

Buddhism and Peace

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Buddhism and Peace¹

While fellow-scientists have been able to come together and discuss their common problems without bitterness or acrimony, the idea that people of different religions can meet and discuss topics of mutual interest is of more recent origin. This is unfortunate since it is the religious men who profess to stand for the ideals of truth and love, who should have given a lead in this matter to the others. I need not go into the historical reasons for this, but I am glad that this organization among others has in recent times succeeded in extending its hand of fellowship beyond sectarian boundaries.

What Buddhism has to say on the theme of peace and the concepts of truth, freedom, justice and love is, I believe, particularly appropriate to our times. This view, I also believe, would be shared by most of you in respect of your own religions. This raises a number of problems. Are we all saying the same thing? Or are we saying a number of things which complement and supplement one another, each of us contributing some aspect of truth regarding these concepts, values and ideals? Or can it be that only one of us (or none of us) is right and the rest are wrong? Or is it the case that our talk about these things is devoid of meaning and has only an emotive significance for us and some of our hearers? We cannot hope to solve all these problems, but I believe that discussions of this sort can go a long way to help us see one another's points of view and clarify our own views about them.

It is evident that there is a common content in the higher religions. All these religions profess a belief in a Transcendent Reality, in survival, in moral responsibility and moral values, and in a good life, despite the differences when we go into details. The Christians and Muslims seek communion with God, the Hindus seek union with Brahman, and the Buddhists seek to attain Nibbāna. It is equally evident that on matters on which they disagree they cannot all be true—unless it can be shown that the disagreements are purely verbal. Christianity believes in one unique Incarnation; Hinduism in several. To Islam the very idea is blasphemy. To the Buddhist it depends on what you mean. Now what I have to say on the concepts of peace, truth, freedom, justice and love in Buddhism belongs partly to the common content and partly to the disparate element, which distinguishes Buddhism from other religions. It would be necessary for me to point out both, if I am to give a clear picture of the account given of these concepts in Buddhism.

Peace is a central concept in the religion of the Buddha, who came to be known as the “santi-rājā” or the “Prince of Peace.” For, on the one hand the aim of the good life, as understood in Buddhism, is described as the attainment of a state of “Peace” or “*santi*,” which is a characteristic of Nibbāna or the Transcendent Reality. On the other hand, the practice of the good life is said to consist in “*sama-cariyā*” or “harmonious (literally: peaceful) living” with one's fellow beings. It was this doctrine, which gave “inward peace” (*ajjhatta-santi*)² and resulted in “harmonious living” (or “righteous living”—*dhammacariyā*—as it is sometimes called), which the Buddha for the first time in the known history of mankind sought to spread over the entire earth when he set up, as he claimed “the kingdom of righteousness” (*dhamma-cakkam*, literally, rule of righteousness) or “the kingdom of God” (*brahma-cakkam*).³

The Buddha, who in the earliest texts is said to have been “born for the good and happiness of mankind” (*manussaloka hita-sukhatāya jāto*),⁴ first trained sixty-one of his disciples to attain the

¹ Talk given on 8 April 1961 at a Seminar organized by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, held at All Souls College, Oxford University. The Seminar was on the theme of “Religion and Peace, with special reference to the concepts of Truth, Justice, Freedom and Love.”

² Sn 837

³ “*Brahmā*” means here “the highest” or the “most sublime” without theological connotations.

⁴ Sn. 683

highest spiritual goal in this life itself and then sent them out, requesting that no two of them were to go in the same direction. They were “to preach this good doctrine, lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle and lovely in its consummation.” It is necessary to stress the importance of this training which was intended to bring about the moral (*sīla*), intuitive (*samādhi*) and intellectual-spiritual (*paññā*) development of the person. For it was only those who had attained the “inward peace” who were considered fit to preach, since according to Buddhism “it is not possible for a man who has not saved himself to (help) save another.”⁵ Those who went out on such missions were to train themselves in such a way that “if brigands were to get hold of them and cut them limb by limb with a double-edged saw,” they should not consider themselves to have done the bidding of the Buddha, if they showed the slightest anger towards them.⁶

The practice of “*mettā*” or Compassionate Love was thus an essential part of the training. The worth placed on Love in Buddhism may be gathered from the following remark of the Buddha: “None of the good works employed to acquire religious merit is worth a fraction of the value of loving-kindness.”⁷ The word *mettā* is the abstract noun from the word *mitra*, which means “friend.” It is, however, not defined just as “friendliness” but as analogous to a mother’s love for her only child. “Just as a mother loves her only child even more than her life, do thou extend a boundless love towards all creatures.” The practice of the “highest life” or the “God-life” (*brahma-vihāra*) is said to consist in the cultivation of compassionate feelings towards all beings, sympathy (*karuṇā*) towards those in distress who need our help, the ability to rejoice with those who are justly happy (the opposite emotion to that of jealousy, envy, etc.) (*muditā*) and impartiality towards all. The person who has successfully developed these qualities is said to be “one who is cleansed with an internal bathing” after bathing “in the waters of love and compassion for one’s fellow beings.”⁸

When the Buddha’s disciple Ānanda suggested to him that half of the religion of the Buddha consisted in the practice of friendliness, the Buddha’s rejoinder was that it was not half but the whole of the religion. It was this emphasis on compassion which made it possible for Buddhism to spread its message over the greater part of Asia, without resorting to military force or political power. It is the proud boast of Buddhism that not a drop of blood has been shed in propagating its message and no wars have been fought for the cause of Buddhism or the Buddha. It was able to convert people to its view by its reasonableness and the inspiring example of those who preached it.

