

DIMENSIONS OF
BUDDHIST
THOUGHT



COLLECTED ESSAYS

FRANCIS STORY

DIMENSIONS OF BUDDHIST THOUGHT

This book comprises Francis Story's contributions to the two serial publications *The Wheel* and *Bodhi Leaves*, which belong to his best and most mature writing. With its rich and variegated contents, this book may well serve as an introduction to the Buddha's teachings.

The Buddha once said that his Teaching has only one taste, that of liberation. Yet, being a Teaching of Actuality, Buddhism has also dimensions extending to wide fields of human life and thought. Some of them are mirrored in the essays of this volume. These wide-ranging and penetrative writings offer, therefore, many stimulating approaches to Buddhist thought and its application to problems of our time.

ISBN 978-955-24-0366-8

B U D D H I S T P U B L I C A T I O N S O C I E T Y I N C .

BPS

P.O. Box 61, 54, Sangharaja Mawatha, Kandy, Sri Lanka
Tel: +94 81 2237283 Fax: +94 81 2223679
E-mail: bps@slt.net.lk Website: <http://www.bps.lk>

DIMENSIONS OF BUDDHIST THOUGHT

Essays and Dialogues
Contributed to the Serial Publications
The Wheel and Bodhi Leaves

**Collected Writings
Volume III**

Francis Story

**BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY
KANDY • SRI LANKA**

Buddhist Publication Society
54 Sangharaja Mawatha
PO Box 61
Kandy
Sri Lanka
<http://www.bps.lk>

First edition: 1976
Reprinted: 1985
Second edition: 2011

Copyright (©) Kandy; Buddhist Publication Society.

National Library and Documentation Service Board -
Cataloguing-In-Publication Data

Story, Francis

Dimensions of Buddhist Thought: Essays and Dialogues /
Francis Story.- Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society Inc.,
2011

BP 403S.- 394p.; 22cm.

ISBN 978-955-24-0366-8

i. 294.392 DDC 22

ii. Title

1. Theravada Buddhism

ISBN: 978-955-24-0366-8

Typeset at the BPS in URW Palladio Pali

Printed by
Ajith Printers, 85/4, Old Kesbewa Road,
Gangodawila, Nugegoda.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Buddha once said that his Teaching has only one taste, that of liberation. Yet, being a Teaching of Actuality, Buddhism has also dimensions extending to wide fields of human life and thought. Some of them are mirrored in the essays of this volume. These wide-ranging and penetrative writings offer, therefore, many stimulating approaches to Buddhist thought and its application to problems of our time.

This publication is the third and concluding volume of the Collected Writings of the late Francis Story (The Anāgārika Sugatānanda). It comprises his contributions to the two serial publications *The Wheel* and *Bodhi Leaves*, issued by the Buddhist Publication Society of Kandy. Some of these essays belong to his best and most mature writing. It was, therefore, felt that a reprint of these writings should not be missing in this edition of the author's collected work.

It was as early as 1959, the second year after the foundation of the Buddhist Publication Society, that the author contributed his first essay to the *Wheel* series, i.e., "The Case for Rebirth." This essay, however, in view of its subject, has been included in *Rebirth as Doctrine and Experience*, the second volume of the Collected Writings.

As will be seen from the Table of Contents, several articles in this present volume were taken from the *Wheel* Publications, *Gods and the Universe in Buddhist Perspective* and *Dimensions of Buddhist Thought*. Both of these are posthumous compilations gathered from magazine articles (difficult of access now), unpublished (and partly incomplete) manuscripts, etc. These sources of the articles have caused some minor duplication of subject matter in the material taken from *Gods and the Universe*. But as these parallel passages appear in different contexts and contain new formulations, they have been retained in this reprint.

Issuing this volume, the Buddhist Publication Society, including the Editor, wish to express their deep and affectionate gratitude to the late author, Mr. Francis Story, who for many years, had been a loyal friend and devoted helper of the Society. His help was not limited to the excellent literary contributions which this Society was privileged to publish. When coming regularly to Kandy from his residence in suburban Colombo, he assisted in the evaluating and editing of manuscripts submitted for

publication, in replying to readers' questions on the Dhamma and in many other ways, including office work and designing book covers. Being convinced that the dissemination of the Buddha Word was a noble and important cause, he never stinted the time and labour devoted to it. His death, aged 61, has been a deeply felt loss, to us personally and to the common cause.

Francis Story's literary work, we are sure, will find growing appreciation in times to come. The Editor and the publishers have been happy to present it to those who wish to study the Buddha's liberating message and apply it in their lives.

Nyanaponika Thera
Forest Hermitage Kandy,
Sri Lanka
September, 1976.

CONTENT

Editor's Preface	iii
Content	v
1. Hymn for Vaishakha	1
2. The Buddha—a Unique Teacher	3
3. The Supreme Conqueror.	12
4. The Appeal of Buddhism	32
5. The Uniqueness of Buddhism	37
6. The Four Noble Truths	42
7. Dialogues on the Dhamma	51
8. The Scientific Approach to Buddhism	112
9. The Buddhist World View in the Age of Science	123
10. A Larger Rationalism	163
11. Of Gods and Men.	175
12. Prayer and Worship.	185
13. Gods and their Place in Buddhism	208
14. Cosmological Thought in Buddhism and Modern Science	227
15. Expanding Universe and Steady-States Universe.	245
16. The Magic Mountain	248
17. Is there a Beginning?	254
18. Buddhism and the Origin of Life.	257
19. Divine Creation or Lawful Genesis?	266
20. Buddhist Meditation	273
21. Buddhist Mental Therapy	284
22. Buddhist Lay Ethics.	297
23. The Place of Animals in Buddhism.	304
24. Action.	314
25. Karma and Causality.	321
26. Karma and Freedom	331
27. Collective Karma	336
28. Beauty and the Buddhist.	339
29. Omniscience and the Buddha	343
31. Saṃsāra	360
32. The Way of Dispassion	365
33. Nibbāna	369

1. HYMN FOR VAISHAKHA

In the midst of the world's tumult
we seek Thy Peace
from clamour of many voices and the clash of conflict.
Thou alone are the Silence
where all things cease
where suffering entereth not, and the pain of being
findeth no sustenance.
Here in the dark ocean of time
strange currents bear us, bewildered and unseeing—
only through Thee we know of the Further Shore,
the unchanging clime.

Long have we known
the scant mercies of night and day:
burned in the self-created fire and restless longing
of the uneasy heart,
the season's play
has cooled with brief winds our fever,
fleeting joy
beckoned our wayward steps
and wrapped us round
with flowery snares of passion — made us pain's toy
even to the last tear
helpless and bound.

Upon this day let us remember Thee;
call up the still-abiding mercy Thou has left us
who came with compassionate eyes to view man's
bondage and see
beyond the proud glitter of Thy earthly state.
No stranger Thou, but one who all things had shared,
a fellow-wanderer encompassed by love and hate
even as we—no human fear unknown, no sorrow spared.
Upon this day let us remember Thy Birth,
when the heavens poured forth their music and the
world of gods

stood hushed. The broad firmament throughout its girth quickened in wonder, for a Prince was come, a Chakravartin, a Master of gods and men, a righteous Charioteer of the rich-teeming sum of nations, and a Seer beyond human ken.

Let us remember Thine Illumination—
the keen sword of the Kshatriya's will that cut the bonds of Māra: Thy pitying heart that lifted man's degradation. Thou wert He who stood alone against the hosts, vanquished the phantom ranks, cleaving a way for lesser men. Baleful and beautiful, the ghosts of lust and passion melted in Thy holy Ray.

Upon this day let us remember Thy Passing:
Name and Form to the last vestige cast aside never to be renewed, the multitudinous worlds outclassing,
Thou from the transient to the Eternal leapt. No more the swing of the stars nor the cycle of craving, no more the tongue that spoke nor the eyes that wept—only the Peace beyond thought, and Thy Law for our saving.

In the midst of the world's tumult
we seek Thy Way:
the world is weary yet drugged with the madness of getting,
and sick with the frenzy of things
that cannot stay.
But in the darkness still we behold Thy Light,
and as a dreamer waking
throws off the tangle of fear,
so man beholds his refuge, measures the thread of night,
and in the dawning feels
his release is near.

First published in "The Maha Bodhi," 1946.

2. THE BUDDHA—A UNIQUE TEACHER

History has produced many great figures, but none in this present cycle or time as impressive and memorable as that of Siddhattha Gotama, the Sakyan prince who became the world's greatest spiritual guide. He was unique as a personality, and unique as a teacher. There have been countless Enlightened Ones before him and there will be more, as long as *samsāra* endures, but he is the only one of whom we have actual historical knowledge, and his life has been a source of wonder and inspiration for more than twenty centuries. It continues to be so today.

Every Buddhist is familiar with the miraculous stories connected with Prince Siddhattha's birth and early manhood. The traditional tales handed down from generation to generation of Buddhists are full of marvels, some of which are difficult for the modern mind to accept as literally true. In this, Buddhism is no different from other creeds. All of them have their accretions of the supernatural, the legends that time and the devotion of the faithful have woven about the lives of their founders. But whereas in most other religions the supernatural events are an essential part of the faith, to be held as proof that the founder was a divine personage, an incarnation of God or a prophet especially singled out to be God's spokesman on earth, in Buddhism they have no importance at all, because the Buddha did not claim to be any of these things. A Buddhist may believe the stories literally, or he may regard them as fiction. The uniqueness of the Buddha does not rest upon miracles, but upon the plain, un-garlanded facts of his life and, above all, on the realizable truth of his teaching.

The facts themselves are powerful enough to move us to awe and veneration. They confront us with something outside normal experience, a challenge to the world's accepted values and to some of its most cherished goals.

The world of Prince Siddhattha's time was not so very different from our own. Then as today men were inclined to worship power; they strove for wealth and position, revelled in luxury when they could, and lamented their poverty when they could not. They loved and hated, quarrelled and cheated, were cowards at times and heroes at times, were mean and noble by turns, just as they are now. They placed the greatest value on the pleasures of the senses and did their best to ignore the tragedies around them, turning a blind eye to sickness and pain, and above

all trying to forget the death that awaits us all, king and beggar alike.

And who was in a better position to enjoy life than the young prince of the Sakyas? Surrounded by every conceivable luxury, he was protected by his anxious father from even the distant sight of ugliness and suffering. His days were spent in delightful gardens from which every withered leaf had been diligently removed. The melodious song of birds and the splash of fountains soothed his ear; the green shade of cool arbours shielded him and his companions from the noonday heat, and the air was filled with the languorous scent of jasmine and frangipani. And at night, in the lofty hall of the palace where great fans of peacock feathers gently stirred the air, he would watch the dancing girls weaving sinuous patterns in the soft glow of perfumed lamps until, lulled by drowsy music, he would drift into the peaceful sleep of youth. The dancers would one by one stretch themselves on the carpeted floor and relax their tired limbs; the fingers of the sitar-player would slip from the strings, and all would be quiet as the flickering lamps burned out.

And so it was from day to day, a light and carefree existence. Why, then, was the young prince not happy? Could it be that he was troubled by some dark knowledge from a life before this? Did he suspect that the world outside the palace walls was not the gay, exquisite and gentle world he knew that had been artificially made for him? Or did he have the unconscious knowledge that his life was already dedicated to something other than this, and that a supreme, self-chosen task lay before him?

We do not know. But a day came at last when four sights met his eyes and changed the whole course of his life. For the first time he saw old age, sickness and death. And then, grieved beyond measure by this revelation of the true nature of existence, and pondering a remedy for its universal ills, his troubled eyes encountered the fourth sight—a man in a patched yellow robe, with shaven head and an alms-bowl in his hand. It was another thing he had never seen before and he did not know what it meant. But when he learned its meaning, the understanding of his destiny dawned clear and decisive for him. This was the hard path of the seeker for deliverance, the path he had to take. The fragile world of beauty and joy his father had created was shattered. It could not hold him any longer.

That night his slumber was uneasy. Rousing himself and shaking off his death-haunted dreams, he looked around him. The dancing girls lay where they had sunk down, their limbs sprawled among the fading petals of their garlands, their scanty dress in disarray and their damp hair clinging to their cheeks. Some were twitching in their sleep as though tormented by insects; some were snoring, open-mouthed, with saliva drooling from their painted lips. It seemed to him that he was seeing them for the first time as they really were, and he felt as though he were surrounded by corpses. Lifeless and pitiful they lay there in the dying light of the lamps, and all the sorrow of the world flooded the young prince's heart.

But still it was not easy for him to carry out his decision. Yasodharā, his young bride, gave birth to a son. When they asked him what name should be given the boy, he replied, "Rāhula." A fetter. With what bitter agony he must have uttered that word. This was another bond of love to be torn out of his life.

For no fetter, human or divine, could bind him. That same night he rose from his couch when all was still, and he quietly picked his way out of the hall between the strangling arms and legs of the dancing girls. Now they seemed repulsive to him; he knew that never again would beauty alone have power to stir his senses. Instead of the soft flesh he saw the white bones of death, and the smell of decay was in his nostrils.

In her room, Yasodharā was sleeping, the baby held against her breast. Silently he looked at them a long moment; then he let the curtain fall back, and turned away.

He left the palace in the dead of night secretly and rode away, a fugitive from that which other men most desire. And then began the long, arduous years of seeking, the years in dedicated exile. First of all he had to find a spiritual teacher, and his choice fell upon Ālāra Kālāma, a renowned yogin with a large following. He mastered all that Ālāra Kālāma was able to teach, but he was not satisfied. He placed himself under another instructor, the celebrated Uddaka Rāmaputta, who was said to have attained the highest level of yogic transcendence. Again he became equal to the master, yet still was not convinced that final release from the ills of conditioned existence had been gained. Both these teachers were advanced in years, and when they saw that the disciple had become their equal they urged him to take their place at the head of their followers. But the prince-ascetic was not to be tempted. He knew, if they did not, that there was a

higher goal still to be reached. Union with Brahmā had been attained, no doubt; but the experience was inconclusive. What if the Brahmās themselves were still involved in the round of birth and death? Was he to stop short of that complete release from suffering, for the sake of which he had sacrificed everything he held dear in normal life?

There was another path he had not yet tried. It was a fearful and dangerous one; nevertheless, he determined to follow it. There were ascetics living in the depths of the forest or in cemeteries or wandering from place to place homeless and shelterless who subjected themselves to the most extreme physical torture. Their belief was that by fasting and mortification of the flesh they could release themselves from earthly bondage; they hoped that by dying as to the body they could obtain immortality in the spirit. To them, the body was a prison which kept them from union with the "divine soul," and their aim was to destroy its hold while they yet lived. Among them were some who wanted power, for it was also believed that by protracted austerities, so much spiritual strength could be accumulated that even the gods would be forced to obey their will.

The Samaṇa Gotama, as he was then called, did not want that. He longed only for the end of suffering, and perhaps this was the way to find it. He left the ashrams as he had left the royal palace, and took to the life of a forest-dwelling ascetic. For six years he followed that path with unflinching resolution. Shelterless, his body exposed to the burning summer sun, the drenching rains of the monsoon and the cold of winter nights, he lived from day to day, from year to year. Gradually he reduced his food until he was subsisting on one grain of rice a day and his body became a skeleton covered only by parched, weathered skin. Other ascetics—men who had been practising less rigorous austerities—marvelled at his zeal no less than at his powers of endurance. It seemed that only by a miracle could that emaciated body still harbour life.

There were five ascetics, in particular, who looked upon him as one who was certainly destined to reach the goal. They took him as their leader, revering him as one who had already touched the divine essence.

But it could not go on. A point was reached beyond which the enfeebled body could no longer bear up. The prince of the Sakyas, the prince of ascetics, fell unconscious, a heap of bones and dry skin on the ground.

They thought he was dead, but he was not. Consciousness came back, slowly and painfully, to that stricken body. And with it came the realisation that the goal had not been reached. The path of self-mortification, too, had failed.

One of the characteristics of a wise man is that he knows when his present line of action has failed him and it is time to abandon it for something fresh. While others continue to follow the same futile course from stubborn habit, he recognises its uselessness and seeks another way. So it was with the Samaṇa Gotama. He had carried the burden of asceticism to its last extreme, the threshold of death, and had found it worthless. If there was indeed a path to liberation it was not to be found through the breaking of the body, but rather through the breaking of barriers in the mind. With the same unfaltering decision he had shown in all his previous acts, he at once gave up his suicidal fasting and took to a simple but sufficient diet again. The reaction of his five followers was to be expected. They deserted him. In their unimaginative eyes he was a failure, and they turned away from him with scorn.

Had they possessed a little more patience, a little more faith in a man who surely had displayed enough courage and determination to warrant it, they might have been present at the greatest event in our history—the attainment of Buddhahood. As it was, when the ascetic Gotama seated himself at the foot of the Asvattha tree with the unshakable resolution that, though his flesh and bones should wither and decay, he would not rise until Enlightenment had been gained, he did so in solitude. No human eye witnessed that act of supreme decision. No human voice was heard to acclaim him in the moment of victory. No human hands were folded to pay homage when he rose at last, the conqueror of death.

Nevertheless, it was to those same five ascetics that the Buddha first revealed the Way that he had found. His two former teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, had passed away, and were in the Brahmā realm to which their attainment had led them. The Buddha, whose teaching was for those who could practise it here and now, made his way to Banaras, where he found his former disciples living in the Deer Park at Isipatana. It was to those who had forsaken him that he gave the first taste of the liberating truth. He knew that, despite their limitations, they were worthy. The Wheel of the Law was set in motion, and it was they who became the first Arahants.

The exertions of the ascetic Gotama were ended, but those of the supreme Buddha had only just begun. He had strenuously worked for the attainment of liberation not for himself alone, but for all who were able to profit by it. So began the task of his ministry, the spreading of the Dhamma, which he was to carry out untiringly for forty-five years.

With what skill, patience and understanding he did it can be seen from the record of his sermons, the Sutta Piṭaka. The unerring insight by which he knew just how to present his teaching best to whatever type of people he was addressing, constitutes the Buddha's true miracle, the *desanā pārihāriya*, the miracle of instruction. In giving instructions he would use the terms familiar to his listeners, and would grade his discourses according to their understanding. To some he would give simple moral guidance, illustrated with vivid anecdote and enforced by earnest exhortation. To others he would give philosophical truth, discussing with them the various schools of thought and the metaphysical conclusions to be drawn from them. With some, he used a gentle but penetrating irony that stripped away the vain pretensions of Brahmanical superstition. In such dialogues we see the manifestation of a cultured and perceptive mind, ever ready to accord with what was true and good wherever it was to be found, and at the same time fearlessly realistic when confronted by delusion or bigotry. But it is in those sermons where the Buddha is dealing with the practice of meditation, of mindfulness, of destruction of the impurities, that the depth and completeness of his own realisation is most clearly to be seen. In the religious literature of the world there is nothing to compare with them. They carry their own authority, the stamp of veritable insight, of truth seen face to face.

"One thing alone do I teach: suffering and the destruction of suffering." In these words, the Buddha summed up his own mission, the burden of his life's work for mankind. From the time of his first sermon to the five ascetics at Isipatana, to his last exhortation to the Bhikkhus before his Parinibbāna, it is this theme that runs through all his utterances. He did not claim that he could remove suffering from the world as an omnipotent God could do, did such a God exist. He taught that there is a Way by which release from suffering could be gained, that he had found it, and that it was open to all who were prepared to follow it.

A unique Teacher, and a unique Doctrine. The Buddha, who passed into Parinibbāna two thousand five hundred years ago, is

still the only guide who can lead us out of the jungle of ignorance and craving into the everlasting peace.

The Buddha, after himself attaining supreme Enlightenment, preached the Noble Doctrine of Self-Emancipation for forty-five years. During that period his utterances were treasured and memorized by innumerable of his devout followers of the Sangha, many of whom had also gained complete deliverance and, as Arahants, could confirm the truths of which the Buddha spoke, for they, like him, had “seen Nibbāna face to face”—had experienced its ineffable happiness, which is beyond any earthly concept of happiness that the ordinary man is able to achieve.

The Teaching the Buddha gave was consistent throughout; it never varied and it was never ambiguous. It laid down certain principles which are valid for all men at all times and in all circumstances: guiding principles by which men may live in the spirit of truth and virtue, live beneficially both for themselves and for others, in an atmosphere of mutual trust, esteem and concord. And this, the only real formula for human peace, tranquillity and prosperity, is but the prelude to the greater and only permanent achievement, the crown of man’s spiritual evolution, by which he becomes greater than any of the gods he has created and worshipped—the attainment of Nibbāna.

The whole of the Dhamma may be summed up in its fundamental propositions, the Four Noble Truths; and its unique quality lies in the fact that any man of intelligence can understand—at least intellectually—the first two of these Truths. He can, if he seriously applies his mind to an examination of the world about him, see for himself quite clearly that its chief characteristic is suffering (*dukkha*). He can realise that, even in the best ordered society, with poverty, disease and danger reduced to a minimum, it is still not possible to evade the hazards of sentient existence, the misfortunes that assail living beings in the form of accidents, deprivations, sicknesses of mind, and finally old age and mortality. However happy a man’s life may be on this planet, it has to come to an end; and by the irony that seems to lie at the root of all human conditions, the happier the life he has led, the more sorrowful is his departing from it. Those who are most miserable are least reluctant to die, while those who enjoy the pleasures of life are haunted by the knowledge of inescapable death. Their joys are clouded by it; they feverishly plunge from excess to excess in the hope of escaping from this gnawing pain,

striving for forgetfulness when they should be striving instead for knowledge. That is the disease of our materialistic age—the knowledge that with all our science, all our plans for a richer, fuller life, we have not been able to conquer the last ramparts of suffering. We may manufacture artificial pleasures, but we cannot make them permanent. We ourselves are things of but a moment: how then can the joys we seek and cling to be made more lasting than ourselves? Time, that destroys us, destroys our world along with it.

It is by knowledge alone that we can conquer this suffering that is inherent in all life, for we can never escape from it by any other way. Its cause must be understood, in order that it may be treated at its source. The second of the Four Noble Truths points to the cause, and shows it to be craving. Human suffering is exactly proportionate to human craving, for it is in being deprived of what we are attached to that pain and grief arise. Here again the truth is self-evident. The man who is attached to wealth worries while he has it, and is plunged in despair if he loses it. The ambitious man works often to the ruin of his health to achieve his ambition of power; if he succeeds, he enjoys his position precariously, maintaining it against all kinds of external forces that seek to drag him down; and if his downfall comes, he sinks alone into a dishonoured grave. The man who glories in his physical power, stamina or prowess, must live to see these desert him, stripped from him by the remorseless processes of time, and he grieves at losing them.

And thus it is with all the things that human beings value and desire; each of them carries with it the canker of its dissolution. The more fervently it is desired and grasped, the more suffering attends it. But it is not in the nature of things that such advantages as these, ephemeral as they are, can be enjoyed dispassionately. The fact that men strive for them reveals that it is the impulse of craving for them that provides the motivating principle behind the life-process. Indeed, the life-impulse is itself craving—it is by desire that men work and struggle. The desire, envisaged in imagination, becomes the focal point of all man's energy: he is unhappy until he has gained it, he is unhappy if, having gained, he loses it. And his enjoyment of it while he has it is very brief, for each object of craving, once it is attained, must give place to another object. Man's nature can never be static; he cannot for long rest satisfied with what he has. The explanation of this is a very simple one: to the ordinary man, utter satisfaction

with nothing more to reach for is death itself. If his craving-impulse does not at once fashion for itself a new goal, it must search about from the point it has already attained for something else to desire—another step upward on the ladder of worldly success, another million to be added to the bank account, another refinement of sensual gratification, or another and more forceful assertion of the ego. It is the continual striving, this unrest and wearisome repetition of new desires and new satisfactions, this craving for an eternal something more that is the cause of all life's manifestations, from the evolutionary process itself to the development of great civilisations and the personal ambitions of individual human beings. And, while it is the cause of all these things that may superficially appear to be good, it is also the cause of suffering. Craving and suffering are the two points about which the whole of the life-process, forever unfulfilled, revolves. Where there is craving, there is life: where there is life, with its urgencies, its conflicts and its hazards, there is suffering.

This much of the Buddha's Teaching man does not have to take on trust; it is before his very eyes, confirmed by his own experiences and the history of his race. Even as when the Buddha, in the moment of supreme attainment, touched the earth to bear witness to his right to the throne of wisdom and the physical universe confirmed his words, so through our knowledge of its nature the physical universe today speaks to us of this truth. For the very composition of the material world is seen to be subject to the balance of tensions—restless forces that are continually arising and passing away—and as such are the substantial mirror of our own psycho-physical nature, reflecting faithfully its impermanence, disease and lack of an abiding essence. By tensions man lives and functions in the world; by similar tensions the material substance of the world itself is held in ordered relationship. The one principle, showing itself in different manifestations, holds good throughout.

3. THE SUPREME CONQUEROR

I

Without beginning and without end, over unimaginable aeons of time, the rolling cycles of the cosmos unfold themselves. Worlds arise, produce their living beings, their civilisations and then fall into decay and pass away. Entire universes, planetary systems, whirling in the vastness of space, emerge from their gaseous wombs, live out their span of life and disappear.

Nowhere is there stability, nowhere peace, nowhere security. All is change, incessant, repeated—a blind whirling in the vortex of becoming. Birth, decay and death, the one following inevitably upon the other. Birth, decay, and death. Over and over again—the blind groping, the craving for being, a being that can never achieve being, because it is always becoming.

Man, caught in this blind cosmic machinery, himself a part of it, is carried onward, through life after life—a process, not a being, because he too cannot free himself from the universal flux, cannot achieve the perfect state of being, the perfect equilibrium. Driven by an insatiable thirst, he clings to his minute illusion of self as a man clutches at a floating spar in a whirlpool. He is the slave of *samsāra*; its slave and at the same time its creator. The vortex is also the ultimate paradox.

Blind because ignorant, man struggles pitifully, matching his puny strength against the huge impersonal forces of this cosmic process. Age after age, aeon after aeon, over measures of time beyond thought, swept along by currents of passion in a void that he peoples with the phantoms of desire, he drifts from birth to birth, from world to world.

But in this dark, chaotic night of suffering and ignorance, from time to time a light shines forth. Then men see the Truth and many of them break the chains that bind them and gain their release. From time to time, in the course of aeons, a being by his own efforts penetrates the thick veil of ignorance and teaches man the way to ultimate peace, cessation from becoming, equilibrium, fulfilment.

One destined to Buddhahood is born.

II

In this world-cycle, it took place close to the foothills of the Himalayas, for ages the home of India's great saints and teachers. A prince of the Sakyas, a race of the warrior-nobility of ancient Bharata, was born at Kapilavatthu on the borders of modern Nepal. He was named Siddhattha Gotama; his father was a Rāja, Suddhodana, his mother Māyā. His race was that of the Ikshvaku, the Solar Dynasty, proud, heroic, rulers by descent and by instinct, who looked even upon brahmins with disdain.

But the prince was greater even than his lineage. For at the age of twenty-nine he abandoned his rank, turned aside from the destiny of a world-ruler that had been predicted for him, and became a wandering ascetic. The Sakyas were ambitious, but his ambition was greater than theirs; it was the greatest of which men or gods are capable. Prince Siddhattha cared nothing for earthly glory, for power or for luxury. The tears of the world were too real to him; its pain and insecurity were too vivid; he could not rest, nor could he find distraction in activity. One thing, and one thing alone, could satisfy him—absolute knowledge, absolute liberation and absolute bliss. For, having attained these, he could help the world of suffering beings.

So he renounced the world and set forth to find liberation. At first he did as all seekers do; he placed himself under a teacher, the best teacher of the time. Twice he did this, but having mastered all they could import, he left them dissatisfied. He had practised their methods, attained to the realm of Brahmās and identified himself with the highest cosmic forces, but this was not enough. He must get beyond the process of cosmic becoming, must find the last, eternal, unchanging state.

He left his teachers and embarked on the path of extreme asceticism. He lived in the forest, mortified his flesh, fasted and watched and guarded his senses, deprived his body and reduced his frame to a skeleton. For six years he continued this course with the indomitable resolution of a warrior who knows no surrender. His fair body became black, his rounded limbs mere sticks hung with withered skin through which the bones stuck sharply, his belly became hollow and close to his spinal column. His five companion ascetics watched and waited. Never had they seen anything like this, accustomed though they were to the superhuman mortifications of their kind. Surely his supreme struggles must gain the supreme reward. Surely he would be

their teacher and liberator. They watched and waited.

But the prince-ascetic became weaker and weaker and still he had not achieved the final goal. He had gone beyond all of them, including many who were not his peers in spiritual attainment who had set themselves up as teachers and were honoured and claimed large followings. He could have done the same, but not for one moment did he waver in his set purpose. He had not achieved his goal and he knew it. He must go on, higher, higher.

One day he collapsed. Scarcely conscious he lay, unable to move. Yet still that fine, indomitable mind was alive, active, searching. What had he gained? Instead of becoming superhuman he was reduced to this—a pitiful victim of the insatiable body, weak, powerless, almost dead from hunger. And then suddenly he knew: this was not the way. They had all been wrong. To abuse the body is to enslave oneself to the body, whatsoever form the abuse might take. The body would take its revenge. Its conquest must take a different form from this.

He was offered food and he accepted it. Giving the body its just demands, he strengthened himself again; and once more his mind asserted itself over the body, clear and luminous and resolute. But his five companions were grieved—grieved and disappointed. He had failed them; he who was to have been their teacher, the master-ascetic, the greatest *rishi* of all time, had failed them. He had deserted his quest, had taken to easy living again, and was no more worthy to be their leader. They left him.

Alone, the prince-ascetic found himself at Gaya and once again he addressed himself to the supreme task. Seated cross-legged beneath a tree, he considered his position. He had tried so many paths, and all ended the same way. Was there no end to this quest? He summoned all the latent powers of mind and body and made the supreme resolution: "Even though my body should fall into decay and dissolution, I shall not rise from this seat until I have attained Buddhahood."

In the first watch of the night, Prince Siddhattha meditated.

III

It was the festival of spring ploughing. Already the sun was hot, but where the child sat there was shade from the sal tree that spread its branches over his head. His father, the king, was at the plough, performing the ancient, universal ritual of breaking the

soil to ensure a healthy crop for the coming year. Back and forth he went, the handles of the jewelled plough glittering in the golden sunlight, and the child watched. As the rich brown earth was overturned, worms and insects were exposed and flocks of birds followed the track of the plough. Noisily they clamoured, fluttering their wings and jostling one another for the fattest worms, the largest insects. They fought and screamed at one another in their tiny bird voices, pecking at the ground, eating the living creatures as they were turned up by the royal plough.

A microcosm of the universal order. Worms, insects, born into the world to be eaten by birds. The birds, in their turn, killed and eaten by larger creatures, and the animals themselves food for one another. A universal, ceaseless round of inane carnage: the whole earth, a battle-ground and a cemetery. Pain and suffering and bloodshed, birth, decay and death. And in between birth and death, continual uncertainty, restlessness, disappointment, disease, separation from that which is pleasant, contact with that which is unpleasant. In a word, suffering.

And the cause of this suffering? The answer was there, too. It was craving, thirst for life. The craving of the worms and the insects for life, the craving of the birds for life, the craving of animals, the craving of men. They were born and reborn because they craved for the satisfaction of the senses. Their craving bound them inexorably to the wheel of becoming and so they suffered, hopelessly, endlessly, for there could be no life, no process of becoming, without this accompanying element of suffering.

A strange thought: what precisely did it mean? It must mean that suffering goes deeper than the mere superficial aspect of it that we all see. For that suffering appears to be balanced by a contrasting enjoyment. A fleeting enjoyment, it is true, but still happiness of a kind. But fleeting—fleeting. There was the answer. There could be no true happiness in fleeting sensations. Impermanence—suffering—a pattern, a relationship was beginning to emerge.

What of the material phenomena of nature? Did that know anything of this suffering? Was there a cosmic suffering, something inherent in all compounded things, an element that existed whether there was any awareness of it or not? What did the body have to say? Turn inward, concentrate the attention, get to the very foundations of physical being. Search there.

Yes. There it was. There was the agitation of the molecules, the atomic restlessness of the body, felt, perceived, the arising

and passing away. So inconceivably rapid as to be imperceptible to the distracted mind, but very clear to the trained, stabilised attention that brought all its functions to bear on the object, the cosmic suffering, inalienable, an inherent part of all phenomena throughout the universe. The primordial fact.

So as long as there was the arising of compounded things that are impermanent, there must be suffering. The perceived suffering that is in grief, lamentation, pain, despair, and the unperceived suffering that is the agitation and restlessness of the atomic constituents of matter and mental formations, each one an aspect of the other. And it was all the result of craving, the thirst for sentient life.

In this process of arising and passing away was a momentary birth and death. Mind and body alike were changing from moment to moment. Where then was the stable, immutable element, the self, the *ātman*, the soul? On the one hand, there was his body, and, according to all the schools except the materialist ones, there was the immaterial element, the spirit, opposed to it and yet in some inexplicable way bound by this gross physical envelope. Of what did this spirit, the conscious element, consist? There was sensation; that was indisputable. There was also perception, awareness of the sensation. There were also the mental formations and tendencies that make up the character—were they permanent? No, they too were subject to change and transformation, because they were linked up with past and present actions, *kamma*. So what was left? Only consciousness—the sum of awareness, the knowledge that says: “I am”—and that in the very act of asserting, it is changing, flowing, perpetually in transition. So there could be no permanent entity of selfhood, no single element alone and independent of the others to constitute a self. Just five aggregates, like bundles bound together; when they were all present, there was what is called a living being. An interdependent complex of factors, with no element stable or constant and no link of self-identity from one thought-moment to another.

Void. Yet in the void, this infinite potentiality of suffering. A current passing from one phase of becoming to another—from childhood to maturity, maturity to old age, old age to death. And then a leap, a spark of the energy-potential jumping to a new manifestation, a “rebirth.” Not the same, yet not another, as the man is not the same as the infant, the old man not the same as the man in his prime. All different, yet all belonging to the same

sequence, the same current of actions and results. Inheritors of the *kamma* of the past: ancestors of a yet unborn futurity.

The cosmic pattern takes shape—visibly the factors arrange themselves. The vast incomprehensible machinery is seen, not from within, but from the outside. A new dimension of knowledge and experience is opening up.

The universe of phenomena, of compounded things, arranges itself in accordance with a common denominator—three characteristics which are in their final essence one, because each is the natural corollary of the others. Impermanence; and because of impermanence, suffering; and because of impermanence and suffering, the absence of self.

The lean ascetic seated under the banyan tree at Gaya—was he the same as that child who had been seated under the sal tree watching his father the king on that day of the spring ploughing so many years ago? In a sense, yes; but in a deeper sense he was not. The ascetic was the result of the child; the child was but one link in a series of beings flowing back into an infinite past.

Let the mind run back. Beyond this life, to birth before birth. Where was the beginning? Nowhere could it be found. Man, deva, animal, man again, infinitely, endlessly but no beginning to the process, no point at which it could be said, "Here is the first link in the chain, the first cause." Over hundreds of aeons the luminous, developed mind might retrace the paths of lost time, but the beginning would ever elude it. For there could be no beginning to time when this was not, no time outside the realm of conditioned things.

And there arose in his mind the knowledge of past births.

IV

With a supernormal vision in which space and time were transcended, he surveyed the world and the immensities of world upon world beyond. The relativity of all things became clear to him and he traced their relationships, above, below and across. Men, gods, in worlds of form and worlds without form, he saw distinctly in the light of a new knowledge. Only the dark frontier of ignorance hemmed them in; they came and went, chained forever to that palpable darkness which seemed to be their very substance, the fabric of their being and the atmosphere they breathed. There arose in his mind the knowledge of their present birth, their arising and passing away. Yet still the first

cause hid itself, search where he would. And the second watch of the night came to an end.

Ignorance, the sleep of not-knowing, the dreams of the sleeper, acting in a trance of ignorance. And then he saw that here was its beginning; a beginning not in time but co-temporal and all-permeating. For these beings clung to life because they thought it good, believed it to be wholesome and desirable. Every thought, every word, every deed was the outcome of this ignorance. The ever-renewing consciousness, the assertive "I am," sprang from these actions, from the identification of the actions with the actor. Because there was the thought, word and deed, there was the delusion of a thinker, a speaker, a doer, but everywhere it was the same thing—a process that masqueraded as a being. From birth to birth the causal process, the relationship of dependent phenomena. Nothing more.

Out of that came the aggregates of personality, physical and mental, the fivefold group. Body, sensation, perception, tendencies and consciousness; the body equipped with six senses all on fire with craving nourished by contacts and sensations as a fire is nourished by fuel. For out of the contacts came sensation, and from sensation new craving-impulses were born from moment to moment, gathering into a force of grasping that would not let go. And that force became the current of becoming, the becoming which was the enemy of being. A life-force recharged from moment to moment and endless momentary succession of births and deaths. And when the bundles were at last torn apart and scattered, it was only a simultaneous group death, as against the separate deaths and rebirths of mind and body which, like a flowing river, preserved the seeming identity of that restless current. For on the instant of disintegration, a new mind-body complex arose, the current remanifested itself again somewhere in space and time. All causes must produce a result.

But how could this be expressed? Just as a ripple on the surface of water travels from its point of origin to some other points but the particles of the water are not displaced, so it was only the impulse, the pushing of an active force against the inert mass, imparting movement. It wasn't the water that moved, but the impulse that moved through the water, rebirth—but nothing that was reborn, nothing identical except the force and the direction.

For a long time he contemplated it, in the light of this new knowledge. How completely mistaken they had all been, blinded

by the illusion of self. There was no *ātman*, no permanent, unchanging entity. There was only this current of activity functioning in the void; yet from that arose all the suffering of the world, the grief, lamentation, pain and despair of sentient beings. Still and detached he sat and contemplated it, absorbing the knowledge, seeing the reality for the first time. Plainly the pattern spread itself before his sublimated vision; not in words, not an intellectual concept but a direct realisation.

Then where was the cessation, the peace, the unshakable stillness in which becoming ended and true being took place? Twelve causal factors, and at their head, the primal ignorance. If ignorance were destroyed, then there could be no more actions prompted by ignorance—no more aggregate of kamma. The force would be neutralised. With the kamma force neutralised, there could be no more arising of consciousness, no more mind and body, no more field of sense-perceptions and therefore no more could thirst or grasping arise. That indeed would be the end of the life-process, the end of rebirth, the final end of grief, lamentation, pain and despair. It would be Nibbāna, the great cessation. There at that point, becoming would give place to being—a state that was not life nor death, existence nor non-existence, but was beyond all the opposites and dualities of relativity, the false concepts of ignorance, outside of space and time and eternal, unchanging.

So there was suffering, the cause of suffering and its cessation—three Noble Truths hitherto unrealised, now clear to his awakened insight. One thing more was needed—the way to achieve that cessation, the method by which beings might, by their own exertions—for there was no supreme deity to help them—eradicate ignorance and gain Nibbāna.

Right View must come first. For unless it is known that all things are impermanent, subject to suffering, and void of self, there can be no starting on the right direction. Without that there could only be misdirected energy. Kālāma, who taught that the atman was permanent and unchanging, and so could never get beyond the sphere of sublimation and self-identification. Or the unending struggle with kamma of Uddaka Rāmaputta, who could never free himself from the entanglements of metempsychosis. With Right View established, Right Resolution must follow—the thought free from lust, free from ill-will, free from cruelty. The pure, untainted thought of benevolence directed without distinction toward all beings, the resolution to

gain Nibbāna. And from that, Right Speech, truthful, sincere, uttering whatsoever was good for gods and men, beneficial, free from trivialities, from malice and from harshness. Then Right Action, gentle, non-violent, pliant towards others, but rigid towards the self, restrained and controlled. Also Right Livelihood—the livelihood gained by work beneficial to living beings, by one who has put away violence in all its forms, who will not encourage violence in others. Then would the character be formed for Right Effort—the fourfold great effort, to avoid the arising of impurities and demeritorious states, and to bring to an end those that have already arisen—to avoid and to overcome. Furthermore, to develop states of purity and merit that have not yet arisen, and to encourage and establish those that have already arisen—to develop and to maintain.

This, then, was the teaching of all the Buddhas: to put away evil and to fulfil all good—to purify the heart. Then the way would be made clear for the supramundane path: clear and luminous in the light of virtue which is power. Cultivation of a mind that can see through illusion; Right Attentiveness, the awareness of the functions, the detached, impersonal regard of body, feeling mind and phenomena, knowing them to be but a part of the cosmic order, not “I,” not “mine,” not “myself.” Then, with the breaking down of the limitations of personality, would come the great psychic powers and the release from pleasure and pain, fear and mundane hope, and the calm, unshakable equilibrium of mind would be realised. And lastly, Right Concentration, the opening up of new dimensions of experience, the *jhānas*. Detached from sensual objects, from all impure contacts, the mind enters upon the first sublime state, with thought and discursive rumination, distinguished by rapture, happiness and concentration. From thence, overcoming thought and rumination, it enters the second sublime state, free from the activities of discursive thought, the state filled only with rapture and happiness.

And further, overcoming rapture, the mind enters into the third sublime state, the sphere of equanimity, attentiveness, clear consciousness, and dwells there in the enjoyment of pure happiness. But then, giving up pleasure and pain, joy and grief alike, it enters the fourth sublime state, which is beyond these—the state for which it can neither be said that it is consciousness nor unconsciousness, nor does it admit any of the categories of normal experience. And from there the gate of the deathless is open.

This is the Middle Path that the All Enlightened One discovered, that enables one both to see and to know, that leads to peace, to discernment, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

Then the glad cry of the conqueror rang forth from the prince-ascetic who had become the Buddha of this world-cycle: "Long have I sought you, O builder of the house of this body. Now I have found you. Your beam is cast down, your ridge-pole broken. Never again will you build the house. For good, birth and death are ended; I have done what had to be done. The path of virtue is fulfilled. I behold Nibbāna face to face."

V

The long night was ended and a new light flooded the world. The All Enlightened One began his ministry of teaching, which he was to continue for forty-five years. Great were his supernormal powers, gained that night under the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya when he attained omniscience; but first and greatest of all, he placed the power of teaching the Dhamma. He rarely performed miracles, but when he did they were of such kind as to stagger the mind and confound his opponents. Most of all, he desired to convince people by the power of truth alone, so that of their own free will they would accept what he had to tell them and act upon it. His Dhamma is "*ehi passiko*"—that which bids us, "Come and see for yourself." He taught it in the sequence in which it had been discovered by him, beginning with the three signs of being: impermanence, suffering, and non-self. From this came the Four Noble Truths: the truths concerning suffering, the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to that cessation.

The cause of suffering is craving and the process of its arising is shown in the twelve factors of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination). Its cessation is Nibbāna, the unborn, unoriginated, the state free from any possibility of the re-arising of conditioned existence, the ultimate peace. The Supreme Buddha did not attempt to define Nibbāna in words because words relate to concepts, being relates to non-being as day relates to night, and Nibbāna is neither being nor non-being as we understand these words. It is altogether outside all categories or experience; it must be known to be understood.

In his teaching, there is no metaphysic (except where later men and lesser minds have manufactured one); it is a practical

way, a path to be trodden. Speculation is useless, a hindrance on the path, and as such the Buddha condemned it. All he asked was that his disciples should examine the factors of phenomenal existence, satisfy themselves that what he taught of it was true, and from there go on to discover by direct insight the real truth that lies beyond phenomena. The way itself, the Middle Way between all extremes, is the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*). From this nucleus of teaching, all further developments of ethic-psychology followed in natural and logical sequence, from the Five Precepts of the layman to the intricacies of Abhidhamma, the detailed analysis of mental phenomena.

Very soon after the attainment of enlightenment, the Buddha founded the Order of Monks, containing the four groups of ariyan disciples: the stream winners, or those who had entered the path; the once-returns, those of the second stage of purification who, if they passed away before gaining arahantship, would only be reborn once; the non-returns, those destined to achieve rebirth in a Brahmā-realm from whence they would pass into Nibbāna, and the arahants, the fully perfected and purified for whom there would be no rebirth after this present life. "In whatsoever discipline, O monks, there are the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold path, there will be found those of the four degrees of saintliness. But in whatsoever discipline the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold path are not found, they cannot be disciples of the four degrees of saintliness." And the Exalted Buddha sent forth his perfected disciples to preach the doctrine. "I, O monks, have seen suffering and the destruction of suffering and the way leading thereto. I have freed myself of the impurities. You too, O monks, are freed from the impurities. Go forth, then. Proclaim the Doctrine perfect in its beginning, in its continuation and in its end, for the good, the benefit and the welfare of gods and men."

So it came about that the Doctrine was established and propagated in the world. The noble Order of Monks increased and spread throughout India and beyond, and the gospel of mercy and liberation became known to all those "whose eyes were but lightly covered with dust." The ariyan discipline followed by the monks in their yellow robes was austere but not extreme; it looked more to the mind than to the body, for in the mind is the seat of craving. "*Mano pubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā*, mind is the forerunner of all phenomena; mind is chief, they are all mind-created." "Guard therefore the mind,

purify the mind, for out of the intention all things come to be." Neither do you look to any external aid, for "Self is the master of self. What other master could there be?" Put aside all vain beliefs, all faith in rituals and religious performances, for these things avail not against ignorance, being themselves products of ignorance. "In this fathom-long body, O monks, equipped with sense and sense-perceptions, I declare to you is the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to that cessation." Never before in a world bewitched by superstition and priestcraft had such a challenging message resounded. The followers of the Supreme Buddha no more resorted to the sacrificial fires, to holocausts of men and beasts to appease the personified force of nature, no more cultivated magic or submitted their bodies to unavailing self-torture. Instead, they cultivated a mind of boundless loving-kindness, lived righteously and fearlessly and found a happiness hitherto unknown to them.

VI

"I promise to observe the precept to abstain from taking life. I promise to observe the precept to abstain from taking that which is not mine. I promise to observe the precept to abstain from adultery. I promise to observe the precept to abstain from untruthful speech. I promise to observe the precept to abstain from intoxicants and drugs."

To the laymen and women who came to him the Buddha gave these five simple precepts. He did not command, did not take upon himself the authority of a creator-god to punish and reward. He was greater than this. He was the Supreme Teacher, above all beings spiritual and terrestrial, himself having seen, with direct insight, the working of cause and effect. He prescribed the course of conduct that would eliminate evil results and lead upwards. "Take these precepts," he said in effect, "for by observing them you will avoid the lower courses of rebirth, will diminish suffering which men bring upon themselves by unskilful action. These precepts of mine are a medicine for your sickness. Take them and become safe from sorrow. All fear the rod; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should neither strike nor kill." And the people, reverently receiving the precepts from the lips of the Master, assenting to the undeniable truth of his words, bowed themselves in homage: kings, ministers, treasurers, artisans, householders, hetaerae and

beggars. Many were the ascetics of other faiths who embraced the Doctrine of the Buddha with the simple formula: "I go for refuge to the Buddha. I go for refuge to the Dhamma. I go for refuge to the Sangha." The Teacher, the Teaching and the Taught were their refuge but they themselves had to effect their own liberation. "You yourself have to tread the Path; the Buddhas can but show the way"—it was the supreme test of self-reliance, the greatest assertion of human freedom, so that in accepting the discipline they were proving the triumph of men's free will in its highest and ultimate sense, taking upon themselves the mastery of their own destiny.

VII

"Profound and difficult to understand is this Ariyan Doctrine, O bhikkhus, only to be understood by the wise; deep and unfathomable as the ocean. But like the vast ocean, it has but one flavour throughout—the flavour of liberation." So it was that some failed to follow the Teaching, while others, like the great disciple Sāriputta, perceived its truth on hearing just one verse from the lips of a monk who was himself not completely a master of it. Others there were who started well, but fell by the wayside like the unfortunate Devadatta, intoxicated by his mastery of the psychic powers, who became maddened by pride and ambition and so cast himself down into hell. But with unchanged serenity the Master smiled, knowing that Devadatta too, in course of time, would expiate his evil deeds and attain enlightenment. To a Buddha, the enormous cycles of time are but as a moment: with his divine eye he surveyed the world, the seen and unseen, to the furthest limits of space, and knew the nature of gods and men—what past deeds had produced them and where their destinies lay. For the potentialities of a man's nature are deep hidden in his past; he is the heir of a countless succession of dead selves and only a Supreme Buddha can know when the moment of fruition, the ripening of wisdom, is about to take place.

