one’s work. Because of his ability to achieve both detachment and one-pointed attention, he believes that his intuitional and productive powers are so increased that he functions far more effectively as a government servant than most men. Whether he is a kind of genius who makes his “system” work or whether he represents an important new type in Burmese Buddhism—the lay teacher who combines meditation and active work in a successful synthesis—it not yet clear in my mind.

III

The daily schedule at the center is intended to produce the maximum amount of profitable meditation. To this end it is strenuous but flexible, designed like a revival meeting to achieve a

spiritual crisis and breakthrough in those who are ready for it. The pattern is as follows

Meditation	4:30 - 6:30	A.M.
Rest and breakfast	6:30 - 7:30	A.M.
Meditation	7:30 - 10:30	A.M.
Rest and lunch	10:30 A.M. -12:30	P.M.
Meditation	12:30 - 5:00	P.M.
Rest	5:00 - 6:00	P.M.
Talk by Gurugyi	6:00 - 7:00	P.M.
Meditation	7:00 - 9:00	P.M.

As Westerners, unused to meditational methods, we were given special consideration, since U Ba Khin believes that actual meditation, not a Set pattern for it, is the essential. We each had a separate meditation cave and a private room with bath at opposite ends of the center compound. We ate our meals together in my wife's room, and we were allowed a light meal in the late afternoon, a privilege not given to our Burmese fellow-meditators. Likewise, we could experiment with meditational postures till we found those that allowed the maximum amount of comfort compatible with meditation. I finally settled on three alternative methods: (1) seated flat on a cushion, back against the wall, legs out straight in front on the floor, slightly separated, and hands in lap; (2) seated in an acute-angle corner, feet together and drawn up near the buttocks, legs (bent) spreading out on either side till they rested against the walls, clasped hands resting on the cushion near the feet; (3) semi-reclining in a deck (lawn) chair. I tried to keep each position at least half-an-hour at a time.

The whole pattern might be described as concentration without tension. The Western method of attention, said the Gurugyi, is concentration with tension on outward things; the Eastern is inner concentration within a context of relaxation, or as expressed in a canonical text, meditation "with zestful ease." (Hence we were allowed to exercise discretion.) Aching muscles do not necessarily

conduce to good meditation; they may indeed distract. If a position becomes intolerable or if his mind becomes dull or the meditator becomes sleepy, he should change position, lie down to rest, sleep a little, or take a walk for five minutes. Only the person himself can hold himself to the meditative process— not a given position or pattern.

We were urged to find the “middle way” of Buddhism between a sharp tight tension of mind and sloth. Gently but firmly, relaxedly but persistently, the meditator must focus his attention on the given subject till outside noises, wandering thoughts, and all other distractions sink into the background and one-pointedness of mind is at one’s command.

Three levels of attainment are recognized in Buddhism. *Sīla*, or external morality of the basic sort, is the first. On the first day we were all required to promise observation of the Five Precepts during our stay at the center: no killing of any living beings (mosquito nets and repellents) were allowed; no lying; no stealing; no sexual intercourse; no drinking of intoxicants. In addition, the Burmese meditators ate no afternoon meal and slept on mats rather than beds.

Sīla thus being taken care of, we turned to the next stage called *samādhi*, or concentration. The goal here was to achieve one-pointedness of mind. And our Gurugyi’s method—one of the orthodox methods—is to concentrate the attention on the upper lip below the nostrils with only the thought “in-breath, out-breath” allowed. This thought, plus the thread of the physical awareness of breathing, is to be the total content of consciousness. As one pulls a bull with a ring in his nose, so he keeps steadily pulling his attention closer and closer to its object. U Ba Khin thinks that this is the logical point for meditative discipline to begin, where “inner” and “outer” worlds meet; he believes concentration here produces results much faster than the grosser methods.

For three days and a half of meditation time this was our sole occupation: to focus our attention on our breathing at the upper lip just below the nostrils. I found it best to close my eyes to avoid the eye-distraction even of the bare unlighted cave, and I avoided using

the deck chair during early morning or night periods lest I sleep. If his attention wanders to the outside noises, other parts of his body, or miscellaneous thoughts, the meditator must turn his attention again and again to the given area. If his attention flags for the moment, he may begin to breathe rather vigorously and rapidly to renew the necessary central thread of physical sensation for anchoring the attention again. So it was that repeatedly one might hear a fellow meditator, like a little pump, breathing himself back to one-pointedness of mind.