Differences of opinion there were with regard to the interpretation of the texts among the Buddhists themselves, and this was inevitable in a religion which gave full freedom of thought and expression to man. But these differences did not result in fanaticism and an attempt on the part of one party to persecute the other. History records the fact that those who subscribed to the ideals of Mahāyāna or Theravāda Buddhism were able to study side by side in the same monastery. In world conferences of Buddhists, Mahāyānists and Theravādins come together despite the known differences in their views. Another aspect of this practice of compassion on the part of the Buddhists is the fact that they were the first in history to open hospitals in India, Ceylon and China for the medical treatment not only of human beings but of animals as well, thus translating into action the saying of the Buddha that “he who serves the sick serves me.”⁹

⁵ M I 46

⁶ M I 129

⁷ *Itivuttaka*, 19–21

⁸ M I 39

⁹ *Vinaya Pitaka, Mahāvagga VIII. 26.*

The effect that this doctrine of compassion had on the Buddhist emperor, Asoka, may be seen when he says, “All men are my children, and, as I desire for my children that they obtain every kind of welfare and happiness both in this world and the next world, so do I desire for all men.” Here was a king, unique in history, who on his conversion to Buddhism gave up military conquest as an instrument of policy not after defeat but after victory. Asoka had conquered an area almost the size of Europe, but he did not extend his conquest to the southernmost part of India or try to annex Ceylon, although he could have easily done so.

The Rock Edict XIII contains a personal confession of his remorse at the sight of the suffering and carnage which his military campaigns involved. When he embraced Buddhism, he indulged in spiritual conquest saying that “the reverberation of war drums” was now replaced by the “reverberation of the drum of the dharma.” It appears as if Asoka was trying to emulate the example of the righteous “universal monarch” (*cakkavatti-rāja*) as depicted in the Buddhist texts. The Buddha had said that “it was possible to rule a country in accordance with dharma without resorting to harsh punitive measures or engaging in military conquests.”¹⁰

The “universal monarch” who is called a “king of righteousness” (*dharma-rāja*) governs his country as a model state in which there is both economic prosperity as well as the practice of righteousness. The idea and fame of this Just Society spreads over the earth until the entire world follows its example and comes under a single rule “without the necessity for arms or the sword” (*adaṇḍena asatthena*). In any case he seems to have been impressed by the sentiments about war expressed in the Buddhist texts. The Dhammapada says:

“Victory breeds hatred,
for the conquered sleep in sorrow;
casting aside victory and defeat,
the peaceful one dwells at ease.”¹¹

“The conqueror gets someone who conquers him.”¹²
“Hatred does not cease by hatred—
hatred ceases by love—
this is the eternal law.”¹³

The Mahāyāna work, the Suvarṇabhāsottama Sūtra, contains a plea for peace and concord between “the 84,000 kings of India.”

The Buddha not only preached against war but actually intervened on one occasion to prevent a war—the first practical lesson in *ahiṃsā* in the field of politics. Two tribes, the Sakyas and the Koliyas, who lived on either side of a river were making warlike preparations to destroy each other because they could not agree on dividing the waters for their use. It is on this occasion that the Buddha intervened and brought about a settlement after asking the warmongers what they considered to be of greater worth—water or human lives! It is these acts of compassion of the Buddha, who gave up a kingdom to show humanity the way to enlightenment, which made one of his contemporaries say of him, “I have heard it said that God is Compassionate but I have seen with my own eyes how full of Compassion the Blessed One is.” It is not surprising therefore that in the Mahāyāna, the Buddha should be conceived of as the Incarnation of the “highest Compassion” (*mahā kāruṇika*).

¹⁰ S I 116. According to Buddhist tradition, there are periods in the world cycles when human beings are at the peak of moral and intellectual development, and at such times a world ruler (*cakkavatti*) is able to govern in righteousness, without the use of force.

¹¹ Dhṛp 207

¹² S I 85

¹³ Dhṛp 5

The idea of Compassion has its origins in pre-Buddhistic thought. It is first met with in the Chāndogya Upanishad, where it is said that one should practise *ahimsā* (non-violence) towards all creatures with the sole exception of holy places¹⁴—in other words animal sacrifices to God were permitted. The concept of ahimsa also finds a central place in Jainism, where the Jain ascetic goes into extremes in practising this virtue. But it was Buddhism which made ahimsa basically a virtue to be practised in human relations and introduced the new word “*mettā*” (the abstract noun from *mitra*, friend) to denote this concept. But the object of one’s *mettā* (Compassion, Love) is not only human beings but all beings both higher and lower than the human, and it came to mean the completely selfless but boundless compassion of a Buddha.