There was, for instance, the ruthless murderer Aṅgulimāla, who wore about his neck a grisly garland of the fingers of his victims. Surveying the world with his divine eye of infinite compassion, the Buddha one morning saw this outlaw and he perceived that an atrocious crime was about to take place. To complete his garland the murderer needed one more finger; and Aṅgulimāla's mother was on her way to visit her son.

Instantaneously, as a strong man reaches out his arm, the Buddha was upon the scene, for to one who has conquered life and death, space no longer exists. He stood before Aṅgulimāla, radiant and majestic, and barred his way. But one thought alone possessed the murderer's mind—he must obtain the finger. He drew his knife and leaped towards the Buddha.

He leaped, but the same distance remained between them. Calmly the Buddha surveyed him, compassion in his eyes. Aṅgulimāla started running towards him, but although the Buddha remained motionless, the distance between them was not decreased. Aṅgulimāla ran, and as he ran he cried out, "Stop, Ascetic! Stand still!"

"I am still, Aṅgulimāla," the calm voice replied. "It is you who is running."

Panting and frenzied, the murderer strove to reach his objective, but no matter how fast he ran, the figure of the Buddha remained motionless before him, still, remote, imperturbable.

And the voice was speaking again, penetrating into the depths of his consciousness. "I am still, Aṅgulimāla. For he who is still, goes; but he who goes is still."

Exhausted and confused then, the murderer came to a halt. And as ever, the Buddha stood before him. Waves of tremendous force struck against the murderer, enveloped him and rendered him powerless. But they were waves of compassion, vibrations of an infinite, indescribable power and beatitude that flowed over and through him, and he was aware of a super cosmic light that seemed at first terrible but when, giving way to his weakness, he surrendered himself to the light, it was more tender and comforting than anything he had ever known. He fell on his knees and stretched out his arms towards that glorious light, towards that all-embracing compassion. And the heat and frenzy of his heart was calmed.

"I am still, Aṅgulimāla. For he who is still, goes; but he who goes is still."

In that moment Aṅgulimāla understood. "I take refuge in the Buddha: in the Dhamma: in the Sangha." And so the former murderer, whose pride had been the garland of fingers hung about his neck, took the yellow robe of a bhikkhu and in no long time attained arahantship.

Many are the ways whereby a man may be brought to realise the truth. The Supreme Buddha was master of them all. If the potentiality for understanding were present, the Buddha

could awaken it, bring it to perfection. Where a demonstration of power was called for, he exercised power. Where wisdom was called for, he exercised verbal skill, yet always with gentleness, forbearance and compassion. There was a philosopher skilled in dialectics who swore to overcome the Buddha in argument. Although the Buddha did not value dialectics, rarely resorting to argument, before long the sophist was reduced to confusion. He contradicted himself, became entangled in his own theories, and became alarmed for his reputation. Sweat poured from his body and his mind became dazed; and in the end he crept away, leaving the Buddha serene and calm as ever. For who can refute truth?

But those, often people of simpler minds, who listened to the Teaching and allowed it to sink into deeper consciousness, or who tested it by the touchstone of their own experience, knew the awakening of confidence and pursued the Path to the glorious goal. For wisdom does not always consist in learning or scholarship; it is something that may, and often does, exist independently of these.

VIII

“All compounded things are impermanent.”

For forty-five years, the exalted Buddha taught the incomparable Doctrine until his *sāsana* became established. Then, in his eightieth year, the time came for him to give up his existence. To the arahant who has seen Nibbāna in this very life, death is of no account. He suffers the continuation of his earthly existence only for the good of others, knowing all the time the process of arising and passing away, the continual agitation of the elements which men call “life” to be but a flux of energies, without stability and without permanence. And so a day came when, at the small town of Kusināra, the Supreme Buddha laid himself down for the last time. None can escape the pains of existence, and the Buddha’s body was old and enfeebled by sickness. But not so his mind. Alert, composed and tranquil, he continued to survey the world. He was about to leave. His robe had been spread for him by his devoted attendant, Ānanda, between twin sal trees. And the bare branches of the sal trees blossomed over his head and broke into glorious bloom in the season of bareness.

A wandering ascetic of another faith, hearing of the Buddha’s greatness, came and begged to talk with him. “The

Blessed One is sick," he was told, "Please do not disturb the Blessed One. He is resting."

But the Buddha called out, "Who is there?" And when they told him, he said, "Let the wandering ascetic approach. Do not forbid him."

So the wandering ascetic approached, and saluting the Blessed One, he seated himself respectfully on one side. And the Blessed One discoursed to him for a long time. At the end of the discourse the wandering ascetic acknowledged the Teacher and begged admission to the Order. He was the Buddha's last convert.

Rapidly the news spread that the Supreme Buddha was about to pass away, and from far and wide came the sorrowing people to pay their last homage to the beloved Teacher. From the adjoining kingdoms came the brahmins and nobles of the warrior caste together with the people, and assembled about the Buddha's last resting place. From the heavenly realms also, the devas and Brahmās gathered together and heavenly music was heard from invisible minstrels. At the same time, divine perfumes filled the air and petals from flowers of more than earthly beauty were scattered on the Buddha's couch. And seeing this, the Blessed One spoke to Ānanda and those about him, and what he said was this: "It is right and fitting that the passing of a Tathāgata should be honoured by divine music, divine perfumes and flowers of celestial beauty. But not thus is the Tathāgata most truly honoured. The layman or woman who fulfils all the greater and lesser duties, who observes the Precepts and follows the Noble Eightfold path, he or she it is who renders the greatest reverence and truest homage to the Teacher."

And when the sorrowing Ānanda, who had not yet attained arahantship, gave way to his grief, the Buddha reminded him of the Doctrine. "Have I not told you Ānanda, that all compounded things must pass away? Then grieve not, but apply yourself with determination. The Teacher must pass away, but the Teaching remains. I leave you the Doctrine; when I am gone, let that be your guide and refuge."

Calm, tranquil and in full possession of his great faculties, the Buddha continued to advise and instruct and encourage his followers to the last. Just before the end, he gave his final exhortation: "Let the Dhamma be to you a lamp and a refuge. Seek no external refuge. Strive with earnestness."

Then, with faculties collected and intent, he entered into the first jhāna. And rising out of the first stage he passed into the

second. And rising out of the second stage he passed into the third. And rising out of the third stage he passed into the fourth. And rising out of the fourth stage of deep meditation, he entered into the sphere of the infinity of space. And passing out of the consciousness of the infinity of space, he entered into the sphere of the infinity of consciousness. And passing out of the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, he entered the sphere of nothingness. And leaving behind the stage of nothingness, he entered into the realm of neither-perception nor non-perception. And leaving the realm of neither-perception nor non-perception, he entered into the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling. Then the Venerable Ānanda said to the Venerable Anuruddha; "O Venerable Sir, O Anuruddha, the Blessed One is dead."

"Not so Brother Ānanda," replied the Venerable Thera. "The Blessed One is not dead. He has entered into the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling." Then the Blessed One, passing out of the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling, entered into the sphere of neither-perception nor non-perception. And passing out of the sphere of neither-perception nor non-perception, he entered into the sphere of nothingness. And passing out of the realm of nothingness, he entered into the sphere of the infinity of consciousness. And passing out of the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, he entered into the sphere of the infinity of space. And leaving the sphere of the infinity of space he entered into the fourth jhāna; and leaving the fourth stage he entered into the third; and leaving the third stage he entered into the second; and passing out of the second he entered into the first jhāna. Then, passing out of the first jhāna, he entered into the second. And passing out of the second jhāna, he entered into the third. And leaving the third jhāna, he entered into the fourth stage of deep meditation. And passing out of the last stage of deep meditation, he immediately expired. And when the Blessed One expired there arose, at the moment of his passing out of existence, a mighty earthquake, terrible and awe-inspiring and the thunders of heaven burst forth. When the Blessed One expired, Brahmā Sahampati, at the moment of his passing away from existence uttered this stanza:

"All beings that have life must lay aside
 Their complex form, the mind and body compound
 From which, in heaven or earth, they draw their brief
 And fleeting individuality—

Even as the Teacher, such a one as he,
Unequalled among all the sons of men.
Successor to the Buddhas of the past.
In wisdom mighty and in insight clear—
Even as he hath passed beyond our ken.”

And when the Blessed One expired, Sakka, king of the gods,
at the moment of his passing away, uttered this stanza:

“Transient are all beings, their parts, their powers:
Growth is their nature, and with growth decay.
Produced are they, and then dissolved again.
And best it is when they have sunk to rest.”

When the Blessed One expired, the Venerable Anuruddha,
at the moment of his passing away, uttered these stanzas:

“When he who from all craving was released,
Who to Nibbāna’s tranquil state attained,
When the great Sage his life’s span had fulfilled,
No breathless struggle shook that steadfast heart.

All resolute, with firm, unshaken mind,
He calmly triumphed o’er the pangs of death;
Even as a bright flame dies away, so he gained
His deliverance from the bonds of life.”

When the Blessed One expired, the Venerable Ānanda, at
the moment of his passing out of existence, uttered this stanza:

“Then was a mighty fear!
The hair uprose,
When he, possessed of all perfection,
He, The Supreme Enlightened One, expired.”

Thus, having taught the sublime doctrine of deliverance, the beloved Teacher passed out of *saṃsāric* conditions forever. He left behind him, bound up with his Teaching, the memory in men’s minds of a personality absolutely unique in human experience. The virtues towards which others had striven, in him were exemplified in their fullest perfection, effortlessly with unwavering assurance. Freed for ever from internal conflicts that mark our human condition, the alternations between selfishness and altruism, the loves and hates, doubts and fears that beset even the best of men. He trod a path trackless as the flight of birds in space, and only one who was his equal could fully understand

him. Men judge and evaluate one another by their own standards, the standards set by self and the degree to which self-interest motivates them. The Exalted Buddha had destroyed this illusion of self, had become identified only with the Dhamma, for he had said: "One who beholds the Teacher beholds the Doctrine: and in beholding the Doctrine he beholds the Teacher." All limitations of phenomenal personality transcended, the Buddha had no peer save in the Buddhas of former ages, and will have none until the next Buddha, Maitreya, walks the earth.

IX

Two thousand five hundred years have passed away since that day when the Supreme Buddha entered into final Nibbāna. The Doctrine was then only preserved by word of mouth, memorised and passed on from teacher to pupils. But while the arahants who had heard it from the lips of the Master were yet alive, a great meeting was convened to recite the Teaching. Each point was then carefully checked and confirmed and the body of the Doctrine was consolidated. During the reign of Asoka, another meeting was held for the same purpose, and by that time it had become necessary to correct certain heretical versions that had become current. After that, it was put into writing, and the present Pali Tipiṭaka of three divisions, the Sutta, the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma, represents this authentic Theravāda tradition. Generations have come and gone, but the *sāsana* of the Buddha still stands. And although the greater part of the world yet remains in the dark night of ignorance, there has been a strong historic current from Buddhism that has affected the whole of human thought, lifting and ennobling it. Our present age is a paradox. While it is highly materialistic in the sense that all the emphasis has come to be laid on material achievements and activities centred about the world, it shows at the same time a growing tendency towards higher aspiration. Men on the whole are more humane, their laws more just, their relationships more equitable, than in the past. There are many dark blots upon our civilisation, survivals from a barbaric past, but they stand out the more clearly because of the progress we have made elsewhere. We are more aware of the shadows in contrast to the light and cruelties and injustices that only a few generations ago were accepted as part of the natural order of things, now stand out with shocking clarity.

Together with this, there is a widening of mental and spiritual horizons. More and more people are turning, often unconsciously, towards a Buddhist interpretation of life. Warped and distorted this may have become in its progress from East to West, yet the spirit is there revealing itself in modifications of traditional thought, in a broader and more tolerant view of the conflict which is life.

Many are the creeds that men have followed, many the idols before which they have abased themselves, many the dogmas to which they have prostituted their understanding. And inasmuch as in every thinking man there lurks a vestige of knowledge gathered painfully from his past lives, which speaks to him of moral law and a beauty to be realised, these creeds have moulded themselves to this faith imperfectly; perhaps, because they could not reach the ultimate understanding of life which alone can give actuality to man's dreams of perfection, but still containing in themselves something of this knowledge, the knowledge that as ye sow, so shall ye reap—and so have helped to raise this human nature which is midway between the animal and the divine. But above and beyond them all stands the supreme Truth, the Truth discovered and taught by him who was Prince Siddhattha of the Sakyan clan. Who became the Supremely Enlightened One, Teacher of gods and men, and around whose funeral pyre, because he was a Khattiya and the greatest warrior of all—the conqueror of self, who shed no drop of blood—the warrior nobles raised a palisade of spears.

4. THE APPEAL OF BUDDHISM

In the *Buddhist Forum* of Radio Ceylon on June 1st 1958, four self-converted Buddhists were asked to speak on the subject of "What appeals to me most in Buddhism." The following is the reply given by Anāgārika Sugatānanda (Francis Story).

From *The Light of the Dhamma*, Vol. 4 (1958)

It was many years ago that I became a Buddhist and I was quite young, between 14 and 16, but I remember that it was first of all the two facts of rebirth and *kamma* which convinced me of the truth of the Dhamma. I say "facts" because even among many non-Buddhists rebirth is now well on the way to being a proven truth, and once it is accepted the reality of *kamma* must be accepted with it. In the first place, these two doctrines explain everything in life which is otherwise inexplicable. They explain the seeming injustices with which life abounds, and which no earthly power can remedy. They explain, too, the apparent futility and lack of a satisfactory pattern in the individual human life which, taken as one life out of a measureless eternity is obviously quite pointless, full of unresolved problems and incomplete designs. Take, for instance, a recent and much publicised example of what appears to be a cruel freak of chance—the tragically brief life of a child, Red Skelton's son, whom neither human science nor divine mercy could save. There are, and always have been, countless millions of such cases, besides the untold numbers of blind, deaf and dumb, deformed, mentally deficient and diseased human beings whose pitiful condition is not due to any fault of theirs in this present life, nor to any remediable defect in the organisation of human society.

Materialists may say what they will, but we now know enough of the limitations of science to realise that it will never be able entirely to abolish these evils. At the same time we can no longer derive comfort from religions that science has discredited. While we know that material progress will never succeed in abolishing suffering, it is equally futile to suppose that some special compensation for unmerited misfortune awaits the victims in a future life irrespective of any moral issues that are involved.

The sense of justice, which was very strong in me, demanded a reason for these things and an intelligible purpose behind them. I could not accept the theory that there is a "divine

justice" which is different from human concepts of justice, for both the word and the idea can only mean what we take them to mean by human standards. If conditions are not just in the human sense they are not just at all: there cannot be two different meanings to the word. The "justice of God" is an invention of theologians, the last refuge of unreason.

But right at the beginning Buddhism gave me the justice and the purpose which I had been seeking. I found them both in the doctrine of *kamma* and rebirth. Through them I was at last able to understand the otherwise senseless agglomeration of misery, futility and blind insensate cruelty which forms most of the picture human life presents to a thinking person. Those who know something about the subject may say, "Yes, but Buddhism is not alone in teaching *kamma* and rebirth; Hinduism has it also." That is true; but Buddhism is alone in presenting rebirth as a scientific principle. When I say "scientific" I mean that it is a principle which is in accordance with other universal laws which can be understood scientifically and even investigated by scientific methods. The principle of change and serial continuity is one that runs throughout nature; all scientific principles are based on it. In Buddhism it is the principle of *anattā* which lifts the concept of rebirth from the level of primitive animism to one on which it becomes acceptable to the scientifically-trained mind. *Anattā* means "non-soul", "non-ego" and "non-self;" it is the denial of any abiding or constant and unchanging element in the life-process. Buddhism does not point to a "soul" that transmigrates; it points to a continuum of cause and effect that is exactly analogous to the processes of physics. The personality of one life is the result of the actions of the preceding current of existences, in precisely the same way that any physical phenomenon at any given moment is the end-result of an infinite series of events of the same order that have led up to it.

When I came to understand this thoroughly, which I did by pondering the profound doctrine of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination), I realised that the Buddha-dhamma is a complete revelation of a dynamic cosmic order. It is complete scientifically because it accounts not only for human life but for the life of all sentient beings from lowest to highest; and complete morally because it includes all these forms of life in the one moral order. Nothing is left out; nothing is unaccounted for in this all-embracing system. If we should find sentient beings on other planets in the remotest of the galactic systems, we should find

them subject to the same laws of being as ourselves. They might be physically quite different from any form of life on this earth, their bodies composed of different chemical combinations, and they might be far superior to ourselves or far below us, yet still they must consist of the same five *khandha* aggregates, because these are the basic elements of all sentient existence. They must also come into being as the result of past *kamma*, and pass away again just as we do. *Anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* are universal principles; and this being so, the Four Noble Truths must also be valid wherever life exists. There is no need for a special creation or a special plan of salvation for the inhabitants of this planet or any other. Buddhism teaches a cosmic law that obtains everywhere; hence the same moral law of spiritual evolution must prevail everywhere. Cosmic law and moral order in Buddhism are related to one another as they are not in any other religious system.

Another fact which struck me forcibly right at the beginning is that Buddhism does not condemn anybody to eternal hell just because he happens not to be a Buddhist. If a being goes to the regions of torment after death it is because his bad deeds have sent him there, not because he happens to believe in the wrong set of dogmas. The idea that anyone should be eternally damned simply because he does not go to a certain church and subscribe to its particular creed is repugnant to every right-thinking person. Moral retribution is a necessity, but this vicious doctrine of damnation for not believing in a certain god and the particular myths surrounding him has nothing whatever to do with ethical principles. It is itself supremely immoral. It has probably been the cause of more harm in the world than any other single factor in history.

Furthermore, Buddhism does not postulate eternal punishment for temporal sins—that is, for misdeeds committed within the limiting framework of time. The Dhamma teaches that whatever suffering a man may bring upon himself is commensurate with the gravity of the evil action—neither more nor less. He may suffer through several lives because of some very heavy *akusala kamma* (evil action), but sometime that suffering must come to an end when the evil that has been generated has spent itself. The atrocious idea that a being may be made to suffer throughout eternity for the sins committed in one short lifetime does not exist in Buddhism. Neither does the equally unjust doctrine that he may wash out all his sins by

formal acts of contrition or by faith in some one particular deity out of all the gods man has invented.

In Buddhism also, there is no personal judge who condemns, but only the working of an impersonal law that is like the law of gravitation. And this point is supremely important, because any judge in the act of judging would have to outrage either justice or mercy. He could not satisfy the demands of both at the same time. If he were inexorably just he could not be called merciful: if he were merciful to sinners he could not be absolutely just. The two qualities are utterly incompatible. Buddhism shows that the natural law is just. It is for man to be merciful, and by the cultivation of *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* to make himself divine.

Lastly, the truth that rebirth and suffering are brought about by ignorance and craving conjointly is a conclusion that is fully supported by all we know concerning the life-urge as it works through human and animal psychology and in the processes of biological evolution. It supplies the missing factor which science needs to complete its picture of the evolution of living organisms. The motivating force behind the struggle for existence, for survival and development, is just this force of craving which the Buddha found to be at the root of *saṃsāric* rebirth. Because it is conjoined with ignorance it is a blind, groping force, yet it is this force which has been responsible for the development of complex organisms from simple beginnings. It is also the cause of the incessant round of rebirths in which beings alternately rise and fall in the scale of spiritual evolution.

Realising the nature of this twofold bondage of ignorance and craving we are fully justified in the rational faith that, as the Supreme Buddha taught, our ultimate release, the attainment of the eternal, unchanging state of *Nibbāna*, is something that we can reach by eliminating all the factors of rebirth that are rooted in these two fundamental defects. *Nibbāna*, which the Buddha described as *asaṅkhata*—the unconditioned, *ajara*—the ageless, *dhuva*—the permanent and *amata*—the deathless, is the reality that lies outside the realms of the conditioned and illusory *saṃsāra*, and it may be reached only by extinguishing the fires of *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*—greed, hatred and delusion.

So we see that *saddhā*, or faith, in Buddhism is firmly based on reason and experience. Ignorance is blind, but Buddhist faith has its eyes wide open and fixed upon reality. The Dhamma is *ehi-passiko*—that which invites all to come and see for themselves.

The Buddha was the only religious teacher who invited reasoned, critical analysis of his doctrine. The proof of its truth—and hence the conclusive proof of the Buddha's enlightenment as well—is to be found in the doctrine itself. Like any scientific discovery it can be tested empirically. Everyone can test and verify it for himself, both by reason and by direct insight. The Buddhist is given a charter of intellectual liberty.

These are just a few of the features which appealed to me when I first started studying Buddhism in my quest for truth. There were many others which followed later; they came in due course as my own understanding and practice of the Dhamma made them manifest to me. As one investigates the Dhamma, new vistas are constantly opening up before one's vision; new aspects of the truth are continually unfolding and fresh beauties are being disclosed. When so much of moral beauty can be discerned by merely intellectual appreciation of the Dhamma, I leave it to you who are listening to imagine for yourselves the revelations that come with the practice of *vipassanā* or direct insight. There can be nothing in the entire range of human experience with which it may be compared.

5. THE UNIQUENESS OF BUDDHISM

Most of our present day problems, including the great problems of social organisation and of war, have come into being through the lack of a clear-cut and compelling philosophy of life. We do not know what, if anything, is life's ultimate purpose: whether it is to make the best we possibly can of a single life here on earth, or whether it is to strive for some higher and more lasting achievement.

The course of conduct laid down by necessity for those who see nothing to hope for beyond this present existence is fairly clear and straightforward. It is obviously to work solely and single-mindedly for earthly benefits. The more civilised and altruistic people who hold this view devote themselves to activities that shall benefit others, not primarily themselves. But there seems to be no valid reason why they should do this. The law of nature appears to be that each individual should take care of his own interests, irrespective of the welfare of others. And in fact, subject to the laws of society, this is just what the materialistic minded person does. His instincts prompt him to it, and there is nothing whatever in nature to suggest to him, that it is a harmful course. So while the rationalistic mode of thought gives us a handful of people who are disinterestedly virtuous, who love goodness for its own sake without any desire for reward, it gives us a far greater number who follow no principle except their own selfish wills, with natural law apparently on their side, for nature itself seems to favour those who can 'get away with it'.

On the other hand, the course for those who believe in a principle of right and wrong, and in a higher objective than worldly gain, while it is clear up to a point and on broad general issues, is very confused when it comes down to details. The major religions of the world all differ on certain points of conduct; and when it becomes a question of the basis of moral rules—the particular world view from which they spring—there is a hopeless disagreement. This is impossible to resolve because there is no manifest common fact of revelation to which they can point as their authority. Such authority as they claim is valid for themselves alone; it does not convince anyone else. And nature does not help them, for it is the most neutral factor of all in the conflict of religious ideas.

If we divide mankind into the followers of the two major creeds, materialism and, as its opposite, theism, we find that the former are much more centralised in their world-view, and in a sense more united than the latter. They have, in fact, a much more solid basis on which to think and act, although necessarily a more restricted one as to final objectives. At the same time they have greater freedom to adapt their course of conduct, since they are not bound by any mandatory beliefs. The single object of materialism, wherever it is found, is to achieve mastery of the physical world by science and technology, and it follows that human values must eventually become subordinated to this end in a materialistic society. Man is to be perfected as a social animal, not as an individual.

On the opposite side of the picture we find a great confusion, a chaos one might say, of opinions unsupported by any one basic and unquestionable fact. The great world-religions have never been in agreement as to the nature of man, his place in the cosmic scheme, or his final goal. The reasons for this are too many to deal with now; it is enough to note the situation as it is. Faith can be very strong; and when it becomes strong enough to exclude reason it becomes bigotry. That is precisely the defect of those world-views that are established entirely on faith. When they cannot accommodate themselves to reason, or adjust themselves to particular aspects of knowledge on their own level, they are bound to become immoderate.

So far, we have glanced at two forms of religion, materialism and theism. Buddhism is radically different from both of them. As a world-view and a way of life it resembles what we commonly term religion, but there all likeness ends. The Buddha Dhamma refuses to fit exclusively into any of our categories of religion, philosophy, metaphysics, ethics and so on. It includes all of them, and its sum total transcends them. Since it also includes in its ontology the world-picture given us by scientific knowledge, it presents a complete and verifiable system of thought, and hence of moral conduct. I say verifiable advisedly, because from whatever point of view we choose to regard it we can find confirmation of its principles in the universe around us.

It is in this, perhaps, that its greatest superiority is manifested, for while, as we have seen, nature itself gives no support to other systems of moral values, everything observable in nature fits in logically with the Buddhist interpretation of the universe. The primal delusion of 'selfhood' is the governing

principle of nature and from it spring all the evils of greed, hatred and delusion which we see all about us in the natural world, and which are certainly not confined to mankind: These factors are mutually supporting, the delusion of the 'self' and its associated craving for self-existence being the mother and father of all sentient life. It is simply to overcome and eradicate these two root conditions of suffering existence that the Buddha directed his Teaching. Hence we have in the Dhamma a system of morality that does not have to draw support from any source outside its own effective world-view, and does not have to reconcile an unmoral creation with the idea of a moral creator.

But this is only the negative starting-point of a very positive and constructive train of thought set in motion by the Buddha's discovery. The Buddha began with first principles, in the sense that he took known facts, not hypotheses, as the point of departure in his enquiry; and from these known facts he disclosed underlying causes and the way to remove them. The first and fundamental fact of life is suffering. Do what we may, either as materialists or idealists, we cannot remove suffering entirely from life. A sentient being must have the capacity both to enjoy and to suffer; he cannot have the one without the other, for either without the other would be meaningless. The graduated modes of mental and bodily sensation can only exist between these two polarities, pleasure and pain. So birth in any realm has to be associated with suffering as an integral part of its nature. And the suffering is infinitely more frequent, more inevitable, than the pleasure.

Then why is it that we live at all? What is the reason why, having been born, we continue to live on, no matter what sorrows, injustices, misfortunes and disillusionments we encounter? There can be only one answer: clearly, it is because we desire to live. Our desire for life is the desire to continue experiencing sensations; to continue being conscious of sense-reactions, to continue being aware of the world and of people about us. Therefore, the root cause of living is the life-affirming desire and craving for renewed experiences.

This is the second of the Four Noble Truths discovered by the Buddha: that life conjoined with suffering is caused by craving. It led naturally to the third: namely, that as there is an end implicit in all beginnings, there must be the possibility of an end of craving, and so an end to the clinging to life that causes repeated rebirth. This end is the cessation of the fires of craving,

ill will and delusion, and from all the effects that arise from them, and it is called Nibbāna. The Fourth Noble Truth gives us the means of attaining Nibbāna, which is the Noble Eightfold Path embracing *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*—morality, mental concentration and insight wisdom. It is *visuddhi magga*; the path of purity, and also *majjhima paṭipadā*, the middle path between the two extreme views we have been discussing.

This is but a brief summary of the Teaching of the All Enlightened One, which in its completeness is the most rational and consistent plan for living that has ever been shown to the world. If we are to call it philosophy, we must realise that it goes far beyond philosophy; if religion, that it is based on facts and verifiable conclusions, not upon ancient mythology. It makes no appeal to blind faith, and cannot be overthrown by the enlargement of scientific knowledge. It stands lofty and unshakable through the ages, and is as fresh today as when the Buddha first proclaimed it.

The Noble Eightfold Path is a practical way of thought and action, not a mere theory. It is no use studying abhidhamma and ignoring the five precepts; it profits us nothing to practise mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) unless we use it as an instrument to clear our minds of self-delusion and the faults of character that arise from it. To think in terms of anattā will not help us if we still continue to act as though there were a 'self', and that 'self' the centre of the universe, harbouring pride, resentment and greed connected with something which we say does not exist. The knowledge of anattā must be something more than a theoretical concept or a convention of speech; it must be realised, so completely in the inner structure of our minds that it colours our whole outlook, and from that our actions. To follow the Noble Eightfold Path successfully we must not cherish delusions about ourselves; that is one of the first essentials.

Applied in this way, Buddhism enables us to set our thinking straight, which is the first step towards wisdom. There is altogether too much confused and contradictory thinking in the world today; as there has been all through human history. The mere fact of being a Buddhist will not correct this; we have to use the Teaching of the Buddha intelligently and constructively. We have to learn to see life exactly as it is, and not obscure our vision with rose-tinted spectacles that falsify the picture. There is no escapism in the Buddha Dhamma. We are not invited to turn our backs on the uncomfortable truths of life, but to face them boldly,

march straight ahead, and come out triumphantly on the other side as conquerors. That is the meaning of '*appamādena sampādettha*'—'Strive with earnestness'.

We have only just entered on the 2500th year of the Buddha sāsana, and this is a great opportunity for the whole world to hear the Buddha's doctrine of deliverance. There has never been a time when it was more needed, to put an end to the doubts and perplexities that beset mankind. It is the privilege of the Buddhist peoples of Asia to show forth its greatness and uniqueness, and there is only one way to do this—the way the Buddha himself commended. That is by following His teaching in all the actions of our daily lives, both for our own benefit and that of others. Those who are fond of old proverbs will not need to be reminded that 'example is better than precept'. The whole aim of Buddhists now should be to follow the precepts, and thus become an example.

Radio Talk, Rangoon, August 23, 1956.

6. THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

By walking thou canst not the world's end gain;
Nor, if ye win it not, be freed from pain.
But truly, he whose wisdom is profound,
Who rightly sees the world—by him 'tis found.
He that has lived in holiness shall know
With mind serene the ending of life's round,
Nor to this world nor other long to go.

Rohitassa Sutta SN 2:26
Verse translation by the author

Mankind, pondering and disputing, has been engaged for so long in trying to find an answer to the enigma of existence, and so many first-class minds have been devoted to the task, that had the problem been open to solution by the intellect alone we should certainly have been furnished with the definitive blueprint of our being, beyond all doubt or conjecture, many centuries ago. From the time when prehistoric myth became merged into an attempt to give a rational account of the universe the questions, 'What is life? How did it originate? Has it a purpose, and if so, what is it?' have haunted the imagination; yet still for most people they remain unanswered. Reason has offered a wide range of ingenious possibilities from the speculations of the Eleatics down to the more sophisticated theories of the modern epiphenomenalists, but so far it has failed to provide any reasonable explanation that is not open to equally reasonable objections. And whilst reason has failed, its alternative, supernatural revelation, has shown itself equally contradictory and inconclusive, and has suffered an even worse defeat. Its historical record has weighed heavily against it because of the disastrous influence it has often exerted in human affairs. The private revelations of mystics, by their exclusively subjective nature, can never offer more than an insecure foothold for faith in those who have not directly shared them, and a doubtful faith is the father of fanaticism.

The record of man's speculative thought down the centuries has come to resemble a maze of tracks in a boundless desert. The tracks can be identified by their characteristics; they are the tracks of religion, of philosophy, and obliterating many of these, the more recent tracks of science. For the most part the tracks of

religion go round in circles. Beginning as myth they continue as myth hardened into dogma, and so go over the same ground in endless repetition. Other tracks wander along aimlessly, drawn in this direction and that by new theories, new discoveries and new contacts, their path variable as the wind. These are the tracks of philosophy, the imprints of man's restless, inquiring mind—a mind which, despite its courage and adventurousness, has only the old material to work over and so is reduced to combining ideas in endless permutations, seeking to reconcile the irreconcilable and always failing to reach an end. Then, superimposed upon these there are the imprints of scientific thought, which has invaded philosophy to an ever-increasing extent, but which at the same time discourages any concern with ultimate issues, or with questions of value and purpose. Time and again the older tracks of philosophy and religion are seen to have crossed one another, and where they met there are signs of a scuffle. Too often, there is blood on the sands of history.

So it has been ever since man emerged as an animal capable of abstract thinking. Now we have entered a phase in which supernaturalism has given way almost entirely to scientific knowledge, and the approach to the problem is somewhat different. Yet science has not brought us any nearer to the answers. The tracks of thought still remain indecisive, their beginning a mystery, their end a mark of interrogation. Present day knowledge with its unprecedented accumulation of facts concerning the physical universe and the constitution of living organisms, has provided philosophers with a vast stock of new material to take into account, but so far the result has only been to give the mind more than it can handle. Far from clarifying the general picture, the effect has been to overcrowd the canvas. To correlate the various specialized branches of knowledge is a stupendous task, and one that is further complicated by the areas of uncertainty in each of them. The non-specialist is seldom in a position to be able to separate theory from established fact in the scientific disciplines, and this is particularly so in the case of those which relate to the life-processes, such as genetics and biochemistry, and are therefore the most relevant to the inquiry.

Besides this, the facts that science presents often seem to point to opposite conclusions. Despite the great advances that have been made in physics, technology is still working to a great extent with factors that are not completely understood, or even satisfactorily defined. There are, for example, certain radiations

forming the basic structure of the universe which appear both as waves and as particles, although logically they cannot be both at the same time. It is not even certain whether the expression 'at the same time' has any meaning in a universe where events can hardly be said to be simultaneous at all, and where the image of a star seen from a distance of many thousands of light years may be nothing more than the ghost of something that ceased to exist in space before man appeared on the earth. Expanding knowledge tends to cut us adrift from the apparent security of empirical facts, and in many ways the nature of thought itself has been brought into question.

There are people who entertain the hope that at some time in the not-too-distant future we may be able to get final answers to questions that have tormented men for generations by feeding all the relevant data into an electronic brain. But that hope is founded on two very large assumptions: first, that all the necessary data will eventually become available, and secondly that man can devise a machine more capable than its creator. So far, the most advanced electronic computer has not been able to do more in the field of mathematics than a human mind can do. It only does it more quickly. Even there it adds nothing new; there have been abnormal human brains that could extract cube roots with the same speed and accuracy. If a new and basically different mode of thinking is needed it must be sought for elsewhere than in electronic machines.

Does this mean that we shall never know any more about the ultimate things than we do now? The conclusions to which science moves at present are, in regard to the older beliefs, chiefly negative. They tell us what is no longer believable, but do not suggest alternatives or encourage any positive inferences. Yet in the quest for truth science contributes something of greater value than the facts it provides. It offers a method of inquiry, a disciplined use of the facts at hand, which is more productive than the pursuit of random theories. It indicates a method by which the data of experience, no matter how limited they may be, can be taken as starting points for a journey into unknown territory, and how from a few observed facts a general principle can be deduced. Furthermore, it includes as an important part of its method the readiness to discard whatever theory is found to be in disagreement with the observed phenomena, and this iconoclastic function of science points to a truth of the highest significance, namely, that in the search for reality what is most

essential is not the gathering and tabulating of facts, but the understanding of those facts in their true relation to one another, and the preliminary stripping away of hitherto accepted ideas until we are left with nothing more than the bare bones of experience, but that experience of the most fundamental and universal kind. Science works on theories, certainly, but is prepared to abandon them when they fall flat; it does not build model cosmologies from selected materials.

This method, which has been responsible for everything we can claim to have derived from our knowledge of the physical universe, is the only profitable one to follow when we seek to enlarge our understanding beyond the world of immediate sensory perception. And it is towards the possibility of such an extension that the psychological sciences are now turning. There is an increasing recognition of the truth that the world of external phenomena is only a part—and by no means the most important part—of man's total experience. What goes on within ourselves, in our psychological responses and motivations, and also on the intuitive levels of the mind, is being given the same analytical scrutiny as that which is turned on the objective features of the universe. For the first time, scientists are making a serious study of the mental processes, conscious and unconscious. They are giving equal attention to the paranormal aspects of the mind, such as the phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance and the recollection of previous lives. From this may develop an entirely new approach to the problem of being.

A new one, that is, so far as the West is concerned. But nothing in mental science, or in philosophy, is really new. More than six hundred years before the Christian era, the tracks of speculative thought had reached a stage of the utmost complexity, in India. There we find the familiar arguments of mysticism versus rationalism, of empiricism, pragmatism, logical positivism, the opposing views of 'eternalism' and 'annihilationism', and of so many intermediate doctrines that it can be safely said that later philosophers have been able to produce nothing that was not a duplication or variant of one or the other of them. When we examine the sixty-two *ditthi*s or theories regarding the nature of life and the universe, which were current in the time of Gotama Buddha and described by him in the Brahmajāla Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, we find there the seeds of all later thought, the archetype of every idea that has appeared in philosophy between Plotinus and Kierkegaard. That some of

them were the doctrines of established schools which had been in existence long before the birth of the Buddha is evident from the accounts of the Buddha's own search for illumination, for on renouncing the world the prince-ascetic Siddhattha first placed himself under two teachers from among the many sects that were already laying claim to ultimate knowledge. Those teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, were not logicians but exponents of yoga. As such they had their philosophy, but its final vindication was to be sought in the subjective realm, in an intensified perception outside the scope of formal reasoning. By the practice of *jhāna*, or mental absorption, they had in fact succeeded in raising consciousness to a higher power.

But great as were the achievements of these two eminent yogis, the ascetic Gotama did not find the full enlightenment he sought in their systems. Neither did he reach it by way of the extreme asceticism to which he turned later. He found, on the contrary, that an entirely new mode of approach was needed if he were to break through the tangle of conceptual thinking on the one hand, and sublimated consciousness on the other. By the traditional yogic methods, he had gone beyond the world of forms, but not beyond that of ideas or the mere suspension of ideas. He found that the degree of illumination these methods gave was far from that of absolute knowledge and liberation. Thrown back on his own resources, with no longer any guiding principle except what he might find within himself, he returned in thought to the original impulse of his quest. Its beginning, significantly enough, lay in a very early experience he had known, of an intuitive kind. He had been sitting watching his father, the king, carrying out the ritual of the spring ploughing. His attention had been caught and held by the flocks of birds that followed in the wake of the plough; they were eagerly scratching in the newly-turned furrows for worms and insects. Driven by hunger, the all-demanding hunger that is ever present in nature, and excited by the sight of their living prey, birds of all kinds were quarrelling and fighting one another, a noisy, turbulent mass of feathered bodies, striking and tearing with beak and claw, unmercifully.

A common enough sight, and one that carries no special meaning for most people. But to the young Siddhattha, it had been a troubling experience. So indeed it should be to anyone who believes in an overruling power, a Creator, whose chief attribute is love. Birds—among the most delicate and beautiful of nature's offspring, creatures so light and ethereal that when man

thinks of spiritual beings it is with the wings of birds and something of their morning ecstasy that he pictures them—those same birds that have been the poet's inspiration and the nature lover's joy, at close quarters are seen to be fully as rapacious and as cruel towards smaller creatures and to their own species as the most ferocious of the larger animals. By such a slight transformation the winged angel becomes the winged tiger.

Yet, as the young Siddhattha saw even then, it could not be otherwise. Birds had to satisfy the urge to live, and for their food they had to prey on others and compete with others. So it was throughout nature, and from whatever particular the generalization was drawn it expanded into the same universal truth. Not only is nature indifferent to cruelty and pain, but it actually imposes them upon all living creatures as the condition and price of their existence. To inflict or to suffer; or both to inflict and to suffer—that is the law of life.

The peculiar insights of childhood, which often have an extraordinary clarity and depth, are too commonly lost when we become submerged in the world's incessant and implacable demands. As we accumulate knowledge we lose percipience; we know the fact, but its true inner meaning is estranged from us. So, regardless of the moral indifference of nature, men build and try to maintain systems of ethics, in the comfortable belief that in some way they harmonize with natural law and an underlying principle of goodness, call it God or what you will. But while doing so they are walking a tightrope stretched across a mocking abyss of negation. Woe to him who looks into that dark gulf and tries to find there the features of an omnipotent, all-merciful ruler of the universe! If he sees anything of the sort it will be only in his imagination, the reflection of an idea instilled into him by tradition. If he sees nothing, he risks losing his balance. Unless he is strong enough to face this void, it is better for the tight-rope walker to keep his gaze fixed elsewhere, on some defined point in the sphere of action, and trust solely to the labyrinth organs, his own interior instruments of balance. His innate sense of right and wrong must be his support. It is not always a trustworthy sense, but for most intelligent people today it is all that is left. As for the theologian, in order to remain on good terms with the birds, he has to forget their private lives and admit only the idealized convention; let the angels have their wings, but not the beak or claws.

To most thinking people now, there is no longer any question of reconciling theology with reality. Not many,

however, have the courage to face the facts and say, with the Existentialists, that "the universe is absurd, because there is no reason for it to exist—no God has created it to declare his glory or serve as a dwelling-place for his creatures—and because nothing in it has any specific function to fulfil. Man has no destiny or privileged position, and not even the consciousness, which he has of himself, can save him from the universal absurdity of all created beings.¹ That disquieting knowledge lies like a cancerous growth in the background of man's mind, driven inwards yet injecting its poison into all that he says and does and believes in. Rationalism, humanitarianism and all the other substitutes that have been devised in place of the spiritual life lost to mankind are all essentially meaningless in face of the futility man feels, his sense of utter helplessness in an alien world. The Egyptians found no difficulty in worshipping a dead god, but modern man can only worship life.

When Siddhattha arrived at the most critical point of his quest, when all the traditional paths had been followed to their uttermost limits and still the truth beyond all truths had not been found, he recollected his early experience and what it had revealed to him. He remembered too that it had led him to another experience, on a different level of consciousness. At that time he had delved for the answer to the problem into the deepest layers of his being, for he knew instinctively that what he was seeing in nature was a true reflection of his own condition as a living, sentient organism doomed, like all others, to unceasing conflict. Each of us stands alone with each one's destiny, yet in another sense each is deeply involved with all others. If the solution to the world mystery was to be found anywhere it must be in the fullest, most intimate understanding of one's own nature.

So he turned his mind back to that incident in early life which had shown him his true path, to the glimpse he had had of a knowledge he possessed before creed and tradition claimed him. After his Enlightenment, the Buddha described it in these words:

I recalled how once I was seated under the shade of a jambu tree while my father, Suddhodana, was ploughing the royal furrow, and having put aside desires and impure states of mind, yet cognizing and reflecting in the bliss born of detachment, I attained the first mental absorption. Could it be

1. Jean-Paul Sartre: *A Literary and Political Study* by Philip Thody, 1960

that this was the way to realization? With that thought the clear consciousness came to me: 'Yes, indeed, this is the way to realization.

Now, the first mental absorption (*jhāna*) is reached by purifying and tranquillizing the mind, which can be done by the practice of *ānāpāna-sati*, contemplation of the breathing. The state of tranquillity is accompanied by joy and rapture, and in this *jhāna* refined and calmed thought-conception and sustained thought are still present though no longer engaged with a multitude of objects, but exclusively in the subject of meditation. Having risen from that absorption, the mind will be calm and concentrated, and being no longer disturbed by desires of the more active kind, it becomes able to examine the factors of experience with detachment, and so enjoys a new clarity of perception. It is as though the rippled surface of a pool were to become smooth and still. When that happens two things follow: the surface reflects external things more accurately, and at the same time it becomes possible to see through the surface to the depths below.

This is only the initial stage of the *jhānic* consciousness, which is progressive; but it opens the way to the succeeding levels. In these, the second, third and fourth absorptions, consciousness becomes more and more refined as the sensations of joy, the bodily perceptions, the reflex-perceptions and the remaining elements of self-awareness are discarded step by step. When the ascetic, Siddhattha, seated under the Bodhi Tree, remembered his first *jhānic* experience, he at once applied himself to inducing it once more, starting from the point of the first *jhāna* that he had reached spontaneously on that occasion. Then, having attained tranquillity, he went on to apply mental concentration to the analytical examination of his own interior world—the body, the mind and the mental objects. The technique of making the mind tranquil, known as *Samatha bhāvanā*, is the prelude to the cultivation of direct insight, or *vipassanā-bhāvanā*. It is in the latter form of meditation that the mind finally penetrates the Four Noble Truths and so comes to distinguish reality from illusion. The ultimate truth is then seen 'face to face'. From being descriptive truths, that are merely grasped intellectually, the Four Noble Truths become known and understood and felt as certainties, on a new level of realization. In a quite indescribable way they become *experienced*, just as we experience the sensations within our own bodies, our thoughts and emotions—indeed, with an even greater force and reality than these.

Thus it was by intuitive penetration that Siddhattha attained Buddhahood after all other means had failed. He stood outside the limitations of the consciousness centred in an illusory self and was able to see through and beyond the cosmic processes, past the boundaries of space and time. At last, after those six years of arduous, agonizing and fruitless austerities, he was able to say, "I discovered that profound truth, so difficult to perceive, difficult to comprehend, tranquilizing and sublime; *which is not to be grasped by mere reasoning*, and is visible only to the wise (Majjhima Nikāya 26).

The truth he had penetrated was the fourfold division of knowledge, the basis of all that is comprehended in the term *ñānadassana*, insight-wisdom. Expressed as the Four Noble Truths, it comes first in the Buddha's teaching and summarizes everything that follows. Concerning the first declaration of these truths, the Buddha said:

The Perfect One, O Bhikkhus, the Fully Enlightened One, has established at Isipatana the supreme Kingdom of Truth, which none can overthrow—neither ascetic nor Brahmā nor heavenly being nor fiend, nor god nor anyone whomsoever in the universe—by proclaiming, pointing out, revealing, setting up, explaining and making clear the Four Noble Truths.

And what are these Four Noble Truths? They are the Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Truth of the Noble Path that leads to the Cessation of Suffering.

Now, these truths, as we shall see, are something quite different from the usual bases of religious belief; so different, in fact, that it has been questioned whether Buddhism is a religion at all. It has been disputed whether it is a philosophy, a code of ethics, a religion or a science. The fact is that it contains all of these and transcends them. Superlatively, it is the science of the mind. The Four Noble Truths crystallize the uniqueness of Buddhism and of the Buddha, for as the Teacher said:

So long, O Bhikkhus, as the absolutely true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths were not quite clear to me, so long I was not sure whether I had attained that Supreme Enlightenment which is unsurpassed in all the world ... But as soon as the absolutely true knowledge and insight as regards these Four Noble Truths had become perfectly clear to me, there arose in me the assurance that I had attained to that supreme, unsurpassed Enlightenment.

7. DIALOGUES ON THE DHAMMA

I

Mr. Thompson: Good evening, sir, I have seen you several times on my visits to this temple, and have been told that you are an *upāsaka*. That means a lay follower of the Buddha, doesn't it?

The Upāsaka: Yes. Is there anything I can do for you?

Mr. T: I was wondering whether you would mind answering a few questions for me. You see, I have been reading some books on Buddhism and find its doctrines very appealing. But there are a number of points that are not quite clear to me, and I should be very grateful for any help you could give.

U: Why, certainly, I hope you will ask me freely about anything you wish to know. I'll try my best to answer your questions.

Mr. T: That is very good of you.

U: Not at all. We consider it a great privilege and a deed of merit to give instruction in the Dhamma when it is asked for. So go right ahead and ask me anything you like. All I ask in return is that you keep an open mind and give serious thought to what I shall say, because the doctrines of Buddhism are not dogmas, to be absorbed without reflection, but universal truths which, to be of benefit, must be understood in all their implications. Buddhism invites, indeed, I would say, insists upon a critical attitude of mind, yet one that is sufficiently flexible to accept a new idea when it is shown to be in accordance with reason, observation and experience.

Mr. T: Yes, that much I have gathered from my reading. So, sir, as you have given me licence to question freely I shall start with a point that has been bothering me. I hope you won't mind if I put it very bluntly?

U: I assure you I shall not mind in the least. But blunt questions sometimes elicit sharp answers, you know! So you must not mind that, either.

Mr. T: Good! I can see by your smile that we shall understand each other very well. Since I want to get at the truth I would rather that we spoke straight to the point—as philosophers rather than as diplomats! Well then, my first question is this: Isn't Buddhism a selfish doctrine since its aim is perfectionist, with *arahantship*² as the goal?

U: Put like that, your question sounds as though you consider that the aim of making oneself perfect must necessarily be a selfish one, but I don't think that is quite what you mean, surely?

Mr. T: Not exactly. I mean, shouldn't one try to help others to gain perfection, as well as striving for it oneself?