When the Gurugyi judges that his meditator has gained sufficient concentrative power—this through conversations with him—he is then turned toward the next stage, *Paññā* or wisdom. This third and highest stage is not gained at once; there are many degrees of it, but the highest degree of this highest state is the kind of insight which finally produces enlightenment; it is such a knowledge of reality as destroys all desire, save for *Nibbāna*, and finally produces *Nibbāna* itself.

Many meditation masters take a long time to introduce their meditators to this stage, or better, to that kind of meditation which produces *Paññā*, namely, *Vipassanā* (*vee-pah'-sah-nah*); but U Ba Khin believes that, as soon as the meditator achieves a reasonable degree of one-pointedness, he should go on to *Vipassanā* meditation on the body, mindfulness of the changes in the body.

The starting point in *Vipassanā* meditation is to turn the now one-pointed attention to various parts of the body in order to discover its “true nature,” i.e., that it is only a flux of split-second atomic-level combustions. This, the nature of all reality including the body, has been but recently “discovered” by science; but the Buddha, says the Buddhist, discovered this long ago by introspective attention, calling the smallest particles in the physical plane “*kalāpas*.” Of course one does not observe the individual atoms at play within himself, but he does directly experience, as in a laboratory, the atomic combustion en masse. By a dual consciousness of heat in the body, part feeling and part thought, though mostly the former, he experiences for himself that combustion of atoms or, to put it differently, the impermanent nature (*anicca*) (*ah-neé-chah*)¹ of that body. A little later, after this body-

burning consciousness is established in the mind, one comes to include the mind itself in the impermanence-awareness realizing that his attention, thoughts, and awareness themselves come and go. This is the second great truth which one is to realize by *Vipassanā*, namely, *anattā* (*ahn-ah't-tah*), the non-entity of self. And as a final truth, inseparably bound up with *anicca* and *anattā*, there is *dukkha* (*duh'-khah*) or suffering awareness. Indeed, how can one resist *dukkha*-feeling when he feels the pulsing, burning awareness of his own body-mind! And how can he fail to be detached from it, in Nibbānic peace! . . . Such is the goal of *Vipassanā*.

To achieve this kind of meditation, we were instructed to begin with the breath-lip awareness and, when attention was fully gained there, to shift the focus to the fontanelle, which, as the coming-together point of the skull bones on the top of the head, is the “most sensitive point” in the human body. As a result of successful concentration here one begins to feel pricklings, stings, itchings, or burnings. By widening his attention he is to “push” or “widen” this tingling area over the crown, then down the sides of the head, and finally down through the whole body. The goal is to gain such a body-awareness that a person can focus his attention on any one point in the body in such a way that separate physical sensation springs up there at will—evidenced by burning or prickling. As he grows in power to do this, he tries more and more to center his body-awareness in the heart-chest region, which is the core of man’s psychophysical being, according to Buddhism, and the last refuge of those impurities he is now seeking to “destroy.”

The burning, prickling feelings which come at this stage serve a double purpose: as already noted, they make the meditator vividly, personally aware of *anicca*, that great slayer of all conceit and I-ness; and second, the appreciation of *anicca* in relation to the burning sensation leads to the actual destruction of one’s impurities, i.e., the bad results of evil deeds done in past lives. Therefore, as the tender of a refuse-burning operation, the meditator keeps poking the fire (by meditative attention on various parts of the body) until even the hard, wet, heavy lumps are burned. My head was apparently such; it never properly burned!

What were we expected to do in ten days' time? That depended upon us. By the fourth day we were told that we had sufficient one-pointedness of mind to pass on to the next stage. From there on we were only urged to keep on till perhaps some crisis was reached, i.e., the burning became almost unbearable; and by continued burning to consume the further impurities as far as possible. Presumably one might accomplish something here, once and for all, like Christian sanctification; for, according to Buddhist teaching, one may by meditation, even as a layman, achieve the Stream-Winner stage (*sotāpanna*), after which he will never be reborn again in subhuman planes of existence. Thereafter, meditation periods serve the purpose of washing away the impurities which collect in one because of his contact with unholy men and mundane affairs: but the Great Divide has been crossed. However, no such actual statement was made about any of us.

IV

A brief summary of my actual experiences during the ten days will now be attempted, with accompanying interpretations given them by the Gurugyi. But first a word needs to be said about my personal approach to the discipline, and ensuing complications.