The concept of “beings higher than the human” is unintelligible except in the background of the Buddhist cosmology. According to the Buddhist conception of the cosmos, there are an innumerable number of world-systems. The Buddha says, “As far as these suns and moons revolve shedding their light in space, so far extends the thousand-fold world-system. In it are a thousand suns, a thousand moons, thousands of earths and thousands of heavenly worlds. This is the thousand-fold minor world-system. A thousand times such a thousand-fold minor world-system is the twice a-thousand middling world system. A thousand times such a twice-a-thousand middling world-system is the thrice-a-thousand major world-system.”¹⁵ This is a conception that partially coincides with the modern physicist’s view of the cosmos, with its hundreds of galactic systems or island universes, whether we accept the interpretations of Bondi and Hoyle or Ryle.

The compassion of the Buddhist is to be extended not only to the humans and animals on our earth but to the beings in all these worlds. All beings within the cosmos, however low their state of evolution may be, are said to have the capacity to evolve up to the very highest state; and however high their stature may be, are said to be subject to death so long as they remain within the cosmos—both these facts teach us the same lesson, namely, that it is each one’s duty to help his fellow beings and that no one has any right or valid grounds to despise another.

At the human level the need for mutual help is much greater. Buddhism taught the doctrine of the equality of mankind at a time when human inequality was taken for granted. We find here for the first time the biological argument that mankind was one species. The Buddha says, “Know ye the grasses and trees ... the marks that constitute species are for them and their species are manifold. Know ye the worms and the moths and the different sorts of ants, the marks that constitute species are for them ... As in these species the marks that constitute species are manifold, so among men the marks that constitute species are not found ... Not as regards their hair, head, ears ... Difference there is in beings endowed with bodies, but amongst men this is not the case—the difference amongst men is nominal (only).”¹⁶

The Hindu conception of society was static and was dominated by the idea of caste. This was given a divine sanction by being considered a creation of God: “God created the fourfold castes with their specific aptitudes and functions.”¹⁷ Against this was the dynamic evolutionary conception of society as pictured in Early Buddhism. The Buddha countered the arguments that the hierarchical fourfold division of society was fundamental by pointing out that in certain societies (e.g. among the Yona-Kambojas, i.e. certain Persian states), there were only two classes, the lords and the serfs and that even this was not rigid for “sometimes the lords became serfs and the serfs lords.”¹⁸

¹⁴ *Chandyogya Upanishad* 8, 15

¹⁵ A I 227, 228; IV 59, 60

¹⁶ *Suttanipāta*, Tr. Fausböll, *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 10, pp. 111–113

¹⁷ *Bhagavad Gīta*, IV. 13

¹⁸ M II 157

While the Theists at that time urged that men were created unequal by God, the Buddhists turned the arguments of the Theists against them. Āsvaghoṣa, a brahmin convert to Buddhism, writes in his *Vajrasūcī* (circa 1st c. B.C.) in a polemic against caste that the fatherhood of God should imply the brotherhood of man. He says, “Wonderful! You affirm that all men proceeded from One, i.e. God (Brahma); how then can there be a fourfold insuperable diversity among them? If I have four sons by one wife, the four sons having one father and mother must be all essentially alike.” We also find moral and spiritual arguments for equality to show that all people, irrespective of caste, race or rank were capable of moral development and the highest spiritual attainments. The Buddhist idea of fellowship or *mettā* is thus founded on the conception of the oneness of the human species, the equality of man and the spiritual unity of mankind.

The Buddhist undertaking to refrain from killing is not a negative precept and has its positive side when fully stated, viz. “One refrains from killing creatures, laying aside the stick and the sword, and abides conscientious, full of kindness, love and compassion towards all creatures and beings.”¹⁹ A Buddhist layman has to follow a righteous mode of living (*sammā ājīva*) and this meant that certain professions were not open to him. According to the texts five trades are forbidden: he should not engage in the sale of arms (*sattha-vijjā*), the sale of human beings or animals (*satta-vijjā*), the sale of flesh (*maṃsa-vijjā*), the sale of intoxicating drinks (*majja-vijjā*) and the sale of dangerous and poisonous drugs (*visa-vijjā*)²⁰. The order of monks were exhorted to practise the following, which are said to promote unity—to be compassionate in their behaviour, their speech and their thoughts towards one another and to have all things in common.²¹