U: There is a twofold answer to that, and you can place the emphasis on whichever aspect of it you like better. To begin with, one who is trying to make oneself perfect *does* help others. Not only by example, which is the strongest influence of all, but also by teaching. Buddhist monks have always had it as one of their functions (although not necessarily a duty) to teach the Dhamma to lay people, especially to children. In the Buddhist countries, formerly, bhikkhus were the chief educators, and they always gave first place to religious instruction, as being that which ultimately is of the greatest benefit to mankind. But as you know, Buddhism does not point to any external means for attaining "salvation." In the end, we all have to strive individually and reach the goal individually. Beyond a certain point no one can help another. Even a Buddha can only show the Way; he cannot tread it for us. Furthermore, one who is himself still sunk in the mire of ignorance cannot lift another person out of it, or even render the same help as can one who is standing on firm ground. A Buddha or an arahant is one who is on firm ground, and it is he who can do most to help others out of the quagmire. So if we want to render the most effective aid it is surely our first task to get out ourselves. Until we have done that, we may be able to extend a little help by way of teaching what we know to those who know less, but that should never be allowed to obstruct our first aim, which must be to liberate ourselves.

Mr. T: Yes, I see your meaning. I suppose to understand Buddhism properly one has to give up thinking in terms of "leading others to God."

U: Precisely. We can light a lamp for others here and there as we go along the path ourselves, and every conscientious Buddhist will do so, by making use of whatever opportunity comes his way of making the Dhamma known to others. It is then up to the others to take advantage of the light or not, as they wish. Truth cannot be associated with compulsion. It has to be accepted freely and followed freely. We cannot drill others into perfection—only

2. *Arahantship*: the fourth and last stage of purification.

ourselves. But I do want you to realise that to have attained perfection—the complete eradication of ignorance and craving—means to have destroyed selfhood and egotism. So how can it be selfish?

Mr. T: I must confess I hadn't thought about it in that way. It is true, of course. But I was also thinking of social obligations and relationships. Is the doctrine of "withdrawal from the world" and renunciation compatible with social development and "team spirit"?

U: If one were to withdraw from the world out of a spirit of misanthropy, as certain hermits have done and still do, certainly it would be a negative act, a repudiation of society and one's responsibilities towards it. But in a civilisation given over to materialism and competitiveness it is a good thing that some people should point the way to a simpler and healthier way of life, by renunciation. When I say healthier I mean just that—a life that is not dominated by greed for possessions, for sense-gratification or for power over others. It is these things that have brought our present civilisation to the brink of destruction, without giving any real, lasting happiness to anyone in the process. In Buddhism, renunciation of the world is a positive act, not a mere negation. It leads to a life that is sane, balanced and integrated to the highest degree. If people purify their lives, live in accordance with sound ethical principles and exert themselves to get rid of selfishness and the aggressive instincts that arise from it, then social progress follows automatically. Those who practise renunciation introduce new and more wholesome values into life, and their influence is felt permeating society. In fact, this is the only true way to bring about genuine social reform. All improvements in human life must come from within, as an organic growth of human consciousness, out of the developing sensitiveness and refinement of man's nature. It is useless trying to impose reforms of any kind from without, by laws and acts of government. On the contrary, such legal enactments have force and validity only when they are an expression of the real character of the people. The goodness of society is the goodness of the people.

Mr. T: You mean that every society is just an extension of the personality of those composing it? And that the mass personality can be influenced for good by the example and teaching of those who reject the lower values in favour of higher ones?

U: You have put it very well. Our civilisation is primarily a commercial one; it is built up on the intensification and multiplication of "wants." But this encouragement to perpetual *wanting* of one thing after another is nothing but the systematic cultivation of discontent. That in turn breeds conflict—and so we get crime within society and hatred and suspicion among societies. And the more man is integrated with society, the harder it is for him to withstand its pressures. Being forced to accept the prevailing values, he strengthens them by his acceptance, and so there are reciprocal movements, from society inwards and from the individual outwards into society, which accelerate the trends, good or bad, of the age. Now all these mass movements tend to flow along the lower channels of human nature, the grooves worn by greed, hatred and delusion. This is a state of things that can be corrected only by giving the individual opportunity to cultivate detachment, and by setting before him, in place of examples of successful acquisitive competition, examples which prove that our real happiness lies in our capacity for doing without, of being self-sufficient. It is not expected that every man should practise total renunciation, but those who do so help others, by their example, to loosen the bonds of craving and so create a healthier, sounder type of society.

Mr. T: Then what about social service?

U: Well, it is a good thing, of course, and Buddhism encourages it. But even social work may be a failure if it is not grounded on a genuine love for one's fellow-men. If it is not inspired by a real altruism, which stands as the opposite to a desire to win esteem for oneself or to impose one's will on others, it can do more harm than good. And even good intentions are not enough, without sympathy and understanding. That is why we find so much well-meant blundering in the world. But if people improve, social conditions improve—that is the teaching of Buddhism. As for the "team spirit" you mentioned just now, surely it springs up most naturally and strongly where there is least selfishness, least acquisitiveness and individual competition, and most desire to work for a goal beyond that of self. Buddhism maintains that the world should always be guided by men of wisdom and insight, and it has always been from the ranks of those who have renounced the world—the entirely disinterested spirits—that such men have been drawn. They are the guiding lights of humanity, and a world bereft of them would be in spiritual chaos.

Mr. T: But shouldn't the Sangha devote itself explicitly, at least in part, to social service? Why doesn't it do so?

U: Well, you know, making oneself perfect, in the Buddhist sense, is really a full-time job! And that is what a bhikkhu really takes the robes for. Maybe he does not expect to achieve it in this life—few do, in fact—but his main task is to cleanse his mind of the impurities as much as he possibly can, and that, if it is done intensively, leaves little time for anything else. It is not a thing that can be done in the midst of distractions, and no social work can possibly be undertaken without getting oneself involved in distracting situations and becoming burdened with cares—to say nothing of the feelings of aversion that are likely to arise if one is engaged in a battle against man's greed, stupidity and callousness. The bhikkhu's social work consists in teaching the Dhamma, and that is the greatest contribution anyone can make to the welfare of others. If the laymen, who from choice are still in contact with worldly things, take the Dhamma to heart, they will look after its social application. One cannot sincerely practise the meditation on *mettā*, universal benevolence, without feeling the urge to give it some practical form. The bhikkhu plays his part in social service by helping to make good lay Buddhists. If he achieves that, everything else follows.

Mr. T: You said just now that it is not necessarily a bhikkhu's duty to teach the Dhamma.

U: In the strictest sense there are only two duties enjoined on a bhikkhu, the *dve-dhurāni* or twofold charge of the bhikkhu's life. One is *gantha-dhura*, the task of studying the Dhamma as it is written in the texts. The other is *vipassanā-dhura*, the practice of meditation leading to insight. Any instruction that a bhikkhu gives to others, as the outcome of his mastery of either sphere of the monk's endeavour, is something additional, which he takes on out of kindness to his pupils or lay supporters. He is not forced to teach, simply because it is not everyone who is capable of teaching, even though he may know the subject himself. There may be impediments which prevent his preaching. This, incidentally, is one of the distinctions which show that a bhikkhu is not a "priest." But the Buddha did indeed impress certain other obligations on the monks, if they were able to carry them out, and if occasion arose. One was the duty of the bhikkhus to take care of their companions who were sick; another was to give hospitality to visiting bhikkhus and to look after their needs. And he often

emphasised, as the Vinaya shows, that the monks were to respect the convenience of their lay supporters in the matter of meals and the other necessities provided for them. For example, the rule of not eating solid food after midday was instituted by the Master, among other reasons, to prevent undue inconvenience to the householders. And of course it is the bhikkhu's duty to observe faithfully the 227 rules of the Sangha. This in itself is no light obligation. It can only be carried out consistently by those who have given up all other duties of a more worldly kind.

Mr. T: Yes, I see the truth of that. Now, I am interested in what you remarked about not being "priests." Can you tell me what other distinction marks the difference between them?

U: A priest is someone who is authorized to act as a mediator between human beings and a god or gods. The bhikkhu is not a functionary of that kind at all. Hence he is not obliged to officiate at any ceremonies, offer up any prayers, give any absolution or perform any sacrificial rites. Buddhism does not recognize any of those offices of a priesthood. All ceremonials, rituals and ecclesiastical performances, designed to awe and impress the multitude, are *sīlabbataparāmāsa*—useless observances. Buddhism has no place for them.

Mr. T: Thank you. You have certainly cleared up for me the matter of the bhikkhu's role in social progress. I have always felt that if the spirit of love and service can be strengthened in the hearts of the people, it must result in the betterment of conditions everywhere. But I wasn't quite sure what part the religious ought to play in translating thought into action. Now I have a question of a different kind—one touching on doctrine.

U: Well, what is it?

Mr. T: It's this: Doesn't the Buddhist conception of heaven and hell as rewards and punishments amount essentially to the same as Christianity teaches?

U: In the sense of moral retribution, yes, there is a similarity. But consider the differences; they are far greater.

Mr. T: In what way?

U: Surely the most obvious difference is that the Christian heaven is an eternal reward, and its hell an eternal punishment, whereas the heavens and hells—or states of purgation would be a better term—taught by Buddhism are impermanent like all other conditioned states. Buddhism does not teach that it is just to inflict

an eternity of torment on a being for a wrong action that was limited, both as to its carrying-out and in its effects, by earthly time. Even if a man were to be the worst possible sinner all through his life, it would hardly justify consigning him to hell for all eternity. And it is not in human nature to be so consistently bad. Likewise, no ordinary man during his lifetime could be so free from wrongdoing as to deserve eternal bliss in a heaven, without some further purification. And since moral purification can be achieved only by and through the mind and volitional action and not merely by undergoing a period of physical torture, it can only come about through repeated trial and development in the world of sense-desires—that is to say, through rebirth again and again in this and other worlds. Buddhism teaches that “punishment” is exactly commensurate, in duration and degree, with the wrong action that has brought it about. The same applies to the happy results of good actions. When the results of the good or bad kamma are exhausted, the being leaves the state of reward or punishment and is re-born elsewhere. But we do not really like to use the words “punishment” and “reward,” because these results come about as the operation of natural law—a law which is quite impersonal and at the same time inescapable. They are not inflicted or awarded at the whim of a deity who can forgive or increase punishments arbitrarily. The law of moral retribution is an automatic process. That is another very important difference between the Buddhist and the Christian concepts. It is important because it does away with the idea of vengeance in justice. If there were a God who was omnipotent he could forgive and wash out all sins; if he does not, his justice is only another word for revenge. But Buddhism shows that it is the individual himself who passes judgement, in the very act of performing a deed. It is he who sends himself to heaven, or consigns himself to a state of suffering, not a jealous and revengeful God, who is himself impervious to harm from his creatures.

Mr. T: Then do Buddhists really believe in hell? I don't!

U: Whether one believes in it or not has no real bearing on the principle involved, which is that of moral retribution. To believe in “rewards”—that is, heaven—but not in “punishment” is to make good and bad, right and wrong, meaningless words. If you reject hell, you must reject heaven likewise. If you are prepared to do that, well and good—but you are left with nothing more than materialism. That vile and odious crimes against humanity

should go unpunished without any evil consequence whatever to their authors is incompatible with any concept of right and wrong. Now it is a fact that many Christians have more or less had to discard the idea of hell, simply because the concept of eternal punishment, no matter how terrible the wrongdoing, is so manifestly unjust, as I have shown. But Buddhists have no need to reshape their Teacher's words to fit more humane modern ideas. Jesus Christ spoke of eternal damnation, of "the everlasting fire."³ The Buddha spoke of states of suffering in which beings, on account of their evil deeds, may be reborn for periods varying from a day to an aeon. If we do not accept the principle of moral retribution to this extent, we ought logically to close all prisons and abolish all punitive laws on earth. But I do not know of anyone except of a few extremists who advocate that measure.

Mr. T: No doubt that is so. But can one really suppose, in this twentieth century, that there is a place of fiery punishment situated somewhere in the bowels of the earth? Has not the belief in hell come about because primitive man regarded the craters of volcanoes and seismic fissures in the earth as being the gateways to the supposed infernal regions?

U: Possibly. And it is just possible that the Buddha when he spoke of niraya was making use of the current ideas of his time to illustrate an important moral truth. However that may be, we do not have to ascribe a geographical location to either hell or heaven. They are states we can recognize around us and within us. Wherever people are suffering extremes of physical or mental pain, there is a kind of hell. Wherever they are transported by a passing phase of happiness, there is a type of heaven. The man whose mind is darkened by the insanity of hate is in hell, while he who is temporarily lifted outside himself by the ecstasy of religious joy, or even one who is momentarily lost in the contemplation of something beautiful, is in heaven. What are these but states of mind? And what, if it comes to that, is this world of our senses but a state of mind?

Mr. T: You mean that all of it is only a subjective experience?

U: Not quite that, either. The world has an objective reality, of a conditional and relative kind, and so have the heavens and hells. But to the extent to which they correspond to states of mind, this world itself can take on the aspect of either a heaven or a hell.

3. Math. 25:41, 9:42-48.

Buddhism avoids both the materialist and the subjectivist or idealist interpretations of the world. But anyone who has seriously thought about the implications of modern physics can scarcely deny the possibility of other planes of existence—spheres of being that are in every respect as “real” on their own level as our present one is for us. That is what most thoughtful Buddhists today believe in, and it is strictly in accordance with the Master’s teaching. And, by the way, do you really consider that the theory that the belief in hell arose in the primitive mind from the observation of volcanic fires, and nothing else, is a fully adequate explanation?

Mr. T: Yes, it seems very reasonable.

U: But don’t forget that Dante’s inferno had its frozen hell, Cocytus, as well as a burning one—just as Buddhism has! In fact, the visions of hells and heavens described by the poets and mystics of all religions bear a surprising likeness to one another, despite all the doctrinal differences that surround them.

Mr. T: Now that you mention it, it does seem rather suggestive. Swedenborg, I remember, claimed to have seen some very gruesome nether worlds in the course of his astral explorations. Would you say that his experiences were genuine ones, not hallucinations?

U: Why not? All kinds of people have had such experiences, and Buddhism does not claim to have the monopoly of knowledge regarding other states of saṃsāric existence. What it does claim is to have the sole means of gaining release from the saṃsāric planes—that is, the Noble Eightfold Path.

Mr. T: Since we are on the subject of doctrine, is *avijjā*, ignorance, the first cause in Buddhism? There must be a first cause, mustn’t there?

U: In a consistent system of causality, such as that taught by Buddhism, there cannot be a first cause. There cannot be a something which arises spontaneously out of nothing, for if such causeless arising were possible, the entire system would be invalidated. Furthermore, true causal relationships exist only in a temporal sequence. But we do not consider *avijjā* as being a cause in this temporal relationship sense. It is a conditioning factor. In the formula of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*)⁴ ignorance is the supporting factor of *taṇhā*, or craving, and these two in combination bring about the other supporting factors, some of which are co-existing auxiliary causes. Nothing can stand by itself

as sufficient cause; it must always combine with something else in supportive co-ordinate relationship. When it is said that “dependent upon ignorance arise kamma formations (*saṅkhāra*)” it is implied that the eighth link of the process, craving, is also present. So, when ignorance is eliminated, craving disappears at the same time, and the other factors, grasping (fastening on to life), the process of becoming, rebirth and decay-and-death consequently cease to arise. That is how the entire process can be brought to an end. But as to a beginning—a first origination in time—there could not have been one, for nothing can spring up uncaused, yet proceed to function as a cause. There could not have been any time when this process of coming-to-be did not exist. *Avijjā* is placed first in the formula only because in explaining the process a start has to be made at some point, and it is convenient to fix on ignorance because it is the nearest approach we can make to define the fundamental and ubiquitous characteristic which makes all the other factors operate. Once we recognize that without ignorance there could be no craving, we are able to appreciate the part that ignorance plays in producing the link that follows it, namely, kamma-formations. In reality, *avijjā* and *taṇhā* are both present along with all the other links that are named subsequently.

Mr. T: Then Buddhism maintains that there was no first cause?

U: Yes, and not only Buddhism. Some outstanding philosophers of our own time are agreed that the belief most people hold, that there must have been a first origin of the cosmos, comes about through an error in thinking. It is largely the result of a misconception regarding the nature of time and causality, our notions of which are limited by the fact that the mind itself functions in time and so is confined to a very narrow view of the relationships that subsist in other dimensions. We tend to think in analogies, and most of these analogies are false. They do not really correspond to things as they are—Do you have a watch?

Mr. T: Why, yes ... I’m sorry if I’m taking up your time. It’s now—let me see. ...

U: Never mind the time. That isn’t what I meant. I see you have a watch. Well now, from the fact that you have a watch, we can safely infer that the watch had a maker, can’t we?

4. See The Wheel No. 15, *Dependant Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda)*, by Piyadassi Thera and Wheel 394/396, *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, by Nyanatiloka Thera.

Mr. T: Of course.

U: And from that, people deduce that the world must have had a maker, who is the first cause of all. But it shows nothing of the kind, because the maker of the watch did not exist uncaused. He was the offspring of his parents, and they of theirs. And no matter how many generations back you may go, you cannot find any ultimate origin of the watch. All you find is an ever-increasing number of tributary streams of causality. And that is only one side of the causal process; on the other you find that there is no ultimate origin of the metals that compose the watch. So you see the falseness of the analogy, don't you?

Mr. T: Indeed, yes. It is false in more ways than one, because it assumes also that one cause alone—the watchmaker—could be sufficient to produce the watch, whereas it is obvious that even if the watchmaker existed he could not make a watch without the metals. And if the metals existed, but no watchmaker, there would still be no watch. Also, someone had to make the watchmaker's tools.⁵

U: Now you see the necessity for co-ordinate causal factors, for separate streams of causality converging to the one end. It is precisely this rather complex system of causality that Buddhism teaches. But, you know, this is a very profound philosophical subject, and it is not enough to be given just a brief summary of the conclusions. To understand it properly one must examine the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination in detail, and also relate it to the supplementary doctrines, such as the doctrine of *paccayā*, which deals with conditionality and relationships, and *niyāmatā*, the order of cosmic necessity. All these things form a part of the analytical knowledge of the Dhamma (*Dhamma-ṭṭhisambhidā*) by which we become able to grasp the true nature of phenomena. Along with these it is a help for modern people to take into account some of the ideas of our contemporary scientific philosophers. If you do that you will find that together they form a perfectly convincing picture of the world we live in, so far as it can be known through the intellect.

Mr. T: Then Buddhism is not simply an intellectualism?

U: Certainly not. So far as the intellect is capable of analysing the elements of the world accurately, it marches with Buddhism.

5. See "Professor Paley's Famous Clock-argument" by Max Ladner (in *The Wheel*, No. 74/75, *German Buddhist Writers*, p. 57).

That is why there is no conflict between Buddhism and those ideas which are veridical products of the scientific method. But to confront absolute truth, to comprehend the real order of things in its entirety, one has to transcend the intellect. The intellect selects, narrows the range of cognition and arranges things in its own way, and in so doing imposes the limitations of its nature. We have to break through those conceptual barriers and grasp reality on a different level. That is the great objective of the Buddhist meditation practices—they are to develop the higher consciousness that reaches beyond the intellect. That higher consciousness alone is capable of seeing reality face to face.

Mr. T: Then, if I understand you rightly, Buddhism does not deny the validity of those empirical truths which are capable of being known intellectually, but it definitely asserts that the intellect itself can never come to grips with the final underlying truth of things?

U: Yes, that is just it. And that is precisely what present-day philosophers for the most part believe, also. But since few of them admit the possibility of a higher faculty than the intellect, or of a transcendental order of experience, truth must always appear to be inaccessible. There are some notable exceptions to this, of course. An increasing number of modern thinkers are drawing very close to Buddhism. That is why comparative study of their ideas, along with the ancient teachings of the Buddha, is so rewarding. Some of our present-day scientific philosophers are, all unconsciously, making it easier for the Western mind to understand the concepts of Buddhism. And that is quite natural—they are approaching the same truth by a different, more roundabout route. The Buddha went towards it directly—through the mind itself, which is the basis of all phenomena—instead of trying to get at it through the facts of the physical world alone, as the scientist does.

Mr. T: Yes, I see that the Buddha approached the knowledge of things as they are through the facts of psychology rather than through physics.

U: That is so. And yet we find that his general teaching concerning the physical world is also accurate. It is a true picture in broad outline.⁶ Its details, as Western man is interested in

6. See *Buddhism and the Scientific Revolution* by K. N. Jayatilleke (*The Wheel*, No. 3, p.3).

them, were of no concern to one who taught only Suffering and the way to its cessation. What the Buddha showed were the fundamental principles of life, its impermanence and “substancelessness”, and consequently its “unsatisfactoriness”—and these principles are found in the physical as well as the mental realm.

Mr. T: You are referring, I suppose, to the three characteristics of phenomena, impermanence, suffering and egolessness.⁷ But why should what is impermanent be painful—why suffering? It does not seem to follow at all necessarily. And there is so much good in the world, after all.

U: Surely the joy that slips through our fingers, that fades and dies even as we experience it, is a source of suffering? If we say it is not, that can only be because we expect to experience the same joy, or something similar, again later on. Man can endure the passing of his happiness only through the expectation of gaining it once more. If that expectation is taken from him, he sinks into despair. So it is the renewal of happiness that we are always looking forward to, that keeps us going. And we allow this to compensate us for the knowledge that no individual experience of happiness can be permanent. In fact, man lives alternating between memory and hope.

So far as the second part of your question is concerned, Buddhism does not deny that there is good—in whatever way you understand that term—in the world. It simply affirms that on the whole the suffering outweighs the good. And most thinking people who are aware of the condition of the great mass of living beings must and do agree with this. It is only the superficial mind, or the mind that is totally engrossed in its own present felicity, that can resist the conclusion.

Mr. T: Hm ... That’s a pretty pessimistic outlook, isn’t it?

U: It would be, if Buddhism offered no hope. But as regards the world, it is simply realism. Buddhism offers the cessation of suffering—Nibbāna. That is the sole permanent good—*dhuva* and *parama sukha*—in which suffering can arise no more.

Mr. T: So we are to desire Nibbāna. But isn’t desire craving? And isn’t craving for Nibbāna a contradiction?

U: Why?

7. See *The Three Signata* by Prof. O. H. de A. Wijesekera (*The Wheel* No. 20).

Mr. T: I mean, if Nibbāna is the cessation of craving, it must be a contradiction to crave for it. But isn't wanting it, or hoping for it, a sort of craving? Does Buddhism make a distinction between that and all other kinds of craving?

U: No distinction of a functional kind can be made between one craving and another. The desire for Nibbāna is an aspiration—a higher form of craving. But it acts in the same way as any other desire when it furnishes the motive for action. All effort is grounded in the wish to gain an objective, and if there were no wish for Nibbāna there could be no striving for it. There is no contradiction in the desire to end desire; for the moment Nibbāna is attained, the desire for it ceases. While the means of gaining the end are being practised, all the other cravings which stand as hindrances are gradually eliminated, until there is only the one desire left. The desire for Nibbāna is therefore the last and highest desire. And since no one goes on desiring what he has already got, it comes to an end the moment its objective is gained. It is the one desire that is not self-regenerating.

Mr. T: I see now that my question was rather unconsidered. How prone we are to verbal entanglements! But isn't the Buddha's teaching of the ending of suffering by the ending of craving, with the consequent ending of existence, rather like a stab in the throat as a cure for a toothache?

U: Well, to make your analogy more fitting you will have to assume that the toothache is *absolutely incurable*, and that any kind of treatment can give only temporary alleviation. Because there is no way of putting an end to suffering in *saṃsāra* except by ending the round of rebirths. Don't you think many people would prefer a stab in the throat to going through eternity with an eternal toothache? But the picture is far too dramatic. It is one of those analogies whose terms do not correspond to the situation at all. The "ending of existence" is nothing more than the ending of a process of "becoming," in which there has never been any true *being*. That is why it is wrong to think of Nibbāna as annihilation. There is no "self" to be annihilated. When the current of causal becoming is brought to an end, the factors of phenomenal personality do not arise anymore. That is all that can be expressed in words. But to imagine Nibbāna as a kind of spiritual suicide is completely wrong.

Mr. T: Forgive my saying so, but that sounds rather like an evasion. For us, life is the phenomenal personality. What

alternative can there be to either existing or not existing?

U: When the Buddha was asked that, he replied in effect that the question was wrongly put. Actually, the whole problem hinges on what one means by "existence." The phenomenal personality, by which is meant the five *khandhas*, exists as an aggregate of mutually-supporting factors, one of which, the physical, or *rūpakkhandha*, has a spatial as well as a temporal existence.

The other four, which are mental—that is, sensation, perception, mental formations and consciousness—exist as a continuum in time. Now the existence of each of these is confined to the unitary moments of its arising, persisting and passing away, which are of only infinitesimal duration. These momentary existences are strung, as it were, on the line of causal relationship, "as beads are strung on a cord," forming a progression through time. But the cord is purely imaginary; like the line of the equator, it expresses only an idea; in this case, the idea of cause-effect relationship. There is no absolute identity between the conscious existence of one moment and that of the subsequent one. The only thing that links them is the knowledge we have that one arises because of the prior existence of another. It is from memory that we derive the sense of a persisting personality. But, although we may remember our childhood, we cannot say that we are the same person, in absolute identity, as we were in childhood. If we were the same, we should not be remembering being children—we should be actually *being* children still. The fact that we remember shows that we are not the same. And sometime we experience very vividly the truth of this "otherness," when we think, "Could that really have been I?"

Mr. T: Yes, I know that feeling—the feeling of being a stranger to one's past self. It is rather disturbing when it comes very strongly.

U: Naturally; it is disquieting to the "ego." The process of change precludes any absolute identity of the personality between one phase and another of its progress through time. We have reached our present moment of existence through an infinite series of dead selves. And this present "self" is vanishing even as we think about it. So you see that Buddhism is right in refusing to consider existence as a static quality of some enduring "things," and in refusing to place an imaginary "being" in opposition to an equally imaginary "non-being." The terms of the problem as it is presented in that way simply do not correspond to the reality, with the result that any answer we were to give, affirming

existence or non-existence, would be false.

Mr. T: That is a very difficult point to grasp, you know.

U: Indeed, yes. It is so extremely difficult for the average person that the Buddha himself, after he had realized it, at first thought it would be impossible to make anyone else understand it. But as I said before, modern scientific thinkers are independently reaching the same conclusion regarding what we call existence and personality. For the Westerner trying to understand the Dhamma, their approach to it is sometimes very helpful.

Mr. T: In what way?

U: Because they arrive at it by the path that the Western mind has become accustomed to take—via examination and analysis of external phenomena. To that they are now adding the study of the psychological phenomena as well. But because they still continue to treat it as a study of external events in the psychology of others instead of within their own minds, their speculations are often at variance with one another. Many still hold, with Comté, that it is impossible to study the operations of one's own mind. And certainly it is not possible by the methods they use. To take an example, when Freud was making an analysis of his own dreams, he was not making a direct study of his mental processes in dream, but what he remembered of them. Therefore, although he was able to make a very accurate report of what had supplied the content of his dreams, he could make no investigation of the means by which his consciousness registered them. No one can yet say just how the mechanism of consciousness in dreaming differs from that of waking, or even whether it differs at all. But the Buddhist system of mental development proves that the mind can be brought under direct scrutiny, its operations studied at the moment of their occurrence. That is the only way to reach a final understanding of what the personality consists of.

Mr. T: Well, that has certainly given me food for thought. I have just two more questions of this kind. The first stems from what you have just been saying about examining one's own mind. Does not a man know what is right, ultimately, by searching in his own heart, without regard for books or listening to teachers?

U: Do you mean ethically right, or right in the sense of what is ultimately true?

Mr. T: Both.

U: Then let us take your second meaning first. The Buddha was

one who discovered absolute truth without a teacher. But to be able to do that, he had previously undergone a process of self-training and spiritual evolution through a long series of lives. Only relatively few beings are able to gain enlightenment for themselves, without a teacher; it is they who become *Sammā Sambuddhas* or *Pacceka Buddhas*.⁸ It is not that anyone is debarred from attaining Buddhahood—on the contrary, it is open to all; but it is better for most people to take the quicker path to *Nibbāna* under a guide. Those who take the more arduous path leading to Supreme Buddhahood do so to gain the special powers by which they can make the Dhamma known for the benefit of others. However, during the period in which the *Dispensation* (*Sāsana*) of a supreme Buddha endures, and while the teaching is still extant in the world, those beings who have reached the point at which they can attain *Nibbāna* do so through the Teaching, not by their own unaided seeking. Obviously it would be a waste of time and effort to search for the truth anew, when the Teaching concerning it is still known to men.

Mr. T: Yes, of course, I see that.

U: Well, now, regarding the knowledge of what is ethically good, I think we can get the answer to your question from common observation. Does it not sometimes happen that men commit all kinds of crimes and atrocities, firmly believing that what they are doing is right and good? Believing, in fact, that they are carrying out the “will of God”? Do we find that “conscience” always supplies the right answer to any moral problem? Have not wars, persecutions and all kinds of evils been brought about by people acting, as they were convinced, in accordance with the highest moral principles, through some inner prompting of their own?

Mr. T: Yes, it does seem that conscience, the “inner voice” or the “voice of God,” is not always an infallible guide.

U: History shows that it has often been the worst guide possible. Think of the bloodthirsty persecutions of the Middle Ages; think of the unspeakable cruelties inflicted by men who piously believed that they were doing what was right and pleasing to God—the torturing and burning of heretics—to say nothing of the instances of men who have committed crimes of their own

8. *Sammā Sambuddha*: the Supreme Buddha, qualified to set in motion the Wheel of the Law. *Pacceka Buddha*: a Silent Buddha, one who has attained Enlightenment but is not qualified to teach.

accord, under the influence of what they believed to be divine prompting. And if that is not enough, consider the horrible ritual sacrifices of human beings that have been carried out in the name of religion.

Mr. T: Yes, yes, I know. But surely modern civilized man. ...

U: Please go on.

Mr. T: Well—I mean ... er. ...

U: Yes ...?

Mr. T: Oh, all right. ... You think that modern civilized man is not any better?

U: Hardly, if at all. And if he were, would it not be the result of past conditioning? The study of behaviour shows that codes of conduct and ideas of right and wrong are not built-in features of man's nature; they have to be learned. And what is so learned is not any universal system of morality, but only the ideas prevailing in one particular place at some given period. So we find that actions which are condemned in one place are blessed with the full approval of society in others, and that at different times totally different standards obtain. Where then is there any innate, infallible guide as to what is right and what is wrong? Where is the standard by which these values are to be measured? All we can say, from observation, is that some people have a more highly-developed moral sense than others, and that sometimes this shows itself at a quite early age. Where it exists it seems to be independent of heredity and, to a surprising degree, of environment as well. That is a fact which the behaviourists cannot explain; but Buddhism accounts for it by past kamma. Yet still it is the outcome of prior conditioning; the ethics and ideals have not come to birth spontaneously, but as the result of learning in previous lives. To that extent Buddhism agrees with the psychology of behaviourism; it maintains that all codes of conduct have to be learned; but by showing causes that are more remote than any operating in a single life, it is able to explain those anomalies which leave the findings of the behaviourists open to question. The sense of right and wrong is not inherent, and it is not of supernatural origin; it has to be acquired; but it is not always acquired in the present life alone. It can be carried over from one life to another, and that is one of the processes which make man's evolution possible. But what we have to remember is that people, besides being differently conditioned as

to their ideas of right and wrong by the environment in which their minds develop, are also influenced by the ideas, appearing as instincts, some of which may be true whilst others are false, that they have “inherited” from their past existences. So there can never be any certainty that what a man’s “inner voice” tells him is right is really so. It may be most terribly and disastrously wrong. That is why Buddhism holds that intuitive feelings of right and wrong are not a safe guide.

Mr. T: So religious teachings and teachers are always necessary?

U: Yes. But even there one must qualify the statement. We have seen already that much evil has been done in the name of religion and that even today it is still possible for fanaticisms of a religious or pseudo-religious kind to incite men to commit grievous crimes against humanity. There are certain political ideas current in the world which are invested with a kind of religious mystique capable of intoxicating their followers to frenzies of hatred and violence, and they are, unfortunately, extremely contagious. Cults that centre round the personality of some almost deified leader are the modern equivalent of the religious frenzies that drove men to madness in former days. These for the most part have their origin in some supposedly inspired teachings; the leader is given the reverence due to a superman, and even if he fails miserably and comes to a degraded end, there are still weak-minded and fanatical people who are ready to continue idolizing him. The world would be better without “teachers” of that kind.

Mr. T: Very true, indeed.

U: People have a strong tendency, you know, to rationalise their own selfish desires and make them “the will of God.” Men have even been known to commit murders at the instigation of some “inner voice” which they devoutly believed was the true voice of their deity. This is an extreme case of pathological delusion, of course, but it points to a fact of the first importance in normal psychology as well. History provides innumerable instances of men finding self-justification for their greed and aggressiveness by dressing their crimes in the trappings of religion. It is the most common device of all for making the baser instincts respectable.

Mr. T: Then how are we to know which teachers are to be followed and which are not?

U: That is the point I was coming to. We can only apply the advice the Buddha gave to the Kālāmas when he said, “In cases

where occasion for doubt exists, it is right and proper to doubt. Do not go upon mere report, or tradition or hearsay; neither go upon correspondence with holy writings, upon (unsupported) cogitation or specious reasoning; nor should you go upon the approval of accepted notions, nor upon the authority of one who may appear competent, nor be guided by the instinct of reverence, thinking, 'this ascetic is our teacher.' But, Kālāmas, when you yourselves know (by observation, experience and right judgement), 'Such things are bad, such things are blameworthy; such things are censured by the wise; such things, when undertaken and followed, lead to harm and ill,' then you should abandon such things. But when you yourselves know, 'Such things are good, such things are praiseworthy; such things are commended by the wise, such things, when undertaken and followed, lead to the good and welfare of all beings,' then should you accept, hold to and follow such things.⁹ In other words, we have to correct the promptings of the subconscious mind, which too often represents the lower nature, by using reason and intelligence. In that way we can form a correct judgement of whatever ideas are offered to us.

Mr. T: But could you give me a summary in brief of the Buddhist criterion of right and wrong?

U: Certainly. It is summed up in the words, "To abstain from all wrongdoing; to develop all good; to purify one's mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas." And the basic distinction between what is good and what is bad is very simple in Buddhism. All actions that have their roots in greed, hatred and delusion, that spring from selfishness and so foster the harmful delusion of selfhood are demeritorious and bad. All those which are rooted in disinterestedness, friendliness and wisdom are meritorious and good. And this standard applies, irrespective of whether the deeds are of thought, word or physical act. The Pāli word *lobha*, which I have just given as "greed," also includes excessive lust; *dosa* means hatred and anger, while *moha* is equivalent to *avijjā*; it stands for ignorance of the real nature of conditioned existence—ignorance of the fact that all the aggregates of personality are impermanent, liable to suffering and devoid of selfhood, and at the same time ignorance of the Four Noble Truths. *Lobha*, *dosa* and *moha* are called the three roots of unwholesome action. When we

9. See *Kālāma Sutta*, transl. by Soma Thera, *The Wheel*, No. 8.

have learned to analyze our thoughts, contemplating them objectively and dispassionately, we become able to know, distinctly and without any shadow of doubt, when any of these three unwholesome factors are present and when they are not. It is only by this intimate self-knowledge that we can develop a true instinct for what is right and wrong.

Mr. T: That is excellent! I really like that very much. Volumes have been written on ethics, from every possible angle, but it seems to me that this Buddhist concept, so simple and direct, gets right to the heart of the matter. It does not depend upon any questionable metaphysical ideas, but on fundamental truths of psychology. It is something that everyone can grasp, and prove for oneself. That much of Buddhism, at least, everyone must accept. But now my other question. It is about rebirth. How can there be rebirth? Isn't it really an impossibility?

U: Well, to that question I usually reply in the words of Voltaire: "It is no more impossible to be born many times than to be born once! Even the old sceptic, Ferney, had to admit that he had been born, and that being so, he could find no reason for supposing the event to be unique in his experience.

Mr. T: That's all very well, but can rebirth be *proved*?

U: That depends on what you are willing to accept as proof. There have been many intelligent people who have believed in rebirth simply because it is the only view that gives any meaning or purpose to life—the only conception that makes any sense of this muddled, apparently futile and inconclusive existence, with all its injustices, its insoluble problems and loose ends of experience. And further, it has seemed to them that if there is any survival beyond the grave, any kind of immortality at all, rebirth is the only form it could take, because the very essence of life is change. They have found these considerations a sufficient ground for accepting it. But there are also others who know it to be true by personal experience. You must surely know that of recent years much has been written on the many cases of people who have actually remembered previous lives, and have given evidence that proves the truth of their statements. And then there are the instances of those who virtually re-live their former existences whilst under hypnosis. Psychologists are now making a special study of these cases. Some of the subjects whilst under hypnosis speak foreign languages that are unknown to them in their normal state—a phenomenon which is known as xenoglossy. In any case we cannot dismiss the belief in

reincarnation, which has played so large a part in the religious and philosophical thought of mankind from the earliest times, as mere moonshine, just because we ourselves cannot remember having lived on earth before. How much can any of us remember of our early childhood? Or of the years in between then and now?

Mr. T: Well, regarding what you said first, is it really necessary to assume that life has any meaning or purpose? Granting that one life on its own—whether followed by immortality elsewhere or not—does not make any sense, is there any reason why it should do so? May not the whole of existence be merely a gigantic cosmic accident?

U: It could be, of course, judged only by what our intellect makes of it. But doesn't it strike you as significant that the very people who hold that view themselves behave as though life had meaning, purpose and values? I have in mind one very eminent English mathematician and philosopher who on grounds of strict determinism denies all freewill to man, and believes, apparently, that life is nothing more than a particular function of matter, yet who shows more concern for humanitarian values and the survival of mankind than do many who claim to believe that man's nature and destiny are of paramount and supernatural importance. This same philosopher, who, if he were to conduct himself in accordance with his beliefs, should be sitting quietly in his study awaiting the inevitable outcome of mathematically-determined events, is instead actively engaged in trying to save humanity from a war of nuclear extermination, at great personal inconvenience and not a little real physical danger to himself. And this kind of conduct, from a man who has written, "Some people ... derive comfort from the thought that if God made the world, He may wind it up again when it has completely run down. For my part, I do not see how an unpleasant process can be made less so by the reflection that it is to be infinitely repeated"¹⁰ is somewhat unexpected. One might ask, "Why protest against the possible destruction of humanity if life is merely an unpleasant process that would be better brought to an end rather than infinitely repeated?"

Mr. T: Well, there are certain philosophies that can only be treated as engagements of the intellect. No one could consistently live in accordance with them. But still, neither the fact that people

10. Bertrand Russell, *Science and Religion (The Scientific Outlook)*, 1931.

believe in rebirth because it gives meaning to life nor the evidence of those who claim to remember previous lives furnishes real, decisive proof, does it?

U: True. The final and conclusive proof lies only with those who personally remember having lived before. Only to them its truth is beyond dispute. But the weight of evidence, you know, is generally taken as being on the side which can show most facts or inferences in its favour. There are many we “know” to be true on this kind of evidence alone. Now in addition to the people who have given proof that they have lived before, we have a great number of philosophical reasons for believing in rebirth. And what is to be set against this? Nothing more than the fact that the enquirer himself cannot remember any previous existence. You must admit that it is scarcely reasonable to set up one’s own individual experience against the great mass of evidence that can be brought up on the other side. That would be like refusing to believe that the earth is a sphere, just because one has not seen its rotundity with one’s own eyes. In any case there is every reason why we should not all remember our previous births. If we did so, the complications of the present life, which for many of us are already far too weighty, would become insupportable. There has to be “a sleep and a forgetting” but the forgetting is not always complete. We all bring something of our past into our present lives, even if it is only some traits of character.

Mr. T: Well, I must say, that is very reasonable. I can see that whereas one fact in isolation, or even three or four, may not be impressive as evidence, when a great number of facts drawn from different sources all point to one conclusion, we have something like a solid body of evidence. Thank you very much for being so patient with me. I shall give very careful thought to what you have said. May I come and see you again?

U: Of course. I am happy to find that you are interested in the Dhamma sufficiently to ask questions about it. Buddhism welcomes questions, you know. There are no sacred mysteries in our creed; there is nothing that has to be treated with reverential awe as being too holy for human understanding.

Mr. T: Yes, that is what I find so attractive about Buddhism. Thank you once more. I shall come back again when I have digested what you have given me today.

II

Mr. T: What you said to me at the end of our last talk, about the openness of Buddhism to enquiry, prompts me to ask you this: Is Buddhism a form of rationalist atheism or an atheist humanism?

U: Any attempt to label Buddhism, or to fit it into any of the categories of Western thought, which incline to separating the philosophical from the religious, is bound to be misleading. Buddhism is atheistic in the strict sense of rejecting belief in a Creator-god. It is not atheism in the sense of rejecting all belief in a superior order of being or a spiritual purpose in life. It is necessary to mark that distinction, because too often people mistakenly believe that there can be no religious or ethical values without a supreme power, a god in some form or another. In Buddhism the supreme power is the natural law of cause and effect, from which comes the moral order of kamma, or actions, and *vipāka*, or results. The ethical teaching of Buddhism is intrinsically a part of the concept of man's highest purpose, which is to gain his release from the painful conditions of saṃsāra. The goal and the means to it cannot be separated. If there were an omnipotent God, he would be able to release man from his bondage to kamma; and if that God were all-compassionate, he would certainly do so. As I have already explained to you, Buddhism is rationalistic, but it goes beyond rationalism in the scope of its vision of causes unseen. The rationalism which we speak of today is limited to a very small section of the total human experience, and by itself can never encompass the ultimate truth of things. Buddhism, on the other hand, continues where this limited rationalism leaves off; it expands the principles and the frontiers of reason and finally it teaches us how, by developing higher faculties, we may finally transcend the realm of sense-perception and conditionality. In much the same way, Buddhism also has a likeness to humanism. It holds that man is the measure of all things, and can by his own efforts solve the riddle of life; and further it maintains that the human values are the sole standards and arbiters of morality and progress. It does not have to fall back on such theological distinctions as a supposed difference between man's justice and God's. But Buddhism goes beyond mere humanism when it claims that man can become superhuman. The values of humanism, fine as they are, are not enough to form the basis of a progress that aims at lifting man right out of the human situation.

The humanist philosophy can only leave man where he is at present, with all his imperfections, his perplexities and his uncertain ethical values fundamentally unchanged.

Mr. T: Why so?

U: Because humanism on its own does not provide any ultimate standard by which man's progress is to be measured. It measures man only by man, and you cannot measure a thing, either quantitatively or qualitatively, by itself. Buddhism provides a standard for normal life and a higher standard for it to measure up to as well—the standard of *Arahantship*. The second, which is the standard of man perfected, is constant and immutable. It serves to mark humanity's highest level, at any time and in any situation. So it gives us a clearly defined goal at which to aim, the state of absolute "desirelessness", dispassion and enlightenment.

Mr. T: I see. But, if enlightenment comes at all, why does it not come all at once, instead of in four stages?

U: You mean the four stages of *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmi*, *Anāgāmi* and *Arahatta*? Well, all progress is made in stages, isn't it? In this case the four stages represent definite psychological changes, each of which occurs at a certain point in consequence of the changes brought about by the preceding stage. You see, there are ten mental obstructions which stand in the path of self-purification, or as fetters (*dasa saṃyojana*) bind us to the wheel of existence. Now all beings have been bound by those ten fetters throughout innumerable cycles of existence, and they are very strong. They cannot be broken all at once. Therefore the Buddha taught a gradual training, a progress by recognizable stages.

Mr. T: Please tell me about the ten fetters.

U: They are (1) delusion of selfhood, (2) doubt or uncertainty, (3) belief in the efficacy of rites and ceremonies; or, in short, superstition, (4) sensual craving, (5) ill-will. These five are called lower fetters, because they bind beings to the planes of sense-gratification. Then come (6) craving for existence in the fine-material worlds, (7) craving for existence in the formless worlds,¹¹ (8) pride, (9) restlessness, and (10) ignorance. This second group of five is higher fetters, in the sense that they bind

11. Fine-material and formless worlds: planes of the thirty-one abodes of saṃsāra which correspond to highly refined and ethical states of consciousness.

beings to the fine-material and formless worlds.

Mr. T: Then how do they separate into four stages?

U: In this way: when the first three fetters are broken one becomes a *Sotāpanna*, which means that one has become confirmed in the knowledge of the truth. One who has reached this stage becomes incapable of committing any of the unwholesome deeds that lead to rebirth in sub-human realms of suffering. *Sotāpanna* literally means “Stream-winner”—he has entered the stream that leads surely to Nibbāna. After that comes the disciple who has reached the next stage, by weakening the next two fetters, four and five. He is called a *Sakadāgāmi* or “Once-returner,” because even if he fails to reach Nibbāna in the current life, he is bound to do so in the next birth. Then comes the *Anāgāmi*, who has completely destroyed all the first five fetters; he is called *Anāgāmi* or “Non-returner” because if he does not gain Nibbāna before he dies he will reach it in his next birth, which takes place in *Suddhāvāsa* or the Pure Abodes. There he attains *Arahantship*, and passes straight to Nibbāna without returning to the sensuous planes. The fourth and last stage is of course that of the *Arahant*, who has broken all the fetters, burned out all the defilements and brought the grasping-formations to an end. For him there is no rebirth.

Mr. T: So Nibbāna is attained when these ten fetters are broken?

U: Yes, in this present life itself all the stages can be accomplished.

Mr. T: Then cannot Nibbāna rightly be called the “Kingdom of Heaven”? Doesn’t that also mean the ending of suffering?

U: Right thinking depends so much, you know, on the right use of words. That is why we try to be as exact as possible in terminology when we present Buddhist ideas. What exactly do people mean by “Heaven”? If that question could be settled, the answer could be found at once. If in thinking of “Heaven” we mean what is intended by the phrase “Heaven lies within us,” then there certainly is a likeness to the Buddhist concept of Nibbāna as it is experienced whilst the *Arahant* is still in the flesh. That is the subjective “Heaven,” the state of mind that knows its own happiness and security, and is fully detached from the troubles of earthly life. But if “Heaven” means a place of bliss which is a kind of superior copy of the best of life on earth, it does not correspond to Nibbāna at all. Buddhism recognizes heavens of that kind, but Nibbāna is above and beyond them. Those

heavens are impermanent—and there indeed one might find a correspondence between them and the heaven of which it is said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”¹² in the Christian scriptures. Those words are better fitted to a Buddhist than Christian setting, since the Buddhist heavens and hells are subject to the law of impermanence and causality, but the Dhamma which teaches that law is everlasting. Universes arise and pass away, but the law remains the same forever. And Nibbāna, which is outside the realm of condition and causality, also remains unchanging. So, as Buddhists, we should simply amend the phrase to “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the Law of Causality shall not pass away.” Nibbāna does not come into it at all, because it is not within the causal law. It cannot be compared to any idea of a heaven in which phenomenal personality, with its inevitable arising, decay and destruction, continues to manifest.

Mr. T: I see. But now there is another comparison I should like to make. It concerns what is meant by *saddhā*. If the Buddha’s teaching requires faith, is not a Christian justified in arguing that it is merely a matter of developing the faculties to become able to perceive the truth of the revealed dogmas of the Christian Church, and so there is no difference between Buddhism and revealed religion in that respect?

U: *Saddhā* means confidence more than faith. When we are sick and go to a physician, why do we believe—or at least hope—that he can cure us?

Mr. T: Well, I suppose because he has got his degrees, has an established practice and has shown his capability by curing others.

U: Exactly. And for the same reason when we wish to learn any art or science we go to a teacher whose ability has been shown in practice. Doesn’t that mean that we have confidence in the doctor or teacher?

Mr. T: Yes, of course.

U: But it does not come from direct knowledge that he can cure or teach us? There is no absolute certainty about it?

Mr. T: No, we can be absolutely certain only after the event.

U: Then it can also be called faith, can’t it?

12. Matt. 24:350

Mr. T: Yes.