A basic question which I confronted from the very beginning was that of personal perspective. In what way should I approach the meditative practice? To some extent I felt that I had been pushed into the experiment by the constant insistence:

‘Don’t try to understand or talk about our Buddhism until you have practiced it. Then you won’t need to ask some of your questions: they will either be answered or seem unimportant.’ Further: Should I think of it merely as a cold-blooded experiment in religious research for the sake of future writing? This would violate the basic requirement of “sincerity” of search for Nibbānic peace on the part of the candidate. For, while Buddhism reiterates that it cordially invites investigation, it does not consider that mere casual experiment brings any notable results. One must be at least precommitted to a serious personal effort. Yet, to be honest, I did not feel myself to be precisely a desolate, storm-tossed soul desperately seeking light, come to meditation as a last resort.

The compromise attitude which I tried to maintain consistently throughout the course was that of seeking to penetrate the Buddhist meditation experience from the “inside,” both to achieve understanding of it and to see whether it offered me anything personally. I was interested to see whether it seemed to be a spiritual methodology which could be adapted in the West without benefit of specific Buddhist beliefs and commitments. To this extent I tried steadily and “religiously” to follow the Gurugyi’s directions, to carry them out in the Buddhist manner as nearly as possible, without directly translating them into Christian experiential terms or equivalents. It may be that the consequent lack of a completely single-minded spiritual quest limited my success; at several points I was strongly tempted to declare the whole business impossible on these terms and found that my feelings about the experience fluctuated considerably.

A further difficulty was that of conflicting viewpoints and terms. Here was a visceral approach, characteristic of the East, in which the best knowledge is in part feeling; decisions intuitional rather than logical; and truth to be approached experientially rather than intellectually. But I came as a Western, cerebral man. Hence it was that throughout the ten days, sometimes more and sometimes less, I found myself struggling with interpretations both of the method and of my experiences rather than experiencing simply and instinctively. Even in the midst of meditation when I was supposedly feeling-knowing the burning flux of *anicca* in my own body, I found my attention wandering to questions about the meaning of *anicca*, whether this experience really proved its truth, whether it were a mere conditioned sensation, and so forth.

I could not help realizing what a world apart the Gurugyi and I were in conceptual terms, whenever he gave his lectures or interpreted my experience to me in his counseling. *He* spoke of casting out the evil spirits of Chinese devil-gods and Hindu deities by the power of the realization of *anicca*; of the storage of one’s past good deeds or evil deeds in some one of the thirty-one planes of existence, and of possible rebirth there; of sensing “atomic combustion” in the burning sensations in one’s body; of localizing one’s bad *kamma* in some part of his body and there burning it up

by focalized meditation. *I* thought in terms of neuroses, psychoses, split personalities, and psychosomatic tensions. The thirty-one planes were not a reality to me, or rebirth into one of them. Though I experienced lights and burnings (see below), to me they were not direct experiences of atomic combustion or absolute proof of *anicca-anattā-dukkha*. I always had need of the Gurugyi to tell me what my experience signified; and it seemed that I must needs tack the label “*anicca*” rather artificially on certain feelings rather than finding its realization immediately therein.

V

The experience itself I will deal with in terms of four periods by first describing each stage and then giving its interpretation by the Gurugyi, U Ba Khin.

First Period: three and one-half days. The first day or two was a time of acute physical discomfort in which I sought to find the proper position. Likewise there was great difficulty in holding the attention closely to the breath-lip focus. External noises in particular (bird calls, bells, coughs, voices) troubled me. Gradually they receded into the far-off background; if not actually unheard, they ceased to be distracting. Questions about the meaning of the method and my experience continually disturbed my concentration, however.

And there were various specific occurrences. In the afternoon of the second day I had, for some minutes, a strongly felt sense of being above and beyond the stream of breaths, thoughts, and bodily pulsings going on within “me.” There was a delightful sense of detached freedom, a sense of living only in the “here-nownness” of those moments, without past or future. Likewise—one of the most interesting features of the whole meditation period—there gradually came a new sense of the relativity of time. Time seemed to be infinitely spacious; a moment lasted forever, and three hours was an infinity—yet strangely it passed quite rapidly too. Only when I was quite tired, as at night, or for some reason could not concentrate, did time seem to drag.