I said that the ideal in Buddhism was to attain a permanent state of mind described as the “inward peace” not in the remote future but in this life itself. This is not a passive apathetic state of quietism as some Western critics of Buddhism have thought. For the passage from our finite self-centred existence to Nibbāna is pictured as one from bondage to freedom (*vimutti*) and power (*vasī*), from imperfection to perfection (*parisuddhi*, *parama-kusala*), from unhappiness to perfect happiness (*parama-sukha*), from ignorance to knowledge (*vijjā*, *aññā*, *ñāṇa*), from finite consciousness to infinite transcendent consciousness (*ananta-viññāṇa*), from the impermanent to the permanent (*nicca*), from the unstable to the stable (*dhuva*), from fear and anxiety to perfect security (*abhaya*), from the evanescent to the ineffable (*amosadhamma*), from a state of mental illness to a state of perfect mental health, etc. It is a peace that passes understanding for it is the result of what is paradoxically described both as the extinction of one’s self-centred desires and the attainment of an ultimate reality. Let me explain. According to Buddhism, the springs of action are six-fold, comprising the three immoral bases of action (*akusala-mūla*) and the three moral bases of action (*kusala-mūla*), viz.

¹⁹ D I 4

²⁰ A III 208

²¹ M I 322

1. Immoral bases

- a. *rāga* (craving): *kāma-rāga* or *kāma-taṇhā*, the desire for sense gratification; *bhava-rāga* or *bhava-taṇhā*, the desire for selfish pursuits
- b. *dosa* (hatred): *vibhava-taṇhā*, the desire for destruction
- c. *moha* (delusion): erroneous beliefs.

2. Moral bases

- a. *arāga* (non-craving): *cāga* (charity)
- b. *adosa* (non-hatred): *mettā* (love)
- c. *amoha* (non-delusion): *vijjā* (knowledge)

Toynbee has said that the Buddha failed “to distinguish between self-devoting and self-centred desires.”²² But the distinction between the two is so marked in Buddhism that the former (the Moral bases) are not even called “desires.” “Desires” or “thirsts” are threefold—(1) the desire for sense-gratification (*kāma-taṇhā*), (2) the desire for selfish pursuits, e.g. self-preservation, self-continuity, self-assertion, self-display, etc. (*bhava taṇhā*), (3) the desire for destruction (*vibhava-taṇhā*). These desires continually seek and find temporary satisfaction (*tatra-tatrābhinandinī*) though ever remaining unsatisfied and provide the fuel for the process called “the individual.” They are said to be narrow and limited (*pamāṇa-kataṃ*),²³ while their opposites—Charity and Love—are boundless (*appamāṇa*).²⁴ Now the Buddha urges only the total extinction of these self-centred desires (i.e., 1 a & b) and the complete elimination of ignorance or delusion (i.e., 1-c). This is done by gradually cultivating and developing the opposite traits of charity, love and knowledge until the mind at all its levels is finally purged of all such self-centred desires and considerations.

The mind is said to be “divided into two compartments” (*ubhayato abbhocchinnaṃ*),²⁵ the conscious and the unconscious. As long as it is affected by the threefold desires, there is an influx of defiling impulses (*āsava*) into the conscious mind, and it is in a state of tension and unrest. Now diseases are classified as twofold, bodily disease (*kāyiko rogo*) and mental disease (*cetasiko rogo*). It is said that we suffer from bodily disease from time to time, but that mental illness is continual until the final state of sainthood is attained. This is the concept of the healthy mind as understood in Buddhism—a state in which the self-centred desires are utterly extinguished and the mind enjoys an “inward peace,” which is said to be one of indescribable happiness.

Toynbee has said that this goal “looks intrinsically unattainable”²⁶ since desires cannot be given up without cultivating the desire to give them up. This criticism has already been forestalled and met in the Pali Canon itself. The self-centred desires are to be eliminated by depending on desire (*taṇhaṃ nissāya-taṇhaṃ pahātabbaṃ*)²⁷—namely the desire for Nibbāna. But this latter master-desire, it is pointed out, is not on the same footing as the first-order desires, for unlike the self-centred desires, which continually seek gratification from time to time without being permanently satisfied, the master-desire would achieve final satisfaction and be extinguished with the eradication of the self-centred desires and the attainment of Nibbāna, which coincides with it. This is the “inward peace” spoken of in the in the Buddhist texts. It is a

²² Toynbee, Arnold, *An Historian's Approach to Religion*, Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 29

²³ M I 297

²⁴ loc. cit.

²⁵ D III 105

²⁶ Toynbee op. cit. p. 64

²⁷ A II 146

word full of meaning but it has meaning only to those who have experienced it, partially or fully. To others it is devoid of meaning in the same way in which the formulae of a physicist would be devoid of meaning to one who does not understand his subject.