U: But “faith” is a rather emotionally-loaded word, which we usually reserve for the mysteries of religion. It implies belief not confirmed by reason—even belief in defiance of reason. Now a Buddhist’s confidence in the Buddha is just the kind we have in a good physician or teacher. It is not blind faith, because we have substantial grounds for it. The doctrine the Buddha offers us is one that we can believe in first of all intellectually, because it conforms to what we can see and prove empirically as to the nature of the world. And, like the physician, the Buddha has effected his cures. We know that his method is effective in putting an end to suffering because it has done so for so many people during the last 2,500 years. It is, one would say, a very old, established practice indeed. So we have that much confidence in the Buddha’s Dhamma before we start on the treatment. It does not ask us to believe in any improbable dogmas, and certainly not in anything that goes against fundamental reason. It is not based on myths, or legends, but on observed facts of experience—the truths of impermanence, suffering and non-self. Those cardinal truths, irrespective of miracles or revelations, attest to the solid foundation of Buddhism in the knowledge of things as they are. And since everything else in the Dhamma springs logically from those three facts of observation in a coherent and articulated system, we surely have the most emphatic reason for feeling confidence in the Physician and Teacher. And lastly, it invites us to “come and see” for ourselves. We are asked only to suspend our doubts until such time as we have clear proof, by direct experience, that the Teaching is true. This comes with the first attainment, after which doubt (*vicikicchā*) cannot arise anymore.

Mr. T: That, I see, is quite different from making faith a prerequisite of revelation. When one considers how many of the finest intellects in the Christian Church have struggled against doubt, blaming themselves for their inability to believe and fearing that the longed-for revelation will be withheld from them because of it, one realizes what a stumbling block this demand for unquestioning faith can be. Now that you have entirely satisfied me on that point, I shall be glad if you can clear up another matter for me. Does the Buddha teach that the world is a dualism of good and evil, as Manichaeism is supposed to do?

U: That is not a question that can be answered with a plain yes or no. To begin with, we should suppress the emotional overtones

that accompany such words as “good” and “evil.”

Mr. T: Why?

U: Because they interfere with our view, which should be as far as possible detached, objective and scientific. In any case, “good” and “evil” are very loose terms. What is good for one person may be evil for another. Man exterminates pests and certain kinds of animals for his own “good” (as he imagines), but the effect so far as the animals are concerned is decidedly evil. So it is, even with actions concerning man and man. It is extremely difficult to make a hard and fast division between what is good and what is evil—a distinction that will remain valid for all occasions and eventualities. These are words that really describe different viewpoints, rather than fixed qualities.

Mr. T: But still, we do know in a broad general way what is meant by good and evil.

U: No doubt. But can we always be agreed as to what is good or evil in specific instances? Can we, when our own interests are in conflict with those of someone else? Practical experience shows that we cannot, so long as the feeling of selfhood sways our judgement. If we could, human beings would live in a greater measure of peaceful agreement than they have ever shown themselves able to do. The fact is that we all measure good and evil according to the way events afford us either pleasure or pain. So, for the purpose of this discussion it would be better if we were to substitute some other terms for “good” and “evil.” They are really too subjective to be very helpful in our present enquiry. In Buddhism, where “evil” denotes the pain inherent in life it is defined as “suffering.” Where it denotes moral wrong it is called “unwholesome action” (*akusala-kamma*). These terms are on the whole much more satisfactory for a precise treatment of the subject than are the “good” and “evil” of theology.

Mr. T: Yes, I grant that they are more precise. But suppose, then, we were to define “evil” broadly as whatever causes pain to living beings, and “good” as whatever gives them pleasure?

U: Well, we can accept that definition for the moment, and try to find an answer to your question along those lines. Only I must ask you to remember that it is still not an entirely satisfactory definition, because things that give pleasure are not always good. Very often they are bad in themselves, or they bring “evil” consequences to ourselves or to others. But let us see what the

believers in dualism themselves meant by their distinction. The Manichaeian idea of two powers or cities, light and darkness, was derived from Zoroastrianism, which postulated two coeval, co-eternal and equally potent powers in the world—the creator of all good, Ahura Mazda, and the force of evil, Ahriman. It explained the presence of good and evil side by side as the inveterate opposition of these two equally matched personages. It was a ditheism, and as such it overcame the difficulties that present themselves when belief in one single Creator-god makes him necessarily responsible for both good and evil in the world. The Zoroastrian and Manichaeian position was to some extent more logical than that of monotheism; but it had one unhappy result, which was that the power of evil tended to receive as much worship, if not more, than the power of good. This was really unavoidable; it followed upon the recognition that there is on the whole more evil than good in the world.

Mr. T: I'm not altogether prepared to agree with that.

U: Perhaps not. But remember that in Christianity also, the Devil is called "the Prince of this world." And also I must ask you to bear in mind, again, that when I use the word "evil" I intend it to mean whatever is painful and a source of suffering and grief. Don't be led away by those emotional overtones I warned you about at the start!

Mr. T: Hm ... Well, exactly how did the Zoroastrians measure good and evil?

U: I'm afraid they measured it just as most people always do. "Good" was what was beneficial to them, or seemed so; "evil" was what was harmful. In the Pahlavi scriptures, Ahura Mazda goes about creating things for the good of man, such as crops, fruit trees, fair weather and so on. Ahriman follows behind him creating blight, locusts, storms, disease and floods. Everything that Ahura Mazda creates Ahriman mars. But you can see that this concept of what is good and evil is a very narrow and parochial one. It is all centred about man and his needs. Suppose that we consider it from the point of view of the locusts, rats and other vermin that Ahriman is supposed to have brought into being. To them, the works of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman would appear equally good—except that they would regard man as the creation of the evil spirit. But the dualists never gave that a thought. They were concerned only with themselves and their own welfare. And of course they had no idea of the balance

which nature preserves, in which every species of living being plays a part in the general economy of the world.

Mr. T: Meaning...?

U: Meaning that, for example, if man succeeds in utterly exterminating one form of pest, another, which the destroyed pests formerly kept in check, increases—with perhaps even more harmful effects than before. This is a fact that man never realized until he was able to make practical experiments in the wholesale destruction of parasites, predatory animals and the like. And even in the question of weather, the Zoroastrians of course did not realize that storms and fair weather alike are all part of the climatic system of the earth, and that you cannot have one without the other. So you see that what they meant by “good” and “evil” was really nothing more than the balance of opposites. By personalizing these they made two deities in eternal conflict.

Mr. T: Scientists believe now that in course of time we shall be able to control the weather. ...

U: And when that comes about it will be just another complication, just another source of conflict, in human life. For when one section of people needs dry weather for crops, another will want rain. If control of weather is practised on a regional basis it can only be a further cause of international tension, by interfering with world economics. Artificially produced dry weather in one region would probably cause floods in another.

Mr. T: Yes, I can see that man’s power of controlling his environment artificially holds even greater dangers than those we confront now. However, to return to the main subject: the only point of dualism, then, is that it absolves God of responsibility for suffering?

U: Yes—but at the cost of admitting the existence of another power as mighty as God, if not mightier. So the omnipotence of God is abandoned. That supposed infinity of power can be reserved to a god only by attributing to him good and evil in at least equal measure. But very few monotheists are prepared to go along with Jacob Boehme when he speaks of “the evil that is in God.”¹³

13. In his later works, e.g., the *Mysterium Magnum*, Jacob Boehme developed his theory of evil as being a direct outcome of the divine manifestation, the “wrath side” of God.

Mr. T: Truly, it does seem that God's omnipotence and infinite love are mutually exclusive ideas. They cannot both be the attribute of one and the same deity. Yet the Vedāntists claim to have an answer to that, don't they?

U: Yes, an answer of a sort. But it practically amounts to denying the existence of evil as an objective reality. It holds that all things emanate from God—therefore all things are "good." And as a logical corollary of this, there is left no moral distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, either. This is actually what the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* amounts to.

Mr. T: Dear me! Is that really so? Someone told me that what the *Bhagavad Gītā* teaches is pure Buddhism!

U: No, its ethical teaching is rather the opposite of the Buddha's. The *Gītā* tries to show that one may be a full Yogi whilst engaging in all the activities, good and bad, of the world. It is a sustained argument to the effect that violence is not necessarily evil kamma. According to this theory, morality is solely a matter of social obligations; a man's moral duty is whatever his caste, or station in life, requires of him. If he is of the warrior caste by birth, it is his moral duty to kill even his own relatives and preceptors, should occasion arise. The *Gītā's* teaching is expressly that so long as such actions are performed without desire for or clinging to the results (a psychological impossibility, by the way), but are made an offering to God, there is no sin attached to them. Buddhism denies this argument absolutely. But don't let us digress. Dualism, as we have seen, is an escape from the difficulties created by monotheism. But Buddhism does not postulate any supreme consciously-acting power, either of good or evil.¹⁴ It teaches only the supreme law of cause and effect. It is in the working out of that law, in all its inescapable necessity, that man, judging from his own standpoint, finds these two apparently opposite effects which he labels "good" and "evil." But the causal law is an operation of nature; in itself it is neither good nor evil. We may liken it to the law of gravity; without gravity nothing could remain in place on the surface of the earth. So then you will say the law of gravity is "good." But supposing you fall from a high building? Then, because it causes your death, the law of gravity is "evil"?

Mr. T: All right—I get your point. What we call good and evil are simply two aspects of one and the same law, which is in itself completely neutral. And from that Buddhism derives the

principle of kamma and vipāka, actions and results, as you explained previously.

U: Yes. It may seem to you that I laboured the point, but you must admit that if I hadn't gone into it as I did, you would not have been ready to accept it merely on a dogmatic statement such as "good and evil are necessary and complementary to one another."

Mr. T: You are right—I shouldn't. But doesn't Buddhism regard man's nature as a sort of dualism of good and evil?

U: In man's nature there are the lower instincts, summarized as greed, hatred and delusion, all three of which are brought into play in man's character of an animal struggling for survival and seeking sensual satisfaction. But man is potentially something greater than this. He has higher aspiration, a higher scale of values, and so these two aspects of his nature come into play alternately. Buddhism teaches us to eliminate the lower nature and systematically to cultivate the higher. By that means man can become greater than the gods. He can become a *visuddhi-deva*—a god by purification.

Mr. T: Isn't that the same as becoming God, or becoming "one with God"?

14. Māra, the personified evil of Buddhism, appears in the texts sometimes as a real person, sometimes as an externalisation of the mental defilements, often in the plural form. It is as a real person that he tempts the Buddha at the time of Enlightenment and later, to pass into *Anupādisesa-Nibbāna* without fulfilling his mission. But at no time after the Enlightenment does Māra appear to the Master in the guise of the grosser fetters; his temptation of the Buddha, whose defilements are eradicated, can only be on the highest level—the temptation to accept his *Parinibbāna* at once. This, the Buddha's concern for suffering humanity did not permit.

Buddhism has no concept of a power of evil which can work from the outside on a human will; evil can work only from within. Its source is the mind, and there only are the materials with which it works. Even conceived as a real personage, "Māra" is no more than the title of an office; the being, who holds that office in the texts, is itself destined to *Arahatship* in a future life. In a previous world-cycle the office was held by Mahā Moggallāna Thera, one of the present Buddha's Chief Disciples. This idea invites comparison with Origen's Gnostic doctrine, condemned by the Christian Church as a heresy, that even Satan would ultimately gain salvation.

U: Not at all. In those ideas God still has a personal identity and attributes. He is supposed to be the creator or source of all that is. As I have said before, there is no place for a god of that kind in Buddhism.

Mr. T: Well, since we are back again on the subject of God, what is the harm in developing the love of God, as the Christians and Vedāntists do? Is not love the noblest and most liberating sentiment? And if belief in, or worship of God—even if it is only a matter of faith, or even if he does not exist—helps us to develop love, isn't that a good thing?

U: As I pointed out in answer to one of your earlier questions, the idea of a supreme Godhead can be used to cover up some self-centred wish of one's own, as the wars of religion in the past have amply proved. Armies intent on pillage have marched into battle "in the name of God"; rulers have oppressed their subjects and subverted all human rights—"in the name of God"; ecclesiastical authorities have tortured and burned people alive for daring to disagree with their doctrines, all "in the name of God." And why is this? Obviously it is because nobody really knows anything about this God—what his will is, or how he expects man to act in any given situation. Every theistic religion differs on these questions. Therefore the Buddha likened the love of God to loving a woman one has never seen, whose form and characteristics one does not know, and whose very existence is in doubt. He dismissed this kind of love as foolishness.¹⁵ The love of a being whose attributes exist only in one's own imagination is at the best an unprofitable expenditure of the affections. One is most likely loving an image of one's own desires. Is not such love offered in the lively expectation of getting some reward from the deity? If God is needed only as a peg on which to hang one's love, what happens when the peg is nothing but an illusion? Buddhism teaches that it is far better to fix on real living beings as objects of *mettā bhāvanā*.¹⁶ One then has something concrete and external to oneself on which to focus the concentrated mind of goodwill. You must see that it is easy to love a fabrication of one's own imagination, especially an image constructed in the form of a loving father and protector, but it is not so easy to love beings

15. *Tevijja Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (*The Wheel*, No. 57/58).

16. *Mettā Bhāvanā*: the meditation on universal benevolence, one of the four *Brahma Vihāras* (*The Wheel*, No. 6/7).

who have their own independent existence—an existence that may possibly be hostile to one's own. That is the real test of whether love is genuine and disinterested or not. It is the cultivation of that kind of universal benevolence—entirely unconnected with any expectation of return or reward—that Buddhism prescribes as the real development of the heart of loving-kindness. This is the love that liberates. But the love of an imaginary being, a projection of one's own dreams, can never lead a man out of ignorance into the highest Enlightenment.

Mr. T: No doubt the love of God, when it is harnessed to institutional and sectarian religion, often does give undesirable results, but isn't an ascetic who tortures himself out of devotion to a god still doing a good action? Isn't devotion spiritually profitable?

U: The Buddha was most emphatic on that point. Having tried to gain liberation by the most extreme asceticism himself, without result, he was in a position to speak with authority on it. The very first declaration he made, before preaching the Dhamma, was that the two extreme courses, self-indulgence and self-torture, were equally low, base and unprofitable. Self-torture is not conducive to sound health of mind or body. It can only bring on hallucinations and mental derangement, or, if the mind is stronger than the body, a physical breakdown before the mind gives way. That is what actually happened to the *Bodhisatta* himself; his weakened body collapsed and he could go no further on that path, but due to his strong mental powers his brain remained clear. But tell me this: why, in any case, should it be supposed that God is pleased by self-torture? Does he take delight in seeing men make wrecks of themselves?

Mr. T: No. ... No I must say, it doesn't seem likely.

U: Indeed, one would think that human life was painful enough, without voluntarily inflicting more suffering on oneself. But very often such extreme asceticism is itself the outcome of a pathological condition of the mind. Haven't you noticed how, in history, those given to self-torture were equally ready to torture others on the slightest provocation?

Mr. T: That's true—the Grand Inquisitor with a hair shirt under his habit!

U: Violence towards oneself is never very far from violence towards others. Buddhism condemns them both. It is not one of

the cults of blood. But the self-torture of Hindu ascetics was originally not undertaken out of devotion to God, but to gain power through the strengthening of the will, so that the gods themselves could be brought under compulsion. This is made very clear in the old Hindu stories of gods and ascetics, the *Purānas*. It is all part of the cult of power which underlies the Hindu system. The idea was that a man could make his will stronger than the gods, by mortification of the flesh. It is only in early Christianity that we come across the paradoxical notion that a god of love can be pleased by self-torture. And in Christianity it did not gain widespread credence because the contradiction was too self-evident. It was so far from being universally approved that on several occasions the Vatican took action to suppress a sect of self-torturers, the flagellants; possibly because those who were eager to torture themselves could not be expected to fear torture from others.

Mr. T: Really? When did that happen?

U: Oh, some time between 1349 and 1389, in Italy. The leader of the sect was burned at the stake by order of the Pope. You can read about it in W. M. Cooper's *Flagellation and the Flagellants*, written in 1908. But in any case, the belief that the ego can be overcome by mortification of the body has no psychological justification whatever; on the contrary, egoism is more likely to be increased by it. The pride of the ascetic in his asceticism is a byword. There are several allusions to it in the Buddhist texts. When Devadatta, the renegade bhikkhu, proposed stricter rules for the Sangha, one of the reasons he gave was that "people esteem asceticism." The Buddha rejected his proposals decisively.

Mr. T: Can you quote me anything the Buddha said on the subject?

U: Certainly. In the *Dhammapada*, verse 141, you will find this:

"Neither wandering naked, nor matted hair, nor dirt, nor fasting, nor lying on the raised ground, nor smearing the body with dust, nor (the ascetic pose of) squatting can purify a mortal who has not overcome doubt."

And again, in verse 394:

"Of what use is your matted hair, O wicked man? Of what use is your deer skin? Within you is a thicket (of passion); only outwardly are you clean!"

Mr. T: Thank you. I am bound to agree that rigorous self-mortification may be undertaken out of vanity and a desire for renown, and even if at the beginning the motive was a higher one it may in the end produce spiritual pride. And it does seem to me that the idea of self-torture is quite out of keeping with the modern spirit, which looks with suspicion on all forms of fanaticism.

U: I am glad you have grasped those points. Buddhism recommends a life of simplicity and austerity for the subduing of the passions. It is the Middle Way of moderation and sanity—a sound and healthy regimen that carries the full authority not only of the Buddha's personal experience but also the great weight of sane opinion throughout the ages. All truly great men have led simple, even spartan lives, practising self-restraint and avoiding all those excesses which encourage sensuality and dissipate vital energy. By such means the mind is kept clear, unclouded by the passions that warp judgement, yet the body is not deprived of anything necessary for its healthy and efficient functioning. That is the ideal life which Buddhism enjoins on everyone, monk and layman alike, but more strictly of course on the bhikkhu.

Mr. T: That is very reasonable indeed, and must meet with the approval of all sensible people. But now, leaving aside what we were talking about just now, the love of God, which you have made me realise is of little value because in loving God each man is really loving a being of his own conception, fashioned in the likeness of his own desires and often with his own defects—leaving that aside, isn't the whole of the Buddha's Teaching simply love?

U: The whole of the Buddha's Teaching, as he often said, is simply the fact of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the way to make it cease. Love, which is an attitude towards other beings, has an object and is therefore bound up with concepts; it can never on its own produce the insight-knowledge which is the crown of the Buddhist achievement. Love is an instrument—a necessary instrument—for eliminating the erroneous concept of selfhood and all the mental defilements that spring from self. And besides, it is a special kind of love that must be cultivated—not the self-assertive, possessive emotion that people usually mean by love. The Pāli word *mettā* corresponds more closely to the Greek *agape*. It means universal, dispassionate benevolence. It is not the love we feel for any particular person who happens to

be pleasing or agreeable to us. Still less is it the love that is associated with sensuality. And it is not a mere passing emotion, but a fixed attitude of mind, something which has become habitual through constant cultivation.

Mr. T: But just how does the Buddha's teaching of love differ from that of Christianity or Vedānta? Isn't that the kind of love they teach, also?

U: There are very important differences. Christianity says: "Love your enemies, and those that spitefully use you," and here there is a strong affinity with the teaching of the Buddha. But Christian love is confined to God and human beings; it does not include the lower forms of life, which according to Christian belief are created for man's use and pleasure. Now when I say this it is just to serve as a reminder of fact. In practise, many Christians show great love and kindness to animals, but this does not alter the fact that the Christian religion does not call for it. Those people are extending love beyond the bounds required by their religion—or perhaps some of them substituting the love of animals for the love they cannot feel for their own kind. However that may be, it is only certain kinds of animals they love—those that are useful or agreeable to them. Others they hunt and kill without compunction. But in any case, when we are dealing with matters of doctrine we should never let ourselves be influenced by the behaviour of the followers of the various creeds; we should go straight to the teaching itself. Again, Christianity does not call on its followers to love the Devil, or the damned souls in hell; but Buddhism excludes nobody. The beings in the states of suffering are the greatest objects of compassion, and Buddhists are taught to share with them the merit of their good deeds, that their pains may be alleviated. And another difference is that Buddhist *mettā* is not an emotion which can turn into anger and violence, into furious denunciations of sinners and threats of eternal punishment. The love taught by Christianity always has its reverse aspect—loving righteousness involves hating evil. The injunction to "hate the sin but love the sinner" is really meaningless. It is impossible because the sinner and his sin cannot be separated—a man *is* his character, his personality, his actions. The fallacy of this idea of hating the sin but loving the sinner is shown in the fact that the God himself does not love sinners. If he did, he would not cast them into hell. He loves them only when they repent—that is, when they cease to be sinners.

Even God, it seems, cannot separate a man and his deeds in such a way that he can save the man and send only his deeds to hell!

Mr. T: Do you know, I never thought of that before! It is really appalling the way we accept meaningless words as being profound wisdom, simply because we never stop to think out whether they have a meaning or not. ... And so we go on deceiving ourselves. We use words as a sort of plaster, to cover up truth and reality, instead of using them to clarify our ideas. Really, it is shocking when one realizes it.

U: I am afraid the language of theology is designed more to that end than any other. That is what has put theology into irreconcilable opposition to philosophy in the West. To be quite plain, Christianity does not offer any reasoned basis for its teaching of love. No attempt is made to explain to man why he should love his enemy. It is simply given as a commandment of God; yet it is quite clear that the God himself does not continue to love those who persist in rebelling against him. Jesus himself often denounced sinners in anything but loving speech, as Bertrand Russell has pointed out in one of his essays. And one is bound to remember that this God who cannot forgive has not really been injured by the sinner. How can a puny mortal do any real injury to the "Eternal and Almighty God"? But the enemy a man is commanded to love and forgive is one who has done a very real injury to him, and may inflict another in the future. So what can one deduce from that?

Mr. T: That man is expected to be more loving and forgiving than God. That seems to me the sole and inescapable answer.

U: Yes, exactly.

Mr. T: But—but ... Oh, dear ... Excuse me—I feel a bit bewildered. These things seem so plain now—and yet—how was it I never thought of them before?

U: In the case of Vedānta, again, love is directed mainly towards a God—one who is conceived either as endowed with qualities, the personalised or *Saguṇa Brahman*, or as being "qualityless," the neuter or *Nirguṇa Brahman*. No matter which of these two aspects of godhead may be its object, what I have already said about the love of God applies here as well. So far as the love of real beings is concerned, it is limited, for all but ascetics and yogis, by the obligations of caste. We have already referred to the teaching of the Bhagavad Gīta concerning the duty of a *kshatriya*, one of the

ruling warrior caste, and how it involves taking life, and I have said that the Buddha, who was himself a *kshatriya*, opposed this concept of duty absolutely. Buddhism makes no compromise on this question; the first of the Five Precepts, which is the undertaking to abstain from killing, shows how literally the spiritual love towards all beings is to be cherished and observed by the follower of the Buddha.

Mr. T: Buddhism is certainly very consistent. Its theoretical view of life—if I may use the expression—and its ethics are all of a piece. I have not found such a closely-knit integration of the two in any other religion.

U: That is because the ethics of Buddhism spring logically and inevitably from its view of the cosmos as a whole. When the law of cause and effect with which we are familiar in the physical world is expanded to include the world of moral values, then a consistent and homogeneous system is the inevitable result.

Mr. T: Yet I wonder whether the moral rules can always be applied consistently.

U: In what respect?

Mr. T: Well, you referred just now to the First Precept, to abstain from killing. But is it possible for man to live in health and comfort on this planet without taking life in one way or another? Even to raise crops for food, vermin and pests have to be exterminated. And what about bacteria? For example, does the treatment of germ-borne diseases by antibiotics involve a breach of the First Precept?

U: It may seem strange to you, but that question touches on an important point in Buddhist ethical psychology. The first fact we have to grasp about kamma is that it is primarily intention. That, incidentally, is how craving comes to be implicated in actions. A kamma, in the sense of a deed that bears good or bad results to the doer, is an action performed knowingly, in full awareness of its immediate consequences, and desiring those consequences. With more remote effects we can hardly be concerned, because often they are beyond our control. We cannot be held morally responsible for them. But we are responsible for whatever it is we wish to do, when our intention is carried out. So the Buddha said: “Kamma, I declare, O monks, is volition.” We are not responsible for any effects, good or bad, which we have not intended. Do you follow me so far?

Mr. T: Yes, of course. That is plain common sense.

U: Nevertheless, one Indian school of thought holds otherwise.¹⁷ Anyway, in consonance with its teaching of kamma as volition, Buddhism states that for an act of killing to be complete and kammically potent, four conditions must be present. There must be the knowledge that the creature is living, the intention of killing it, the act of killing and the creature's death. Here, by the way, I must point out also that the intention of killing alone does not constitute the kamma of killing. It only does so when it is followed by the act and its result. The thought of killing is an unwholesome mental kamma, but it does not amount to killing unless it produces the actual deed. All the same, thoughts of killing should always be avoided because the thought is father to the deed.

Mr. T: Yes, quite so. But what bearing does this have on the use of antibiotics?

U: Just this: all medical practice, from the earliest times, must have included preparations whose action was that of destroying bacteria. But since it was not then known that the action of these herbal and other decoctions was to kill minute forms of life which caused the disease, those who employed the medicines were not aware that they were taking life. Their sole intention was to cure sickness. So they were certainly not guilty of conscious killing and no evil kammic consequences would follow for them. But we today are no longer unaware of the bacteriological causes of disease, and when we give treatment we are knowingly taking life. It is in the light of that knowledge that we have to consider your question.

Mr. T: Yes, indeed. It seems that modern science has complicated life for us in this way, as well as in so many others.

U: Well, of course there are systems of medicine which do not employ any of the products of animal life and do not aim directly at destroying bacteria. They simply help the body's vital powers of resistance and natural processes then overcome the bacteria. An organism can protect itself very well by its own method of producing antibodies.

17. Jainism, the teaching of Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the Buddha, holds that even involuntary actions constitute kamma, so that release from saṃsāra can be gained only by abstaining from all activities. Mahāvīra is the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta of the Buddhist texts.

Mr. T: But still I don't think it is going too far to say that there are certain diseases which are too malignant and swift in their onslaught to be dealt with in that fashion.

U: Yes, I will grant that. In such cases it is imperative to destroy the bacteria or the virus before it kills the patient. It is one of the dilemmas which are perpetually lying in wait for those who live and act in the world. A bhikkhu who is solely bent on attaining Nibbāna will not care about the preservation of his life to the extent of involving himself in unwholesome moral action. Ideally, he will take the view that if, through some bad kamma of the past, he is to die before attaining Nibbāna, he should resign himself to it; if he is not, his body will deal with the disease in its own way. But when we are considering the case of ordinary people, we have to look at it from a different standpoint. There is, as you know, one law for the world—the law of self-preservation—and another law for those who seek Nibbāna—the law of self-renunciation. Those who still follow the law of the world keep the Precepts according to their capacity. If they break them they do so in full awareness of the consequences to themselves. For the Buddha has distinctly taught, "Such and such is wholesome action, and such is its good result; such and such is unwholesome action, and such is its evil result." But also he has said, "He whose evil deed is covered by a good deed (*kusalena pithīyati*) illumines this world like the moon emerging from clouds".¹⁸ This was in reference to Aṅgulimāla, who abandoned a life of violence, renounced the world and became an *Arahat*. After his attainment, Aṅgulimāla had to endure great distress as the result of his past deeds, but by having cut off the round of his rebirths at that point he saved himself from aeons of suffering in hell. But Aṅgulimāla's sin was that of taking many human lives, and in force of kamma the killing of bacteria can in no wise be compared to that. There is, indeed, a scale of values accorded to the moral culpability involved in the taking of life, and sub-microscopic organisms are at the bottom of the scale. There is a mitigating element, also, in the fact that the foremost intention of the doctor who administers the antibiotics or other bacteria-destroying drugs is to cure the patient. Therefore, the unwholesome mental factor of hatred, which is present in all acts that have killing as their direct objective, is lacking. The suffering that is alleviated is far greater than any pain inflicted on the

18. *Dhammapada* v. 173. Dh. Com. XIII, 6.

bacteria, if indeed there is any at all. We may apply the same principle to all other acts which, although they result in death to certain organisms, are not primarily performed with that intention, but are carried out for the welfare of higher organisms such as man. But still I must repeat that one who is intent on his own ultimate and lasting good will eschew all such actions.

Mr. T: I understand. It is in the end a question of personal choice—whether we choose the immediate good, which is not enduring, or the ultimate good, which is the only real and permanent good.

U: Yes, and there is still another aspect of this problem, which is really a very complex one. It is that if man were to lead a more natural, healthy life, eating pure, unadulterated food and living in accordance with Dhamma, he would have less need—possibly none at all—for antibiotics, sera prepared from living animals and all the other treatments that depend upon animal experimentation. The bad kamma that is generated by these methods of investigating and treating disease, particularly by vivisection, is itself one of the causes of man's increasing proneness to disease, and so a vicious circle is set up. Man will never succeed in conquering disease by torturing animals. The proof of this lies in the fact that by mutation and adaptation nature produces new strains of micro-organisms which are impervious to the old treatments. New variations of the diseases then make their appearance, and further experiments on animals are carried out, to find new remedies. It has even been questioned recently whether vaccination is really effective against smallpox. This is strange indeed, considering that vaccination has been used effectively for the past hundred years. If there is any room at all for doubt in the matter it can only mean that something has changed. If a new strain of the virus is beginning to appear, medical science is more or less back where it started so far as smallpox is concerned. First the new strain will have to be isolated, then experiments will have to be made on more unfortunate animals to produce a new vaccine—and so the wheel of kamma and vipāka goes on drearily and endlessly turning.

Mr. T: Then you do not deny altogether that experiments on living animals have contributed to our understanding and treatment of disease?

U: No, certainly not. To deny it would be to go against all the clear evidence. But I say most emphatically that it is not the right

way of dealing with the problem. Man brings diseases on himself by weakening the natural resistance of his body through unnatural and unwholesome living, through contaminated atmosphere, food de-natured and adulterated by chemical preservatives and, last but not least, through wrong thinking and acting—and then he subjects animals to unspeakable torture in order to find remedies for his self-produced ailments. Such a course can never be morally defensible; in the light of the law of kamma it is seen to be self-destructive.

Mr. T: I am sure you are right in saying that many of our diseases would vanish if we led healthier and more natural lives. And in view of what we know now about psycho-somatic sicknesses most people would agree that our bodies would be healthier if our minds were better regulated. The trouble is that people don't know how to set about straightening out their minds.

U: That is where Buddhism could help them. Do you know that the Buddha expressly said that sickness increases when people live without regard for the moral law? There is a definite connection between disease and the moral standards of the people in general. In a very real sense, disease is the outward and visible sign of an inward corruption. I do not mean that all sick people are wrong-doers in this present life, but that the prevalence of sickness in a society is an index of declining moral standards which affect every member in some degree. Does that seem improbable to you?

Mr. T: No, I cannot say that it does. Psychiatry has even gone some way towards establishing it as a scientific fact. Anyway, we have enough data to show that there is a connection. But now, with your permission I should like to go back for a moment to the subject of intention which you were explaining in connection with kamma. Doesn't an absolutely pure motive justify *any* action?

U: If you mean by that, "does the end justify the means," the answer is "no." An action that is bad in itself can never produce good, no matter what the motive may be. It is not *any* action that can be performed with a pure intention, only a good one, so that in Buddhism the question does not arise.

Mr. T: What I had especially in mind is whether killing for mercy is not justified. Supposing, for example, that an animal is in dreadful pain and cannot be relieved, surely it is merciful to put the creature out of its misery?

U: Well, I will ask *you* a question now. Are you in favour of euthanasia for human beings in similar circumstances?

Mr. T: As a matter of fact, I had a discussion on that subject with a friend recently. He is a deeply religious man while I, as you will have gathered, am a bit of a freethinker. On the whole, and with some important reservations, I argued in favour of a human being's right to take his own life if he is suffering from a painful and incurable disease.

U: But you weren't, I suppose, in favour of someone else taking the responsibility of "putting him out of his misery"?

Mr. T: Only with his knowledge and consent. After all, a man is a rational and responsible creature, whereas an animal is not.

U: Let us leave animals out of it for a moment, please. What position did your religious friend take?

Mr. T: As you would suppose, he argued that life is a divine gift, something which man cannot bestow or restore, and so no one has any right to terminate his own life, or get another person to do it. And he also maintained that human suffering has a purpose and meaning; it is a trial or purgation. Pain is something sent by God, which man should bear in patience and resignation to the divine will. I replied that might be so or not, but it was a very slender possibility on which to doom countless people to a life of torment. If he really believed in the purgation theory he should also be against the administering of sedatives and anaesthetics. The only point I would concede was that euthanasia could be a very dangerous instrument, and should only be resorted to under very strict conditions.

U: Well, now I know your ideas on the subject as it concerns human beings, let us return to the animals. Buddhism holds that the pain of animals is also not without meaning. If it is the result of previous bad kamma in a human life it will have to run its course until the kammic potency is exhausted, which means that even though we may succeed in ending it by taking the animal's life, we are only causing an interruption in the current of resultant experience. The suffering will be resumed again in some other life, until the whole of the bad kammic force is expended. Buddhism does not make the distinction that theistic religion makes between man and animals by claiming that man's suffering has a meaning and purpose, whereas that of the animals has none. If the pain is caused by past kamma no outside agency

can prevent it running its course. That is the first point to be considered. The next is that Buddhist psychology shows that no act of killing can be carried out without the arising of a thought of ill-will or repugnance. At the moment when the lethal act takes place, when the thought of killing becomes transformed into deed, whatever motive may have been in the mind previously is superseded. If it were not so, if in that critical moment the mental impulse of aversion did not arise, the deed could not be done. It may seem to you that putting an animal into a gas receptacle is a detached and passionless deed; but nevertheless the psychic genesis of the act is an impulse of aversion. The plain truth is that when a man performs what he believes is a mercy-killing it is because the pain of the animal is repugnant to him; it disturbs his mind and he experiences subconsciously a dislike of the object that has aroused the disagreeable sensation. Below the threshold of awareness he transfers his hatred of the pain to the animal, which then becomes the symbol of the pain and the object on which he vents his feeling of resentment. So, whether considered from the standpoint of the animal's welfare or that of the "mercy-killer," the deed is a mistaken and unwholesome one. Buddhism teaches that we should endeavour, as far as possible, to treat a sick animal as we should a sick human being—to alleviate its suffering as much as we can, but not to interfere with the working out of its kammic life-pattern. It could well be that if the evil kammic result, the vipāka, is allowed to run its full course here and now, the animal might be reborn in a higher state when the present life has come to its natural end. But that could not happen if its life were to be cut short with a residue of bad vipāka still to be undergone.

Mr. T: I am really surprised to find that Buddhist psychology is so profound and searching.

U: It has to be, because the seeking out and recognition of motive is its primary concern. It is, you must remember, essentially an *ethical* psychology. That is why some of its terms and classifications seem a little strange to the Western mind.

Mr. T: But does Buddhism consider that all pain is the result of bad kamma?

U: No. Some forms of suffering are the mere result of being a living organism. They are the price we pay for our existence in saṃsāra, the condition brought on by our craving. So we can never tell precisely whether a particular affliction is the result of

past kamma or not. In any case, even a disease which has kamma for its principal cause must also depend to a certain extent on physical conditions to bring it about. If that were not so, Buddhism would have no use for medicine or surgery. But on the contrary, we should regard every disease as being possibly curable, so long as there is life in the patient. If it is caused by kamma, we cannot tell at what point the bad *vipāka* may come to an end and the patient recover. Many people have lived to a ripe age after having been given only a few months of life by their doctors. It would be a mistake to blame the doctors for such apparent errors; their prognosis may have been perfectly correct by all the clinical evidence available at the time they made it. Yet cases have been known in which the most incredible physical restorations have come about quite naturally after the patient has been given up for lost.

Mr. T: I feel bound to say that the Buddhist explanations of all these obscure matters are more convincing than any I have yet come across. They throw light in the most unexpected places. There is no reply to this! The interest I felt at the beginning has increased tremendously, and I now wish to go into Buddhism in greater detail. Is it necessary for me to learn the *Pāli* language to get a true insight into the Dhamma?

U: Not at the beginning. You can get an excellent general idea of Buddhism without that, provided you are careful in your choice of books. But as you go deeper in your studies you will find it necessary to acquire a vocabulary of certain *Pāli* technical terms, because for many of these there are no really satisfactory equivalents in English. You will learn them as you go along. Then as you proceed further you will probably feel a desire to learn the language, if only to be able to compare translations with the original texts and so clear up doubtful points for yourself. Not all interpretations of Buddhism, or even translations, are equally reliable, you know.

Mr. T: I suppose not. It must be easy to make errors in interpreting a system so complex and in so many points different from anything the Western mind is accustomed to. Well, thank you again. I shall look forward to our next meeting, when I expect to have some further questions to ask you.

III

Well, Mr. Thompson, you are back again, I see. Just now I noticed you making an offering of flowers at the temple shrine. That is a very nice gesture, coming from a freethinker!

Mr. T: I felt I wanted to pay my tribute to the great Teacher.

U: People may have thought you were a visiting politician!

Mr. T: Never mind that. My offering was genuine. Having done some more reading since I saw you last, I am more than ever impressed by the Doctrine. Apart from everything else, it has a coherence and logic that are beautiful in themselves—the beauty one finds in mathematics or in the majestic inevitability of a Bach fugue. One feels that this truly is the law that holds the stars in their courses, that it presents things as they really are and that nothing in it could possibly be otherwise than as it is.

U: Yes, naturally. It is the law of the universe, the “thusness” of things, which in Pāli is called *tathatā*.

Mr. T: But now, to descend from the cosmic to the—er, mundane, I have just noticed some people making offerings of rice and other food to the Buddha-image. I have seen this done before, and it has always struck rather a jarring note to me. Offering flowers, incense and even pure water I can understand. But food. ... Surely they do not believe that the Buddha, who passed utterly away “into the state wherein there is no possibility of the grasping factors arising,” as I have read, is in need of material human food? Or that the Buddha image can eat it?

U: Of course they do not. It is nothing more than a symbolic gesture. But if it is done with the right mental concentration it produces a good kammic impulse resembling that generated by giving food to the living Buddha. The Buddha-image is always just a substitute for the presence of the Teacher who is no longer with us.

Mr. T: Hm ... Well, that calls for rather more imagination than I can muster. I should prefer to see the food eaten by a hungry man. However, I realize that is just a point of view—perhaps my Western mind is too literal. Anyway, I am told the food is not wasted.

U: No, it is distributed to the poor after having been offered.

Mr. T: I am glad to know that. There are too many hungry children in the world for symbolic feedings to be justified, if they

were to involve waste. It would be too costly an exercise of the imagination and I cannot believe that the Buddha would have approved of it.

U: Buddhists understand that very well. You need have no fear that Buddhism encourages heartless waste. The offering to the Buddha is simply a preliminary gesture; it really means that the food is to be given to the poor, in honour of the Buddha's teaching of *dāna*, generosity. If it were wholly a kind of make-believe it would be ritualism, which Buddhism condemns. You will remember that the third of the ten fetters, as I told you, is addiction to vain virtues and observances, or *śīlabbataparāmāsa*.

Mr. T: Yes, one of the things that I, and many others, find so attractive about Buddhism is that it dispenses almost entirely with the external trappings of religion, which to so many people today are tedious and meaningless. It seems to me that the only purpose which communal worship serves is to give people a sense of solidarity. They no longer get the kind of mystical exaltation which possibly people got from it in the past. But I have noticed one thing, which I want to ask you about. It seems to me that most of the Buddha's discourses, and his training in general, were given for the monks. What exactly does the laity get out of Buddhism?

U: That is a quite mistaken impression. Some of the most important of the Buddha's sermons were delivered to lay people—people of every walk of life, from kings to scavengers. One of the best known of the sermons to householders is the *Sigālovāda Sutta*,¹⁹ which gives comprehensive advice on the good life that is as true today as when it was first uttered. And there are many others. In addition to that, nearly all the suttas give some counsel which can be beneficially applied by both monks and laymen. They have a universal relevance. The Dhamma offers a code of living to everyone, the highest and best the world has ever known. It is a path to happiness, both here and in future states, which everyone can follow.

Mr. T: But can a layman attain Nibbāna?

U: He can go a long way towards it. If he goes as far as attaining one of the three stages of purification prior to *Arahantship* he will almost certainly lose all desire to continue with worldly life. He will then take the yellow robe if his responsibilities allow him to.

19. Translated in *Everyman's Ethics (The Wheel, No. 14)*.

Mr. T: Ah, yes, of course—with the waning of desire that would be a quite natural result.

U: But of course it is much more difficult for a layman, surrounded by distractions and sensual enticements, to tread the path to the end. For him it is a considerable achievement if he can manage to observe the Five Precepts faithfully all his waking hours. But he should certainly put forth effort to do so and supplement his self-training by observing the eight or ten precepts²⁰ on Uposatha Days.

Mr. T: What are Uposatha Days?

U: I suppose the best term for them would be “retreat days,” as that conveys the idea better than any other. They are not fast days in the sense of abstaining entirely from food. The Uposatha days fall on the new moon and full moon dates, and the days of the first and last lunar quarter. In practice it is usually the full moon days that are observed by lay people. On those days they withdraw themselves from all worldly concerns and take on the major precepts of a bhikkhu, including that of not eating after midday. They spend the day usually in a temple, meditating, hearing the Dhamma or discussing it quietly among themselves. It is a very beneficial practice, and one that was strongly urged by the Buddha. There is no special sabbatarian significance in the days; they are just the natural landmarks of the lunar calendar.

Mr. T: I should like an opportunity of doing that myself. Would there be any objection?

U: Of course not. I will gladly arrange for you to spend the next full moon day here at this temple. Your meal will be provided, and if you would like to wear the customary white clothes I will see that you are properly fitted out.

Mr. T: That is very good of you, indeed. But is there any reason for wearing special clothes? Isn't that rather like the European habit of dressing up to go to church?

U: The white clothes are not essential. What is essential is the right mental attitude, and special clothes which by their colour symbolize purity, help to put us into the right frame of mind. So it is not just a mere convention. You might call it a psychological device.

Mr. T: Well, that helps. We have become conditioned to respond

20. Text in *The Mirror of the Dhamma* (*The Wheel*, No. 54).

to satisfying phrases and the more solemn and scientific-sounding they are the better! Anyway, I see the point. One needs all the help one can get, to maintain a religious attitude of mind in these days. But, as we are on the subject of the Buddhist precepts, I notice that they are all stated negatively. Why should they not be positive? For instance, why should not the first precept, not to kill, be stated as a positive instruction to *respect* life or to *protect* it?

U: Because all morality must start by abandoning wrong actions. The precepts are actually positive injunctions to refrain from certain acts which are harmful. Old rubbish has to be cleared away before a new building can be erected. The Ten Commandments all begin with “Thou shall not—” Buddhism substitutes “I shall not—” because the precepts are undertaken voluntarily. The difference that is sometimes made between positive and negative virtues is largely an artificial one; all restraint from wrong action is a positive virtue. But out of these necessarily negative statements of what are really positive virtues there does emerge a concept of virtue which is actively manifested, which expresses itself in an outflow of tenderness for all that lives and suffers. There are four qualities of the heart which, when they are developed and magnified to their fullest, the Buddha declared, lift man to the highest level of being, where he abides like unto the gods. That is the literal meaning of the name *brahma-vihāra*,²¹ which is given to them. They are *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā*—benevolence, compassion, sympathy and equanimity. These are not only to be practised in daily life, but also to be cultivated as meditation exercises, when they produce full concentration of mind and *jhānic* consciousness. They are the keys which unlock the gates of rebirth in the Brahmā worlds. In practice they represent the ultimate ethical ideal to which man can aspire in his relations with other beings, for they make no distinction between the hostile and the friendly, the sinner and the saint, the Brahmās of high heaven and the worm beneath the foot—as calm, pure, dispassionate love reaches out to all and encompasses all. This is how the Buddha described the practice of boundless loving-kindness in some passages from the *Karaṇīyametta Sutta*:

*Whatsoever living beings there are,
Be they weak or strong ... small or large—*

21. *The Four Sublime States (The Wheel, No. 6).*

*May all beings, without exception, be happy.
Whether they be visible or invisible,
Dwelling afar or near at hand,
Already born or about to be born –
May they all, without exception, be happy.*

*Just as a mother lovingly protects,
Even with her life, her only child,
So should one cherish boundless friendliness
And good will towards all living beings.
With heart of loving kindness grown immeasurable,
One should permeate the world, above, below
And transversely in all directions, with a love
Unobstructed, free from all envy and hate.*

Here in the world this is the highest, holiest life.

Mr. T: Yes, that is positive enough, and active, so far as the mind is concerned. But what about turning thought into deed? If the loving-kindness is no more than a cerebral activity, an attitude of mind and nothing more, how can one be sure that it is a genuine feeling? If it is never put to practical test, in some situation that calls for self-sacrifice or active work for someone else's good, can one ever be certain that it is not self-deception? May one not be humbugging oneself, to put it crudely?

U: Not if one also practises self-examination and analysis, in the thorough way Buddhism teaches. If one does not do that—yes, there is a possibility of deceiving oneself. Some people do indeed manage to convince themselves that they have boundless loving-kindness, when their actions show very clearly—to everyone but themselves—that they have not. But that possibility is present in every idea one has of oneself. The only safeguard against it, as I have said, is the deep self-knowledge that comes of minutely examining one's thoughts and motives, impersonally and without bias in one's own favour.

Mr. T: But would it not prevent any such self-deception if, right at the start, the precepts were to be framed as I suggested: instead of the injunction not to kill, a positive instruction to respect and protect life?

U: I think a moment's reflection will show you that it would be quite impracticable. No one could literally obey an instruction to protect life, without making his own life impossible. He would be

all the time going about trying to prevent butchers from slaughtering animals and gardeners from spraying their rose trees. And if he professed to obey the commandment (for that is what it would be) whilst knowing that he could not possibly carry it out, it would be just meaningless words. He would be left with no choice but to be a hypocrite. As for respecting life, if the phrase has any meaning at all it is surely covered by the resolve not to kill. I do not know in what other way we could show respect for life.

Mr. T: You surprise me! Why do you say “if the phrase has any meaning at all”?

U: Because to a Buddhist there is no concept of “life” in a collective sense; there are only living beings, individual organisms. And the life in them is not divine, or divinely bestowed; it is the result of past kamma actuated by craving. Therefore the Buddhist attitude is not one of respect, but of compassion. The phrase “reverence for life”²² is not found in Buddhism; its place is taken by compassion for living beings.

Mr. T: I see you are determined to resist any theistic terms or ideas.

U: If I am, it is not for the sake of verbal quibbling, but in the interests of straight thinking. Tell me, now, can anyone seriously say that he has reverence for cockroaches or tuberculosis bacilli?

Mr. T: Hardly, I suppose.

U: Well then, you see for yourself the phrase is meaningless. It can only lead to confused thinking. And what would you say of a man who undertook to “protect” those forms of life?

Mr. T: Well—I surrender that point! But I am wondering whether it is any more feasible to feel compassion for them.

U: When they are considered as beings bound to the wheel of suffering *like oneself*, then there is true compassion. But it does not require that we should engage in fighting with other organisms to preserve their lives. In Buddhism kindness and compassion take the form of not interfering harmfully with the destinies of other beings, but of wishing them well. When they die, whether it be naturally or at the hand of someone else, may they be reborn in

22. Schweitzer’s phrase: a concept which has led to much confused thinking and to serious contradictions between theory and practice in the ethical life.

some happier state! If they live, may they be free from unnecessary suffering! Such thoughts as these reach as far as loving-kindness can go without entering into the conflict between one creature and another, and so changing its own nature. If sides are taken, hatred creeps in and the *mettā*, which to be illimitable must be without distinctions or biases, is marred—we are then back at the more primitive level of “loving the righteous but hating sinners,” each being personified for us by some specific individual.

Mr. T: But then, to take a concrete example, what if we should happen to see a murder being committed? Are we to do nothing to prevent it?

U: In that case a Buddhist, like everyone else, will feel a spontaneous urge to go to the aid of the victim. But he should try by every means to avoid using force. If he cannot protect the victim by non-violent means, then it is for him to decide whether he shall use force or not, and if he does, how far he is prepared to go. He should never exceed the limits of strict necessity. Here I am speaking of the ordinary layman; the case of a bhikkhu, and particularly one who is striving earnestly to gain Nibbāna, and has renounced all other concerns and responsibilities for the sake of deliverance, is different. He should confine his intervention entirely to non-violent measures.

Mr. T: And if those fail?

U: Then they fail.

Mr. T: And the unfortunate victim dies! Then does Buddhism teach that it is more important for a man to preserve his own virtue, when by a lapse from his virtue he might save another's life?

U: It leaves the decision to the individual. It is for him alone to decide which he considers more important, and to act accordingly. But if he is one who is seeking the supreme good, the Buddha's words carry the greatest weight: “Let no one set aside his own good for that of another, however great it may be.”