There were physical sensations as well. During the latter half of the second day there appeared a sensation which continued off and

on throughout the ten days, though less in the latter few. This was the sensation of a flashing light, pulsing at the rate of 2 or 3 to the second, it was rather like continuous “heat lightning” on the horizon—a general flickering illumination rather than one bright spot. At first the intervals were short—up to four or five seconds in duration, and appearing on the right side. Later on the light came from the left and then all over my eye range as well. This occurred with my eyes fully but not tightly closed. It usually stopped, momentarily at least, if I opened them, though sometimes a slight eye-twitching sensation remained. At other times there were not discernible eye-twitchings at all.

The other sensation was that of a distinctly marked off area of physical awareness around the nose. It was not on the upper lip in orthodox position, but like a set of parentheses it enclosed the end of my nose, extending roughly from the bridge area to the upper lip on either side. In moments of success I was aware of only this area in which breathing was going on; it was the total content of my consciousness.

Interpretation—The Gurugyi said that though one concentrates on the upper lip, just beneath the nostril, different people experience varying areas of awareness. Such awareness is a sign of some success in achieving *samādhi*, or one-pointedness of mind. Likewise the flickering light which I saw was the result of a mind which was perfectly controlled and evenly balanced for at least the moment. But undue attention must not be given to lights, even though they are signs of progress, for they will divert one from his true focal center.

Second Period: one and one-half days.—During this period we were introduced to *Vipassanā* meditation. The initial period began with instruction as to the purpose of *Vipassanā* (see above) and a dedication to seek Nirvanic peace within. It was carried on for four and one-half hours, with the Gurugyi sometimes co-meditating with us.

The attempt to begin with the fontanelle area in the head was not very successful in my case. Only a few times was I able to arouse minor pricklings in my scalp area; only once or twice to

stroke them down (by attention) to the rest of the body. More successful was my concentration on the feet, which came to feel glowingly warm after a few minutes of steady concentration on them. Later on I was able to extend this sense of glowing warmth up to the chest area, though this usually resulted in a stuporous, near-sleep sense. At this point I would change the area of concentration.

These symptoms came to be more or less under my control during the next day or two. Several times I found myself, after a preliminary period of half an hour, being able to “move” the sense of glowing warmth or sometimes prickling, up and down the body almost at will, even up to the face, though the head on the whole remained refractory. Sometimes the warmth seemed to be a kind of total awareness of an area from the inside of the arches of the feet clear up to the nasal region all along the “front” of my body.

It should be noted that this sense of warmth did not seem to result in heating of the skin. When I put my finger on a “glowing” part, the finger was the warmer of the two. This was always the case, though once or twice later I broke into a sweat.

On the fifth day I was able to induce a sense of pressure, similar to that produced by a pencil pressing, eraser-end down, on the crown of my head at a specific point. It was slightly painful, surrounded by some mild pricklings, and lasting for fifteen minutes or so. My sense of terminological conflict still continued.

Interpretation—The warmth I felt was not physical, said Gurugyi, but was insight-knowledge of atomic flux en masse. Thus I was having direct personal experience of impermanence in myself as a small part of the total flux of nature. This sense of impermanence was the great liberating truth discovered by the Buddha in his meditation.

Attention is not to be given primarily to the burnings and prickling themselves; they only serve to locate the attention and indicate success. It must rather be given to *anicca* (impermanence) made evident in the burnings. Imaginary burnings need not be worried about, for the real sort spreads and remains unmistakably. A question about their being “mere” physical effects was discounted.

Third Period: sixth day—The mood of this day was different from those before, though the instructions had not much changed. (We were to continue concentrating on body-awareness, trying to center it increasingly in the chest area; likewise to keep in mind that even awareness itself is impermanent. We must not fear or restrain the burning, for burning indicates purification.) The better mood came because I had finally shelved the vocabulary conflict, or at least de-emotionalized it. I would forget terminological differences and keep my attention on the business at hand. In the morning of the day, I had a passing, but distinct, impression for some minutes of a kind of repulsiveness about the throbbing, pulsing, grasping kind of awareness which makes up ordinary consciousness and life-interest; and of the attractiveness of a pure, cool, impersonal consciousness above and beyond it.

In the afternoon of this day I experienced a kind of climax or crisis-experience (with a somewhat similar though different experience on the ninth day). I had centered my concentration on the chest area, from which sensations of glowing warmth spread all the way down the inside of the legs to the arch of each foot—though the outer edge of the foot remained distinctly cool.