This brings us to the problem of meaning and truth in Buddhism. The two are related for before we can say that a statement is true or false, we are obliged to ask whether it is meaningful or significant. It is to the credit of the Buddha that he was one of the first thinkers of the East or West to discuss the problem of the meaning of statements, particularly of the statements of religion. We cannot go into this in detail, and we may state briefly that, according to the Buddha, a statement is meaningful if it is in principle verifiable in the light of experience, sensory or extra-sensory. A statement should also have a basis in a person's experience before he can meaningfully assert it, so that the same statement may be meaningful in one context and meaningless in another. Meaningful statements may be true or false. Truth is said to have the characteristic of "correspondence with fact" (*yathābhūtaṃ*). If I believe that there is a next world, and it is the case that there is a next world, then my belief is true²⁸ and otherwise false²⁹. Truth must also be consistent; it is said that "truth is one and there is no second truth."³⁰ But consistency is not enough, for it is possible to have several internally consistent systems of thought, mutually contradicting one another. For this reason any religion based on pure (a priori) reasoning (*takka*) is said to be unsatisfactory, for, even if the reasoning is sound (*sutakkitaṃ pi hoti*)³¹ and internally consistent, the theory may be false if it does not correspond with fact.

While Buddhist tolerance is partly derived from its emphasis on Compassion, it also has its roots in its attitude to truth and its general conception of man. If men did wrong, it was because they were ignorant rather than sinful, and it is, therefore, our duty to enlighten the ignorant and reform them rather than punish them for their wrongdoing. Ignorance again cannot be replaced with knowledge by imposing one's beliefs on others, even if they were true. People have to grow up and discover the truth themselves, and the most that others can do (even the Buddha) is to help them to do this. Far from being detrimental, the scientific outlook was considered to be essential for the moral and spiritual development of man; and our critical faculties should be exercised to the fullest extent in the discovery of religious truth. The Buddha tells a questioner, on more than one occasion,

"You have raised a doubt in a situation in which you ought to suspend your judgment. Do not accept anything because it is rumoured so, because it is the traditional belief, because the majority holds it, because it is found in the scriptures, because it is a product of metaphysical argument and speculation, because of a superficial investigation of facts, because it conforms with one's inclinations, because it is authoritative or because of the prestige-value of your teacher."³²

Even his own teaching was no exception, and the Buddha did not demand a blind faith or allegiance for it. "One must not," he says, "accept my Dhamma (teaching) from reverence but first try it as gold is tried by fire."

The sincerity and frankness on which a truly religious life should be grounded demanded healthy criticism and continual self-examination, and the importance of such an outlook is nowhere so well emphasized as in the following exhortation: "If anyone," says the Buddha, "were to speak ill of me, my doctrine or my order, do not bear any ill-will towards him, be upset

²⁸ M I 430

²⁹ M I 402

³⁰ Sn 884

³¹ M I 520

³² A I 191

or perturbed at heart, for, if you were to be so, it would only cause you harm. If, on the other hand, anyone were to speak well of me, my doctrine and my order, do not be overjoyed, thrilled or elated at heart, for, if so, it would only be an obstacle in your way of forming a correct judgment as to whether the qualities praised in us are real and actually found in us.”³³ There is a distinction drawn in the Buddhist texts between a “rational faith” (*ākāravati-saddhā*) in what is verifiable and worth trying out and a “baseless faith” (*amūlika-saddhā*) in unverifiable dogmas—the former is commended and the latter condemned.

Buddhism parts company with other religions in holding that moral and religious truths (with one exception) are not different in principle from scientific truths. Paradoxical as it may seem, it was the Buddha—i.e. a religious teacher—who was the first in the history of thought to state formally the two principles of causal determination, namely that A and B are causally related: if whenever A happens B happens and B does not happen unless A has happened. The theory of causation is central to the understanding of Buddhism. The Buddha tells us “the causes of things that arise from causes” and adds that “he who understands causation understands the Dhamma and vice versa.” Causation, however, is not Strictly Deterministic since the mind (with its acts of will) can often divert and direct the operation of causal processes and the mind is said to have the capacity to act with degrees of freedom according to its state of development. The Buddhist concept of causation, therefore, stands midway between Indeterminism (*adhicca-samuppāda*: Skt. *yadṛccha*) on the one hand and Strict Determinism (*niyati*) on the other.

There were three forms of Determinism prevalent at the time to which Buddhism was opposed—one was Natural Determinism (*svabhāva-vāda*) which held that everything that happens is due to the innate constitution of things; another was Karmic Determinism (*pubbekata-hetu*, Skt. *purātana-karma-kṛtaṃ*), which held that everything that happens to an individual was due to his past Karma; lastly, there was Theistic Determinism (*issara-nimmāna-vāda*), which held that all that happens was due to the fiat or will of a Personal God who has created the universe and sustains it.

In the universe there operate physical laws (*utu-niyāma*), biological laws (*bīja-niyāma*), psychological laws (*citta-niyāma*) and moral and spiritual laws (*dhamma-niyāma*). While the natural scientists tell us about the first three, the Buddha discovers and reveals the latter. It is said that, whether the Buddhas appear or not, these laws operate and we are subject to them. All that the Buddha does is to discover (or re-discover) them. What is thus discovered is said to be verifiable by each and every one of us, by following the path that leads to their discovery. It is a contingent fact that the moral and spiritual life (i.e. the religious life) is both possible and desirable in the universe in which we live. If the universe were different from what in fact it is (e.g. if Indeterminism or Strict Determinism were the case, if the soul were identical with the body or were different from it, if there were no Transcendent Reality), then the religious life might not have been possible and would not have been desirable.