Mr. T: That is a hard teaching, it seems to me.

U: The point of it is that the one who is cultivating universal benevolence must not discriminate in any way. For him there should be no “aggressor” and no “victim,” but only two beings equally caught up in the web of suffering, for whom he must feel equal compassion. The Buddha illustrated it in this way: You are

one of four monks, practising *mettā bhāvanā* in a forest cave. One of the monks is friendly towards you, another is hostile, the third is neutral. Armed robbers appear at the entrance and demand that you shall give them one of your number to be sacrificed to their deity. Which of the monks shall you give—your enemy, your friend, the one indifferent to you, or *yourself*? The answer is “None—not even yourself.” Your *mettā* for each must be equal and indiscriminating. If the robbers wish to commit a ritual murder you cannot prevent them, but they must choose the victim themselves. The moral responsibility is theirs alone. But now compare with this the *Jātaka* story in which the Bodhisatta gives his life to feed a starving tigress and her young. At first it would seem that two entirely different moralities are being taught. But it is not so. The Bodhisatta was accumulating good kamma by self-sacrifice; the meditating bhikkhus are striving to abolish all notions of distinction between self and others which stand in the way of boundless, indiscriminating *mettā*. Therefore none of them should discriminate against any of them, not even against oneself. His *mettā* for himself must be exactly the same as that which he feels for each of the others. The two parables show the distinction between the way of kamma and the way of the renunciation of kamma. In the *Jātaka* the virtue, or *pāramitā*, consisted of the accumulation of merit; the virtue of the bhikkhus consists of the abandoning of all merit except that of their *jhāna*.

Mr. T: That is a difficult point, but I think I understand it now. At least, I can see why the bhikkhu should not resort to violence, even to prevent a murder.

U: You see, there are two kinds of merit—that which brings a worldly result and that which leads to supra-mundane classes of consciousness.

Mr. T: Very well, then can you tell me how kamma will operate in the case of an ordinary person who chooses to use force to prevent a murder?

U: No one can calculate precisely the consequences of an act from the viewpoint of kamma. So much depends upon the actual state of the mind—on what wholesome or unwholesome mental concomitants are present—when the act is performed. But in the case of a layman who elects to use force in a situation of that kind for the sake of the victim, the bad kamma, if any, must be quite light—perhaps less than he generates in many of his daily activities. The fact that he is not acting from any selfish motive

must mitigate it to a very great extent. If he should sustain injuries as the result of his intervention, the bad vipāka may be completely exhausted in the course of the pain he suffers then. And if he can by self-knowledge and control succeed in using the minimum of force necessary, without any impulse of anger or hatred towards the aggressor, but only feeling pity for the victim, then it is possible that there would be no bad kamma present at all. But to act in that utterly passionless manner is extremely difficult.

Mr. T: Now I am wondering just what kind of social effect such an attitude might be expected to have. Its bearing, I mean, on crime, on social abuses and—what is particularly relevant in these days when power movements and power-seeking groups threaten in some parts of the world to establish the rule of force—what weapon it leaves society to protect itself from such evils as, for instance, race-hatred and political persecutions. It seems there is no place in Buddhism for “righteous anger.” How, then, are these evils to be counteracted? Does not moral indignation, the outspoken public condemnation of vices, cruelties and perverted ideologies, play a part in keeping society pure? Don’t you think that a society which is too tolerant of obvious evils bears within it the germs of its own destruction?

U: We must never lose sight of the fact that the Dhamma is a teaching for individual salvation. It is hardly concerned with society as such because, as I pointed out in another connection, when individuals improve, society automatically improves as well. At the time when the Buddha lived and taught, the ordinary man had no say in the way society was held together, no influence at all in the affairs of the state, its laws or the trends of its development. When the Buddha wished to give advice concerning man’s life within society he addressed himself to the kings, or to the elders who formed the governing bodies of the republics. It was they alone who held the reins of public affairs. And of course the problems they had to solve were relatively simple ones, and quite different from those that confront us now.

Mr. T: But it is just in those matters that man is most in need of guidance today.

U: Yes. For better or for worse, the private individual is now involved more deeply than ever before, in national affairs, and so he is the more responsible for what goes on in the society of which he forms a part. Since you have put this question, and it is

one that cannot well be ignored, I shall try to answer it. But you must understand that what I shall say is my own opinion only; the sole authority I can claim for it is that it is an interpretation of the situation which I believe to be in accordance with Buddhist principles. You have asked me whether too much tolerance of obvious evils is not a dangerous weakness in society. I am bound to grant that it could be a source of danger. The moral indignation of which you speak does act as a corrective, if it is aroused for a just cause. When we admit that in the relative scale of worldly values every virtue can become a vice if it is carried to excess, it is not difficult to see that the virtues of the monastery and the hermit's cave can be harmful if they are practised in a society in which unwholesome and disruptive forces are at work. But Buddhism does not by any means advocate this. For the majority of people—those who bear voluntarily the responsibilities of worldly life—it teaches, as it has ever done, the middle way. Since they enjoy the rights, privileges and securities which society gives them, they own a duty to society in return, which is to keep it healthy. They are under a moral obligation to resist—using means that are in accord with Buddhist principles—whatever influences are manifestly evil and detrimental to society, or which threaten the welfare of their fellow-men. They should never, in any circumstances, tolerate cruelties, injustices or the oppression of the weak by the strong. There are today many means, short of physical violence, by which disapproval may be expressed, and if these are used effectively at the first appearance of vicious trends in society, the necessity of resorting to force later may be avoided. But if the weight of moral force is insufficient to stamp out some grave evil, then the state itself must take action. Even Asoka, who stands out as the pattern of a benevolent Buddhist king, did not disband his army or abolish the punitive laws that were necessary to guarantee his subjects' peace and security. Neither did the Buddha ever counsel a ruler to go to such extremes of non-violence; he simply called for a just and merciful administration of the realm, exhorting kings to look upon their subjects as their own children, for if the king and his ministers were good, the people would be good also, living as members of one united family.

Mr. T: I am relieved to know that Buddhism favours a realistic view of these matters, and does not expect us to take a neutral and complaisant attitude towards social evils; for if it did, I am afraid it would be of little service to mankind as a whole today.

Now, you just mentioned kingdoms and republics in the India of the Buddha's time. Is there any indication as to which system the Buddha himself considered best?

U: No, not enough to base any theory of "rulership" upon. The republics appear to have resembled the Greek republican states; they were governed by a senate—not elected by the people, but composed of men of known character and tested ability, chosen by their peers. The Buddha never drew any comparison between the two systems. But in the Buddhist texts, when the ideal state is depicted it is under the rule of a *Chakravartin*, or world-monarch, a man of sublime wisdom and compassion who rules according to Dhamma. It is, in fact, a benevolent autocracy. But this state of things appears only at a phase of evolution when civilization is at its highest peak and it is possible to rule without bloodshed. It seems to be tacitly assumed that at other times "rulership" must share to some extent the defects of all *Saṃsāric* phenomena.²³ Buddhism has no belief in the perfectibility of human institutions—only in the perfectibility of individuals.

Mr. T: The idea of the *Chakravartin* seems to link up with the Messianic hope that is found in other religions—and his rule, perhaps, with the "Kingdom of God." How natural it is that men should long for a divine or semi-divine ruler—one who will guide them out of the wilderness into the green pastures of peace, and cause the lion to lie down with the lamb, here on this very earth, so stained with blood! It seems to me that this is one of the archetypal dreams of man, something universal and perennial among the varieties of human hope.

U: It may be not a dream but a memory.

Mr. T: You mean...?

U: There have been world-monarchs in the past cycles of the world, just as there will be in the future. Who knows what subconscious memories of them have crossed the portals of death and rebirth? Or what expectations may have been born of those dimly-remembered things?

23. In illustration of this it is related that the Bodhisatta was once born as the son of a powerful monarch. As an infant he saw his father in the counsel chamber condemning criminals to punishment and death. Horrified, the prince thought to himself: "If I inherit the kingdom I too will have to commit such acts, for to a ruler they are unavoidable." From that time on, he feigned dumbness to disqualify himself for the throne.

Mr. T: Yes ... it is possible. I feel now more than ever I did the depth and breadth of this experience we call life, how infinitely it extends all about us, how it stretches back into unimaginable vistas of time. It is a thing I never understood before. The other day I was reading a poem, and all at once I had a feeling that the words were living things, with a meaning greater than their sense. It seemed as though the walls of the room had suddenly, silently, slid away and there was voidness—just voidness—but it contained all that has ever been or will be. And it seemed to me that I knew everything, and had been one with that knowledge throughout all time. ... Strange. ... It seems to me that since I have been reading about Buddhism, thinking about it, something has grown to maturity in me, something that otherwise might never have come to the light. ... But I can neither describe it nor account for it. I can only say—perhaps I knew these things before.

U: Perhaps you did.

Mr. T: There is just one last question I want to ask. Just now you spoke of what should not be tolerated in society. It reminded me of a question I wanted to put to you earlier. What is the proper attitude for a Buddhist to take to other religions? Should it not be one of absolute tolerance? As I understand it, that is what the Buddha taught.

U: Perhaps you think that in answering some of your questions about Buddhism in relation to other faiths I have not been as tolerant as I might have been?

Mr. T: It had crossed my mind.

U: Well, in that case I am glad you have mentioned it. What do you yourself understand by religious tolerance?

Mr. T: I take it to mean not forcing others to give up their own beliefs—not using any kind of compulsion to make them change their religion; and, of course, not making any discrimination in one's attitude towards those of other faiths.

U: But do you think that reasoned, legitimate criticism of religious beliefs, with opportunity given to the other side to oppose you, constitutes intolerance?

Mr. T: Well—it could indicate an intolerant attitude of mind.

U: But in that case, can you name any single religious teacher, including the Buddha himself, who was not “intolerant”?

Mr. T: Actually, I thought the Buddha was the single exception.

U: Then you can never have read the many Suttas in which the Buddha discussed matters of doctrine and practice with other religious teachers or their followers. In those discourses, such as the *Brahmajāla*, *Ambaṭṭha*, *Soṇadaṇḍa*, *Kassapa*, *Sīhanāda*, *Poṭṭhapāda*, *Lohicca* and *Tevijja Suttas* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Buddha courteously but very firmly refuted different kinds of wrong belief. Can you tell me how he could have taught anything at all if he had refused to make comparisons between his own doctrines and those of other teachers?

Mr. T: Hm. ... No, I suppose he couldn't.

U: Exactly so. Having any kind of teaching to impart, must necessarily mean that some other teachings are contradicted. And supposing, further, that someone invites one to make a comparison between his religious beliefs and one's own, can one be called "intolerant" if the comparison does not turn out to be pleasing to him?

Mr. T: No, not really. Of course, a lot depends on how one expresses oneself.

U: More depends upon how sensitive the other person is about his faith. Buddhists are not particularly sensitive because they feel that Buddhism can be demonstrated rationally.

Mr. T: All right, I admit that "reasoned, legitimate criticism" is not intolerance—particularly if it has been asked for. But I take it that Buddhism is tolerant in the stricter sense that I mentioned first?

U: You had better have said "in the true sense," for when you said "not forcing others to give up their religion, and not making any discrimination against others on account of their faith" you were really defining true tolerance. That is the kind of tolerance the Buddha practised and advocated and which Buddhists have always followed. After he had refuted erroneous beliefs, the Buddha still maintained that a man had a right to continue holding those beliefs and that no one should attempt to coerce him out of them. And he went even further than that in teaching that all sincerely held beliefs should be respected, so long as they were not patently harmful doctrines. Buddhism in fact shows that all the great world-religions have some good moral principles which, if they are observed, will lead to a favourable rebirth. Doctrines may be erroneous, but if the actions they prompt are good and wholesome ones they will produce results as beneficial as those

performed by a Buddhist. Morality based upon wrong views is called *ditṭhinissita-sīla*; if it should happen to accord with morality based on right views its kammic action is the same, no matter what strange theories of the universe may have inspired it. The tolerance of Buddhism is grounded on two central facts: that happiness hereafter comes not through faith but through deeds; and Buddhism claims for itself no exclusive right of access to the heavenly realms. It claims only to show the sole way to exit from saṃsāra. So the Buddha taught us to approve and respect whatever is good in other teachings, and furthermore, not to feel anger if his own Dhamma is attacked. This is true tolerance, and it has been observed faithfully by Buddhists through 2500 years of the growth and expansion of the Dispensation or Sāsana. Buddhism has always spread in other ways than by conflict, violence and oppression. Surely that is a sufficient answer to your question. But it is certainly a mistaken idea of tolerance to believe that it forbids us to draw critical comparisons between the Dhamma and other religious teachings.

Mr. T: Yes, I see that now. There are some religions, you know, which hold that since they and they alone are in possession of absolute truth and the means of salvation, they should not tolerate error.

U: Yes, I know. Many crimes have been committed in the name of that doctrine. In reality the exaltation of intolerance is nothing but a cover for dogmatic beliefs that cannot meet the light of reasoned criticism.

Mr. T: Well, Buddhism can certainly do that. I am grateful to you for all the time you have spent over my questions. I am rather ashamed now to realize that several of them need not have been asked. I could have thought out the answers for myself, if I had chosen to do so.

U: Never mind. Don't we all need help and guidance? Come to me again, any time you wish.

Mr. T: I shall come on the next full moon day.

U: Good! And the white clothes...?

Mr. T: Please have them ready. I shall be happy to wear them.

U: And may you always be happy!

Mr. T: "May all beings, everywhere, be happy."

8. THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH TO BUDDHISM

The eminent scientist, Bertrand Russell, has summed up the position of present-day philosophical thought as follows: "Assuming physics to be broadly speaking true, can we know it to be true, and if the answer is to be in the affirmative, does this involve knowledge of other truths besides those of physics? We might find that, if the world is such as physics says it is, no organism could know it to be such; or that, if an organism can know it to be such, it must know some things other than physics, more particularly certain principles of probable inference" (*Physics and Experience*, Cambridge University Press).

That position requires a little preliminary explanation. In the days when science was believed to hold the key to all the secrets of the universe, the materialistic interpretation of life held undisputed sway. The scientist, it was thought, had only to turn the key—in other words, open up the atom for investigation—and the basic principle of all material phenomena would be exposed. All life and thought-processes were believed to have a material origin and foundation, and there was no room for the supernatural concepts of religion. Everything was a mechanical process of cause and effect, with nothing beyond.

The evidence of physics, so far as it went, was overwhelming; it was supported by the findings of astronomy, psychology and Darwinian evolution. Scientists believed that they understood the nature of atomic processes so well that, if the relative position, direction and force of all atomic units in the universe at any given moment were known, every future event in space and time could be accurately predicted. It was only a question of obtaining the data.

In course of time the key was turned; the construction of the atom was analysed, but it was found to resolve itself into energy, a process of transmutation from one form of radiation into another, a continual cycle of arising and passing away of electronic particles. With the discovery of quantum mechanics, another modification entered into the accepted scheme of rigid causality. It was found that although the law of predictability held true of large numbers of atomic particles it was not valid for individual atoms. The law of deterministic causality was not absolute; it could only be applied statistically or quantitatively

where large groups of atoms were being dealt with. This new concept opened the way for what is called the "uncertainty principle."

From a philosophic viewpoint, which is, strictly speaking, no concern of the pure scientist who is only engaged in the investigation of phenomena, not its implications, this "uncertainty principle" made room for the idea of free-will, which had necessarily been absent from the idea of an universe entirely determined by causal principles that admitted of no variation.

With the changeover from a static to a dynamic concept of matter, the scientist did not alter his materialistic theory because science by its nature has to assume the substance or reality of the material with which it is working; but a radical change took place in the attitude towards knowledge itself. Man, and the working of his mind, is a part of the universe, and his examination of its phenomena is like a person looking into the working of his own brain. He is looking at that with which he is himself identified; he cannot get outside and view it objectively. The picture of the universe presented through his senses is quite different from the picture given by physics; where his senses tell him there is solidity, form and substance, physics tells him there is nothing but a collocation of forces in a perpetual state of flux, of momentary arising and decay; and, moreover, that "solid" forms are really nothing but *events* in the space-time continuum, and that the so-called material object is itself mostly space. There is no such thing as a "solid" as we understand the term; it is merely a convention of speech based upon the deceptive data provided by the senses.

Our senses, however, are the only possible means of contact with events outside ourselves, and the data of physics, similarly, have to reach us through these senses. So the problem arises, can we ever be certain that the picture presented by physics is a true one? This picture, it must be remembered, is a purely theoretical one; it is a matter largely of mathematical formulae, from which the mind has to make up whatever imaginative approximation it can. The universe of physics is an entirely mental concept; we cannot make up any picture of the space-time manifold of Einstein, so we have to rely upon the evidence of mathematics, which reveals a new dimension entirely outside the range of our normal experience. But the physicist has come to distrust even the working of his own mind, since it is itself a part of this quite

illusory fabrication; and so he has been forced to ask himself the revolutionary question, "If physics is true, is it possible for us to know that it is true?" The whole subject-object relationship is thus brought into question. When the mind registers the impression which we call "seeing an object," can we be certain that the object seen really exists outside ourselves, or that there is any event taking place in space-time that bears the slightest resemblance to what we think we see? Science can give us no assurance on this point.

The scientific view of the phenomenal universe has reached this stage, and does not seem capable of going beyond it. To view the picture in its completeness, a mind is required that is not itself involved in the phenomenal process, a transcendental mind that is outside the realm of causality and the subject-object relationship. It must "know some things other than physics."

So far, science has helped us, in its own way, to understand the Buddhist principles of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, for the account it gives of the universe is completely in accord with Buddhist philosophy. The process of universal flux and the inherent substancelessness of matter is a fundamental of Buddhism. More than that, the process has actually been observed in the course of Buddhist meditation; the atomic constituents have been seen and felt, and the *dukkha* of their arising and passing away has made itself known to the mind which has stopped identifying the process with what we call "self," the illusion of *sakkāya diṭṭhi*. The supramundane knowledge of Buddhism begins where science leaves us, but because Buddhism is based upon direct perception of ultimate truth, it is only natural that the discoveries of science should confirm it as they are doing today.

The whole process of the deceptive arising and passing way of phenomena may be comprehended in the word *maya*. This word is usually translated as "illusion" but that is not entirely correct. The sphere of *maya* is that of *relative reality*; that is, it is real on its own level, but not real in any absolute sense. To the consciousness functioning on the same level, or at the same vibrational frequency, a solid is a solid exactly as it appears through the five doors of the senses. But to a consciousness operating on a different level, the solid would be seen in a different way; it would appear as physics tells us it is, a collection of atomic particles in continual movement. The "solid" object would be seen as predominantly space, with the atomic

constituents widely separated, like the stars in the night sky, and only held in place by the electronic forces of attraction and repulsion, in just the same way that the planetary systems of the universe are held together. From another level it would be seen simply as the operation of a law, and from yet another plane of consciousness it would be found to be non-existent; there could be only the void, or *asāṅkhata-dhamma*. That plane would be outside the sphere of causality, a state unthinkable to the ordinary mind, which depends upon events in space-time for its consciousness, and we may consider it to be equivalent to the ultimate state of Nibbāna, in which there is neither coming-to-be nor passing away. The space-time continuum of phenomenal perception would be transcended and the timeless, unconditioned state would then be reached.

These ascending levels of consciousness in which the solid object is seen in different aspects, each one more immaterial than the one proceeding it, may be likened to the four *brahma-vihāras*, where the consciousness is freed from the illusion of gross matter, and perceives instead the law that governs it, coming to know ultimately that "matter" is only the expression of that law, appearing in different aspects on the various planes of cognition. To the *kāmāvacara citta* (sense-sphere consciousness), form, or *rūpa*, appears solid and on that level it is what it appears; but to the consciousness which sees it in the light of Dhamma the law of cause and effect becomes apparent, and in the place of *rūpa* the three characteristics of becoming, *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* (impermanence, suffering, not-self), are recognised.

There are indications that man has reached the end of his development on the intellectual plane; he has come to rock-bottom in the analysis of physical phenomena, yet still its ultimate secret eludes him. There is more beyond, which mind is not capable of exploring, because the circle of causality in which it moves has been completed. The next state of development must lie in a different dimension. Enough has happened to bring about a complete re-orientation of all our ideas concerning man and his place in the cosmic pattern, and this represents a great advance on both the animistic and materialist views that prevailed formerly. Like everything else, reason revolves in a circle, bounded by the limitations of conceptual thinking, and the point around which it rotates is the difficulty of distinguishing the process that is being examined from the "self" that is examining it. This is the fundamental obstacle, *sakkāya-ditṭhi* (personality-

belief), because in reality there is no "self" apart from the process. In the modern view there is no such thing as "I;" the word is merely a grammatical convention. Everything we know now about the process of thought can be expressed without the use of the word. We have this also on the authority of Bertrand Russell and others. The discoveries of physics have their counterpart in psychology. In analysing the mental processes a great deal of concealed activity has been brought to light, and definite causal relationships have been traced between the conscious and unconscious strata of the mind. The unconscious, in which is stored the accumulated experience of the individual, supplies the tendencies that motivate the conscious activities. Thus it may be identified with the *bhavaṅga*, or life-continuum, which takes the place of any connecting entity between one phase of consciousness and the next. Professor William James was the first psychologist to formulate the theory of point-moments of consciousness. He demonstrated that these point-moments come into being and pass away again in rapid succession, thus giving the impression of a continuous entity, whereas they are, in reality only infinitesimal units of a series, each existing for a fraction of a split-second, and then passing away to make room for its successor. They are, in fact, like the thousands of static pictures on a reel of film, which, when run through a projector, produce the illusion of a single moving picture. Furthermore, we are only conscious of each one in the moment of its passing away; for this reason they are sometimes called death spots, and the resultant consciousness is dependent upon memory.

These point-moments arise in obedience to the law of causality, each having its causal genesis in the one preceding it, but there is no other connection between them. Everywhere in psychology we come upon these causal processes and the continual state of flux in thoughts, mental impressions and cognition, but nowhere can we detect any permanent entity linking the succession of events together. Again, as in physics, we find only causal relationships, and the Abhidhamma analysis holds good throughout.

Freud went so far as to maintain that every overt act of the conscious mind is instigated by an antecedent cause and no thought can arise spontaneously. This he demonstrated in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. When the cause could not be found in the conscious mind he sought it in the unconscious. His researches led him to the theory that most so-called accidents

were the result of a subconscious wish—that they were in fact, engineered by the subconscious mind for reasons of its own. The theory has been disputed by later investigators, but Freud collected a formidable mass of evidence in support of it.

From the Buddhist point of view it appears to be at least a partial truth. In as much as the unconscious stratum of the mind carries the tendencies and predispositions of the individual, which are his accumulated *kammic* influences, it is the activity of that portion of the mind which determines the experiences and events of his life. It is not that the unconscious mind wills the events, because it has the nature only of *bhavaṅga*, a current directed by past habitual thoughts, and lacks the quality of volition, which is a characteristic of the conscious mind; but events such as “accidents” are certainly determined by the unconscious mind in the discharge of its mechanical function of projecting those situations that constitute the individual’s experience, in accordance with his *kamma*. “*Mano pubbaṅgamā dhammā; mano seṭṭhā, manomayā* — all phenomena arise from mind; mind is the chief, they are all mind-made.” Freud’s error was merely that he mistook a partially-understood causal process in the subconscious mind for an act of volition. That is why his theory has never been completely proved, despite the high percentage of successes in his experiments. It is another instance of science approaching Buddhism, but lacking the key that will unlock the last door.

The materialist affirms that mind and mental conditions have a material basis; the idealist, on the contrary, claims that matter exists only by virtue of mind. The evidence adduced by the materialist is that the mind is only a product of the brain, which is a material substance. Physical objects existing in space are contacted through the nerve-channels leading from eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin-surface. The resulting sensation depends upon the existence of the brain, a complex material nerve-centre with its own particular function of collecting and correlating the data thus received. If the brain is damaged it operates imperfectly; if it is destroyed it ceases to function altogether. The mind, then, is considered to be a causal process depending entirely on material factors.

The reasonableness of this point of view cannot be denied, but it does not account for all the facts. If the process is strictly a mechanical one, determined by physical causes which can be traced back to a material origin and obeying a rigid causal law,

there is no room for the exercise of free-will. Evolution then becomes a predestined automatic process in which there is no freedom of choice between possible alternatives. Yet even biological evolution demands such a choice, since the production of specialised types is usually attributed to natural selection. Those types, such as the mastodon, brontosaurus, pterodactyl and other extinct species, which made a choice of development that suited them to a particular environment, disappeared when that environment changed; they had over-specialised and could not readapt themselves. There is nothing automatic about the evolution of species; it is conducted on a system of trial and error, and shows at least as many failures as successes. There are some who consider that man himself must be numbered among the failures, since he shows a tendency towards self-destruction, due to the fact that his spiritual evolution has not kept abreast of his increasing mastery of physical forces. H. G. Wells, who saw in the Buddhist King Asoka the highest development of civilised rulership over two thousand years ago, was firmly convinced that, far from progressing, man as a spiritual being had deteriorated since that time, and would ultimately destroy himself.

The idea of a steady progress in evolution has been discarded by science, and present theories are more in accordance with what we know of evolution as it applies to the individual. That evolution requires freedom of choice between the alternatives of right and wrong actions. There is progress or regression, according to whether the kamma tends towards good or bad, and the entire concept of kamma is based upon free-will. It is not, as it is sometimes misinterpreted, a fatalistic doctrine. Previous kamma determines the experiences and situations that have to be faced in life, but it is the characteristic tendencies of the individual, which are the product of accumulated acts of volition, that determine how he will deal with those situations when they arise. There is no such thing as an accident in natural law, but the "uncertainty principle" which we discovered in physics allows for the operation of unknown causes, as in the unpredictable behaviour of individual atoms. In the case of an individual, for instance, it may be possible to predict fairly accurately how the person will behave in a given situation when his characteristic tendencies are known, but we cannot guarantee absolute certainty. An honest man may, under pressure of circumstances, or because of some latent *kammic* tendency, act dishonestly, or a

brave man become a coward, and vice versa. This explains the inconsistencies and frequent contradictions of human nature; we can never be absolutely certain that the person we think we know so well will always act strictly "in character." Personality is a fluid structure, altering momentarily, and only guided by certain broad principles which represent the *saṅkhāra*-accumulated tendencies or habit-formations.

Concerning these habit-formations, it may be said that Buddhism is the only system that gives them their due place of importance in the scheme of personal evolution. It is by habit-formations that we are told to eliminate bad tendencies and promote the good ones, thus moulding our own psychology through accumulated acts of strenuous effort, as indicated by the fourfold Right Effort, which is one of the thirty-seven principles of *bodhi*. Now, habit-formation and the association of ideas are closely linked, as modern psychology has proved. In his experiments on conditioned reflexes, Pavlov established the relationship between associated ideas and physical reactions. The dogs he used in his researches were taught to associate the sound of a bell, or some other noise, with the idea of food. When they heard that particular sound, the dog showed the same reactions as though they were seeing or smelling food. Their mouths watered, and they gave other signs of pleasure which proved that the sound and the idea of food had become firmly associated in their minds. The mind of a dog is a very simple thing compared with that of a human being, which makes it easier to trace its sequence of events and their physical consequences. It works almost entirely on this system of conditioned reflexes. The reasoning faculty is rudimentary; and as we descend in the scale of living organisms we find that they become more and more instinctive or mechanical. A termite, for instance, is little more than a mechanical unit controlled by a mind outside itself. Recent experiments with colonies of termites have shown that the directive is the queen-termite, and that the termite-nest must be considered as a single animal, with its brain and nerve-centre situated in the queen. If the queen is destroyed, the termites become confused, running frantically in all directions, and the orderly system of the nest is utterly broken up. The individual termite, therefore, is not a complete organism in itself, but only a part of the whole. They are, as it were, limbs of the main body, detached from it, but functioning in all ways like the limbs of a single animal. It is believed that they are directed by a kind of

radar emitted by the queen-termite. When the queen is killed or injured it is as though the brain of the animal were damaged; the limbs move without co-ordination like those of a man who is insane. But the brain of the organism, the queen-termite, is a strictly limited mechanism; it performs the functions required of it for the survival of the termite-nest, according to inherent tendencies transmitted from one generation of queens to another. Within the limits of its requirements it is a perfect organism, but it has no possibility of further development. Why is this? We can only assume that, having reached its limited evolutionary objective, it no longer has to exercise any choice between possible alternatives; it has surrendered the faculty of free-will and has become a set automaton. It represents one of the levels of consciousness dominated entirely by kamma, in which the results of previous conditions are worked out without any opportunity for using them to advantage, and may be considered the type of consciousness characteristic of all the four *apaya* planes (worlds of misery) in varying degrees. The question is dealt with in the section on the classification of individuals (*puggala-bhedo*) in the *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha* (Ch. IV).

There is an approximation to this automatic type of consciousness to be found even in some human beings, and the termite may be taken as a warning to those who sacrifice their independence of thought to become slaves to authority and tradition; they give themselves a termite-consciousness, and if they re-manifest as termites, it is their own choice. To deliver oneself up to authoritarianism is an easy and comfortable way out of the hazard and pain of having to make an independent choice. But man is a free agent, and to be born a human being is a tremendous responsibility. Having earned that responsibility we should not lightly throw it away. By showing us exactly where we stand in relation to the universe around and within us, Buddhism gives us a clear insight into the divine potentialities of our nature; it is the most emphatic assertion of man's freedom to choose his own destiny.

The Western philosopher of today is bewildered by the confusion into which his speculations have led him. He sees a universe of amoral forces with no fixed centre, a changing phantasmagoria in which all is shadow but no substance, and he is obsessed by the futility of what he sees. His intellectual position has been fairly defined as one of "heroic despair." Discovering no ground for belief in moral values he has come to

question whether they have any absolute meaning or whether they are, after all, only products of mankind's collective imagination. Life, for him, has become "a tale told by an idiot; full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Abstract ideas, such as those of justice, benevolence, wisdom and truth, seem to him only relative qualities, dictated by circumstances and differing from age to age. So ethical standards tend to give way to the demands of expediency.

Only Buddhism can provide the missing element of higher knowledge—the "something other than physics"—which causes all the other elements to fall into place and form a complete and intelligible picture. Seeing the world as the Buddha taught us to see it, we can weigh its values according to the highest standards known to us. And in the process of weighing and assessing, Buddhism encourages us to analyse all the factors of experience, not to hedge ourselves about with dogmas, or cling to preconceived ideas. The Buddha himself was the first religious teacher in this world-cycle to apply strictly scientific methods to the analysis of our own being and the cosmic phenomena in which we are entangled, and his voice speaks to us as clearly today as ever it did 2500 years ago. It speaks to us, not only through his teaching preserved over the centuries, but through the discoveries of modern science also. The teachings, as we have them, may contain something added by later interpreters, but the central truths the Buddha taught are sufficient in themselves to give us the vital clue that has eluded present-day thinkers. When we add their discoveries to the doctrines of Buddhism we find that the whole makes a complete pattern, so far as our rational minds are capable of appreciating it. The remainder we must find for ourselves on the higher planes of Buddhist *jhāna*.

At present it may look as though man has only searched out the secrets of the universe in order to destroy himself with the power he has acquired; and of that there is certainly a danger. But I believe that a change in outlook is beginning to dawn, and that science itself, having destroyed the basis of much wrong thinking, is drawing us ever nearer to the realisation of the truth proclaimed by the Enlightened One. This is what I mean by "the scientific approach to Buddhism;" without being aware of it, the modern scientist and philosopher are being propelled irresistibly in the direction of Buddhism. Their uncertainties and doubts are spiritual "growing pains;" but a time will come quickly when they will realise that, although they have had to reject everything

on which their ordinary religious and moral beliefs are founded, there is a higher religion—one based upon systematic investigation and the sincere search for truth—which will restore their lost faith in the universal principles of justice, truth and compassion. Those who now believe that man has come to the end of his tether will then see the opening up of vistas into the future that they only dimly suspect, and will recognise, beyond it all, the final goal of complete emancipation from the fetters of ignorance and delusion.

9. THE BUDDHIST WORLD VIEW IN THE AGE OF SCIENCE

1. Evolution by Craving: The Buddhist Genesis

During the nineteenth century when the Western World began to be dazzled by the accumulating achievements of science and the amazing vistas of progress that seemed to be opening up in every direction, a belief arose in the inevitability of human advancement through technical mastery of nature.

It was then thought that this progress was bound to lead to an age of perfection when mankind would be the heir to all knowledge and virtue. The belief was strengthened by the current theories of Darwinism, which seemed to teach that the evolutionary process made a steady and regular ascent from crude forms of life to higher and more refined types. A facile philosophy of optimism was born, which placed its faith in the parallel development of technical knowledge with moral and spiritual growth, and mankind was thought to be firmly established on the upward gradient which would ultimately lead to the dreamed of age of absolute righteousness, wisdom and plenitude of power.

Since that period the world has been disillusioned. It has been found that progress in the material sense is not necessarily accompanied by growth of wisdom or deeper understanding of spiritual values. Mankind now has command of tremendous material forces, but does not know how to use this power for beneficial ends. Instead, the tendency of man is still to employ whatever knowledge he has gained in the oppression and destruction of his fellows. The madness of greed, for possessions and for power, points a finger not towards perfection but towards self-destruction, and the gifts of science are only being used to hasten humanity on the fatal road. As H. G. Wells, once a firm believer in evolution through knowledge, pointed out shortly before his death as a disillusioned man, the human being is like a clever monkey, possessing dangerous toys which it does not know how to handle safely, or how to put to a good and constructive purpose. Man's spiritual growth has not kept pace with his increased command of technical knowledge and he is like a lunatic loose in a power-house.

A better understanding of the natural laws of evolution has also gone to show that the shallow optimism of the early

followers of Darwin was based on a fallacy. Natural evolution in the biological sphere is not a steady upward progression as it was once thought to be. It is a hazardous series of experiments, some of them successes but the great majority failures. Numbers of different species have evolved in the course of this evolutionary process, only to become extinct on account of their inability to adapt themselves to changing conditions. Evolution is accompanied by retrogression; species become degenerate and go down in the scale, and there is no indication of any external guiding principle aiming at a definite goal. The entire process is seen to have been carried out on the principle of trial and error, a blind groping, and we can no longer have confidence that our own species has any assured future because of its long upward struggle. The human race too may degenerate—may, in fact, be the result of a degeneration that preceded the earliest traces of primitive man—or may eventually bring about its own extinction through defects inherent in its own nature which intellectual development alone has failed to overcome. The ascending line of intellectual progress may indeed be the descending curve on the side of spiritual development and hence our entire concept of evolution may be false.

Buddhism teaches that the basis of all life, the mainspring, as it were, of the vital principle of living beings is craving. The facts of biological evolution most strikingly confirm this. We are brought face to face with the hidden machinery of evolution only when we acknowledge the power of craving as a dynamic force which is capable of making matter obey its mandate. Just as a man, working on the basis of his own imperfect judgment, commits errors in striving for the attainment of his object, so the process of evolution also is seen to have been a myopic, undirected force feeling its way towards a goal not fully comprehended. As we understand it now, the history of evolution presents a different pattern from that which was first suspected, and we are able to point to craving as its motivating factor. The various species of living beings which have all evolved from a very simple prototype, the single-cell amoeba, show how, over countless millions of years, more and more complicated organisms have come into existence, each developing by branching off from an earlier type, and each in turn reaching a higher degree of sensory perception than those preceding it. Behind all this complicated process we find the sole driving and directing force to be the craving for increased and

more accurate sensory experience, which can only be obtained through improved faculties of mind and body. In the lower animals the organism is simple and relatively insensitive; its sphere of sensory experience is restricted and its perceptions dim. In the course of evolution it acquires a more complex set of sense organs, each one ministering to a particular need, not all of which are utilitarian. The acquisition of a more sensitive organism cannot in each case be attributed, as was once believed, to the needs of survival. In some instances, far from helping the species to survive, the development of a more delicately adjusted physical mechanism has made it more vulnerable. If the scheme of evolution were solely directed towards survival the single-cell, self-propagating prototypes would have fully answered the purpose and evolutionary progression would not have needed to pass on to any higher stage. It is permissible to assume, therefore, that some at least of the characteristic physical changes brought about by mutations within the species were not evolved only to perform a utilitarian function, but also to meet a need that may fairly be called hedonic. What becomes apparent is a blind force whose sole objective is an ever-increasing field of sensory experience. Its motive is the equivalent of what in psychology is called the 'pleasure principle'.

It is thus possible to trace two principles at work, one aiming at preservation and the other no less clearly directed towards the extension of hedonic experience; but it must be understood that preservation of the species is only an incidental to the need for attaining the more important goal of hedonic fulfilment. We have already seen that the evolution of species does not take a uniform upward trend, but that it branches off into blind alleys and forms subsidiary waves that rise and fall independently of the general trend of the current. It shows long periods of seeming lack of progress during which no fresh mutations occur, or in which species that have already over-specialised in fitting themselves to their environment succumb to changing climatic or other conditions. There is, for example, the case of the giant lizards, glorified in folk-lore and tradition as dragons, which became too vast and cumbersome to support their great bulk on a gradually thinning vegetation during the successive ice-ages that crept over the earth's surface when the terrestrial sphere, perhaps influenced by the proximity of another planet, swung on its axis, and what had hitherto been the tropics became polar regions. The same fate was shared by the

mastodons and mammoths, whose gigantic remains are still found in the wastes of Siberia and the Arctic Circle, frozen for millions of years in glaciers that were once tropical swamps.

These enormous animals perished and became extinct because they had specialised in size and physical strength. Under the changing conditions these assets were no help to them; they were, indeed, a handicap, because of the great quantity of food required to sustain them. The animals that did survive were the creatures of smaller size and more active brain, particularly those that had developed prehensile toes for climbing, and could reach vegetation beyond the reach of the largest mastodon. These smaller animals had other advantages; they could creep into crevice's for shelter, and even extemporise rough covering for themselves by using their supple toes to manipulate twigs and dead leaves as a gorilla even now makes its nest from whatever material it can find. These animals had yet another instinct which helped them in their extremity; they were gregarious, moving about in groups for mutual protection and in this way they were able to migrate en masse to warmer regions, while the mammoth and the mastodon perished alone in the frigid wastes that had formerly been their grazing grounds.

But most important of all was the fact that some of these small animals, a type of anthropoid ape, under the compelling force of urgent necessity had developed a rudimentary power of reasoning. Instead of mechanically repeating the same habitual actions prompted by some racial memory stamped upon their brain formation, as did the others, they specialised in a quite new function—that of independent thinking. Obeying the behest of the shadowy consciousness that was awakening within them, further physical changes took place; their toes grew longer and more flexible, becoming in time efficient instruments for carrying out the directions of the brain. From using these toes to pluck fruit and dig up roots they came to employing them for covering themselves with leaves against the cold, and thence to manufacturing rough weapons and tools from bones and flints. In this way the first manlike animals appeared upon the earth. Their bodily structure and capabilities were clearly the outcome of mental predispositions brought into being by the exercise of this new faculty of independent thinking.

Here it becomes necessary to take a brief glance at the story of evolution as presented in the Buddhist Canonical Books. Excluding commentary and tradition, the most complete account

is given in the Aggañña Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya. Explaining the process to Vāseṭṭha (a Brahmin, be it noted), the Buddha tells how at some time, after the lapse of an incalculable period, the universe passes away. When this happens, the beings are mostly reborn in the world of radiance, an aetheric state where they dwell formed of mind, sustained by rapture, self-luminous, space-borne and remaining in a state of immaterial splendour for many ages. Sooner or later the universe begins to re-evolve, and the mind-formed beings, deceasing from the World of Radiance, usually take rebirth on earth. The sutta, it should be noted, does not specifically state what form they take, and certainly does not call them humans (*manussa*); the phrase used is, literally, that they “come to hereness”, and Buddhaghosa says that they are born by spontaneous generation (*opapātika*), a very significant phrase when we consider the scientific theory of the first generation of life from chemical combinations and solar radiations, possibly cosmic rays, on this planet. The description of the earth that follows indicates a state that closely corresponds to the period known to geologists, when, after the formation of the Fundamental Gneiss, an age ensued during which the steam in the atmosphere began to condense and fall down to earth pouring over the primordial rocks and gathering into depressions as lakes and oceans. This must have been a period of thick clouds and darkness; in the actual words of the sutta, “one world of water, dark, and of darkness that makes blind”. A more accurate description could not have been given by an eyewitness. Next follows a description of how the beings, sexless, lived on the scum spread out on the surface of the waters; a perfect account of the existence of the primordial protoplasm from which all life began. The remainder of the Sutta is a detailed, though necessarily somewhat allegorical, account of how craving arose in the beings. They took to feeding on different substances, losing their ability to live on the mud and scum that had formerly nourished them, and gradually over long ages, themselves became differentiated species taking various forms, some ugly, others beautiful.

Is it indeed too much to see in this an indication of how certain branches of these beings, as they developed more specialised organisms along the lines science tends to show, became apes and other mammals, while others developed into human beings? I have spoken of allegory, but in fact, there is very little allegorical element in the description given by the Buddha—

only the very minimum needed to make His Teaching clear to the Brahmin Vāsetṭha. It is practically a literal account of the process. Those who still doubt whether biological evolution is consistent with Buddhism should study the Aggañña Sutta with understanding and in the light of modern knowledge, and then compare both with the magical accounts of creation given in other scriptures. The more the understanding of the student of Buddhism deepens and widens, the more he becomes amazed and impressed by the further proofs of the Omniscience of the Exalted Buddha that become revealed to him.

2. Knowledge and Concepts

“Ignorance is the foulest stain of all” declared the Exalted Buddha, and by ignorance, He meant the belief in self and all the wrong thinking, wrong actions and wrong speech that arise from it. Ignorance is the primal condition behind all manifestations of life; it is the creator of space and time and consciousness and all the phenomena that have their existence in the space-time complex throughout all the realms of becoming.

It is given as the first link in the chain of dependent origination, but this does not mean first in temporal sequence; it is not to be confused with the idea of a first cause, since dependent origination has no temporal beginning. To understand this it is necessary to consider the nature of time itself. Time—that is to say, our knowledge of it, for it has no existence outside the sphere of phenomenal relativity—is governed by the movements of bodies in relation to other bodies, the rotation of the earth and its revolution around the sun, together with the movements of other suns and planets that compose the universe and the dearer and more familiar movements of objects in our immediate vicinity. Because movement (time) implies change of position (space), the two concepts of space and time must be identical: they cannot be considered separately. From this we get the space-time complex of Einstein, an interrelated and interdependent combination of ideas that forms a single concept in mathematics. Without material bodies and physical space—that is, the dimension they occupy—there could be no time [that is, in the sense derived from our world of five sense experience—Ed]. Without time nothing could come into existence, and without the existence of phenomena there could be no time. Hence it is meaningless to talk of the beginning of ‘creation’, or of a first cause. Creation out of nothing can only mean the creation of time,

since time cannot exist in nothingness, and to create something that did not exist previously itself implies the prior existence of time, because there must be the threefold condition of time already in existence to make such an event possible. There must be 'past', the time when the object did not exist; 'present', the time of its creation, and 'future', the time of its continuance. So we are driven to the conclusion that, as Buddhism insists, there could never have been a time when *saṃsāra* and a physical universe in some form or another did not exist. Again we must refer to the statement in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*: "Beginningless is the process of *saṃsāra*; the origin of beings revolving in *saṃsāra*, being cloaked by *avijjā* (ignorance) cannot be discovered." The universe of space and time, the creation of *avijjā*, is a closed circle of conceptuality in which there is no first cause. It therefore cannot be understood or penetrated by any intellectual means for the mind itself operates within its complex mechanism and is bounded on every side by its related conditions. Ignorance may be called the essential infirmity or limitation of the intellect. It is bound to the processes of cause and effect, *yet at the same time itself creates from moment to moment the process and the conditions*. The mind moves like a prisoner confined within its own constructions; it cannot get outside the orbit of its own limitations and so cannot see the process in its entirety or understand its own nature.

All relative concepts are unreal *because they are relative*. They cannot have any existence in an absolute sense. As Bergson pointed out, no object in the whole universe can be isolated from other objects and known as a 'thing in itself'. If we try to describe its shape, calling it square or round, we are merely making a comparison between its shape and the shape of other objects that are not square or round. The same thing happens when we think of its texture, colour, weight, smell or any of the other data concerning it that come to us through our senses. All our knowledge is comparative only; our minds are not equipped to deal with concepts outside the realm of comparisons and relative values. Therefore, the thing we know has no real existence; if it had real existence we should be able to cognise it in isolation, without reference to anything else. This is the meaning of the Buddhist "*sabbe dhammā* (or *saṅkhārā*) *anattā*" all phenomenal (compounded) things are void of reality or self-existence. The material, composite world is nothing but an appearance, based on the illusory activity of the mind. How, then, is the mind to attain

liberation from a condition which is intrinsic to its own nature? That is the problem which it took the Buddha six years of arduous striving to solve. The answer is, to destroy all false concepts, beginning with the fundamental delusion of the personal Self on which all the others are based. This is to be achieved by realising, through insight, the impermanent, painful and unreal nature of all phenomena; the *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* of everything, including the constituents of personality. These three concepts, the most important feature of the entire system of Buddhist thought, are in reality only three different aspects of the same truth. That which is *anicca*, impermanent, must necessarily be subject to suffering. Its suffering consists in the state of restlessness, unbalance and continual agitation of its component elements; the incessant arising, decay and passing away of the units of atomic and electronic energy that compose its physical substance. In the Buddhist sense, *dukkha* means not only suffering associated with consciousness but also the state of disturbance and unbalance in all phenomenal things. It is to be thought of as a cosmic principle, ubiquitous and all-permeating, existing in the nuclear structure of the atom as well as in the growth, decay and death of the physical body and the arising and passing away of the successive moments of consciousness. Wherever there is movement, the state of flux, there is *dukkha*—and this means everywhere; it is present in both sentient and insentient matter. Abhidhamma teaches that *dukkha* is present in all of the thirty-one abodes of *saṃsāra*, including the realm of the *asañña-satta* (unconscious beings). These beings possess only one of the five constituents of being, *rūpakkhandha*. They have material form only, without consciousness, for the duration of their existence in the *asaññasatta brahma-loka*. This demonstrates that, philosophically speaking, suffering exists even in insentient substance.

Where the two first conditions, impermanence and suffering, exist, there cannot be any real selfhood, since all is momentarily undergoing transformation. It is a state of becoming; not of being; it is always a transitional stage from one state to another. Therefore it must be *anattā*; there is no permanent self or soul of a being or even identity of an object from one moment to another. All that can be found is a causal process, a current of causal dependence. Science tells us that there is no actual identity between an atom at one moment and what we choose to call the same atom at another moment; its existence is merely a linked chain of causal relationships, a current of

activity or energy. In the same way, there is no real identity between the infant, the child, the youth, the man and the old man, though for conventional purposes we have to consider them the same person and call them by the same name throughout the different stages of life. All the physical cells of the body die and are replaced many times during the course of one lifetime, and the body itself changes in appearance through the gradual accumulation of these minute changes. Similarly the consciousness, the contents of the mind, its reactions and so on—all are different at different stages, while the fluid current of consciousness, like a river, flows past, bearing only an illusory identity from one moment to another, as a river is seen as a river only by the general contour of its banks. Heraclitus, who declared that it is not possible to step into the same river twice, was thinking Buddhistically. There is no permanent factor—no attā or essence of selfhood—to be found anywhere in the components of personality, either physical or mental.

Many Western philosophers have arrived at the same conclusion as the Buddhist with regard to this universal condition of flux and unreality, but to realise it intellectually is not enough to liberate the mind from its conventions. The mind can only know this fact in its negative aspect; it cannot, as we have seen, be expected to penetrate beyond the phenomenal and have direct knowledge of the noumenal. In order to do this the mind must conquer itself; it must be mastered and even be transcended, and it is only possible to achieve this result by meditation.