After 45 minutes or so I changed to the deck chair. At first I felt the coolness of the air on my back, in contrast to the warmth of my “front”; but soon the sense of glowing warmth spread through the whole thoracic area from front to back. Concomitantly there came the need to breathe deeply and rapidly, as though gasping for air. After a time the heavy breathing and sense of warmth gradually subsided, leaving behind it a sense of quietness and “cleanness.”

During the experience itself there was a tremendous sense of importance or significance about it, perhaps also something of a kind of impersonal consciousness breaking through the ordinary self-awareness. But later in the afternoon, indeed within a half-hour, though the memory of the experience remained, it was impossible to feel its importance. Its quality of significance seemed utterly unreal, the experience itself almost trivial.

Explanation—The Gurugyi did not seem to find this experience as climactic as I had. However, it did seem to him evidence that my

impurities were being burned away by the inward realization of *anicca*; and that the burning was centered in the chest-heart area was an encouraging sign. He predicted that as impurity-burning went on, the warmth in various parts of the body would become less in degree. Likewise, since I reported that the flashing-light phenomenon still continued to some extent, he counseled me to open my eyes or get up and change position to dissipate it. That represented the *samādhi* stage and would now only distract me.

Final Period: four days.—During this period our attention was to be directed still to the task of burning out our impurities, through body awareness, with increasing attention given to the flux of mind-states also. Finding these directions somewhat vague, I concentrated on various parts of my body, with more and more attention to the chest area. Increasingly during these days I was able to do this, with some help from the heart throb.

There was still a continuing sense of body glow subsequent to concentration on a particular part of the body, especially the feet and legs; but, as predicted, this tended to lessen. In general, there was a greater sense of relaxation and peace.

On the afternoon of the ninth day there was a variant of the experience of the sixth day. It made itself felt as a sense of almost suffocation, or at least the almost involuntary progression into deep and rapid breathing at perhaps twice the ordinary rate. This continued for fifteen or twenty minutes. The pulse beat seemed normal, however. Along with the heavy breathing went a sensation of rhythmic swaying to the left (and back) and a slight dizziness, particularly when I held my breath for a half-minute or so. There was also an accompanying sense of vibrations in the chest area, at the rate of three or four per pulse beat.

Gradually the symptoms subsided, perhaps helped out by some deliberate effort to reduce them. Again, as on the sixth day, at the height of the experience it seemed significant, this time as a mood of overflowing benevolence or love to all persons. But again, as before, the whole mood and “reality” of the experience seemed unreal a half-hour later.

The rest of the period was anticlimactic, being interrupted by some other events on the final afternoon; and on the last evening I had such fatigue-twitchings in my legs (for the first time) that I was scarcely able to sit still. In general, however, and particularly in the early morning session just before we left on the eleventh day, there was a pervasive sense of peace and relaxation.

Interpretation.—For various reasons my opportunity to talk to Gurugyi was limited toward the end of the course. He said that the continuing sense of body-glow indicated the continuing burning of impurities. Perhaps my feet tended to remain warmest because impurities often flow out through the feet. It was generally encouraging that I was able to concentrate my attention primarily in the heart-chest area, that center of man's life for both good and ill.

VI

The final evaluation of this experience is difficult except in terms closely related to my own personal viewpoint; therefore perhaps the result is not universally valid with regard either to Buddhist meditation in general or to Westerners who attempt it in particular.

With regard to the psychosomatic therapy which goes on at the center, there is no doubt. One of our party with a catarrhal sniff was not, indeed, cured, as had been hoped. But we did actually talk to a Hindu who, because of a blood pressure of 240 and a serious heart condition (showed by an X-ray), had been given only three months to live five years ago. A meditation course at that time had cured him, and today he is in vigorous good health, permanently grateful to the Gurugyi who "pulled me out of the grave." (He is now an expert in jhānic trances, up to five hours in length.) Nor have I any reason to doubt the reality of other reported cures of asthma, chronic migraine headaches, spasmodic tremblings, a jaw twisted out of shape by muscular tensions, and so on. However important and impressive these cures seem, they are considered to be only by-products of the main business of meditation.

In this same connection it might be said that the East, whatever its terms—devil-possession or impurities—appreciates the fact of the psychic nature of many ills better than the West. It may seem to

the West that the East over-appreciates the psychic, in fact, and too generally excludes the physical aspect of illness and physical means for its cure. Yet there is no doubt that meditation as practiced in the East is able to release much inner tension, perhaps even for the Westerner.