One of the spiritual truths stated in Buddhism is the law of karma. As understood in Buddhism it merely states that there is an observable correlation between morally good acts and pleasant consequences to the individual and morally evil acts and unpleasant consequences. It does not state that all our present experiences are due to our past karma. This is in fact emphatically denied, where it is shown that many of our experiences are due to our own actions in this life or to causal factors (such as the weather, our state of physical health), which have nothing to do with our karma. The law of karma as stated is a causal correlation, which guarantees the fact of individual moral responsibility. It is said to be a correlation that is observable and verifiable by developing one’s faculty of retro-cognition, i.e. the ability to recall

³³ DI 3

one's past lives. This faculty and others are said to be within the reach of all of us to develop by the practice of meditation. What evidence is there to believe in rebirth? Since rebirth or "reincarnation" is said to be a meaningful concept and a logical possibility,³⁴ the problem is whether it is the case or not.

Briefly, the evidence today is of two sorts: (1) there are cases of spontaneous recall of previous lives, especially on the part of young children, which have been verified and claimed to be found true. There was a recent case in Ceylon reported in *The Ceylon Observer* of 19 January 1951;³⁵ (2) there is also experimental evidence. People under deep hypnosis are able to recall not only the lost memories of this life but of previous lives as well³⁶. Several interpretations are possible of these experimental data, but I believe that the simplest and best hypothesis to account for the data I have seen so far is that of rebirth. It is hoped that with more and better experimentation on this verifiable theory of survival, we shall be able to know the truth about it before long.

While the Upanishadic thinkers interpreted the mystic experiences that they had as being due to the grace of God,³⁷ Buddhism explains these experiences as due to the natural development of the mind. For Buddhism they result from the operation of causal processes relating to religious experience. They are, however, not considered subjective and are held to be of great value, though Buddhism does not subscribe to the metaphysical and theological interpretations given to them in the Upanishads and the rest of mystical literature in the East and West. One of the prerequisites for developing these experiences, which give meaning to the religious life, is the absolute moral integrity of the individual.

I have tried to illustrate what I meant by saying that for Buddhism spiritual truths were on a par with scientific truths. There is, however, one "experience," if it may be called an experience, which is beyond the empirical, phenomenal and causal. This is the experience of Nibbāna, which is called "the Truth" (sacca). This illumination is said to be comparable to that of a man born blind obtaining sight after a physician has treated him. It is described as a flaring up of a great light (ālokā udapādi) and is said to coincide with the extinction of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion, and the attainment of the peace that causes understanding. It is not a conditioned causal experience, since Nibbāna is said to be the Unconditioned (asaṅkhata), the Uncaused (akataṃ, na paṭicca-samuppannaṃ) and the Timeless (nibbānaṃ na vattabbaṃ atītaṃ ti pi anāgataṃ ti pi paccuppannaṃ ti pi), not located in space (na katthaci, kuhiñci). To say that one exists (hoti upapajjati) in Nibbāna or ceases to exist (na hoti, na upapajjati) are both said to be wrong.

The question was put to the Buddha in his own life-time: "The person who has attained the goal—does he cease to exist, or does he exist eternally without defect; explain this to me, O Lord, as you understand it." The Buddha explains, "A person who has attained the goal is beyond measure; he does not have that with which one can describe him."³⁸ Elsewhere, the Buddha explained that the question is meaningless. It is the concepts with which we are familiar that make us ask it. We can only conceive of two alternatives—the annihilation of the individual at some point of time or his eternal duration in time. The Buddha illustrates what he means with an example. If someone, who has seen a fire in front of him go out, were to ask in which direction the fire has gone—northern, southern, eastern or western—it is a question which

³⁴ See Ayer, A. J., *The Problem of Knowledge*, Penguin Books, 1957, pp. 193, 194

³⁵ Cf. "The Case of Shanti Devi," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 15 December 1935; also, "The Problem of Rebirth," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 25 September 1892, reported by Ralph Shirley.

³⁶ See a recent study by Dr. Jonathan Rodney, *The Explorations of a Hypnotist*, Elek Books, London, 1959, where the experiments are varied so as to eliminate hallucination.