Meditation begins with concentration; it requires first of all that the activity of the mind should be controlled and fixed in complete stillness, its restless motion brought to a focus of one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*). When this is achieved, the whole force of its concentrated energy must be brought to bear and fixed on an object of meditation. In Buddhism there are forty of these *kammaṭṭhāna*, each one being suitable for a particular type of mind. When the meditation is successful it brings about a state of realisation that is beyond anything accessible to the normal consciousness, carrying knowledge right outside the illusory barrier of phenomenal appearances into the 'unconditioned reality' (*asāṅkhata dhamma*). With this state comes the cessation of all the impurities of consciousness, the end of craving for existence or for material things, for sense enjoyments and all other attachments that imprison sentient beings in the process of

saṃsāra. Hence it is called 'Nibbāna'—the extinction of the fires of lust, hatred and delusion. Not the extinction of Self, because Self never existed, but the end of the illusion of selfhood. When the reality is known and experienced, unreality has no longer any meaning or attraction. When freedom from the thralldom of the six senses, and from attachment to material existence is attained there can no longer be any craving for individual rebirth, with the result that rebirth ceases, and with the end of rebirth comes the end of *anicca, dukkha* and *anattā*.

The Buddha did not try to describe Nibbāna. That which does not come into any of the categories of ordinary experience cannot be described. There is no vocabulary for it because there is no ground of common experience on which the meaning of words used to convey it could be understood. Language can be used only concerning relative things; there is no language or mode of speech for that which is unrelated to anything else. Had the Buddha tried to describe Nibbāna, he would have falsified it by using the terms of phenomenal experience, which are not applicable. That is why he refused to answer questions about Nibbāna, even though many people thought, because of his silence, either that Nibbāna is annihilation or that the Buddha himself had not experienced it. Both views are wrong, Nibbāna is not annihilation, for there is nothing of a self to annihilate; it is annihilation only in the sense of the extinction of the fires, of craving, hatred and delusion. Nibbāna may be called Reality, so far as that word is not misunderstood to mean God, Spirit or any other anthropomorphic concept: it is the sole reality as distinct from the changing forms of the transitory world. There is a great danger in using any word to serve for 'Nibbāna' except Nibbāna itself, because everyone tends to put his own interpretation on a particular word, according to his own associated ideas; and as we have seen, such ideas, since they are formed by and bound up in relative distinctions, sometimes highly individual and personalised, are certain to be misleading. It is a further proof, if any were needed, of the genuineness of the Buddha's enlightenment that rather than give a wrong impression of what he had realised in order to convince and satisfy fools, he preferred that they should leave his presence doubting his Buddhahood.

When asked about the existence or non-existence of a Buddha after Parinibbāna, the Exalted One replied: "After Parinibbāna the Tathāgata cannot be said to exist; neither does he

not exist. Nor does He both exist and not exist nor does He neither exist nor not exist." This means that both existence and non-existence, and all entanglements of these associated ideas, are phenomenal, and therefore unreal, concepts. The point of the Buddha's Teaching is to do away with all such concepts: they are called "*ditthi*"—"views"—and as such have nothing to do with reality. The Buddha said, "I have no theories. I have reached the Further Shore."

3. The Rationale of Conduct

From this necessarily brief comparison of modern scientific ideas and the Buddha's teachings of over two thousand years ago it will be seen how strikingly they dovetail and supplement one another.

The question then arises; how was it possible for the sages of that remote period to penetrate the illusion of material substance and find that it was composed of electronic forces, and to form so accurate an idea of the nature of the universe and its processes? The answer can only lie in accepting the belief that they were able to raise their consciousness beyond the sphere of the mundane, so that they were able to view phenomena from an entirely different angle of perception, through the practice of *jhāna* or meditation. They had no laboratory equipment, no microscopes or telescopes and no mathematical formulae to guide them; and when they had made their discovery they had no technical language by means of which to impart their findings to others. It would indeed have been hopeless for the Buddha to attempt a description of the nature of the universe as He had realised it, on these lines; no one of his time would have been capable of understanding him. That is why he refused to answer questions concerning the origin of the world, or whether it is eternal or not eternal. Had he given an affirmative reply or a negative one to either question it would have been in a sense untrue. All such queries, being based on a false conception of existence, are wrongly framed, and are not capable of being answered by "yes" or "no". The Buddha's reply, in effect, was that questions of that kind are not conducive to release from rebirth, but the implication always remained that the true answer could be gained by the seeker, through insight, although it could not be imparted to others. The *iddhi*, or so-called 'supernatural' powers gained by the arahats were simply the knowledge of the hidden laws of the universe and how to make use of them, but by the Buddha they were regarded as but

another and greater obstacle to the quenching of desire and the attainment of liberation.

The law of causality is like an iceberg; only one-eighth of it or less is visible, the rest lies below the surface. We observe the effects while remaining ignorant of the causes. When we switch on the electric current the light appears; we know how to harness electric power, and we know that it exists because of its manifestation as light, but of its real nature we know nothing.

The scientist Max Planck, wrote: "What sense, then there is, it may be asked, in talking of definite causal relations in regard to cases where nobody in the world is capable of tracing their function? The answer to that question is simple: As has been said again and again the concept of causality is something transcendental—quite independent of the nature of the researches and it would be valid if there were no perceiving subject at all ... We must distinguish between the validity of the causal principle and the practicability of its application:" Even the scientist, therefore, has to admit causes beyond his comprehension, such causes existing in a realm that is distinct from the subjective realm of the investigator. Concerning this the Buddha declared: "Whether Buddhas arise or do not arise (to perceive and reveal the Truth) the law of causality, the principle of the dependence of this factor upon that, the causal sequence of events, remains a fixed and unalterable law."

"The concept of causality is something transcendental." This is a significant phrase indeed, coming from a scientist. It is precisely in this transcendental concept of the causal law that Buddhism establishes the moral principle of kamma. The materialist rejects the idea of God and Soul, and because he finds no evidence of a moral or other purpose in life, he repudiates all belief in the moral order of the universe as well. Buddhism also is independent of a theistic creator and of a soul or ego-principle, but Buddhism maintains the validity of the moral law. Likewise Buddhism admits the infinite multiplicity of worlds and the apparent insignificance, of man—yet man is the most significant of all beings, according to Buddhism; man is of more significance than the gods. Why is this? It is because the gods are merely enjoying temporarily the results of good actions performed in the past, but man contains within himself additional potentialities. He is the master of his own destiny; on the battlefield of his own mind he can conquer the ten thousand world-systems and put an end to saṃsāra, just as did the Buddha. But in order to do this he

must understand the nature of kamma, the principle that governs his internal and external world.

In the 'Gradual Sayings' of the Buddha (Aṅguttara Nikāya) it is said: "To believe that the cause of happiness or misery is God, Chance or Fate, leads to inaction."²⁴ Our spiritual evolution depends upon ourselves and ourselves alone. If there is any meaning behind the ethical laws, any exercise or freewill in the choice between good and evil, right and wrong, it stands to reason that there must be the possibility of developing or degenerating, of evolution or involution. If progress were a mechanical process with its outcome a foregone conclusion, there would be no point in any freedom of choice in a world of opposites. The law of kamma, or causal resultants, must work both ways, like a law of mathematics, otherwise it cannot be a universal law. We cannot, as some believe, have a law that works only one way and gives us the best results even though we choose the worst causes. Freedom of choice between right and wrong, between ignorance and knowledge, implies the highest degree of personal responsibility. Under the influence of materialism humanity is rapidly losing sight of spiritual values and is choosing the path of darkness and ignorance. What is needed today is a return to the wisdom of the past, which is also the highest wisdom of the future—the wisdom that belongs to all ages and all the races of mankind. Without that there can be no lasting peace or certainty of progress for individuals or nations.

Buddhism teaches three essentials: to abandon all evil, to fulfil all good and to purify the mind. Its teaching is a doctrine of scientific principles based upon analysis, discrimination and reasoned investigation. Yet "good and evil" and "right and wrong" are terms that do not rightly belong to Buddhism; we have the choice of *kusala kamma* (skilful action) and *akusala kamma* (unskillful action), the first denoting those actions which are pure and lead to good results, the second meaning actions performed under the influence of delusion and tainted with greed, hatred and ignorance, which lead to retrogression. When the materialist states that he finds no reason to believe that life is governed by any moral principle or that it has any ultimate purpose, but every reason for supposing that right and wrong good and evil, are merely inventions of the human mind, the

24. Translated in "Aṅguttara Nikāya, An Anthology: Part I" (The Wheel No. 155/158), p. 43.

Buddhist reply is that so far as purpose is concerned he is right. The process of *saṃsāra* has no purpose; it is “empty phenomena” without any ultimate meaning. But all the same it is controlled by the causal law, and that law is, transcendently, an ethical law: The purpose of life is whatever we make it for ourselves, and its goal such as we define for ourselves, but all the time we are subject to moral law in every volitional action, mental or physical. The deep conviction which all men, even the least civilised, possess, that there is a universal distinction between what is called right and wrong, persists in the face of all apparent evidence to the contrary. Where does it come from? Can it be justified?

If it cannot be supported by reason, then life becomes nothing but ‘a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing’. Against that conclusion, all our instincts revolt. ‘If reason cannot come to their aid the instincts dispense with reason, for the psychological fact is that we would far sooner abandon reason than lose our faith in absolute justice. And our instincts in that respect are right, though our reasoning be faulty. Drawn unwillingly into an argument on freewill versus predestination, Dr. Samuel Johnson roared, “We know we have freewill, and there’s an end on it!” Most people feel the same way about moral values.

That actually is our starting-point, but it cannot be proffered as anything more than collateral proof. Since people are subject to delusion in so many other matters, the argument cannot stand on its own, but it is very strongly reinforced by (a) its universal existence among all types of men, in all stages of civilisation and historical epochs and (b) the fact that although the finer points of moral conduct may differ widely in different parts of the world and at different periods, the basic principles of morality are recognised everywhere and receive universal assent.

By ‘basic principles’, we are to understand, not the local and temporary standards that prevail from time to time, and which give place to others as modes of thought change, but certain fundamental rules that are found to be identical all over the world, and which provide the foundations on which society rests, by enabling people to live together in communities to their mutual advantage. Morality is not, for instance, a matter of clothing. The dress that is suitable for one climate, period or civilisation may be considered indecent in another; it is entirely a question of custom, not in any way involving moral

considerations, yet the artificialities of convention are continually being confused with principles that are valid and unchanging. It is strange that so much importance is attached to them when history shows that it is possible for a complete revolution in ideas to take place within so brief a period as one generation. Michelangelo depicted many of the characters, both angelic and human, in his Sistine Chapel frescoes completely nude. A subsequent Pope, outraged by their appearance, desecrated the artist's work by commissioning an inferior painter to add loin cloths to the male figures. Marriage customs equally have little bearing on essential morality. In a polygamous society, to have only one wife might quite reasonably be thought an outrage against the customs of one's fellows, and therefore 'immoral'. In Tibet, a girl who has had a child before marriage, instead of being disgraced and humiliated and properly ashamed of herself, as she is expected to be in Western society, is highly honoured and sought after in marriage because she has proved herself fertile. In many parts of feudal Europe it was at one time the custom for a newly-wed girl to spend the first night with the lord of the manor. Such customs are now considered barbarous, but at one time they represented the norm. Marriage between brother and sister was the rule for the Pharaohs, and the records of antiquity provide other instances of incestuous relationships that carried with them no particular moral condemnation. Among the warriors of Sparta and the ancient Samurai caste of Japan, homosexual relationships which in Europe are severely punished by law, were not only permitted but actually encouraged, the reason being that heterosexual relationships were thought to have the effect of softening and effeminising the martial nature. It is abundantly clear, therefore, that all such local and temporary fashions in behaviour are governed by expediency and current beliefs; they represent the standard of conduct which is thought best for the welfare of a particular community at a particular time. Depending on circumstances and conditions, they are liable to change as these undergo alteration. Communities which are mainly pastoral and agricultural, or nomadic as in the case of the desert tribes of Arabia, tend to be polygamous, and any change in their customs is usually traceable to a change in their economic conditions or mode of livelihood. In the same way the sexual customs of the Spartans, quite apart from religious prejudices, are naturally frowned upon in a society that wishes, as most national groups at present do, to increase its population.

It has been the mistake of most systems of morality based upon religion to place too much emphasis on the non-essentials, with the result that, in the frequent phases of reaction against an artificial morality, such as the present generation's revolt against sexual restrictions, the really important rules are thrown aside likewise. Under Christianity, for instance, the very word 'morality' has come to mean almost exclusively sexual morality, so that it may be said of a man who is a confirmed thief, liar and swindler that, despite his failings he is a very moral man—meaning that he is faithful to the one wife the law allows him! The danger here lies in the fact that thoughtful people who are intelligent enough to realise that these rules are artificial and not based on any transcendental, universally-valid principles, are liable to fall into the error of thinking the same about all the other ethical laws. This is not to say that sexual rules of conduct have no importance; they have, but not in the sense that it is necessarily wrong to have more than one wife. It may be legally wrong in one country at one time, but it is not therefore wrong from the moral point of view, since a plurality of wives and concubines is sanctioned by highly moral people in other parts of the world: Mohammedanism permits a man four wives and the sexual enjoyment of those "his right hand possesses", i.e. his female slaves. It does not, however, permit him to commit adultery with the wife of another. Similarly, a prince in the time of the Buddha was given a retinue of concubines and dancing girls. Man is by nature a polygamous animal, and systems that permit a plurality of wives can with greater justice and realism punish severely any man who commits adultery with the wife of another, since he can have no possible excuse for his offence. Actually, adultery is rare among the polygamous sects for this very reason, whereas in the West it is all too common, and so has to be dealt with leniently.

We have already noted that the universe itself is amoral; it does not show any indication of being planned on what we should recognise as ethical principles. It knows nothing, apparently, of justice or mercy; still less is it concerned with sexual rules, except where these are connected with the preservation of species and their propagation, that is, their biological compatibility. A dog in its wild state will not try to mate with a cat because there is no biological affinity between their species, though I am informed on credible authority that under the artificial conditions produced by association with

humans this is occasionally (but very rarely) attempted. But in quite normal circumstances a dog will certainly attempt sexual connection with another dog. The working of instinct in such a case is clear. Nature knows no such thing as 'unnatural vice'; it is only virtue that is 'unnatural'.

Buddhism does not claim that to live virtuously, in any sense, is to live in harmony or accordance with the laws of the universe. Quite the contrary. Nature is governed by the law of craving and self-gratification. The practice of *silā* (morality) is counter to the laws of nature; it aims to nullify and destroy the conditions of *saṃsāra* which are inherently bad, and to open a way out of these conditions. It is the animal, ruled solely by the promptings of instinct and self-preservation that lives according to the laws of nature. Seeing that the universe is not the work of a beneficent Creator the Buddhist is not surprised or dismayed by the discovery that it shows no signs of a moral law or purpose. *Saṃsāra* is the outcome of ignorance; why should it manifest any ethical principle? The materialist, in claiming that moral laws are merely man-made, without any sanction either from nature or from supernatural sources, is right to a certain extent, but only Buddhism is able to show how this can be true, yet at the same time maintain the validity of the moral laws. The fact is that there is one kind of law for the world—the natural law which is completely amoral—but another law for getting outside the world and its conditions. This is the *Dhamma sanantana*, the "ancient law" that the Buddha referred to when He said, "Not by hating does hatred cease; by love alone hatred ceases. This is the ancient law." Not the law of nature, but the law discovered by those who made their escape from the evil conditions of nature, the Buddhas, *Pacceka Buddhas* and *Arahats* of the past. Buddhist morality is therefore on a stronger and more rational basis than any system of religious ethics which attempts to impose morality on man by pretending that moral laws are the laws of a Creator whose own work, the world, itself shows no evidence of morality. This point is vitally important, since it indicates at once the superior realism of Buddhist thought over the philosophy of the theistic systems, which are bound to ignore the contradictions of their doctrines that are to be found everywhere in nature. It establishes morality on an altogether higher and more invulnerable plane. The so-called 'problem of evil', the great stumbling-block of Christian theologians, does not exist in Buddhism; it was not necessary to invent a Garden of Eden and a

mythical apple to account for the existence of 'original sin'. The man who kills, steals, fornicates, lies and stupefies himself with drink is not going contrary to the 'laws of God' or of nature. He is following the laws of the world—that is, the essential conditions of saṃsāra, dominated and brought into being by craving—and he will continue to revolve in the miserable spheres of existence until his ignorance is dispelled and he realises that his egotistical sensory indulgences carry with them a tremendous burden of suffering.

This suffering is not the penalty of transgressing any law, but the natural consequence of following the law of ignorance instead of the higher law of wisdom. The law of nature is the law of ignorance; its bidding is: "Do whatever your lust and hatred prompts you to do; for this is your nature as it is the nature of the beasts. Look around you and you will find the whole world following this, the law of nature and of life. This is the way to remain in the *kāma-loka*, the realms of passion and sensual pleasure!" But the voice of higher wisdom tells us: "The law of the world is an evil law. Giving transitory and illusory pleasure through the indulgence of the senses, it claims payment in suffering. Look around you and you will see all sentient beings paying this price in gain and despair. They revolve ceaselessly in the miserable toils of saṃsāra, self-bound and self-condemned. The law of saṃsāra is their own law, because they in their ignorance have created saṃsāra and the conditions of saṃsāra are the conditions of their own nature. Cease to follow the base of law of the world, the law of lust, hatred and delusion; destroy its power. Follow instead the law that gives release from birth and death and brings all beings to Nibbāna, the Eternal and Unchanging, the Everlasting Bliss!

4. Rational Morality

What, then, can we regard as the basic, or universal and timeless principles of morality? They could not be better summed up than in the five precepts given by the Buddha for the guidance of laymen. It should be noted that these are precepts offered for guidance; they are not commandments.

Anyone is free to break them if he wishes or cannot help doing so, but the Buddhist understands that, in accordance with the law of kamma he breaks them at his own risk, and must inevitably pay the penalty for his indulgence.

The first precept is not to take the life of any sentient being. It bears a much wider meaning than the “Thou shalt not kill” of Christianity. The latter applies only to human beings; but Buddhism, more scientifically, places all life in the same category, and the Buddhist is expected to extend his compassion to every living being without distinction or reservation. All are enmeshed in saṃsāra and all are struggling upwards, evolving towards something higher. At the same time, all are suffering, and no one should willingly increase the sum of pain and distress in the world, or try to interrupt the working out of the kamma of another. Parallel with this runs the law which ordains that he who kills must himself be killed, having created that condition by the volitional impulse of his own thought and deed. “He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword” is a truism, but the Dhamma reinforces its authority by revealing the causal principle, mental in origin, which underlies it. This is the basis of Buddhist “harmlessness”, the foundation of *mettā* and *karuṇā*. If only this one rule were observed throughout the world, wars, murders and violence would come to an end and the security of all peoples would be assured.

The second rule is not to take that which is not one’s own by right. It is the equivalent of the Christian “Thou shalt not steal”. Here again we have a basic principle in the sense that it is one without which no form of society could cohere. So far as the writer is aware, the Spartan community of ancient Greece was the only nation in history that did not condemn theft, but it was the law of Athens that finally prevailed. Theft is the result of greed, and is more harmful to the offender than to the victim.

The third precept is concerned with “wrong sensual indulgence” (*kāmesu micchācāra*). Though the Pali word *kāmesu* signifies excessive sensual indulgence of any kind, in this context it undoubtedly stands more explicitly for sexual licence. The question is: what precisely constitutes sexual licence from the Buddhist—that is from the universal point of view as opposed to mere customs dictated by time, place and circumstances?

To answer this question we have to consider sex, as it stands in relation to the primary defects of the human mind, *rāga* (passion) and *taṇhā* (craving). All sexual desires, whatever their nature are rooted in craving and passion; they are in fact the strongest and most difficult to eradicate of all their manifestations. Sex is one of the fundamental passions, common to all sentient beings in the human and animal worlds.

Buddhism shows that sexual passion is the chief enemy of spiritual progress, but it does not make any artificial distinctions, as does Western sexual morality, between different forms of sexual craving. All, from the Buddhist point of view, are harmful.

But it is not the Buddhist solution to the problem to suppress the instinct, and it is certainly not to be dealt with successfully by making arbitrary laws limiting the number of wives a man may have, or the number of husbands a woman may have, nor by unofficially approving one standard of morality for one sex and condemning it in the other, as is done in the West. Western repressive measures against sex have so far been successful only in one thing—the production of more sex-maniacs.

Man is the only animal that does not have periods of natural sexual inactivity during which the body can recover its vitality, and unfortunately our present civilisation has laid so much emphasis on the erotic side of life by commercialising it, that the modern man is exposed to a ceaseless barrage of sexual stimulation from every side.

The Buddhist way of dealing with the problem is not legalistic, but therapeutic. Sexual craving, like any other craving, is to be eradicated not by suppression but by gradually removing its root. The practice of *bhāvanā* (meditation) directed towards the impurities of the body, the transience of all physical beauty and the painful nature of the passion that it engenders, is a form of mental treatment that weakens sexual attraction and in the end re-orientates the mind against sexual desire. It is a scientific process of cleansing the mind which is fully in accordance with natural psychological laws.

Regarding the sexual control to be practised by the ordinary layman, Buddhist tradition has a list of twenty classes of women to whom the observance of the precept applies. In summarizing them, we may say that the items in the list comprise firstly abstention from adultery; that is, taking sexual pleasure from a woman who stands in the relation, even if only temporarily, of a wife to another man. Further included in the list is sexual relation with minors and all those under guardianship. To be added here are also all cases of compulsion: apart from rape in peace or war, also sexual relation with those who have to yield because of their economic dependence upon the person concerned, as in the case of servants, employees, etc.

The fourth precept dealing with abstention, from “wrong ways of speech” (*musāvāda*), means not only to abstain from

lying, but also from all forms of evil speech—abuse, slander, harsh and biased criticism and anything, that can cause injury or distress to another.

Here again, compassion and benevolence are the keynotes to understanding the Buddhist rule. To abstain from wrong speech is to refrain from saying to or about anyone that which we should not wish said to or of ourselves. It means scrupulous honesty and adherence to truth, and something more—tolerance and kindness.

Fifthly, the Buddha enjoined His followers to abstain from drugs and intoxicants. Christianity has no such precept, but Buddhism requires full command of the mental faculties, an unclouded and penetrating intellect to pierce through the illusion of *saṃsāra* and find reality. The man whose mind is well-balanced and purified by understanding does not need to take refuge in liquor or drugs to dull a mental pain. Drunkenness is the outcome of a sense of frustration and futility. It takes hold of people who subconsciously realise themselves to be failures, even though they may be successful in a worldly sense. It is a refuge from worries and conflict (i.e. *dukkha*), but only a temporary and false refuge, heaping illusion on illusion, a fictitious gaiety erected on the bottomless abyss of despair. Its final result can never be anything but utter physical and moral disintegration.

If we examine these five simple principles of conduct objectively we find that they are sufficient in themselves to guide and regulate the daily life of man, in every age and every land. They have nothing to do with fashions of period or place or with arbitrary prohibitions. They can therefore claim to be basic and fundamental in the only real sense. They are moreover, sane and balanced in outlook and intention. They are not built on dogmas such as “Thou shalt have none other God but me ... for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God”, but on clear and explicit reason.

Behind each of the precepts there lies the unspoken but evident intention to overcome the craving engendered by egotism, which is the only real evil. In Buddhism, the meaning of good and evil takes a different form from that found in any other system of thought. Evil is simply anything which binds us to the delusion of self and keeps us revolving in the cycle of rebirth. It is self-delusion, craving, lust, hatred, avarice—all the *āsavas*, or impurities of the mind. Nothing else. The actions that arise from it are only the outward and visible manifestations of the real evil, which is a subjective quality existing as an essential characteristic

of phenomenal individuality. It arises in the mind as the precursor of all such actions and their resultants: "Mind precedes all phenomena, mind is the chief, they are all mind-made" (Dhammapada, v. 1).

5. Mind and Matter

This brings us face to face with the most perplexing problem of science and philosophy—the relationship of mind (or what in Buddhism is more aptly termed "psychic factors") and material substance. If we accept the theory of organic structures that mutate and develop over the generations, we must next ask ourselves whether there is any essential difference between organic matter, or matter which forms a part of a living organism, and so-called "dead" matter. The latter concept, however, is, already somewhat out-dated, since physics no longer takes a static view of the material universe.

Science makes no distinction today between organic and inorganic matter, and this view, correct as it undoubtedly is, has been interpreted in terms of materialism.

That this interpretation cannot be supported is proved by certain experiments, one of which is fairly well known. It is that of placing a subject under deep hypnosis and telling him that he is about to be branded with a hot iron. A pencil or some similar object is then placed on his skin, and a blister appears, together with all the accompanying symptoms of a severe burn. What happens in such a case is that the patient's mind is entirely under the dominance of suggestion and when it is fully convinced that a burn is about to be inflicted, by some process as yet unknown the message travels to the part of the body that is touched, and the flesh reacts exactly as though it had been in contact with a branding iron. In other words, the material substance reacts to the suggestion of the mind; it is completely dominated by, the preceding mental state. "*Mano pubbaṅgamā dhammā*"—"Mind precedes all phenomena."

Again, an identical psycho-physical relationship is seen in the case of Christian mystics who exhibit the phenomena known as the "*Stigmata*", which are popularly ascribed to a miracle. The *Stigmata* are actual wounds in the hands and feet which sometimes appear on the bodies of Christian religious and ecstasies, reproducing the wounds inflicted on Jesus at the Crucifixion. Invariably they are found in deeply religious people who have experienced states of ecstasy or trance. These states are

analogous to the hypnotic conditions but are self-induced. The mystic meditates on the Crucifixion of Jesus and identifies himself or herself (the subjects are frequently women) with the suffering victim until the experience becomes an actuality in the mind. Here intense faith and concentration take the place of hypnotic suggestion from outside, but the result is the same. The physical body obeys the conviction of the mind just as in the case of the subject who is persuaded that he is being branded with a hot iron, and the wounds duly appear. The devout believer hails a miracle, the materialistic sceptic scoffs at what he believes to be a fraud. Both are wrong, though the believer is nearer the truth than the sceptic. The secret of the phenomenon lies in the pre-eminence of the mind, the determining factor in all physical processes.

Science is now beginning to explore the unknown territory of the mind and serious attempts are being made to define the frontiers between mind and matter. Without guide or compass it is fatally easy to take a wrong path and arrive at hopelessly false conclusions in a science which is yet in its infancy. Enough has been established, however, to indicate that mind is not a product of inert matter or in the last analysis dominated by materialistic principles. The precise nature of the relation between the two may never be known, but from all we are able to observe it seems clear that matter is governed by laws that exist on an immaterial or psychic level. Our tendency to confuse the effect with the cause arises from the fact that the effect, which is material, is more apparent to our senses than is the non-material cause. It may well be that the Western scientist and philosopher encounters difficulties because he is looking for a frontier that is not there, or because he is looking for a relationship of opposite principles when he should be exploring a complex of interdependent factors.

Let us try to elucidate this from the Buddhist standpoint. In Buddhist philosophy a living being, of whatever order, is considered under two main heads, '*nāma*' and '*rūpa*'. *Nāma* signifies mental factors, *rūpa* stands for the physical form, or, in an extended sense, any physical or material phenomena, or any event that occupies space, since every object, considered dynamically, consists of a series of events. This division, however, is the crude division pertaining to relative truth only. Actually the whole organism is only an aggregate of four primary attributes: *āpo*, *vāyo*, *tejo* and *paṭhavī*, or cohesion, extension,

kinetic energy (temperature) and solidity, and these attributes or qualities are shared in varying combinations by all material substances both organic and inorganic. The psychic division consists of *vedanā* (sensation), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (mental formations, e.g. volitions, reflective thoughts, etc.) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness). These groups (*khandha*) are governed by the immaterial law of cause and effect which takes its pattern from the impulse of volitional action or *kamma*, which is actuated by craving. *Sañkhāra* is perhaps the most difficult factor to define of the four mental *khandhas*, but it is precisely in this concept of *saṅkhāra* that the clue to the inter-relationship of mind and matter is to be found, for *saṅkhāra* stands for the whole aggregate of mental immaterial conformations, arising from past habits of thought and action that brings into momentary existence, and gives direction to, the phenomenal being or personality, including the physical form.

The four *mahābhūtas*, *āpo*, *tejo*, *vāyo* and *paṭhavī*, are not material elements in the crude European mediaeval sense; they are rather immaterial qualities which manifest to the sense as material substance. Hence it is said that to form a single material atom all four of the *mahābhūtas* must be present; not one of them can exist independently of the others. The atom of physics is a unit of electronic energy, but in combination with other atoms it assumes the material form characterised by the four qualities, and it is as such that it becomes perceptible to the senses.

Scientific knowledge has led us out of the realm of what is called 'naive realism'—that is, the acceptance of the reality of material phenomena at their face value—into an insubstantial world that bears little resemblance to the external universe with which our senses make us familiar. In this abstract world of the physicist, matter becomes electronic energy in a continual state of flux, and what is to all appearances solid substance resolves itself into a complex of immaterial forces. This has caused scientific thinkers to question the validity of all knowledge which comes to us through the channels of our senses, because the knowledge of physics itself depends on empirical observation. To take a simple illustration; when we perceive colour and give it a name such as 'red' or 'green', we are not perceiving anything that has real existence as 'red' or 'green', we are merely giving a name to the sensation that arises in our consciousness when certain light waves impinge on the retina of the eye. These rays are not a property of the substance which we then describe as being 'red' or

'green'; they are in fact only the rays which are not absorbed by that substance but are reflected back from its surface. In other words, there is no essential quality of 'redness' or 'greenness', but only a subjective sensation caused by neural and cerebral activity set in motion by the light waves entering the eye. This process of cognition: through the *cakkhudvāra* (eye-door) is similar to that experienced through each of the other sense-channels, a process which is fully analysed in Abhidhamma philosophy: it leads inevitably to the conclusion that the world of our sense perceptions is a subjective world fabricated from a merely relative reality and that the dynamic world of physics bears hardly any relationship to that which we cognise by means of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The mind (*mano*), which Buddhism classifies as a sixth sense, correlates the data obtained through the senses and is thus caught up in its own illusory constructions, but these constructions, manifesting as material objects and events in time and space, are determined by the preceding mental dispositions or, *saṅkhāra*. To understand *saṅkhāra* as a factor of personality it is necessary to go more fully into the doctrine of kamma, but before doing so it may be mentioned that the identification of *saṅkhāra* and kamma is so close that kamma frequently appears as a synonym for *saṅkhāra* in the Buddhist chain of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).²⁵

6. The Causal Origination of Mind-Body

Paṭicca-samuppāda,²⁶ the chain or cycle of causality, consists of twelve *nidānas* (links), and in Buddhist philosophy it embraces the whole process of the arising of a sentient being, from life to life and from moment to moment of consciousness, in the following formula:

From *avijjā* (ignorance) arises *saṅkhāra*;
from *saṅkhāra* (here, in the sense of karmic volitions) arises *viññāṇa*;

25. *Saṅkhāra* is identical with kamma only where this term is applied in the context of the Dependent Origination. (see next chapter). *Saṅkhāra* in the sense of the aggregate of mental formations (*saṅkhārakhandha*) is not restricted to kamma. Several of the mental factors grouped in that aggregate occur also in non-kammic, i.e., resultant and functional (*kiriya*), consciousness.—Ed.

26. On this subject, see also *Dependent Origination* by Piyadassi Thera (*The Wheel* 14/15) and *The Significance of Dependent Origination* by Nyanatiloka Thera (*The Wheel* 140).

from *viññāna* (consciousness) arises *nāma-rūpa*;
 from *nāma-rūpa* (psychic aggregates and physical aggregate, or
 roughly mind and form) arises *saḷāyatana* ;
 from *saḷāyatana* (the field of six-fold sense perception) arises
phassa;
 from *phassa* (contact between the organ of sense and the sense-
 object) arises *vedanā*;
 from *vedanā* (sensation) arises *taṇhā*;
 from *taṇhā* (craving) arises *upādāna*;
 from *upādāna* (grasping attachment) arises *bhava*;
 from *bhava* (the process of becoming, or life continuum) arises *jāti*;
 from *jāti* (birth—or, in another sense, momentary coming into
 existence) *jarā-maraṇa*, *soka*, *parideva*, *dukkha*, *domanass'*
upāyāsa,—old age and death, grief, sorrow, lamentation and
 despair arise.

For the proper understanding of this causal nexus it must be
 viewed in different ways according to the particular aspect to be
 considered; sometimes as a whole, and sometimes split up into its
 component parts. For our present purpose a triune division is
 necessary, the first two links to be taken as representing the
 agglomerate of past phases of experience from previous births; the
 following eight (from *viññāna* to *bhava*) covering the contemporary
 existence and the final two, *jāti* and *jarā-maraṇa* with its resultants,
 as presenting a comprehensive survey of the conditions to be
 expected in the future. At the same time it must be remembered
 that the entire process is taking place momentarily and
 continuously, and that each of the *nidānas*, to whatever section we
 have arbitrarily assigned it for our immediate purpose, may be
 considered equally present in each of the others. Thus *jāti* and *jarā-*
maraṇa, present in the continuous process of arising and decay in
 the future, were also present in the past and are active in the
 contemporary middle section. The same is true of *avijjā* and
saṅkhāra. In one sense, *paṭicca samuppāda* represents cause and effect
 operating in three connected life-sequences, while in another it
 stands for the same causal process which is going on from moment
 to moment throughout a single life-span. A stricter analysis of the
 meaning of the technical Pāli terms is necessary in order to
 appreciate this. Buddhism views the process of arising and passing
 away as one continuous stream, in which birth and death follow
 upon one another with the arising and passing away of each
 momentary unit of consciousness.

For our present purpose we have to take the triune division as our basis for understanding the law of kamma; that is to say, the grouping into past, present and future existences. Here we find the first two links bracketed under what is called "*atīta kamma bhava*", or past causal continuum. This represents the aggregate of activities performed under the influence of ignorance in the past, which must bear resultants in the same life, the present or the future lives. These resultants when they fructify are known as "*paccuppanna vipāka bhava*" or present resultant continuum, and they condition the links of the middle section from *viññāṇa* to *vedanā* (five links). In effect this means that consciousness, mind-body, sense-organs, contact and sensation in the present take their arising and their particular form from the willed causal actions of the past. If these were good, the links springing from them must be good; if the actions were bad, the resultants must be of an inferior kind. Hence the inherent differences, physical and mental, between different beings, and the varying conditions of sickness or health, riches or poverty, in which they find themselves. This is governed by a law which is as impersonal and mechanical as the laws of physics. But although present conditions are thus predetermined by past actions, the Buddhist view is not fatalistic. While the circumstances confronting us in the present were predetermined by ourselves, our reaction to them is not predetermined. The remaining links of the middle section, from *taṇhā* to *bhava* are under the control of our will; hence they are grouped under the heading of "*paccuppanna kamma bhava*", which means present causal continuum and is the counterpart of the "*atīta kamma bhava*" of the first section. It is as free volitional action (*kamma*) that the causal process can be given a new direction. It can even be brought to an end. This section, it will be observed, begins with *taṇhā* (craving), as the first section begins with *avijjā* (ignorance). Because these two are in a sense complementary, both stand at the forefront of their respective sections, and because both sections represent the sphere of willed action, it is possible to extirpate them, and in extirpating craving, ignorance is also overcome. This is the purpose and object of the Noble Eightfold Path, with its final goal, Nibbāna.

The incompatibility between a mechanistically-determined universe and one in which free will is possible is resolved in Buddhism in much the same way that it has been dealt with by science. So far as we have been able to see hitherto the causal law

has been absolute, and all enquiry outside the realm of conditionality must still be referred to a different dimension of experience. But the rigid determinism of science has given way under the impact of quantum physics, and we now know that the causal law which operates predictably for large quantities does not necessarily govern the activities of any specified unit. No law has been so far discovered that is equally valid statistically and individually. That this leaves an opening for the admission of free-will has been hotly contested by some scientific philosophers who prefer to cling to the concept of a rigidly mechanistic universe, but that concept no longer holds its former authoritative position. In the sphere of human action we must acknowledge that choice is severely circumscribed—by conditions, situations, environment, heredity, individual psychology and other factors—yet despite this, man shows a quality that differs very greatly from the conditioned reflexes of Pavlov's dogs. He is not solely a piece of mechanism, reacting uniformly and predictably to the nerve-stimuli set up by sense-contacts and associations: A man, confronted by the choice between a good action and a bad one, may have a very strong predisposition in favour of the bad action, due to habit formation kamma, but he can overcome it. He can mitigate his craving and ignorance, taming them to actions that are profitable and useful to society; or, as we have seen, he can if he will, put an end to them altogether and attain the extinction of suffering.

For purposes of, exposition, however, we shall assume that the process of existence (*bhava*) continues, that the present life we have been considering is followed by a rebirth. There is no 'soul' that passes on, linking one life to another, it is not even consciousness (*viññāṇa*), as is sometimes erroneously supposed. Consciousness arises and passes away momentarily and must not, as the Buddha expressly demonstrated to His disciple Sati, be confused with 'soul'. What passes on is merely the causal continuity of actions and results, so that the final group of links, *jāti* and *jarā-marāṇa* etc., fall into the category of "*anāgata vipāka bhava*"; that is to say, future resultant continuum, or the consequences of the *paccuppanna kamma bhava* of the present life section. This *anāgata vipāka*, again, corresponds to the "*paccuppanna vipāka bhava*" of the middle section, so that in the complete *paṭicca samuppāda* we have two sets of *kamma bhava*; past and present, and two of *vipāka bhava*, present and future. In other words, two sets of potential causes and two sets of resultants,

balancing one another. And these two continue to operate reciprocally and in sequence until such time as the volitional action takes a new line and is directed towards extinguishing craving (*taṇhā*) and eliminating ignorance (*avijjā*).

“*Anāgata vipāka bhava*” signifies destination—the future state to which the present actions tend. This can be any one of the thirty-one abodes. As there is no ‘soul’ there is no question of a man’s spirit or personality transmigrating into the body of an animal: The phenomenal personality is merely the manifestation of kamma, nothing more, so that an animal may be reborn as the result of a man’s deeds performed under the influence of greed, hatred and delusion; which is a totally different concept from that of transmigration. It may be said that a man has been reborn as an animal or as a deity, but this is only using the word in a conventional sense, a fresh *nāma-rūpa* has come into being, bearing a causal relationship to the former being in exactly the same way that an old man bears a causal relationship to the child from which he developed. Conventionally, the old man bears the same name as the child, but his *nāma-rūpa*, that ever rolling river of Heraclitus; is not the same in any single respect.”

It has already been stressed that Buddhism makes no false and unscientific distinction between the various forms of life; they are all embodiments of kamma, the mental (*nāma*) and physical (*rūpa*) alike being the direct result of the previous volitional actions. In the case of the lower forms of life, where there is no moral consciousness and hence no possibility of the exercise of free will in choice between right and wrong action, all actions are more or less strictly conditioned by prior determinants. They are of the nature of the ‘conditioned reflexes’ investigated by Pavlov. This means that in such states it is only possible to work out the results of past kamma, which is bound to be predominantly of a bad type. When this is exhausted, rebirth in another sphere of existence, higher or lower, takes place as the result of some residual good kamma left in abeyance from the time when volitional actions were being performed (*kaṭattā-kamma*). It must be understood that all human beings, under the influence of ignorance, craving and delusion, are continually alternating between right and wrong action, each of which must have its result, so that a man who has performed many outstandingly good deeds, although as the result of some particularly bad action he may be reborn for a time in an inferior state, must eventually reap the good results of his meritorious actions, when he again has an opportunity of exercising his human

right of free will. To be reborn as a human being having sunk to a lower level is extremely difficult because of the lack of opportunity and ability to perform the necessary good actions, and it may take aeons to accomplish, but the timescale dealt with by Buddhism is that of infinity, and nothing is final until release is gained.²⁷

7. Kamma: The Universal Principle

The universe is a complicated yet entirely consistent whole, and we ourselves are a part of its mechanism. We cannot dissociate ourselves from the natural process which brings into being and destroys the physical objects around us. They all follow the law of cause and effect, or, to express it more correctly, an intricate pattern of conditionality, a pattern which is universal and all pervasive.

It is the same law which has determined the structure of the atom, and the structure of the atom in its turn has determined the character of material forms from the smallest grain of dust to the colossal planetary systems scattered throughout space. Yet an increasing knowledge of atomic structures has not enabled science to fathom the precise nature of matter or break down the secret of cellular growth or any other characteristic of vital organisms.

According to old systems of belief, man is a being distinct and separate from the rest of nature; distinguished both in origin and in destiny from all other forms of existence, organic and inorganic. He was thought to be unlike the mineral substances, unlike plant life, unlike the insects and unlike animals, because he possessed an immortal soul or some similar imperishable essence, not clearly defined, which other creatures lacked. Modern thought, as we have seen, finds no support for such a belief in science or biology. Human beings come into existence because of the same fundamental laws that give rise to other things in the universe, both animate and inanimate. Any distinction that we make between man and the other species on this planet must be purely a distinction based on differences in qualities, not in essential nature or substance.

What then is the law that underlies the arising of all phenomena? Science encourages the belief that its nature may be known to us through the process of cause and effect; that action

27. For readers who wish to know more in detail about the various types of kamma and how they function, an excellent summary of the subject will be found in Nyanatiloka's *"Buddhist Dictionary"*.

and reaction are equal and opposite is a scientific axiom. In Buddhism, *kamma* means action, something performed, and in the moral sense it also implies reaction (*vipāka*), because every cause must produce a result, unless it is inhibited by some other factor of the same type but opposite tendency. That result must be of a like nature to the action that preceded it. If we could trace back the line of causation to the very beginning of this present universe we could not arrive at any first cause. We should discover, on the contrary, that the first atomic particles from which the universe took shape were merely the remains of a previous system that resembled the present one, and so back into unimaginable recessions of time and forward into infinite futurity. "Beginningless is this process of *saṃsāra*; the origin of beings revolving in *saṃsāra*, being cloaked by ignorance is not discoverable." This indicates a state of things which we can only imagine by resorting to analogy; it is altogether beyond the compass of the intellect. But so also are some of the concepts of science. Our minds are bounded by forms and relationships, the qualitative content of the space-time dimension, but this does not mean that other dimensions do not exist. When Einstein carried mathematical speculation into the nature of physics further than it had ever been carried before, he came upon certain laws that proved the existence of another dimension beyond the three dimensions of Euclidean geometry. It is referred to as the fourth dimension, but there is no mind that can formulate any mental picture of it. Whereas we have the evidence of our senses and experience to give us knowledge of length, breadth and depth, for this other dimension we have no data whatever to build upon. It is a thing that exists simply as an abstract concept and can be expressed only as a mathematical formula.

Philosophically, it leads us to a paradox, for we have to work on the assumption that space is curved, that the entire space-time complex is a closed circle in every direction. To the ordinary mind this means nothing, for to understand the nature of the space-time complex we should have to know what lies beyond it; we should have to get outside it in order to look at it in relation to something else. As it is, our minds operate within the structure and are bounded by it—hence our mathematics, like our systems of philosophy and metaphysics, can never lead us to any first cause or final destination. Our ideas, if we project them far enough and pursue them logically enough, inevitably bring us back to the point from which we started. We travel round the

circumference of the circle or round the sphere in every direction, like a ship circumnavigating the globe, and all we discover at the end is a paradox, a seeming contradiction in terms of the “fourth dimension” of Einstein and the Nibbāna of Buddhism, both alike incomprehensible to the normal consciousness. But the fourth dimension, although it is something that exists only as figures on paper so far as we are concerned, is essential to modern physics; calculations in the higher sphere of mathematics cannot proceed without it. The fourth dimension is something which, while incomprehensible itself, yet makes the rest of mathematics understandable and gives reason and cohesion to the laws that govern the other three dimensions known to us.

So it is with Nibbāna. To understand Nibbāna we have to break through the closed circle of concepts and associations. These phenomena are all characterised by impermanence, suffering and voidness of self and substance they have a causal genesis, a beginning and an end, without possessing intrinsically any of the characteristics with which our sense-perceptions invest them. Nibbāna, on the other hand, is the ultimate ‘dimension’ that lies beyond thought and altogether beyond worldly or even cosmic experience. Like the fourth dimension of Einstein, its reality has to be accepted, for the very reason that it alone gives meaning to all the rest. What science tells us of the fourth dimension was said by the Buddha about Nibbāna. “If there was not this unconditioned beginningless, endless, unchanging state there could be no way out from the states that are conditioned, subject to beginning and cessation and involved in ceaseless change.” But while the fourth dimension can never be brought into the perspective of ordinary experience, but must forever remain a mathematical enigma, Nibbāna can become a living reality because it can be experienced here and now, in this present world, in this earthly existence. There is a way out of the closed circle or sphere, and the Buddha has shown the way. If we visualise the sphere as being bounded by the impurities (*kilesa*) that arise in the mind through attachment to sense-objects it becomes clear that to escape from it we must first destroy these impurities. In the centre of the sphere, right at its heart, lies the fundamental delusion, *sakkāya diṭṭhi*—the belief in self or *attā*. Everything else revolves around that central point; so long as we are attached to the basic immemorial error of self-delusion, there can be no breaking through to the unconditioned pure state beyond the sphere of *saṃsāra*.

Everyone has seen a goat tethered to a stake in the ground. The goat moves round and round the stake eating the grass in a circle that extends as far as its rope will allow. The mind is exactly like that. It feeds in the pasturage (*gocara*) of the senses, and all the time its range is limited to the circle, while the stake to which it is fastened represents the idea of Selfhood, which keeps it from freedom. If we are to break away from the circle of conceptual thinking we must first of all recognise that the self around which it all centres is a delusion; once this truth is fully realised the realm of sense-objects and enjoyments can no longer imprison us. In terms of the cycle of dependent origination, if ignorance is abolished, volitional action and all the subsequent links, down to rebirth and death with their attendant miseries, come to an end. Thus it is not that there is any wall around us separating us from the reality; we are bound from within, and it is to the realm of consciousness within ourselves that we must turn in order to uproot the stake that binds us.

But it is with the principle of kamma that we are concerned at present, because while we are still within this wheel of saṃsāra we are subject to its law. It is necessary that we should understand that law so that we may use the knowledge to our benefit instead of being its blind, ignorant slaves. The working of *kamma* and *vipāka* is impartial, it does not favour one above another, but when we realise it as being the one law that governs all our existence we realise also that through it we are the masters of our own destiny. The action we perform so unthinkingly today is a part of what we shall be in the future, for our aggregates of *nāma* and *rūpa*, our mental and physical characteristics,—which, being in a perpetual state of flux are only tendencies,—were formed in the past, while, from moment to moment our present activities of mind, speech and bodily action are determining our future.

Western critics of Buddhism sometimes raise objections to the principle of kamma on the lines of the following quotation, which is taken from an article by a European who studied Buddhism but failed completely to grasp the important point which has been emphasised at the beginning of this work. He writes: "The justice of the law of karma is acceptable only if we take a superficial and theoretical view of life, but not when we examine more carefully the actual web and woof of human lives. Let us take the case of a cripple child born to parents in abject poverty. He does not remember his past life so he cannot be

expected to appreciate that he is merely paying the penalty for former misdeeds. He will not in any way benefit from such a crude form of punishment but, on the contrary, will probably grow up with criminal tendencies and a grudge against society. Karma cannot save him."

Such objections are the result of a view that is animistic and artificial, a view that is essentially emotional rather than scientific. It is an attempt to find human motives and a human purposiveness in what has been shown to be an impersonal, amoral mechanism. It is not the function of the law of kamma to "save" or to "punish" anyone; its function is to maintain the process of saṃsāra, just as the function of the law of gravity is to make life on earth possible. Its results are only "good" or "bad" as we interpret them from our human standpoint. The law of gravity is not concerned because a man falls from a high building and breaks his neck. The law of cause and effect is not operated by any external agency with the object of "teaching" human beings. Man has to find his release, by struggling against it. The theistic idea, together with man's projection of his own personality and values into a scheme which has no place for them, is the root cause of all such confused theorising. Emotional thinking destroys objectivity: it is bound to be personalised and to evaluate everything according to personal standards of what is good for "me" or bad for "me". Buddhism requires a scientific objectivity of outlook, a faculty for seeing things as they are without emotional reactions or any tendency to indulge in emotional interpretations. It is not possible to understand Buddhism while retaining the outlook on life of a sentimental spinster.

It cannot be too often repeated that there is no being, no continuous entity linking together our moments of conscious life, but there is a continuum of cause and effect, or the current of our becoming which is like a river, never the same from one moment to another yet all the time following a pattern that gives it visible form and makes it appear to be a continuous entity. Buddhism teaches a dynamic concept of consciousness, and hence of personality, which is a phenomenon momentarily arising and passing away. There is nothing in it that can survive the fleeting moment, nothing that can endure; its nature is *anicca*, impermanence, and *anattā*, the absence of any real core of personal self.