The parallels between Buddhist and Christian religious experience, particularly Christian mystic experience, are interesting. The Christian mystics too, perhaps having learned it originally from the East, emphasize a one-pointedness of mind as essential to genuine religious insight—though with them such insight implies direct knowledge of Deity, rather than *anicca* and *Nibbāna*. So likewise the Buddhist emphasis upon “emptying” the self of its illusory pretensions to permanence and importance and using the resulting sense of impermanence to burn away impurities and stand alone before the unconditioned peace of *Nibbāna*, may find its analogue in the Christian war against the self and the Christian mystic’s effort to penetrate beyond the namable, or conditioned, aspects of God into the unconditioned Godhead. The “old man” equals the “deluded self” and the Christian “new man” is not unlike the one who is nearing “enlightenment” or the knowledge of “things as they are.” And the resulting sense of “calm and cool,” i.e., experience of Nibbānic peace in this life, is comparable to a Christian’s “deadness” to the world and self-will. My wife especially felt this sense of experiential similarity which goes much deeper than differing terminologies,

This leads me to a suggestion which the Buddhist apologetic would find unwelcome, but which seems at least partially valid to me. Should not the great trio of concepts, *anicca-anattā-dukkha* (impermanence, non-entity of self, dissatisfaction) be taken experientially rather than conceptually? Is not this their main significance? For *dukkha* this is indeed natural, since it is experiential rather than conceptual. But may not *anicca* be considered as the conceptual extension of the feeling one gets from body-burning consciousness? and *anattā* an implication of the fluctuating and dim self-awareness present when consciousness is reduced to a barest minimum of content? So likewise *Nibbāna* is the ultimate projection of the calm, coolness which ensues upon

such experiences; it is the delight of the voided mind living in sheer here-nownness. Is it not when these experiential elements are hypostatized and hardened into dogmas concerning the metaphysical nature of reality and the self that they become difficult of comprehension and acceptance by a non-Buddhist, and perhaps less than fully fruitful, religiously speaking, to the Buddhist himself?

Perhaps, however, this is a hen-egg situation: Can one have such an experience without such intellectual beliefs even though the center makes an implicit claim that it has a method which proves itself, regardless of one's faith or lack of it? Also, I was urged by Buddhist friends, as noted, to find in meditation answers to my intellectual questionings. And some Western converts to Buddhism see in meditation a completely neutral and "scientific" method of insight which can be transported meaningfully to the West.

It seems to me at this point that there are only two ways in which to make Buddhist meditation of maximum experiential value; and that both of these negate the presupposition that there is a neutral methodology which guarantees per se an experience of spiritual significance and brings to solution the intellectual difficulties attending Buddhist doctrine. One is to translate the Buddhist experience into the terms and emotional equivalents of one's own faith. (This my wife did and ironically was considered to have been more successful than I, who attempted such experience solely in terms of the method itself!) But then this is not precisely a Buddhist experience which results; nor even a neutral one.

On the other hand, one may approach meditation as a believing Buddhist to whom *anicca*, *anattā*, *dukkha*, *Nibbāna* are meaningful and feelingful terms. (For I became aware that the higher reaches of "knowledge" are for Buddhists a kind of feeling.) As realities already believed in, these terms become authentic and direct experiences of truth, when tied by the meditational method to certain sensations and feelings which the method is bound to produce. Because the doctrine is previously held true intellectually, it is certified by the ensuing experience achieved in its context.

This situation explains my personal difficulty. Not that it was profitless. Quite the contrary. Such aloneness with one's self,

whatever realities there be, is always of immense value personally; the likeness to some Christian experience is genuine; and I gained some insight perhaps into the interior Buddhist experience. Yet I was caught between the two possibly successful approaches, incapable of either. The path of finding Christian equivalents as I went along, I tried to avoid as a genuine researcher in Buddhist method. Yet, not being a Buddhist intellectually, the *anicca-anattā-dukkha* methodology of spiritual purification was not natural to me; it never became an organic feeling-knowing experience for me as it does for the Buddhist. And certain psychophysical results, which the method almost automatically produces, did not therefore produce in me a deep feeling of religious reality. Hence, unless Westerners translate the Buddhist meditational technique into equivalent and meaningful terms in their own religious experience, or else become Buddhists, such a method is, at most, likely to produce a few psychosomatic effects, interesting in themselves and of instrumental value but of no great religious significance.

NOTE

1. The Buddhist order is *anicca-dukkha-anattā*, since it is considered that the realization that existence is suffering comes after that of impermanence but before the full realization of the insubstantiality of the self, the last and highest stage.

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