³⁷ *dhātuh prasādāt, Katha Upanishad 2.20*

³⁸ *yena naṃ vajju taṃ tassa natthi. Sn. 1076*

cannot be answered, since the question itself is meaningless. Wittgenstein takes the same example to illustrate the same point: "Thus it can come about that we are not able to rid ourselves of the implications of our symbolism which seems to admit of a question like 'Where does the flame of a candle go when it is blown out? Where does the light go? ...' We have been obsessed with our symbolism. We may say that we are led into puzzlement by an analogy, which irresistibly drags us on."³⁹

The Buddha classified questions into four types, (1) questions which can be answered categorically, (2) questions which can be answered only after analysis, (3) questions which must be answered with a counter-question, and (4) questions which have to be put aside as meaningless. The question whether the saint exists in Nibbāna or not, is said to be meaningless, although there is a psychological urge and a linguistic reason for asking it. Another set of questions which the Buddha set aside as meaningless were the questions, "Is the soul identical with the body?" and "Is the soul different from the body?" Having discarded as an empiricist and a "verificationist" the concept of the soul or substance as meaningless these questions too are meaningless since they contain a meaningless concept. The traditional explanation says that these questions are like asking whether "the child of this barren woman is fair or dark." It was not agnosticism which made the Buddha discard these questions but a realization of their very nature. It is not that there was something that he did not know but that he knew only too well what he was talking about. Where language failed, the Buddha literally followed the dictum: "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," but his silence was more eloquent than words. To those who had attained Nibbāna, no explanation was necessary; to those who had not, no explanation was possible.

The Buddha was very meticulous in the use of language. He often reformulated questions or removed ambiguities in words before answering them in order to remove misleading implications. He claimed that he was not a dogmatist (ekamsa-vādo) but an analyst (vibhajja-vādo). The truth of Nibbāna or the ultimate reality is thus strictly inexpressible, but all else that belongs to the realm of moral and spiritual truth can be stated and stated precisely.

The final state of "inward peace" is also a state of perfect Freedom (sammā-vimutti), for the mind then ceases to be conditioned by the load of its past and the desires raging within it. It becomes master of itself. In the state of normal everyday consciousness we are finite conditioned beings. According to what the texts say, we are conditioned by what we inherit from mother and father, by the store of unconscious memories going back to our childhood and our previous lives, by the desires and impulses which agitate within it and by the stimuli which come from the "six doors of perception," i.e., the data of the five senses, our environment and the ideas that we imbibe and respond to. But, despite the fact that the ordinary man is thus largely conditioned by his inner nature and environment, he has a certain degree of freedom to act within limits.

During the time of the Buddha there were violent disputes about this problem between two schools of thought. There were akiriya-vādins who denied freewill because they were determinists in some sense or another, and in the opposite camp were the kiriya-vādins who upheld freewill. The Buddha held that man was possessed of a degree of freewill, while not denying that he was largely conditioned. What is meant by attaining salvation in Buddhism is the attainment of full freedom from our relative state of bondage. This is possible because of the very fact that we possess a degree of freewill and the processes of sublimation and de-conditioning are causal processes, which can be understood and directed by the mind. It also means that man's salvation lies in his own hands and that he cannot and should not depend on an external saviour. As the Dhammapada says:

³⁹ *The Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford, p. 108

By ourselves is evil done
By ourselves we pain endure
By ourselves we cease from wrong
By ourselves we become pure.

No one saves us but ourselves
No one can and no one may
We ourselves must tread the path
Buddhas only show the way.⁴⁰

The Buddha says that there are four false religions and four unsatisfactory religions in this world⁴¹. One of the four false religions is that which denies causation and asserts that “beings are miraculously doomed or saved” (natthi hetu natthi paccayo sattānaṃ saṅkilesāya ... visuddhiyā).⁴² Buddhists pray that “all beings may be happy” (sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu); but they do not pray for salvation either to the Buddha or to anyone else. When our salvation depends on what we ourselves do with our freewill, prayer is superfluous and is nothing more than a pious wish or hope. The Buddha compares a person who prays to God for salvation to one who wishes to cross a river and get to the other bank, but hopes to achieve this by incessantly calling on the other bank to come to him.⁴³

Religious truths, with the exception of the truth about Nibbāna, are thus “statable.” They are all verifiable and have meaning only to those who verify them. There is individual moral responsibility and, therefore, justice in the universe. Freedom we have in a limited sense, which makes it possible for us to attain Freedom in the absolute sense. Seeking our own salvation may appear to be a selfish pursuit, but it is a paradoxical fact not only that we can attain this only by living in a completely selfless manner but that the goal itself is one in which our self-centred individuality is lost in a state “beyond measure.” Selfless charity (cāga), compassionate love (mettā) and enlightened behaviour (vijjācaraṇa) is what we have to develop in attaining this goal.

The Buddhist monk does not cut himself away completely from society. His isolation is intended to provide him with the leisure to develop his mind and spiritual vision. He is thus in a position to speak from direct experience about the nature of spiritual truths and give guidance and advice to his fellow beings. He is one who is expected to specialize in his field of inquiry as much as the physicist specializes in his. The development of the mind is a full-time job, and the findings of these explorations are of no less interest and value to society than the findings of the natural scientist working in his laboratory. Both have something to offer to society; and monasticism, if understood rightly, has a big part as yet to play in the moral and spiritual regeneration of mankind.