A living being, made up of five aggregates of grasping (*upādāna-khandha*) is therefore simply the manifestation of kamma

and vipāka; he or it is the living embodiment of past actions. The five *khandhas* are *rūpa-khandha*, *vedanā-khandha*, *saññā-khandha*, *saṅkhāra-khandha* and *viññāṇa-khandha*, some of which have already been dealt with loosely under paṭiccasamuppāda. They mean respectively physical substance and attributes, sensations, perception, the mental formations (fifty in number), and consciousness. Of these, the one that forms the subject of our immediate attention is *saṅkhāra-khandha*, the fifty mental tendencies, for this is the result of the predominant or most frequently recurring kamma of the past.

When a certain action is performed, a tendency is set up to repeat that action; when it is repeated over a number of times the tendency grows stronger. This is what is called habit-formation and is found to some degree even in inanimate objects, the most familiar example being a piece of paper that has been rolled. When it is unrolled and released again it rolls up once more, although there is no force causing it to re-roll except the fact that it had been rolled previously and certain minute alterations in its structure had taken place accordingly. Thus it can be seen that habit formation has its counterpart in a physical or "natural" law, and operates even where volition is absent or is represented by a volitional action from outside. In the lower forms of life, where volition, or will power, is only very slightly manifested, its working is even more clearly seen than in human beings. A fly settles on a particular spot on your arm. You brush it away and it makes one or two circles in the air, then comes to rest once more on precisely the same spot as before. This experiment may be made several times in succession with the same result. Every time the fly will descend on the same place on your arm, even though there is nothing special there to attract it, until something happens to break the chain of habit-formation which its first act set in motion.

Much the same mechanical pattern of behaviourism can be observed in the habits of fowls: If the hen roost in which they are accustomed to sleep is removed to a different place, at roosting time the fowls will go to the same spot where the hen-roost formerly stood, and for several nights they have to be guided into the shelter in its new location, until a fresh habit-pattern is established.

Such is the tremendous force of a habit which has become confirmed by the repetition of particular action. The only thing that can break it is a strong act of will, or the arising of a different

set of circumstances which make it impossible to continue on the same lines. Every action that we perform, therefore, is potentially the father of a long line of actions of a similar kind. When the planets emerged from the fiery nebulae they continued revolving in space, not because there is any mechanism to keep them going, but simply because there is nothing to stop them. The initial impulse carries on requiring nothing more to maintain it, and it will continue until it is exhausted. Motion, and the thing moving, are merely a series of events in time and space, and this is the law governing the psychic tendencies—the principle of an action or an event producing a like action or event, the second producing a third and so on in unbroken sequence.

The Buddhist philosophy of dependent origination must now be considered as a whole, rather than interpreted according to the sequence of its parts. It begins, as we have already seen, with ignorance (or nescience—"not knowing"), which is a condition of the mind. Because of ignorance the mind functions imperfectly, accepting phenomenal appearances for reality, unaware of their true nature which is impermanence, disease and dissatisfaction and lack of essential reality. This condition is dispelled by realising the three characteristics of the phenomenal world and gaining knowledge of the Four Noble Truths, i.e., the fact of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the way to its cessation. Until that point of insight is reached, ignorance is present at every stage of existence; it is like an invisible cage which keeps the mind trapped in its own illusory constructions. Another name for this condition is *vipallāsa*, meaning distortion. It is of three kinds: *saññā-vipallāsa* (distortion of perception), *citta-vipallāsa* (distortion of mind or thought); and *diṭṭhi-vipallāsa* (distortion of views). Each of the three kinds of distortion has four modes; that is to say, perceiving, thinking or believing that which is impermanent to be permanent, that which is painful to be happiness, that which is without self or soul as having selfhood and reality and that which is impure as being pure. The delusion of a permanent self and of the reality of material things leads to attachment to an external that has no noumenal reality, and under the influence of this craving the impurities of consciousness (*āsava*s) come into being; that is, *kāma āsava*, sensual craving, *bhava āsava*, lust of life, *diṭṭhi āsava*, speculative opinion and *avijjā āsava*, the impurity of ignorance. The word '*āsava*' literally means an influx of tainted concepts. The mind being self-tainted from various sources is governed by *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*,

the unholy trinity of greed, hatred and delusion, and these characteristics give rise to evil actions producing bad *vipāka* (resultants) through repeated births. The central fact of Buddhist teaching as it concerns this present world is the actuality of rebirth and the operation of a moral law which conditions and dominates material phenomena.

From this it may be seen that Buddhism disposes of the materialistic fallacy, not by denying the data of experience, but by going beyond it. The material universe is not a delusion, neither is it a fixed and self-existing reality. It is to be viewed as it truly is—an aggregate of composite factors existing in relation to a certain imperfect sphere of consciousness; in short, a “relative reality” or conventional truth. For example, any material object may be regarded from different levels, and known or experienced according to those levels. First we have the level of ordinary cognition, which the materialist takes for the reality. On this plane the object is a solid body occupying three-dimensional space. We are aware of its existence through the channels of our senses and to them it appears to be endowed with shape, solidity, colour and other qualities. On the next higher level to this, the “solid object” is seen as a collocation of apparently material atoms, a miniature planetary system but consisting mostly of space. Viewing it thus, we are still not out of the material sphere; the atoms are the seemingly solid particles, like billiard balls, of Dalton’s physics. Above this level it is seen to take the form of immaterial forces, and the electronic energy which is the basis of its atomic structure becomes apparent. The infinitesimal billiard balls disappear, resolved into the energy which is the sole reality of present day physics. The next higher viewpoint, that which is accessible to the contemplative seer who has gained insight into the truth of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, discloses the *dhammatā* or underlying law of the whole process, wherein its true nature is revealed and it is known to be constantly subject to change, perpetually in a state of unbalance and restlessness, and absolutely unsubstantial. The *dhammatā* is the law of being which, while itself invisible makes all its results visible. The ultimate stage of insight is above this, it reaches the void wherein even the *dhammatā* of the object ceases to exist and all relativities are wiped out. To exist means to function; in any dynamic concept such as that held by Buddhism and science the two terms are interchangeable.

Properly understood, Buddhism provides the one acceptable explanation of the arising of material phenomena from a mental base, and how it comes about that the mind can control, shape and evolve material forms to suit its needs. It also explains how it comes about that the effect of a strong mental supposition can, under favourable circumstances, produce an immediate reaction in the physical body. Everywhere the dominance of the mind (which most scientists are now agreed is not to be identified with the physical brain) over material substance reveals this most important side of their interrelationship. The Hindu Yogi in a state of religious ecstasy can walk on burning coal without injury, because intense faith has convinced his mind that he will not be burned, whereas the hypnotised subject of our earlier experiment is burned by the harmless touch of a pencil. The fact that this law works both ways, and that the physical can also influence the mental, as in the case of disease or injury impairing the psychic faculties, shows, not that mind arises from matter, as materialism, would have it, but simply that there is no 'soul' or self-entity independent of the five *khandha* process, which is a closely correlated, dynamic psycho-physical structure. One of the earliest sermons of Buddha, the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, deals with this point exhaustively. The "being," complete with form, identity and personality, is a purely momentary resultant of past causes and the potential of future ones. He may be called the material manifestation of kamma, but kamma itself represents a law which is above the material. It corresponds to the *dhammatā* or immaterial law that underlies all material phenomena.

Despite the widespread belief voiced by the writer quoted previously, it is a fact that many people, at least in early childhood, do remember their former lives, sometimes in great detail, and cases have been known where the evidence has been confirmed beyond all question of doubt. The point then arises as to how, since at death the old aggregates disappear and fresh ones come into existence with rebirth, is it possible for anyone to remember anything relating to the previous aggregates? Memory is a function of the brain cells, and at rebirth the physical brain, which is part of the material aggregates, is a new organ. Does this not mean that there must be some kind of a "soul" that transmigrates and takes up its abode in the new body, carrying its memories with it?

There is no such "soul." What happens in these cases is that the memory is carried forward by the causal impulse stamping the

new brain structure with a pattern similar in some respects to that of the old. In *paṭicca-samuppāda* the life-continuum is represented by *bhava*; it is this which conveys the previous impressions in conjunction with the *saṅkhāra* group. It will be remembered that *avijjā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* constitute the first group of links, with *viññāṇa* in its function of *paṭisandhi* (connecting) consciousness bridging over to *nāma-rūpa*, at which point the new body and mind appears and the next birth-group of links begins. Similarly, at the end of the middle birth-group comes *bhava*, the life-continuum, bridging over to *jāti* which stands for the future birth. Here the relationship in place between *bhava* and the two links *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa* shows how these three function in concord to project certain characteristics from one life to another. In actual practice, what happens is this: Pre-natal memory is almost always that of the life immediately preceding; it is usually the result of a very strong impression coming close to end of the life, or even dominating the final moment of consciousness; the death-proximate kamma which has the greatest influence in determining the next existence, and it is often of an intensely emotional nature—the kind of impression that is most powerful, in affecting thought-patterns at any stage of life. At the rebirth, this powerful impression stamps its pattern on the cell structure of the new brain, and so the fresh *nāma-rūpa* inherits, together with accumulated tendencies of the *saṅkhāra-khandha*, certain memories belonging to the old. It is an operation analogous to the process whereby a mental conviction that the body is going to be branded produces a burn on the flesh, without any heat having touched it. The mental activity comes before the physical organ and determines its conformations. In Buddhist Abhidhamma, *bhavaṅgasota* corresponds to the unconscious-mind current or “subconscious mind” of modern psychology.

In this way Buddhism avoids the two extremes of idealism and materialism. While it teaches that as a man thinks, so he becomes, it does not attempt to dismiss the material world as a dream and a mirage. The multiple material universe exists, but only on the mental plane of ignorance (*avijjā*). Its space-time dimensions, ignorance and sequences are homogeneous within the framework of their own logic, but that logic itself can only be understood by reference to a higher principle that is not in any sense supernatural or contrary to mundane knowledge and purposes, but which on a spiritual level reconciles the data of sensory experience with the intuitively-perceived moral law.

With this knowledge it becomes possible to trace the harmonious pattern of cause and effect through all phases of sentient and insentient existence.

Sakkāya-diṭṭhi, the belief that the self alone is real, and that it is unaffected by circumstances or actions, is a delusion of idealism that leads inevitably to the rejection of moral values. Materialism on the other hand, leads to the same result by denying the existence of immaterial ethical categories; for this reason it was denounced by Buddha. The mind that is enmeshed in materialistic delusions can never relinquish craving. It takes the impermanent to be lasting, and tries to find happiness in things that are perishable. At the same time it gives birth to impure states of consciousness, unaware that these and the evil action resulting from them produce misery without end. This, indeed, is the grossest form of ignorance, for even without any knowledge of the law of kamma it is plain for all to see that true and enduring happiness can never come from the pursuit and grasping of material pleasures. Emancipated from ignorance the mind views all things and sensations impartially, without clinging to any—this alone is the true secret of mental equilibrium and the stability that constitutes the greatest happiness in this world or any other plane of existence.

For many centuries these truths have been uttered, so that they have come to sound commonplace. They are the clichés of philosophy. But it is only Buddhism which is capable of bringing them into line with the facts of every day experience and the discoveries of science, and thus infusing into them new life and meaning. The Teaching of the Buddha does not deny any scientific fact, or even such evidence as that to which the materialist points as being contrary to religious belief. These materialistic facts are true—but they are not all the truth. Buddhism comprehends them and passes beyond them.

10. A LARGER RATIONALISM

Writing in *The Humanist*, Mr. Hector Hawton once remarked that he had 'always been puzzled by the fact that Indians should become Christians;' and he adds: 'It is equally surprising to me that Europeans should become Mohammedans or Buddhists.'

Europeans who become Buddhists might well share his surprise at the fact that other Europeans become Muslims, since the basis of all theistic religions is the same, and lays them open to identical objections. What can be argued against one religion claiming divine revelation can be applied with the same force to all. If the choice between religion and non-religion could be settled simply by an appeal to the superiority of empirical knowledge over belief in the supernatural, the decision would not be difficult for anyone. And yet among the religions, the special case of Buddhism would still be left outside that decision. For while Buddhism is certainly not supernatural revelation, it does go far beyond the empirical knowledge with which it begins, while never coming into conflict with what we are able to observe and verify for ourselves. Instead of contradicting knowledge and reason, Buddhism accepts, utilizes and supplements them.

It sometimes happens that people change their religion not because one form of theistic revelation satisfies their reason more than another, but because the emotional appeal of a certain faith, or its associations, or perhaps simply revolt against the dogmas of their childhood, impels them to do so. But that is not always the case. There are some for whom the question of why they have not chosen one of the non-religious attitudes which others find satisfactory cannot be answered in terms of filling an emotional need, or following the attraction of the exotic. The rationalist may believe that it can; but his own case may not be so simple as it appears to him. Behind his rejection of all religion there may lie disguised a deeply-rooted feeling that if the faith of his ancestors and compatriots is outdated, all other creeds must be even more so. There is a kind of loyalty in this, but it is not exactly rational.

Those who have decided that Buddhism has more to offer them than atheistic faith on the one hand and the uncertain ethics of humanism on the other, usually come to that conclusion because they have been seeking a more comprehensive view of human experience in all its enigmatic, paradoxical variety, and a more acceptable explanation of it, than either can give. For

obvious reasons, religion which offers a supernatural account of man's being in the world is unsatisfactory; at the same time, it is hard to find any superiority in a system which offers none at all. Whatever view we may choose to take of the universe and man's place in it, there are teleological considerations in the very structure of our thinking which refuse to be ignored; there are problems of purpose and of value which insist upon intruding into our picture. The rationalist who succeeds in treating them as though they did not exist is tricking himself in the same way as the religionist who firmly closes the doors of his mind against the improbabilities of his creed.

Rationalism is believed to be based upon a scientific view of the world. But the popular phrase, 'a scientific view,' calls for more clarification than it usually gets. A view that is rigidly confined to what happens to be scientifically demonstrable at any given time is not the same as a scientific view. If it were, no outstanding scientist could be said to have a 'scientific view,' for every advance in science has been the result of someone taking an imaginative leap beyond the bounds of what is already known. The mind which does not reach out, like a plant thrusting towards the light, is dead. Should we accuse Einstein of not having a scientific view because he divined the general principle of relativity first by a kind of insight, and only verified it scientifically afterwards?

At present, scientific thought is satisfied with tracing and defining the operations of the physical world, and its speculations have to proceed cautiously, step by step. It does not concern itself with why these operations take place. Its interest is limited and selective, and is unfortunately bound to become more and more so as specialized knowledge accumulates. We have come to a stage at which the separate departments of knowledge are as clearly marked out as political territories on a map. And just as the map is concerned with nothing more than these arbitrary divisions as they exist, while the reasons for them come within a different province altogether, that of the historian, so the scientist, as far as the field of his particular research extends, can quite happily dispense with all notions of purpose and design, and he is quite justified in doing so.

To take one example, we know biological evolution to be a fact. We are more or less familiar with its general development, and science does not encourage us to ask ourselves precisely why this complicated process began at all; or, having begun, what

guiding impulse it was that by laborious trial and error over aeons of time converted elementary single-cell organisms at last into the highly-complex, though still imperfect, structure of human beings. Once it is seen that no Creator-God is necessary—that such a God is not only redundant, but actually impossible—it is thought that all problems connected with a purpose and a directing principle can be set aside. The layman is inclined to believe that because science disregards such questions they are of no importance, or that they have been answered. In this way a mythology of science has grown up which is not the fault of the scientist, but rather of the ordinary man who confuses science with omniscience. It is of course true that some knowledgeable specialists take the view that because science has not so far disclosed any purpose in the universe, there cannot be one, but they are becoming fewer as the vistas of knowledge extend. By appropriating to itself more and more of the supernatural (or what would have been considered so, not very long ago), science is becoming increasingly metaphysical. But it is only by taking a survey of it that is at once minute and comprehensive, that this fact can be appreciated.

In regard to the origin and development of life on this planet, it may quite reasonably be assumed that some fortuitous combination of chemical elements gave rise to the first emergence of living from non-living matter; there is nothing improbable in this. We now know for a fact that living cells could in the beginning have developed from non-living substance, and that it could quite well have happened accidentally or in the normal course of events. It must in fact be inevitable under the right conditions, and for this reason we are justified in assuming that there are other inhabited worlds besides our own. But, granted that life had this beginning, why did not the process stop at unicellular protoplasm? Or, if it did not stop altogether, why did it not go on repeating the same elementary forms instead of, as it actually did, progressing from one stage to another with an ever-increasing organic and sensory equipment?

The answer usually given is that it was in order to master the environmental conditions. But this in itself is an answer on the teleological level. It prompts the further query, What was it that gave apparently intelligent direction to these developments? Was there a something which was able to discern particular needs, however dimly, and to work through natural selection and other biological principles to produce the required organs? For

after all, living structures show a degree of organization, with many details still not understood, which seems unaccountable on the theory that it was reached by the purely negative process of eliminating the inefficient. A positive, active process must be in operation before a negative one can take place. Although we see that there could not have been any omniscient power guiding the series of events (since, had there been such a power the fumbling process of trial and error, with all its ruthless wastage, could have been by-passed), are we altogether justified in dismissing the problem as irrelevant?

Even the earliest forms of life were undoubtedly fitted to survive in their surrounding medium, and many have survived to the present day. If, therefore, the sole objective was to produce living forms that could survive and propagate, they were perfect from the beginning. Even locomotion is not essential to life, for plants exist successfully, and in complete adaptation to their environment, without it. All that is needed for the act of living organically is a mouth, a stomach and an excretory system. There was no real need for the single-cell protozoa to develop more organs; no need for successive appearance of eyes, fins, legs, wings or any other embellishments to the primary forms. We choose to regard these as aids in the struggle for survival, but there is another point of view in which they may be seen as causes of that struggle. From either of these two viewpoints, however, the question of what it was that foresaw each need, and experimented until the need was met, remains unanswered.

It worried no less a person than Darwin, to such an extent that he was compelled to put forward, without evidence, a theory by which every cell in the body was supposed to send its representative to the germ cells, there to debate, in parliamentary fashion, the best course for the next generation. Unlike his more timid followers, Darwin repeatedly emphasised the need for speculation. "How odd it is," he wrote in his autobiography, "that anyone should not see that all observation must be for or against some view if it is to be of any service." So to meet a need he did not hesitate to regard cells as thinking, willing and desiring entities.

To discuss questions of motive without being able to define what it is that experiences the motivating urge is unsatisfactory; but in this instance we have no alternative. It is at all events necessary to assume some connecting principle between one generation of living beings and another which converts each

generation into a link between what is desired and its realization. Biological evolution may choose to ignore this, but it cannot dispose of the need, nor close up the gap in our understanding which it leaves, so long as it is treated as an illegitimate field of speculation. Where we see something like intention at work, it is natural to ask from what the intention derives. And when, because it blunders towards its goal and operates extravagantly and amorally, we can no longer believe it to be the activity of an omnipotent and merciful Creator, we are not thereby compelled to reject the possibility of other sources of activation.

If the development of more complex and refined organisms was not absolutely necessary to survival, we have to seek elsewhere for a possible cause. We find then that while the acquisition of higher sensory organs did not contribute materially to the ability to survive, it contributed to the ability to enjoy. A tree lives longer than a man, but a man's life is preferable.

So it becomes apparent that survival is not the sole or chief objective: there is another motivation, that of hedonic satisfaction. And this is not merely ancillary to the survival motive, but is in reality the objective that lies beyond it, and to the realization of which survival is only the first necessity. Biological evolution is subservient to the pleasure principle; its purpose is nothing but the development of organisms that are capable of heightened sensory experience, the pleasures of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching—and thinking.

It is precisely this desire for sensory pleasure that Buddhism declares to be the life-impulse, the causative principle behind every living form, whatever may be its particular stage of development, and whether it be on this planet or any other. Defined simply as *taṇhā* (literally, thirst or craving), this takes the place in Buddhism of a 'creator.' Since it is self-renewing, the process of creation is perpetual and cyclic, and there is no need for a first cause. Although our universe had a beginning, and will one day come to an end, in the Buddhist view it is only one of a series of universes, and the series had no ultimate beginning. According to Buddhist cosmology, when a world-system comes to an end a long period ensues during which matter remains in an unorganized state; then by degrees it forms into fresh world-systems, or island universes, and gradually life appears once more. When it does so it is the result of the rebirth of beings from the previous world-cycle, whose karmic force acts together with chemical processes in nature to produce the first organic

structures. The process is described in a mixture of literal and allegorical language in the Aggañña Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya and elsewhere. In interpreting the Buddhist account of evolution it is useful to remember that we have no geological record of the very first living organisms that appeared on earth. Being protoplasmic they passed away without leaving any fossilized traces. For all we know, there may have been other, even less substantial beings in existence before them, and the Aggañña account may be more literal than it appears.

Craving is a mental impulse, and Buddhism treats mental energy as a force in some ways analogous to electricity, or perhaps to electromagnetic waves. That thought-impulses do take some such form is supported by the evidence of their action on the Hans Berger encephalogram. We will leave aside any reference to telepathy because, although it has been proved to the satisfaction of most reasonable people, there are still those who refuse to acknowledge its reality. Even leaving aside all arguments that can be drawn from parapsychology, science has shown that the great governing principles of the universe operate by means which are themselves invisible and often indefinable. Electric current under the right conditions is transformed into heat, light, sound and power; yet still its actual nature eludes definition. Gravitational force keeps the galaxies in place and the moon gives us our tides, but we can find no physical connection between the moon as a body in space and the water on our planet. We are not even certain whether gravity is a property of matter or a special function of curved space. It is often necessary to remind ourselves that while science points to causal relationships between events it cannot always explain just what these relationships mean in physical terms. Some philosophers of science are even ready to throw the whole concept of causality to the winds. A great part of the scientist's time is devoted to examining and measuring the tangible effects of forces which themselves cannot be examined, and so remain essentially a mystery. If this is true of physics it is even more true of genetics and biology.

So when Buddhism asserts that it is 'craving' which gives directional impulse and purpose to the processes of physical evolution, through mental energy transmitted by one being to another in successive lives, the materialist may raise his eyebrows but he is unable to point to any established scientific truth that is outraged by the theory. The Buddhist, on the other hand, can

offer in support of his view the opinion of several eminent men of science to the effect that something like thought and intention is visible in our universe.

In this world, mind depends upon matter for its manifestation, just as the electrical current depends upon some more ponderable agency to convert it into heat, light or power. This fact has given rise to the very unwarranted assumption that mind is a product of matter. It is unwarrantable because the position could quite well be reversed, without changing the picture of the universe as we know it. But avoiding these two extremes, Buddhism maintains that matter and mentality are interdependent; the living organisms produced in the evolutionary pattern have been the result of a transmitted will-to-live, a current of 'becoming' which is based upon craving, and which can be perceived only through its material manifestations, the various grades of living beings. Mind, or mental energy, operates on and through matter to attain its ends.

There is one truth which science impresses upon us very strongly: that this universe is not a universe of 'things' but of events. It is a complex of dynamic processes in which an everlasting 'becoming,' that never reaches the state of perfect 'being,' is the sole actuality. This is the truth as it was seen and taught by the Buddha from the beginning of his ministry. The much misunderstood doctrine of rebirth in Buddhism does not mean the transmigration of a soul, for the existence of any such persisting entity is completely denied. There is no question of a personal survival or immortality, either partial or complete. Personality is seen as a collection of aggregates, physical and mental, which come together and disintegrate again in obedience to natural law and to the mind-originated causes from the past. Everything that is subject to conditionality is subject to dissolution, and can never attain completeness.

Each state of existence is therefore only a momentary link between past and future states, and what we call life is nothing but a causal continuum. To put the case in simple and concrete terms, an old man is not the same person as the infant he once was; that infant has vanished for ever. The old man is the present result of the infant's having existed in the past. Between these two extreme points in the current of cause and effect that makes up the individual's world-line, there have been innumerable other continuity-links from childhood to maturity, and it is not possible to single out any particular stage and say of it, 'This is the man as

he really is—this is his essence and real self.' In the same way, at his death there can be no totality of 'selfhood' to survive and be reborn. Instead of the animistic concept of an unchanging soul-essence there is the transmission of his thought potential, by which his will-to-live produces another being (or a further stage in the causal series) to carry on the tendencies engendered in the past. It was this concept of the *will* manifesting itself afresh in a new individual which Schopenhauer called 'Palingenesis.' If the term can be dissociated from Haeckel's use of it in a biological sense it will serve as well as any other to express the Buddhist idea of rebirth.

It is quite commonly supposed that modern science knows all there is to be known about genetics. This is an exaggeration. Enough is known, certainly, to account for the reproduction of species considered only as a mechanical process, but whether it is sufficient to cover all the phenomena is another matter. The biologist is satisfied to name the chemical DNA as being the carrier of the genes which provide the fundamental units of heredity. It appears that all the necessary information concerning physical structure is somehow packed into this substance and thus transmitted from one generation to another. But the theory does not carry us any further than that. It may be adequate to explain how the blueprint of the unborn being is fed into the genetic machinery, but it leaves little room for variations on the given design. Yet variations of a minor kind are constantly occurring, and without them evolution itself would have been impossible. It does not attempt to explain how individual modes of thinking, specific character-traits and, above all, the complicated patterns of instinctive behaviour found in certain animals, can all be conjured into a chemical which, without doubt, we shall soon be able to produce artificially. It is all rather like the unsophisticated savage's notion that the London Symphony Orchestra is seated inside the radio receiving set. Whether there are such simple aborigines today is questionable—but we still have the scientific theorists. Had Flaubert been living now he would probably have found no reason to alter his dictum that heredity is a true principle misunderstood. The real function of DNA may be just what it is claimed to be, but that does not make it anything more than the physical conductor of an unknown force. According to Buddhism, that unknown factor is kamma, and DNA is just another material auxiliary to the process of rebirth.

Sometimes it is said that the Buddha made no direct pronouncement concerning God, and that his position was agnostic. This is completely false. The Buddha categorically denied the existence of a creator or overlord, and his system of philosophy leaves no room for a 'Supreme Being.' The Buddha's refusal to discuss eschatological questions was not due to the agnostic's lack of knowledge; it came from the fact that the mind in its purely intellectual functioning is not capable of dealing with anything outside the realm of relative concepts, and there is no language to express those areas of experience which lie beyond the temporal and spatial relations. We can think and speak only in terms of comparison and contrast, and our communication of ideas is limited to those things we all know and can name. Of ultimate truth nothing at all can be predicated. On the other hand, our need to think in terms of a beginning and a 'first cause' is conditioned by our habitual use of ideas which involve relationships. Ordinarily, relationships and sequences dominate our thinking as space dominates our physical movements. Yet there is no need to resort to metaphysics in order to understand that the idea of a beginning to time is self-contradictory. Although, like the curved space of Einstein's mathematics, it is a truth with which formal logic and semantics cannot cope, we can discover its necessity by reminding ourselves that space and time are concepts derived from the relationship between things and events. There could not have been any time before objects and their movements existed. Consequently, the idea that the universe could have arisen from nothingness at a particular point of time is a contradiction.

But while the life-process had no point of beginning in time, it can be brought to an end by the individual, for himself. He can put a stop to his own particular current of existence, the 'wearisome round of rebirths,' and Buddhism offers a technique of mental cultivation by which this is possible. It consists in the total elimination of all the craving impulses. This fundamental psychic transformation is accompanied by the development of higher faculties of perception and insight, in which the reality beyond conditioned existence is directly experienced. It was this knowledge that the Buddha possessed, and the evidence for it is in the doctrine he taught—a doctrine so different from any other creed that it is even doubtful whether it should be included under the heading of 'religion.' In this method of approach starting from observed facts, analysing and probing into causes and

relationships, the Buddha more nearly resembled a scientist of today than any of the mystical dogmatists who have provided the world with religions. But his area of exploration was the mind, not the physical universe. It may be that the future of our own science will also lie in this direction. To understand the external world is merely knowledge; to understand oneself is wisdom.

The humanist and rationalist viewpoints appear to leave no opening whatever for a continuity of experience beyond that of the one life known to us. The good man and the bad, and the man whose life has been nothing but a chronicle of failure and frustration, alike come to the same end, a dark oblivion. If that is indeed the case, the most outstanding characteristic of life is its enormous inanity, its fatuous meaninglessness. Those who have contributed to human progress have no share in its results; they die without even any assurance that the progress they worked for is a reality. We who live in the present century can no longer believe in progress in quite the same way that our grandfathers did. The idea that evolution marches in a straight line to perfection has had to be discarded. Science itself, which holds out to us gifts with one hand and swift destruction with the other, is rapidly qualifying for a place among the discarded gods. On what evidence can we believe that science will ever succeed in abolishing disease, congenital mental deficiency or deformity? If it cannot do this, it cannot ever assure happiness to all. Even its very real material contributions, which no one can deny, have not brought the happiness which we take to be the chief goal of existence; instead, they have given us more desires. And for many people those desires can never be satisfied.

Apart from these facts, we are confronted by the disturbing realization that this view of life gives us no rational justification for ethical principles. It is useless to talk of a purer ethic emerging from the multiplication of desires; that is the last fatuity of wishful thinking. If the sole object to living is experience of pleasure—which we must accept if we confine our vision to the goal of biological evolution—the most successful organism, be it a man or an animal, is the one that has experienced most pleasure. The means by which it has done this do not matter; the cardinal rule of life on the biological level is that survival and enjoyment are to be achieved at the expense of other weaker organisms. Therefore, any moral principles that man may import into the system are entirely artificial and unnatural. Let those who use the word 'unnatural' as a rhetorical term of

condemnation stop for a moment to consider what is 'natural' and what is not! The plain truth is that Nature is amoral, and in this view man's introduction of morality is a perversion. When the humanist says, truthfully, that he experiences happiness in working for others, he is unconsciously denying the basis of what he understands by a rational philosophy. What his experience really suggests is that the ethical motivations which religion has brought into an amoral world survive in certain types of men even when religion itself has been discarded. How else can we explain this curious phenomenon of happiness arising from a subjugation of self-interest which is contrary to all the principles of survival in nature?

There is in fact another explanation, and it is the one that Buddhism offers. There is a larger rationalism, in which it is reasonable and good to introduce pity into a pitiless world, justice into a world of injustice, unselfishness into a system of survival by selfishness. In the higher types of men this knowledge exists subconsciously; they instinctively follow its promptings, whether it agrees with their philosophy or not. But to make the higher instinct rational we have to cast our vision beyond the limitations we have ourselves imposed. It is necessary to leave the dogmas of both religion and science behind. We may then arrive at the Buddhist truth that while all manifestations of life, from the amoeba to man, are dominated by craving and are therefore doomed to perpetual dissatisfaction, there is a fulfilment of another kind to be sought and striven for, and that the moral principle is an inherent part of the universal law of cause and effect. In place of the endless struggle for existence, with its emphasis on egocentric values, Buddhism puts a perfection to be reached on a higher level, the annihilation of desire and the final extinction of the life-asserting urges. When this becomes the end in view, morality ceases to be a morbid excrescence on the natural lust for life, and becomes a logical necessity. The transitory and incomplete happiness that the humanist finds in labouring for mankind is then enlarged to an all-embracing compassion, in which the individual ego is seen to be an illusion.

Then is the Buddhist goal a merely negative one? To the life-worshipper it may appear so. But when we re-orient ourselves to a view that is neither pessimistic nor optimistic concerning man's portion of happiness, but is realistic in its acceptance of the facts, we find that the oppositions of negative and positive have no

significance. Or they take on a different meaning in the new context. If all the life-processes are, as Buddhism teaches and experience confirms, impermanent, subject to suffering and void of ego-substance, it follows that their cessation, the Nibbāna of Buddhism, must be the sole reality.

The real cannot be described in terms of the unreal, and the only possible answer to those who wish to know what it is must lie in the Buddha's own words: 'Come, and see for yourself.' Buddhism does not ask us to take any belief on trust, and the Buddha was the only religious teacher in the world's history who condemned blind faith. The worship of science is after all nothing but another kind of religion. The appeal of Buddhist thought to the Western mind is that it has no 'either/or.' It opens the door to a wider rationalism.

11. OF GODS AND MEN

We are all familiar with the fact that man in former days readily believed in the existence of an unseen world, a world of ghosts, demons, nature-spirits which were worshipped as gods, and a host of other supernatural beings. This world lay all about him and in some respects was more real to him than the physical world. It was his belief in it, and in the power of the forces it contained, that gave birth first to primitive magic and later to religion.

Even today, vast numbers of people all over the world, and not merely among savage tribes or backward peasantry, but in advanced and educated communities, particularly in Asia, still believe in this mysterious realm and in various classes of beings that inhabit it, to an extent that would surprise most Westerners apart from those who have made a study of the subject. To the Asian mind it is equally surprising that Westerners, with the exception of spiritualists, are sceptical regarding it.

Since this widespread belief cannot be attributed to ignorance or to any collective infirmity of mind, there must be another reason for it. If it is a reason that the average Englishman, American or Australian finds difficult of acceptance, the obstruction may be in his own mental attitude. We are all conditioned by past habits of thought, the mental climate of our environment and concepts, those "idols of the market place and of the theatre"²⁸ which we take to be established truths without having troubled to question them. Before dismissing the ideas of a considerable portion of the human race as mere fantasy we should do well to examine first the background of our own thinking.

For many years past, science has been exploring the physical world and laying bare its secrets. In order to do so, scientists have worked on the assumption that for every visible phenomenon there must be a physical explanation, and this axiom has had to be taken as a fundamental principle of scientific method. It must always be so, in regard to the substance and laws of this tangible world in which we live and receive our ordinary sense-impressions, for once it were admitted that a certain phenomenon was not to be explained by any but supernatural means, all

28. Two of Bacon's classifications, adopted by him from Giordano Bruno.

systematic investigation of it would come to a stop at whatever point the investigator found himself baffled. It always has to be believed that if the answer to a particular problem is not at present available within the limits of scientific knowledge, it will ultimately become known through an extension of the methods already in use. This may quite legitimately be called the scientist's creed; it states his faith in the *rationale* of the principles on which he works.

The remarkable success of the method has given the ordinary layman a picture of the universe that appears to leave no place whatever for any laws or forces apart from those the scientist knows and employs in his work. But as knowledge increases and the scientist develops a philosophic mind his own picture of the world changes. He knows, better than the reader of popular science literature, how limited scientific knowledge is when it is confronted with the ultimate questions of man's being. So we get Sir James Jeans with his concept of a universe which, although it excludes God, nevertheless bears all the marks of a mental construction; Bertrand Russell with his opinion that it is unreasonable to suppose that man is necessarily the most highly developed form of life in the universe; Max Loewenthal showing on physiological and dialectical principles that the mind must be something independent of the brain cells; and a number of other eminent scientific thinkers who are not afraid to admit that knowledge gained on the material level, while it can show us the way in which physical processes take place, has brought us no nearer to a revelation of their underlying causes.

But the non-technical man-in-the-street who sees only the astonishing success of scientific research has come to hold the mistaken view that the principle which calls for a material explanation of all phenomena must mean that there cannot, *ipso facto*, be any other laws or phenomena apart from the physical. In other words, he mistakes the principle adopted as the necessary basis of a certain method for a final verdict on the nature of existence. That in itself is an unscientific view, for science does not deliver any final verdicts on any question, least of all on those beyond its present scope. The materialist who adopts a dogma to that extent is departing from true scientific principles. If, as a scientist, he tries to make his discoveries conform to his dogma, he is betraying the first rule of his calling.

Fortunately, that does not happen where scientists are still free men, and the horizons of scientific thought are now being

expanded to include phenomena that cannot be classed as material. We now have not only biologists who are seemingly on the verge of discovering how non-living matter becomes transformed into living organisms, but also workers in the field of parapsychology who are intensively studying a range of hitherto neglected phenomena connected with the mind itself. Their findings, surprising and sometimes disturbing as they are, do not come before the general public to the same extent as do those of scientists whose work has a more immediately applicable function, such as that of the nuclear physicists. But these discoveries, nevertheless, may prove ultimately to be of greater value to mankind than the more sensational work of the scientists who are giving us new, and potentially dangerous, sources of power.

Parapsychology is the term used to denote all forms of extrasensory perception (E.S.P); it has given scientific respectability to the study of a variety of mental phenomena whose existence has always been known to non-scientific peoples, such as clairvoyance, telepathy and trance-mediumship. One reason for the fact that it has not yet received universal recognition is that no absolutely satisfactory scientific methodology has so far been devised for investigating these faculties, since obviously the formulas of physical experiment and verification cannot be applied. So far, the investigators have been able to present the results of experiments in telepathy, telekinesis, clairvoyance and clairaudience which show the existence of such extrasensory faculties in certain persons, but they cannot yet offer a scientifically-formulated account of the laws or conditions under which they operate. This is the case at present with the work of the numerous Societies for Psychical Research and that of Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University, California, Prof. Thouless of Cambridge and a number of other independent investigators. They are having to formulate tentative principles as they go along, which is not a simple task when dealing with a realm of intangible and highly variable phenomena. It is complicated by the fact that the faculties in question manifest themselves in the same person to different degrees at different times, and appear to be intimately connected with emotional states.

At present the evidence for E.S.P. is mostly statistical. Nevertheless, considerable advance has been made in the application of scientific method to the study, using sophisticated

techniques for the detection of fraud and an increasingly rigid control of experiments to eliminate bias on the part of the observer. There is already an extensive literature on the subject, from which anyone who is interested may form his own theories. It is important if only for the light it sheds on the religious and mystical experiences, to say nothing of the miraculous element in religion, that man from the earliest times has believed in. Since the so-called "supernatural" has always been a part of man's universal experience, it obviously does not "prove" the truth of any particular religion. It only proves that there are indeed realms outside our normal range of perception, and faculties that are not subject to the limitations of the physical sense-organs. But this we already know from physical science itself, for it has shown that the world we perceive is something quite different from the actual world; so different that it is in fact impossible to establish a convincing relationship between them. No one has yet succeeded in showing how the subjective world can be made to tally with an objective reality. This constitutes the major stumbling-block of modern philosophy.

The European tradition of materialistic thinking goes a long way back. Even in an age when "philosophy" still meant the natural sciences, it was necessary for Hamlet to remind Horatio that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy," with the accent on the last word. Yet still quite a large number of people in the West continue to believe in ghosts, or "entities on the Other Side," as some spiritualists prefer to call them. The persistence of the belief among rational and practical-minded people can be accounted for only on the assumption that there is some objective basis for it, or at least that it represents some aspect of experience which they, in common with people in more primitive societies, have known. If this were not the case it must surely have been eradicated completely by the centuries of realistic thinking that lie behind us.

There is scarcely any need, then, to explain away the fact that Buddhism does not confine its view of life to the world of our immediate sensory experience. On the contrary, as a system of thought claiming to embrace every aspect of man's experience it would be incomplete and seriously defective if it did so. Realms of existence other than the human may not be strictly necessary for the working-out of the all-important Buddhist principle of moral cause and effect; but if Buddhism denied them, as it categorically rejects the theory of a Creator-God and an immortal

soul, it would be denying something that may one day be proved as a scientific truth; something, moreover, which is already accepted by some on the basis of logical inference and by many others through direct experience.

Although Buddhism lays all the emphasis on the importance of the human plane of existence, since it is here, and here alone, that there is freedom of choice between good and bad action, the Buddhist texts mention other spheres of being, some below and some above the human realm. In particular, there are many references to devas and the various spheres they inhabit. The devas, or "shining ones," are beings born in higher realms as the result of good kamma (= karma in Sanskrit) generated in previous lives as human personalities. They are of various grades and enjoy the appropriate results of their past meritorious deeds, but their condition is not permanent; they are not "enjoying the bliss of heaven" for all eternity. When the force of the good kamma has expended itself in results, they pass away and the current of their life-continuum finds a new manifestation elsewhere; they are reborn as the consequence of some residual kamma, good or bad, from previous lives, which has not hitherto taken effect. All beings have an undetermined store of such kamma, technically known as *katatta-kamma*, which comes into operation in the absence of any fresh kamma from the immediately-past life.²⁹

Thus, although the word *deva* is usually translated "god," these beings are not in any sense gods as the term is generally understood. They are not considered to have any power over human actions or destiny—nor even necessarily superior knowledge. One of the titles given to the Buddha is that of *satthā deva-manussānaṃ*, the "Teacher of gods and men," because in the Pali scriptures it is said that the devas themselves came to him for instruction in the Dhamma. Their place, therefore, is below that of the highest human being, the All-Enlightened One, who is also a *visuddhi-deva*, or "god by (self-) purification."

29. This comes about because some kinds of kamma are of greater moral consequence than others. An action of heavy moral significance produces its results before one that is of lesser importance and so delays the results of the latter. Furthermore, the results of kamma have to wait upon the arising of suitable conditions to bring them about. The interplay of counteractive forces in the good and bad kamma of an individual is the factor that makes kammic operations incalculable.

Beings who are reborn in the higher realms carry with them the beliefs they held when they were living on the human plane, so that "revelations" from other worlds do not necessarily carry any more truth than those that have a human origin. But the devas who have understood the Buddha-dhamma, themselves pay respect to the human world, as being the most suitable sphere for moral endeavour and for the attainment of Nirvana. Alone among the realms of existence, it is the human plane whereon Buddhas manifest themselves; so it is said that the god Sakka, after his conversion to Buddhism, daily saluted the direction in which the human world lay.

At the same time, the devas have a claim to the respect of human beings, for it was by the practice of virtue, and by deeds of supreme merit, that they attained to their present condition. The reverence paid to them by Buddhists on this account is of a quite different order from the worship given to gods who are believed to be controllers of human destiny.

In this sense it is true to say that Buddhism is non-theistic; the worship of gods for favours or forgiveness of sins has no part in it. To this extent it is not very important whether a Buddhist believes in the existence of higher states of being or not. But it is important for the appreciation of Buddhist philosophy to have a clear understanding that whatever other realms of existence there may be, they are all subject, like our own, to the law of cause and effect. Since cause and effect belong to the natural order, even though they may operate in ways that are non-physical, as in the case of the mental faculties of extra-sensory perception, the realms of the devas are not supernatural worlds; it is more accurate to regard them as extra-physical. The distinction may not be at once apparent; but if our own world of sense-data is a mental construction, as *Yogācāra* philosophy and Berkeleyan immaterialism maintain that it is, there is no reason why there should not be other realms of being constructed on the same basis. We know for a fact that the world as it appears to us is something quite distinct from the world of physics, and that understanding alone should make us chary of accepting it at its face value. Our familiar world of objects that appear to be substantial and real is nothing more than the interpretation we give to a something that is quite other than our senses report to us—a world of atomic energy, with scarcely anything substantial in it. The true nature of that world still remains a matter for metaphysical speculation, with which the Buddha was not

concerned. He taught that the reality could be known only through insight developed in meditation, and that the secret lay not outside but within ourselves: "Within this fathom-long body, O bhikkhus, equipped with the mental faculties of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness, I declare to you is the world, the origin of the world, its cessation and the Path leading to its cessation."

Aldous Huxley, in his two brilliant essays, "The Doors of Perception" and "Heaven and Hell" (1956), cites Bergson's theory that the function of the brain, nervous system and sense organs is in the main *eliminative* and not productive. According to this view, the area of individual awareness is practically infinite and extends to modes of being outside those commonly experienced; but with such an awareness continually present, life in the ordinary sense would not be possible. There has to be a "reducing valve" (Huxley's term) which filters this multiple complex down to the essentials of consciousness that are required for biological survival. The reducing valve is the brain and nervous system, which isolate us in the sphere of individual consciousness formed by our sense-impressions and concepts. If for some reason the efficiency of the reducing valve is lowered, other material flows in, material which is not necessary for biological survival and may even be inimical to it, by lessening the seeming importance of ordinary life. From this come the trance experiences of mystics and the visionary entry into other worlds that has been the common property of mankind in all ages. Huxley's conclusion is that these experiences have a validity of their own which is independent of the means used to obtain them. I quote the final paragraph of his "Heaven and Hell," the second of the two essays on his experiences under the influence of mescaline:

"My own guess is that modern spiritualism and ancient tradition are both correct. There is a posthumous state of the kind described in Sir Oliver Lodge's book, *Raymond*; but there is also a heaven of blissful visionary experience; there is also a hell of the same kind of appalling visionary experience as is suffered here by schizophrenics and some of those who take mescaline; and there is also an experience, beyond time, of union with the divine Ground."

Huxley's "divine Ground," since it is not a personal God and is free from attributes, functions and any remnant of personal selfhood, appears to be of the same nature as the highest Brahmā

realms of Buddhism, if it is not that complete cessation of becoming which is the final goal of all, Nirvana.

All beings live in worlds created by their own kamma; the nature of the being creates the peculiar features of the world it inhabits. But in Buddhist doctrine there is no abiding ego-entity, no immortal and unchanging essence of selfhood. When it speaks of rebirth it does not mean the transmigration of a soul from one body or state to another. It means that a new being is created as the result of the volitional activities, the kamma, of one that has lived before. So long as desire remains unextinguished, and with it the will-to-live, the stream of cause and effect continues to project itself into the future, giving rise to one being after another in the causally-related sequence. Their identification with one another lies solely in the fact of each belonging to the same current of kamma generated by desire, so that what each one inherits from its predecessors is only a complex of tendencies that have been set in motion by the act of willing and doing.

In this connection even the word "birth" has to be understood in a peculiarly Buddhist sense, as meaning "arising" (*jāti*), or coming into existence, and not merely in the sense of physical generation. It also stands for the moment-to-moment coming into existence of mental impulses or units of consciousness in the ordinary course of life. The stream of consciousness is made up of a series of such momentary births and deaths. In sleep and unconsciousness the current still flows on in the form of the subconscious life-continuum. And at death the last moment of the series is immediately followed by the first of a new sequence, in perhaps a different form and under entirely different conditions of birth. In Pali, the language of the Buddhist texts, another word, *punabbhava*, is used to denote this renewed existence after death. The old personality, being a psycho-physical compound and therefore unstable and impermanent, has passed away, but a new one arises from the mental impulses it had generated. In this way the kamma of a human being may bring about renewed existence below or above the human level, in a being of a quite different order.

The question of identity between any two beings belonging to the same sequence is not in any way different from the same question as it relates to different stages in the life of an individual. In the ordinary course of life we find that the nature of some persons alters radically for better or worse with the passage of time, while that of others remains fairly constant. Change is

sometimes slow and imperceptible; sometimes it comes with dramatic suddenness; but change is continually and inevitably taking place. Birth and death—or death and rebirth—are merely points of more complete psycho-physical transition in the continuous flow of “becoming.” The new being may inherit many characteristics, both mental and physical, from the previous one, or it may differ in everything except the predominant characteristic developed in the last life. The deciding factor is the nature and strength of the kamma of the human being, and more especially the kamma present in the consciousness at the last moment before death.³⁰

Impermanence, suffering and absence of any enduring self-essence: these are the three characteristics of all life. Whatever sentient beings there may be in the cosmos besides man and the animals, they are all marked by these three characteristics. They are all subject to decay and dissolution. When we come to realise this we cease to concern ourselves with heavenly states or with metaphysical speculations connected with them. All that is left is the urgent need to gain release from the delusions and attachments that bind us to the incessant round of renewed existences. It is only in the attainment of Nirvana, the Unconditioned and Absolute, that eternal peace is to be found. The Buddha, supreme Teacher of Gods and Men, discovered the Way, and out of his compassion for suffering beings revealed it to all. But, having found it, he could be no more than a guide and instructor to others. Each of us has to tread the path for himself, working out his own deliverance. Worlds may be infinite in number, but the same law prevails everywhere and gods must again become men to fulfil their destiny. Like the deeds that caused them, rewards and punishments—man’s interpretation of

30. Death-proximate kamma, consisting of a mental reflex (*nimitta*) symbolizing some act, or aggregate of actions, performed in the past life. This arises in the last moment of consciousness and forms the basis, good or bad, for the consciousness-moment that immediately follows it. The last consciousness-moment therefore gives the key-signature to the next existence. Death in unconsciousness or in sleep also has its death-proximate kamma; this occurs on the dream level and does not manifest outwardly. Those who die in full or semi-consciousness frequently show, by their happy or fearful state of mind, the kind of death-proximate kamma that is coming into operation. Huxley makes some interesting observations on this in his references to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* in the two essays mentioned previously.

the universal law of action and reaction—pass away. There have been men, like Alexander the Great, deified by priests while they were yet alive; but it is not by bloodshed that gods are made; it is not by ceremonies that men are sanctified. The humblest man living, if he has all his mental faculties intact, can forge for himself a higher destiny than these. In the law of change lies opportunity. Piled up, the bodies of our dead selves would raise a mountain loftier than the peak of Sumeru.³¹ And the man who has made his own mountain should try to climb it. Who knows where it might lead him? Perhaps to the abode of the gods—or Beyond.