There is no easy solution to the problem of how we can have peace on earth and goodwill among mankind. The West believes that their military potential is keeping the Communist monster at bay, while the Communists in turn are convinced that their military might prevents the Capitalist demon from swallowing them. Each side is certain that war is the lesser evil to being dominated by their opponents. The great powers are working for peace by forging the weapons of war and talking about peace for propagandist purposes. But the real alternative to peace today is the destruction of mankind. What is really happening is that, while half the world is spending colossal amounts of money on armaments, the other half is dying of starvation, malnutrition and disease in an age when all this can be prevented if the resources are available

⁴⁰ DhP 165

⁴¹ *Majjhima Nikāya, Sandaka Sutta*

⁴² M I 516

⁴³ D I 244, 245

and goodwill is present. People and governments tend to do what is expedient rather than what is morally good. Can we say that in such a world, people have much faith in moral and spiritual values? There is hope in the possibility that the very fear of the dire consequences of the next war may prevent it. It would be too much to hope for a great power to have the moral courage and the spiritual strength to disarm unilaterally without fear of the consequences, but for those who love humanity more than themselves or nations there seems to me to be no other alternative but to work unreservedly for pacifism.

Appendix

(A)

The following are some of the sentiments expressed about Peace and Compassion in the Dhammapada, a Buddhist anthology included in the canon.

- “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”—
the hatred of those who cherish such thoughts is not appeased. (v. 3)
- “He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me”—
the hatred of those who do not cherish such thoughts is appeased. (v. 4)
- Hatred never ceases by hatred in this world.
Hatred ceases by love—this is the eternal law. (v. 5)
- The world does not know that we must all come to an end here.
Quarrels cease when there are those who perceive this truth. (v. 6)
- The noblest victor is he who would conquer himself
rather than defeat a hundred thousand men in battle. (v. 103)
- Better, indeed, is the conquest of self than of all other folk. (v. 105)
- Happily do we live without anger among those who are angry.
Let us live without anger amongst angry folk. (v. 197)
- Victory breeds hatred; the vanquished live in sorrow.
The peaceful ones live in harmony
giving up both victory and defeat. (v. 201)
- Conquer enmity with amity; evil with good;
conquer miserliness with charity and falsehood with truth. (v. 222)
- The followers of Gotama whose minds are constantly bent
on *ahimsā* day and night, awake clear and alert. (v. 300)

(B)

The following is an extract from the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda Sutta*, which gives an account of the evolution of human society. Speaking of the future, it says that there will be a gradual loss of values due to economic causes, resulting in a cataclysm. The aftermath would see a new humanity emerging from the remnant and creating the Just Society with a change of heart and a change of system. The allusion to the decrease in the life span of human beings is, perhaps, not to be taken literally.

“Thus as a result of goods not accruing to those who were destitute, poverty becomes rife; from poverty becoming rife, stealing increases; from the spread of stealing, violence grows apace; from the growth of violence, the destruction of life becomes common; from the frequency of murder both the span of life in those beings and their comeliness waste away
...

The Just Society as depicted in the Buddhist texts is one in which there is equality, economic prosperity and the practice of the good life. The person who is instrumental in bringing about such a society is called the *Cakkavatti-rāja* or “the universal monarch.” It appears as if Asoka was

trying to emulate the example of such an ideal monarch. His Rock Edict No. XIII portrays his Buddhist attitude to war and his attempt to found a state on Buddhist principles.

“The country of the Kāliṅgas was conquered by King Priyadarsi, Beloved of the gods, eight years after his coronation. In this war in Kāliṅga, men and animals numbering one hundred and fifty thousand were carried away captive from that country; as many as one hundred thousand were killed there in action and many times that number perished. After that, now that the country of the Kāliṅgas has been conquered, the Beloved of the gods is devoted to an intense practice of the duties relating to the Dharma, to a longing for Dharma and to the inculcation of Dharma among the people. This is due to the repentance of the Beloved of the gods on having conquered the country of the Kāliṅgas.

Note: The Greek (*Yavana*) kings mentioned in this inscription, may be identified as follows:

Antiyoka	Antiochus II Theos of Syria and Palestine	(261–246 B.C.)
Turamāya	Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt	(285–247 B.C.)
Antikini	Antigonus Gonatus of Macedonia	(276–239 B.C.)
Makā	Magas of Cyrene	(c. 258–250 B.C.)
Alikasundara	Alexander of Corinth or Alexander of Epirus	(252–244 B.C.) (272–255 B.C.)

Assuming that this inscription was contemporaneous with the rule of all these five kings, it may be dated between 252–250 B.C. or 258–255 B.C. The similarity of the Dhamma with the doctrines and practices of the pre-Christian Essenes (s.v. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*) of Syria and Palestine and the Therapeutae (s.v. *ibid.*) of Egypt suggests that they were a result of Asoka’s missions, in the light of what this inscription states. The Essenes and the Therapeutae seem to have adapted the Jewish scriptures to adopt Buddhist beliefs and a Buddhist way of life.