31. Mount Meru, the mythological home of the gods; the Indian Olympus.

12. PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Once when the Buddha was talking to the prominent lay-disciple Anāthapiṇḍika, he made the following comment on the uses of prayer:

There are, O householder, five desirable, pleasant and agreeable things which are rare in the world. What are those five? They are long life, beauty, happiness, fame and (rebirth in) the heavens. But of these five things, O householder, I do not teach that they are to be obtained by prayers³² or by vows.³³ If one could obtain them by prayers or vows, who would not do it?

For a noble disciple, O householder, who wishes to have long life, it is not befitting that he should pray for long life or take delight in so doing. He should rather follow a path³⁴ of life that is conducive to longevity. By following such a path he will obtain long life, be it divine or human.

For a noble disciple who wishes to have beauty, happiness, fame and (rebirth in) the heavens, it is not befitting that he should pray for (them) or take delight in so doing. He should rather follow a path of life that is conducive to beauty, happiness, fame and (rebirth in) the heavens. By following such a path he will obtain (rebirth in) the heavens.

Āṅguttara Nikāya, Pañcaka Nipāta (The Fives) No. 43

Among the Teachers of his time the Buddha was known as a *kammavādin*,³⁵ one who taught the efficacy and importance of actions. In his doctrine and discipline it is not through supplicating unseen powers by traditional religious ceremonies that man obtains benefits he desires; they have to be earned by living the good life in thought, word and deed. This indeed is the basis of Buddhist ethical teaching. The law of moral compensation and retribution inherent in the causal structure of events is the principle which alone can lift rules of conduct out of the sphere of the purely man-made and arbitrary, and place them

32. Prayer: *āyācana-hetu*.

33. Vows: *paṭṭhāna-hetu*.

34. Comy: *dāna, sila, bhāvana*; liberality, virtue, meditation.

35. Not the *karma-yoga* of the *Bhagavadgīta*, which consists in observing religious ritual and caste duties.

on a universal basis. Without that, they are subject everywhere to the exigencies of situation and fashion, and people of intelligence are bound to query their validity. All the various symptoms of present-day moral doubt and disintegration are basically due to the lack of understanding of this principle of moral cause and effect.³⁶

The third of the ten fetters to be broken before *sotāpattimagga*, the first stage of deliverance, can be reached is *silabbataparāmāsa*, the belief in and clinging to empty ritual. In the time of the Buddha this meant the rituals of the Brahmins, such as tending the sacred fire (mentioned as a useless practice in the Dhammapada), and the vows of extreme asceticism taken by naked recluses of the Nigaṅṭha school, and others who lived like dogs or cows. *Silabbataparāmāsa* also embraced offerings and sacrifices to the gods; in fact, all the elaborate formalism of Vedic religion. The Rig Veda, which was old before the Buddha's birth, was a collection of hymns and prayers.

The Buddha, who declared himself "also a knower of the Vedas," was familiar with them and had found them to be useless as aids to Enlightenment. In the text quoted above he even rejects them as a means of obtaining mundane benefits. To understand this position taken by the Buddha it is necessary to examine the nature of prayer and worship in general.

It seems to be a fundamental instinct in human nature to turn to prayer in times of need or perplexity. Prayer is an appeal to a higher power, either for guidance or to intervene in a situation which the individual feels himself unable to ameliorate by any effort of his own. The external power whose benevolence he invokes may be real or imaginary, but whichever it is, cases are cited which seem to show that this kind of prayer is sometimes followed by the desired result. It may be that this was what Voltaire had in mind when he wrote that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him.

The aphorism does not at all imply that God does exist, for clearly Voltaire held other views. What it does suggest, rather strongly, is that he recognised the existence of a common need, the wish to believe that there is an invisible power, stronger than those acting within the familiar framework of causality; a power,

36. In Buddhism, *kamma* (volitional act, involving choice between wholesome and unwholesome action) and *vipāka* (result of such action, in the present life or a subsequent one).

moreover, that is intelligently interested in human affairs and is willing to mould events to our satisfaction.

How primeval this instinct is can be seen from the earliest records of prehistoric man, which date from a time when prayer, or something like it, was conceived in terms of sympathetic magic. The first evidences of human pictorial art are the drawings of deer and buffaloes transfixed by hunters' arrows, left to us by the early cave-dwellers, and they were most likely intended to serve magical purpose. By picturing in anticipation the slaying of these animals, primitive man believed that he could ensure the success of his hunting expeditions. He supposed that by depicting the situation he desired he could bring it about. From this belief, that by willing an event, and giving it concrete and visible form, it could be made an actuality, must have come the idea of prayer. We do not know what strange ceremonies may have accompanied the execution of these cave drawings to give them magical potency, nor whether they did indeed bring results. All we know is that they are there, and from magical usages still to be found in many parts of the world we are able to divine their purpose. They are functional, not decorative, art.

Since we have been led so far back into man's obscure past, it is tempting to speculate that the notion of worship, which is linked with that of prayer, may be present in a crude form at an even lower stage, perhaps among other primates. Tales have been told of travellers seeing apes at the time of the full moon performing something like ritual dances while gazing at the lunar disc, clasping their hands and bending their bodies in an equivalent to the human posture of genuflexion. Such tales are naturally dubious, but there is no really conclusive reason for disbelieving them. The instinct to worship is clearly of such antiquity that it may well be present at this level. The higher apes show so many human characteristics that it would be strange rather than otherwise if this one very universal element were absent from their behaviour when in their natural state. It has not been observed among chimpanzees or orang-utans in captivity, so far as I am aware; but it may be that the animals, seeing the inability of their lunar god to release them, lose their faith; or, since all their needs are provided by man, neglect their religious duties.

It would be fruitless to enter here into a discussion regarding the existence of a God or gods able to answer prayer. A more profitable line of inquiry is to ask whether man's thought

itself is capable of interfering with the natural progress of events which lie outside his direct control. As I have already remarked, it sometimes seems as though prayers can produce results. But is this really so? It is rather more probable that the cases in which prayer seems to have been "answered" are far outnumbered by those in which it is not, but that it is the cases of seeming success that are noted and recalled, while the fruitless examples are forgotten. When a positive response appears to have been made to the prayer it may be due to chance (that is to say, to other, unknown causes), for among a great number of petitions chance average will ensure that some prayers must be followed by the result prayed for. It is only where the chances against the occurrence of a particular event that has been prayed for are very much above average, yet the event takes place, that we are justified in looking for another element besides chance in the situation.

And here we cannot but take notice of the peculiar pattern of events to which Carl G. Jung has given the name "acausal synchronicity." This denotes, for want of a better term, the occurrence of a series of apparently chance events, all belonging to the same order of things or having reference to the same object, where no causal connection between one event and the others can be discerned. To give what is perhaps the commonest example of this, one may light upon an interesting item of information which has never come to one's notice before, although it is within the ambit of one's normal interests. Shortly afterwards one finds a reference to the same item in a book, newspaper or magazine; and this reference may be followed by others in quick succession, as though a source connected with that particular subject had been tapped, while it is impossible to trace any connection between the random events which are bringing it to one's attention. The whole series of events is seemingly haphazard, yet it carries a suggestion that each may be a part of some structure of relationships that underlies the causality of the sensible world, or which projects our familiar system of causal relationships into other dimensions where we cannot follow it. What we are observing is the penetration of one level of reality by outcroppings from another. Every event of which we are conscious has a genealogy in time, but it is not at all certain that an event in its totality conforms to its measurable aspect as that is known to us and as it can be stated in terms of temporal sequence. To grasp its organisation we are compelled to think in

terms of mutual and coincidental dependence as well as in terms of sequential causality, just as we are when considering *paṭicca-samuppāda*, the Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination.

Seen in this context, the praying for a certain thing to happen, and its subsequent happening, may not be events related to one another in the temporal order with which we are familiar: both events may be dependent upon a substructure which is extra-spatial and extra-temporal, a total event of which we are conscious only in those parts of it which project into our world-structure and are spatially and temporally limited. Thus a constellation of unrelated events may enter into our experience without our realising that each event belongs categorically to one total event that lies outside our time-and space-conditioned awareness. They are outflowings from another level of causality of which we have no sensory information, but which stands in relation to our normal area of awareness much as the world of nuclear physics stands in relation to the Newtonian world. It is becoming more and more evident that time on the sub-atomic level is not the time that we know. Its freakish behaviour is causing scientists to revise many of their ideas in the attempt to reconcile it with the concept of causality in conventional physics; and this is hardly surprising when they have stumbled upon an order of time which apparently admits of movement in both directions, or, in popular parlance, a time that moves backwards.

But that is perhaps stating the case too crudely. The situation as it stands at the time of writing is that the behaviour of neutrinos and other elementary particles with a life-span of one billionth of a second in the sub-atomic world does not adhere rigidly to the parity and time reversal invariance principles, which are fundamental to the principle of causality in physics. It seems also that some particles found in super-dense stars can travel faster than light; which gives rise to the inference that signals sent out by these particles travel backwards in time and reach their destination before they are emitted from their source. But it is notoriously unsafe to base any philosophical conjecture on the ever-shifting sands of science.

The universe of concepts is a closed system, and although it may expand into incredible realms, the conceptual mind can travel only around its inner circumference, to reach no final resting place. It is not by journeying to the world's end that the real nature of things can be discerned, but only by making a break-through into other levels of consciousness. This has always

been axiomatic in Buddhism. All that science can contribute to ultimate knowledge is the negative demonstration of the conditioned and relative nature of the world, which is only the starting-point of Buddhism's venture into reality.

A further hint of the paradoxical state of affairs that science appears to have disclosed in the world-structure may be found in the numerous cases of well-authenticated precognition. If precognition, as distinct from mere prediction, is a fact, it means that our accepted view that cause must precede effect is not valid in all circumstances. Normally, an event which we perceive takes place before our perception of it, if only by a split second. This agrees nicely with our belief that the event represents cause and our perception of it is its effect. But if an event is actually seen occurring before it takes place, the effect has come about before the cause, and the relationship in sequence between them has been reversed. This points to a state of things in which, using a different mode of apprehension, it could be seen that our willing of an event to occur is not the cause, but could be the result, of its subsequent occurrence. If this is so, belief in the efficacy of prayer founded upon instances in which it seems to have brought results may be due to nothing but a misunderstanding of extra-temporal causality, or what Jung called acausal synchronicity. Altered states of consciousness experienced under special conditions are themselves sufficient proof that the time which is dominated by events and space-relationships is by no means the only order of time, nor is our world the only plane on which the mind can function. Consciousness is confined to this sphere just so long as it depends solely upon the sensory contacts possible to the human body for its support. For these, the space-time continuum is the framework necessary to give them definition and meaningfulness. There is more than a symbiotic relationship between space, time and events; they are all aspects of the same conceptual reality that forms the structure of relative or conventional truth, and which Buddhism calls *sammuti-sacca*. All phenomena that we apprehend through the senses are made up of mutually-conditioned factors belonging to the same order of interdependence, and this state of things holds good throughout the material universe. But matter itself is now known to exist in unfamiliar states, in which different orders of causality obtain, so that it is clear that none of these states represents an absolute, rock-bed foundation to the edifice of our cognitive experience.

Many people, among them Balzac, who made much of it in his novels, have held the belief that the human will can be concentrated into a force, quasi-material, which is capable of acting upon the flow of events and of altering its direction. This is an attractive and not altogether impossible idea, but to do justice to it a rather oblique approach is needed. We have seen that modern physics is tending to become somewhat mystical, if by that word is understood the entertaining of concepts that lie outside direct observation. But biology, which claims to hold the key of life, or at least of living organisms, is still firmly entrenched in materialism. Therefore to speak of "science" as though it were a homogeneous system that presents a solid front against everything metaphysical is very deceptive, to say the least. Whether the various scientific disciplines will ever form a unified body is doubtful. Between them there still lies a lot of untrodden ground, and those who are attempting to explore it, the parapsychologists, are not receiving much encouragement. Among parapsychologists, too, many are not interested in physical phenomena. Beyond a few experiments in psychokinesis and some, by amateurs, in trying to promote the growth of plants by prayer, not much has been done to test the potency of thought when it is directed towards influencing external objects without physical contact. The most impressive of such experiments to date have been conducted in Russia. In January 1969 I saw a film, brought from Russia by American parapsychologists, of tests that were carried out on a Russian woman who it is claimed has the ability to move objects by mental concentration. Some small articles were placed on a stand in front of her, under a glass dome. Pictures were taken from various angles to show that there was no physical contact between the woman and the objects, the stand and the dome. She appeared to be concentrating intensely, moving her body from side to side and forward and backward. The objects under the glass certainly moved, always towards her. It seemed rather unlikely that fraud was involved since the experiments, or at least the exhibiting of the film, had not been approved by the Russian authorities. It had been shown to the American parapsychologists clandestinely, and brought from Russia in secret. It may be presumed that the experiment was scientifically controlled, but one defect in its presentation by motion pictures lay in the fact that there was no means of ensuring that the objects were not of metal or contained metal, and could not be influenced by magnets.

Whether there is any power in prayer to influence events, and if there is, whether it resides in an external agency or is an unknown faculty of the mind, must rest undecided. Rather than trying to settle the issue on the basis of observed facts it is more instructive to examine the rationale of worship. By this I mean the worship of deities for specific ends, for it was this that gave the first impulse to religion and which still provides the chief motivation in theistic worship for the majority of people.

Most prayers are for gain, although today it has become rather unfashionable to admit that self-interest enters into religion at all. The best known prayer in the world makes the appeal, "Give us our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses...." The point to be noted is that the idea that man should not expect rewards from his religion, and that to do so is in some way unworthy, is only of very recent origin. It has come from the growing tendency to make religion conform to the ideas of humanism, which itself has nothing more to offer as the result of living the good life than the bare satisfaction of doing so. According to the bleak ethics of this school, an honest tradesman whose business is being crushed out of existence by an unscrupulous competitor must be happy in the knowledge that his own moral life is sound. That is the only recompense he will ever get for suffering for his principles. What is to become of the poor man's happiness, in the midst of the ruin brought about by his dishonest competitor, if he ever questions the validity of "natural law," or whether ethics exist in nature at all, is best left to the imagination. If he does, he will feel cheated; for as P. M. Rao has pointed out in a penetrating essay, *The Problem of Sin*,³⁷ "No amount of rational thinking and the doing of good deeds can in any way modify or even affect our inner core. It is like arguing with an idiot or an insane person." The concept of doing good solely for its own sake and without any belief in an adjustment of the moral balance is an invention of humanism; it can scarcely be found in the original form of any religion. It is assumed, a priori, in religious thought that there are transcendental rewards for living righteously and evil consequences for violating the sacred laws. This element is as strong in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as it is in any other religious exhortation, as an unbiased reading of it will testify. On one occasion the Buddha suggested, for the sake of sceptics who could not believe in a continuation of life after the

37. The Wheel No. 136.

dissolution of the body, that to obey the moral law was an end in itself, leading to an untroubled mind and an unblemished reputation in the world; but so far as I am aware this passage is the only one of its kind.³⁸ In many other texts the Buddha condemns the theory that there are no heavens and no hells, and no consequences of good and bad deeds in an after state, as being beliefs that make the good life almost impossible.

Regarding the Bhikkhu life itself the Buddha said, "A man will not give up an inferior pleasure except with the prospect of gaining one that is superior." By this he meant the surrender of sensual, worldly joys for the higher and more secure happiness to be found in the *jhānas*, and ultimately in Nibbāna.

So it is as well to recognise that most men worship as they trade—for gain of some kind. Their prayer is a respectful attempt to strike a bargain with some deity in which they tender so much faith, or so much self-denial in mild forms of asceticism, in the hope of receiving substantial benefits, here or hereafter. Prayer and fasting, the burning of votive candles and the observance of holy days all belong to this aspect of religion.

In principle there is nothing discreditable in this, but its practice gives rise to some anomalous situations, of which most people today have become aware. For example, when two countries professing the same faith are at war with one another, each will pray to the same God for victory, and ecclesiastics will bless the regiments and weapons of destruction before they go into action. But if God is certain to grant victory to the more righteous of the two powers, to ask him to do so seems superfluous. If both sides are equally in the right (or equally in the wrong, which is more likely) the deity is placed in an awkward quandary, which can be resolved only by giving victory to the side that has pleased him most or displeased him least. Again, it is to be presumed that he would do that in any case, even if it is only a pyrrhic victory. Or is it believed that he can be persuaded to overlook faults if sufficient praise and flattery are lavished upon him, and give the victory to the unworthy? Expressed thus crudely, the theist would doubtless call this a blasphemous idea; but it is hard to find any alternative possibility. In the human mind, of course, the difficulty is readily overcome by the naive tendency of each side to believe that it is in the right. Which again brings us back to square one: for if a nation

38. The *Kālāma Sutta* (The Wheel No. 8).

believes it is in the right, it should also believe that God will automatically grant it the victory.

Again, it is generally held that an omnipotent God, who is benevolently disposed towards his devotees, will ensure that they get whatever is best for them. He may be assumed to have made up his mind as to what he will grant and what he will withhold, and that whatever he decides will be for their greatest advantage. If that is so, a prayer can only be an attempt to make God's decision for him, or to persuade him to change his mind, as though it is the petitioner, not God, who knows best. Even if the prayer is followed by the formula, "Yet not my will but thine, O Lord, be done," the situation is not materially altered. The addition merely transforms the request into a reminder that this is what the devotee would like God to do for him. And if God possesses the attribute of omniscience he must know what is desired before the prayer is uttered. Omniscience also implies that God knows whether the prayer will be granted or not before it is made. Whichever way one looks at it, the idea of praying for some specific end is difficult to justify logically. If prayer is effective in any circumstances it must be because some principle entirely different from that of divine intervention is brought into play.

What has been said applies, of course, only to strictly monotheistic systems. Under a polytheism such as that of ancient Greece or of popular Hinduism, where no god is omnipotent but all have varying degrees of power in relation to one another, or special areas of jurisdiction, praying to any one of them is like applying to a superior in worldly rank, who by exerting himself on one's behalf may be able to accomplish what is required of him, and will do so if one can gain his favour, even if the devotee is morally unworthy or if the granting of the request is not to his best advantage in the long run. For this to be the case it requires gods who have human characteristics, who are limited in power and who are not too exacting in ethics. Precisely such are the gods worshipped in popular Hinduism.

If this point should be challenged, the legendary accounts of the gods in the Purāṇas may be consulted for verification. These bear many similarities to the Graeco-Roman myths. Aside from whether prayer to such gods is effective or not, it can be more reasonably justified than can prayer to a sole, omniscient and omnipotent deity. This is but one of many advantages that polytheism has over monotheism when it is necessary to give a

rational account of the belief in supernatural intervention in human affairs.

The concept of one omnipotent God raises many problems besides those connected with prayer. Formerly the difficulties were glossed over by theologians, but for practical purposes every monotheism has had to be in effect a dualism not unlike that of the Manicheans, with a principle of evil opposed to that of good. A system with only one Cause and Mover cannot be made to work.

Though the general purpose of prayer may be the same wherever it is resorted to, the things for which individual men pray have always shown a rich variety. The unspiritual man tends to pray for material profit or victory over his rivals, for success in business or to gain the bubble reputation at the shrine rather than the canon's mouth. The more devoutly inclined pray for higher wisdom, for communion with their God, for forgiveness of their sins or for the welfare of humanity. This higher type of religious impulse is found among some comparatively rare followers of every creed, and the form and content of their prayer is more akin to the Buddhist discursive meditations (on *mettā*, for example) than are the petitions of those who crave material benefits. All the same, behind the prayer there usually lurks a personal wish, the longing for salvation and immortality. And it is in this regard that Buddhism takes an altogether different position.

In Buddhism there can be no question of calling upon a deity for aid so far as ultimate liberation, the attainment of Nibbāna, is concerned, for it is recognised as being something that no external power can bestow. On the lower level, Buddhism is not intent upon the kind of benefits that deities may be assumed to confer. Except insofar as it is the field of moral choice where alone striving for Nibbāna is possible, the life of this world is not the concern of Buddhism in the same way as it is to the creeds which teach the existence of a Creator-God who is thought to be actively interested in the welfare of his creatures and responsible for it. The Buddhist knows that he himself is the sole author of his being, or rather that he is the product of Ignorance conjoined with Craving, and that the Dhamma is not a vehicle for the increase of mundane pleasures and attachments, but a means of gaining release from the suffering they bring. Since the gods themselves are involved in *samsāric* conditions, they cannot help. The Noble Eightfold Path is a way that each has to tread by his

own effort: “*Appamādena sampādetha*”—“Strive with earnestness,” was the Buddha’s final exhortation. Neither liberation nor even the courage and determination to strive for it are things that prayer can bring.

And if it is useless to pray to any gods, it is equally so to pray to the Buddha. He is not a creator, preserver or destroyer of the universe; neither is he a dispenser of favours nor a supreme punitive power. The principle of Buddhahood is not attached to an entity. When the Buddha is worshipped it is as a teacher, the greatest Teacher of all beings, and such devotion is a spiritual exercise; the Great Wisdom (*Bodhi*), last personified in the Master, is the true object of veneration.

The *pūjā* offered by Buddhists therefore cannot be called prayer, since it contains none of the elements usually present in the attitude denoted by that word. The Buddha image is a cenotaph, enshrining nothing more than the idea of the Master who once lived, the symbol of his presence—which, all the same, is more immediately felt in the Dhamma he taught and becomes ever more so as it is penetrated with understanding. The outward aspect of *pūjā*, the offering of flowers, lights and incense, is not only a token gesture of homage; it also carries a deep symbolism, which is expressed in the Pali formulas that are recited at the time. The transient beauty of the flowers, so soon to lie withered on the tray, reminds the devotee of the impermanence of all composite things: “Even as these flowers must soon wither, so shall my body lie crumbling in decay.”³⁹

The candles or lamps recall the Great Teacher whose Bodhi dispels the darkness of Ignorance: “These lights I offer to the Teacher who is the Light of the Three Worlds.” The incense symbolises the sweet and cleansing fragrance of the Dhamma which permeates the mind; it also stands for the pleasing odour of good deeds which, like the scent of Tagara blossoms, can be recognised from afar (*Dhammapada*, vv. 11–12).

For the rest, Buddhist devotion is the mental or vocal recitation of the supreme qualities of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, followed by homage to the Buddhas of the past and future (for homage in anticipation is perfectly reasonable), and the recitation of the *Mettā*, *Mahā Maṅgala* and other Suttas, especially any Sutta which is particularly appropriate to the

39. See “Flower Offering,” by Kassapa Thera, in *Devotion in Buddhism, The Wheel* No. 18.

occasion. It is, in short, an act of mental purification and is carried out with that intent alone.

In Buddhism the cult of devotion (*bhakti*) is certainly not absent; but it is restrained, and emotional transports are not encouraged. Particularly this is so on the levels of the highest endeavour. The Buddha rebuked a monk who showed an excessive attachment to his person which was interfering with the monk's progress, and on his death-bed he praised a Bhikkhu who had retired to practise *bhāvanā* instead of watching beside him to the end (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*).⁴⁰

There is a story of a Christian missionary who found a Chinese priest chanting in a temple. When the Chinese had finished, the missionary asked him: "To whom were you praying?" The Chinese looked faintly surprised. "To no one," he replied. "Well, what were you praying for?" the missionary insisted. "Nothing" said the Chinese. The missionary turned away, baffled. As he was leaving the temple, the Chinese added, kindly, "And there was no one praying, you know."

The Chinese in that story understood perfectly the psychology of prayer as an instrument of mental purification. If it were understood in this sense by people who can no longer believe in any god to pray to, they might still be able to contact sources of power within themselves that have become closed to them by reason of their scepticism. Prayer of this kind, which is not really prayer at all, can be an instrument of potency in itself, irrespective of whether it invokes any external agency or not. When it takes the form of an interior dialogue, or approaches abstract contemplation, it has a real therapeutic value that is entirely lacking in prayer for the fulfilment of desires or for supernatural intervention.

To pray for the welfare of others, when the prayer is untainted by thoughts of self, is another action that brings into play the higher mental impulses (*adhicitta*), and one that, whatever invisible power it may seek to invoke, makes for spiritual growth. This kind of prayer, even though it may be the outcome of wrong assumptions, such as the belief that it will be heard by a Heavenly Father or transmitted to him by one of his angelic emissaries, has its own value, a value that cannot be assessed in any way except by reference to the internal experience that accompanies it and leaves its stamp upon the mind. It may be

40. *The Last Days of the Buddha, The Wheel* No. 67/69.

called the first approach to the divine abidings (*brahma-vihāra*) by way of mental purification through *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). Such prayer, when it is accompanied by erroneous views, may have in it too much of emotion to achieve *upekkhā* (equanimity or detachment), and may be too narrowly restricted to concern for those who are in a pitiful plight to include *muditā* (joy in the happiness of others), but nevertheless it opens up the heart and prepares it for a more comprehensive understanding of the truths which, thoroughly penetrated, bring wisdom and insight. An example of this may be seen in the case of Kisā Gotamī, whose distracted prayers for the revival of her dead child were the prelude to the dawn of higher knowledge. In a sense it may be likened to those moral principles found in all religions which, although they are grounded on false views (*ditṭhi-nissita-sīla*), are good in themselves, and the observance of which is kammically wholesome.

There is another kind of prayer, also, which takes effect, if not in outward circumstances in the individual's subjective experience. It is that which is wrung from a man in the last extreme of anxiety, anguish, perplexity or remorse for a wrong deed that he cannot undo, when he is more concerned for the harm it has caused someone else than he is for any punishment it may bring upon himself. In crises such as these, the spontaneous and irrepressible cry from the heart is an emotional and spiritual catharsis, and it often brings relief from internal tensions that can neither be relaxed nor any longer endured. Remorse in itself is a purely negative emotion and Buddhists do not usually surrender themselves to it, knowing it to be an unwholesome and unprofitable state of mind. If it does arise, it should be translated into beneficial action. The best way of dealing with a situation of this kind, should it occur, is to determine to avoid actions likely to cause it in future, and then to counteract the unwholesome *citta* that has arisen by some deed, or some positive thought, of a wholesome nature. But for those not trained in the Buddhist discipline, prayer is often the only means of finding relief in unbearable situations, and it is not without benefit. If it is a question of some moral problem to solve, the release of tension brought about by praying restores the balanced calm necessary to view the problem in its true light and come to a decision. But in the resort to pray for escape from remorse there lies an insidious danger. It is that the prayer, and the resulting sensation of relief from the burden of guilt, may lead to a belief that the wrong deed

has been forgiven and washed out, though not expiated, and that there is no need to take any further action. Unless the penitential prayer is accompanied by a genuine resolve to make whatever restitution may be possible, and to exert oneself to do better in future, the release from anxiety it has brought will be a delusion, and possibly a very harmful one, like putting a soothing dressing on a wound that is turning gangrenous. It is a device for suppressing the guilt feeling instead of removing it altogether. Past unwholesome kamma cannot be undone or blotted out by wishful thinking, but it can be counterbalanced, and in part at least mitigated, by good kamma of the present and future. If the prayer leads to this insight, in however vague a way, and inspires wholesome action, it is good. If not, it is altogether useless. It has given temporary relief without correcting the fault, which will continue to appear, again and again, in recurring situations of a like nature.

Certain Christian sects, taking an extreme view of man's helplessness in the grip of an incurable corruption and of the doctrine that salvation can come only through grace from without, have taught that the devotee must yield himself to the utmost depravity before he can enter into communion with God,⁴¹ in the belief that "the greater the sin, the greater the forgiveness." Heretical though these sects may have been, the germs of their error are to be found in orthodox Christianity itself, from the Old Testament doctrine of Original Sin down to its New Testament corollary of vicarious atonement and the preference Jesus seems to have shown for sinners over the righteous. This has helped to form ambivalent attitudes towards sin and redemption in the Western mind; attitudes which often bring confusion, and consequent anxiety, to problems of moral responsibility. It has also, in an indirect way, been the cause of an exaggerated concern over the actions of others. In recent times this has shown itself in feelings of guilt arising through an acute sense of personal identification with the societal group and its collective acts of the past, extending to cases where the individual had neither taken part in the group activities he condemns, nor even approved of them, and where, consequently, Buddhism would see no personal guilt involved. Since a mistaken sense of guilt is almost as unhealthy a state of mind as one based upon

41. *Histoire du pantheisme populaire au moyen age et au seizieme siecle*, Auguste Jundt.

reality, it might be supposed to be also an uncomfortable one; but there is in fact some reason to believe that the Western mind finds feelings of collective guilt easier to support than the sense of an individual rightness which it has been taught to regard as Pharisaic. The current tendency to level off distinctions may also have something to do with this, making it more comfortable to be a sinner in company, or to imagine oneself one, than to be a good man alone. The idea of the church congregation, the flock, is the spiritual father of "togetherness," and while it may be a good thing in certain respects it has disadvantages in others. One man may be tempted to throw the entire burden of his moral responsibility upon the group, while another, more conscientious, may tend to take the weight of collective guilt onto his own shoulders and become a victim to feelings of personal involvement that are entirely unwarranted. In the circumstances the good but worldly-minded man tries to interfere. He becomes a reformist—that is to say, if he goes far enough, an executioner.⁴² The more spiritual retires to solitude and prayer.

The religious background to this state of affairs is further complicated by the fact that there are two streams of thought in Christianity, due to its eclectic origins: one is predeterminedistic, the other is dynamic and more akin to the *kamma-vāda* of Buddhism, and since the conflict between them has never been satisfactorily resolved it has been left for sectarians to place the emphasis on whichever reading they prefer. Jansenism, with its theory that some are chosen for salvation from the beginning, and Calvinism, with its similarly pre-elective view, are typical examples of the attitudes that must result from belief in an omnipotent and omniscient deity; other churches attempt, with varying degrees of success, to hold a balance between doctrines that are not easy to reconcile. Whether the new "God is dead" theology will eventually remove the difficulties or whether it makes a crack in the fabric which must quickly lead to its collapse remains to be seen. What will most surely be affected by it is the attitude towards prayer, and especially towards prayer that calls upon a personal deity for intervention in mundane affairs. In the absence of such a deity there are, however, some alternative possibilities that are not entirely without support in actual

42. Some of the great criminals of history—the Cromwells, the Robespierres, the Marats—were not the less criminal because they were necessary. But others have been criminals without being necessary.

experience. We may glance at them, although it is not practicable to discuss them in detail here.

Elsewhere⁴³ I have mentioned some evidence which seems to suggest that intelligences from other planes of being do occasionally intervene in the affairs of the living, and I am far from discounting this possibility. But in those cases that have come to my notice and which appear to me most worthy of credence help seems to have come not from any of the gods recognised by theistic systems but from beings now in one of the lower heavenly states who were formerly connected by ties of relationship or friendship with the person who receives the help. In these cases it seldom, if ever, takes the form of material assistance, but rather that of guidance in times of perplexity, comfort in times of stress and warnings of impending danger. It also seems to come spontaneously rather than in answer to any prayerful demand, unless an unspoken call for help constitutes a prayer. Moreover, it appears to have come in a number of cases when the person concerned was quite unaware that he was in need of help. One such case is that of a European Buddhist monk who affirms that he has several times been saved from a totally unsuspected danger by what he calls his "protecting hand." This sometimes manifested to him as an internal voice, sometimes in the form of physical restraint. On one occasion it took the second form when, running from pursuers in pitch darkness, he was suddenly arrested, as though by an invisible barrier, to find that he had been heading straight for a precipice. Again, the explanation could lie in a psychic faculty of the person concerned, which precognises the peril and alerts the conscious mind to its presence. Relatively few people who have known such experiences, however, are willing to accept this explanation. To them it always appears as though some external agency had been at work, and it would be altogether arbitrary to dismiss their conviction as groundless. Many examples of this type of experience are to be found in the literature of psychical research, and they have not yet been given a satisfactory explanation that rules out the external agency hypothesis. Some of the recorded cases, taken at their face value, point as definitely to some kind of intercommunication between the human world and other planes of existence as do similar accounts given in Buddhist texts. In this connection it is worth noting that the present-day positivist

43. *The Case for Rebirth*, The Wheel No. 12/13.

tendency to regard Buddhism as being “only a philosophy” could easily be corrected if its advocates would study the material on this subject to be found in the earliest Buddhist canonical texts, and make an unbiased attempt to interpret it in the light of contemporary research in parapsychology.

We have seen that Buddhist *pūja* has nothing in common with the offerings made to gods who are believed to be mystically present in their images, and that Buddhism is little concerned with the eight worldly conditions,⁴⁴ except in relation to the truth of *dukkha*. But Buddhists are human, their lives filled with ordinary pre-occupations and anxieties, for themselves and for those dependent upon them. Buddhism, which starts as a very realistic system of ethico-psychology, recognises two forms of aspiration, the worldly and the transcendental, *lokiya* and *lokuttara*. He who wishes to be wholly world-transcending in his aims must of necessity give up mundane attachments. Ultimately there is no avoiding the choice between one and the other. Yet this does not mean that one still remaining in the world rejects the higher life completely. The path of renunciation lies through actions that bear good results (*kusala-kamma*) to the abandoning of all result-bearing actions, the good equally with the bad, when Arahathship is reached. And so the ordinary lay Buddhist, just as much as the Christian, Hindu and Muslim, sometimes feels the need of help from a higher source in his everyday affairs.

The Mahāyāna did not have to invent a god for this purpose; it has the Bodhisattvas who, unlike the Buddha, are still benevolently active in saṃsāra. But the very early Buddhists, before the advent of the Mahāyāna, evidently had to be advised against resorting to the gods of the Vedic pantheon for the fulfilment of their wishes. The Buddha was particularly emphatic against Vedic worship when it involved costly and inhumane sacrifices, and when it was mistakenly believed to confer *mokṣa* (deliverance). It was one of the Devas themselves who asked the Buddha what was the highest (most effective) of the propitious observances to bring about happy results. The commentary to the *Maṅgala Sutta* tells us that the propitious observances (*maṅgala*) in dispute were the Brahmanical ceremonies at birth, name-giving, marriage and so on, at different stages of life. The Buddha's reply was that the observance most certain to bring felicity was to live

44. *Aṭṭha-loka-dhamma*: Gain and loss, honour and dishonour, happiness and misery, praise and blame.

in accordance with Dhamma. By this he meant that a man's good *kamma* is his only certain protection from the ills of the world, not the observance of religious ceremonies, smearing one's forehead and that of others with ashes, interpreting good and bad omens and lucky or unlucky hours of the day, and offering food to gods who were unable to eat it, or, if they really were gods, had no need of it. According to Buddhism—and not merely commentarial Buddhism, but the Buddhism of the oldest texts—what the Devas need and welcome is a share of the merit that only human beings can gain, through deeds of charity, compassion and duty towards the Sangha. The right living of a householder is fully set out in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*,⁴⁵ where the Buddha resourcefully takes advantage of the erroneous views of the young layman, Sigāla to show him the right path to peace of mind and prosperity. The teaching given in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* sets forth in detail the moral code (*sīla*) of a householder, and is the same as that summarised in the quotation at the beginning of this essay. It emphasises man's ability to enrich his own life with meaning and value, without dependence upon supernatural aid.

Yet despite this, the practice of appealing to gods for *lokiya* benefits persists among Buddhists, and to give a clear idea of what is meant by this, some explanation of the two terms *lokiya* and *lokuttara* must be given. Buddhism recognises *lokiya* experience as well as *lokiya* aspiration, and *lokuttara* experience as well as *lokuttara* aspiration. But *lokiya* aspiration and experience bear a wider connotation than does the word "mundane." As a descriptive and defining term *lokiya* relates to all forms of consciousness and of existence within the thirty-one abodes of *saṃsāra*. Even the heavenly states are included in that which is *lokiya*, "worldly" or "mundane." The "world" in Buddhism is not only the sensible world of ordinary consciousness; it is the unseen environment of that world as well, comprising many planes of existence related to consciousness, and one to unconsciousness. As corollary to this, the definition of *lokuttara*, the "supramundane," is narrower; it relates solely to the state outside of conditioned phenomena: that is, Nibbāna. Therefore in Buddhism the desire to be reborn in a heavenly state is just as much a *lokiya* aspiration as would be, for example, to wish for promotion in one's job or success in a business venture. There is thus a displacement of values when a comparison is made

45. Included in *Everyman's Ethics*, The Wheel No. 14.

between the Buddhist terms *lokiya* and *lokuttara*, and what they denote, and the English words used to translate them. In Western thinking, heavenly existence is considered to be supramundane, and the mundane is only life as experienced on this earth, the world known to us through the senses.

It follows, then, that the *devas* to whom Buddhists sometimes pray in the *devalas* and Hindu *kovils* in Sri Lanka, and the *nats* similarly worshipped in Burma, are worldly powers. Among the thirty-seven *nats* of Burma, some were semi-legendary, semi-historical persons; they are indigenous local deities who have no connection with the Hindu gods. One of them, indeed, was a Muslim in his life on earth, and is still considered to be a follower of that faith. His cult-devotees, although themselves Buddhists, abstain from eating pork, just as the Buddhist followers of Hindu gods in Ceylon avoid meat, fish and eggs, the sole object being to keep in the good graces of their patrons. These godlings (*devatā*) are approached with homage and suitable offerings to win their favour exactly as a king's minister or the head of a business corporation might be waited upon, flattered and offered services with the same end in view. This practice, although it is found in all Buddhist countries, with variations, has nothing whatever to do with the Buddha's teaching of the way to bring suffering to an end. It caters for a human weakness which Buddhism in its purest form exhorts man to transcend. Even though the aspiration to be reborn in a heavenly state is a *lokiya* aspiration, the *lokiya* deities are no more capable of granting it to a human being than is his works manager or the chairman of his board of directors.

But there is another way offered by Buddhism to those who have worldly ambitions for wealth, fame and pleasure. This is the forming of a wish accompanied by a good action (*kusala kamma*); it is the "meritorious deed" which, unless it is obstructed by some heavier *kamma* of an unwholesome kind, brings the desired result in the present life, and if delayed, bears fruit in a subsequent one. The wholesome *kamma* linked to the wish reinforces it by rendering the person who makes the wish worthy to have it fulfilled. This makes use of the principle of *kamma* and *vipāka*, and it is effective; but it is not to be used for an evil purpose, such as doing harm to an enemy or gaining unlawful advantages over others. To try to make use of the law of moral causality in such a way would be demeritorious in the last degree, since it could not fail to rebound on its source, the misguided person who had

generated the unwholesome intention. One in whom wisdom is developed will never resort to any device for causing harm to an enemy, be it in the natural way or by invoking the aid of inferior deities. So far as protection from injury to himself by an enemy is concerned, he knows that so long as his own *kamma* is good, no hostile power, human or superhuman, can seriously affect him. He may be wounded, as the Buddha was by the stone hurled at him by Devadatta, but eventually more ill will come to the aggressor than to his intended victim.

There can be no doubt that prayer on the higher level, where it approaches meditation, can be instrumental in bringing about alterations in mental attitudes and consequent behaviour; whether it can cause lasting alterations in the structure of personality must depend upon the degree to which its influence penetrates to the unconscious strata. For this to happen, another mode of consciousness must be brought into play, and it is here that prayer, which by its nature is discursive, has to give way to the technique of bare attention or mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), which rigorously excludes conceptualisation. It is not with this that we are concerned at present, but with prayer as a means of gaining specific ends.

Prayer which is for something is an expression of desire, and desire is only a weaker word, and so less pejorative, for craving. A desire that is strong enough to seek expression in prayer can scarcely fall short of craving, though it may be far from the craving for drink or drugs which has given the word its objectionable colouring. Now, craving (or thirst—*taṇhā*) is the factor which supports and promotes grasping (*upādāna*); that is, attachment to the components of personality. This grasping supports the process of becoming (*bhava*, the life-continuum), and the life-process in turn brings about arising (*jāti*), which is both the arising of the successive moments of existence in the psycho-physical order that constitutes the ordinary life-continuum and the arising of the first consciousness-moment in a new series after death; in other words, arising in a new birth. Thus craving is the king-pin of the mechanism, or the *élan vital* which keeps it going.

It is a psychic energy which manifests itself in the will-to-be and the will-to-do and the will-to-possess. In another guise, it is the will-not-to-be, the death-wish, the craving for annihilation (*vibhava-taṇhā*).

Prayer for something that is desired must necessarily be an expression of one or other of these cravings. People have even

prayed for oblivion in death. Therefore a prayer of great intensity is a method of concentrating and harnessing craving. And since craving is the base of the life-process and an extremely powerful psychic force, prayer of this kind may be effective to some degree. The dynamism inherent in a single-minded wish might indeed act upon the inert factors of a situation much as Balzac supposed it to do.

To express a wish is to bring oneself a step nearer its fulfilment. To concentrate upon it to the exclusion of all extraneous desires is to give it the driving force of the psychic component that sustains life itself.

And that is a dangerous undertaking. Someone once wrote: "Take care what you desire before you are twenty—for you will surely get it." In youth the desires are strongest; they are also the most deeply felt. But how many people, having obtained what they wished for most when they were young, have found that they no longer want it; that their desires have taken a different turn, have fastened themselves onto new objects. How many more have spent themselves in many years of striving and scheming for wealth, voluntarily stripping themselves of all other interests, only to find when at last they possess the riches they craved for in their youth of poverty that they have so robbed and depleted themselves of all capacity for happiness that they cannot enjoy any of the advantages that money brings, and that alone make it desirable. The sad fact is that most men, when they wish, wish for the wrong thing; or, like Midas in the Greek myth, wish for it in the wrong way.

To desire and work for the acquisition of a special skill is more sensible, for at least there is a good chance that it may become woven into the texture of the *saṅkhāras* and manifest anew in subsequent lives. Unlike the self-made millionaire, the man who sets his mind upon becoming a great musician, artist or writer does not have to leave behind him all the fruits of a lifetime's labour when he goes to the grave. No reckless hand will carelessly throw to waste everything he so painfully amassed, after he is gone, and no one else's life will be ruined in the process. On the contrary, he will carry with him into his next life something—and perhaps a great deal—of the art or science that he loved and strove to perfect; and another genius will enrich the world.

But in the final reckoning, any form of desire is prone to cheat him who harbours it. Prayer is a vehicle of desire, and

desire is wedded to the deceptive idea of selfhood. The only safe wish is the wish to attain Nibbāna, the wish to strip away all desire and all delusion connected with desire. When that wish is fulfilled there is nothing left to wish for, and the weary round is over. And because prayer, whether it is effective or not, does not tend towards the attrition of desire nor to the uprooting of the delusion of self, it has no importance in the Noble Discipline of the Buddha.

13. GODS AND THEIR PLACE IN BUDDHISM

Thus is he, the Blessed One, the Arahāt, the Fully Enlightened, endowed with Knowledge and Conduct, the Happy One, Knower of the World, Peerless Charioteer of men to be tamed, Teacher of Gods and Men, the Buddha, the Blessed One.

The Meditation on the Recollection of the Buddha.

I

One of the descriptive titles given to the Buddha is that of *sattthā-deva-manussānaṃ*, the Teacher of Gods and Men. It is found in the earliest texts of the Tipiṭaka and was accepted by the Buddha himself. That the expression was no mere oriental hyperbole, but is to be taken in its literal sense, is borne out by the numerous incidents in which devas figure in the Buddhist canonical literature, where, like human beings, they come to the Master for religious instruction. These beings, whose generic name of deva means Shining Ones, appear so often that there is every justification for an enquiry into their nature and the precise place they occupy in the doctrines of Buddhism.

The Buddhist conception of the universe and of the laws of cause and effect that govern it leaves no room whatever for the idea of a supreme deity in the role of creator or ruler. It is not even necessary for Buddhism to deny the existence of a Creator-god; its philosophy automatically excludes the theory.

No God, no Brahmā can be found,
Creator of Saṃsāra's⁴⁶ round;
Empty phenomena roll on,
Subject to cause and condition.

Visuddhimagga, XIX.

This being so, a deva is not a God in the usual sense, and the word is apt to be misleading through its association with Western theism. If modern man could enter into the spirit of ancient Greek thought and understand the attitude of, say, Socrates⁴⁷ towards

46. Saṃsāra—the cycle of rebirths; the world.

the Greek gods he would come closer to the Buddhist view of the devas. The likeness is not perfect, for the devas, unlike the Greek deities, are not immortal; but they resemble them in being neither omnipotent nor omniscient. They are not creators of the world, but are themselves subject to the law of causality in much the same way that the Greek gods were subject to *ananke*, the higher law of necessity. They exhibit many of the weaknesses of human beings, and often less than their wisdom. Their present relatively happy circumstances, as well as such power as they possess, are the result of previous merit acquired as human beings.

They are in fact simply beings of another order of existence, in some ways superior to men but in others at a disadvantage. But before going further into their nature it is necessary to distinguish between 1) *samutti devas* ("by convention"), 2) *upāpatti devas* ("through rebirth") and 3) *visuddhi devas* ("by their purity"). The first class are human beings of high worldly status; kings; ministers and the like. The second are beings living in the *deva-lokas*, or higher spheres, while the third and greatest are human beings who have attained the final degree of self-liberation, and so are known as devas by purification while yet alive. These are the Supreme Buddhas, Silent Buddhas (*Pacceka Buddhas*) and arahats.

In ordinary usage the word deva nearly always denotes the non-human beings of the second order, and it is with them that we are now concerned. But while in the following pages the word *deva* wherever it occurs is to be understood as meaning *upāpatti deva*, it is well to note in passing that the term *deva* in itself has a very wide connotation and makes no fundamental distinction between human and non-human beings where the former are of exalted position. It may be taken to signify nothing more than a superior personage of some kind. It is important that this should be remembered, for just as the superiority of a king lies only in his position and has no connection with his qualities of intellect or character, so the superiority of a deva rests in the fact of his occupying that position by virtue of his past merits. Like all other beings the deva is revolving in the circle of saṃsāra; he is characterised by the three signs of impermanence, suffering and lack of any essence of selfhood; when the good kamma of the past which sustains the current of his existence as a deva becomes exhausted he must inevitably pass away from that state to be reborn elsewhere.

47. Who had his "*daimon*."

Another point to be remembered is that although, as has been said, the devas hold an important place, in Buddhist thought they are in no wise necessary to Buddhist philosophy. Everything that Buddhism asserts concerning the nature of reality can be stated with equal truth and force without reference to devas or any other class of non-human beings. Indeed, the view has been put forward that the frequent appearance of the Brahmanical deities as disciples of the Buddha in the canonical literature was intended only to emphasise the falsity of the Brahmanical belief in the power and omniscience of gods. However that may be, it is a fact that Buddhist philosophy is a complete and self-supporting system, requiring no intervention of supernatural agencies, and not capable of being affected by the presence or absence of beings of a non-human order. No matter what kind of sentient beings science may ultimately discover in the universe besides those on our own planet, it is certain that they will all be in their nature subject to the same laws which Buddhism reveals as governing the life of man. The living organisms on Jupiter, if there are any, must turn out to be different from those on earth in their physical construction, chemical composition and all other external aspects of their being; but even though they must breathe methane and ammonia instead of oxygen, and live in temperatures far below any endurable to organic life on our own planet, the fundamental and universal laws of cause and effect must obtain for them as they do for us. So the number and variety of beings in the cosmos may be multiplied to infinity, yet so long as they are subject to arising and passing away they belong unalterably to the Buddhist pattern of saṃsāric existence. The only kind of being that could be correctly termed supernatural would be one that is eternal, unchanging and not limited by any physical laws. It is the possibility of such a being as this that both Buddhism and modern science deny, but the denial does not go any further than that. As Bertrand Russell has somewhere observed, there is no reason whatever to suppose that man is the highest form of sentient life in the universe.

II

Even before the physicist demonstrated that our familiar world is not the substantial place it appears to be, but a system of dynamic processes that can be accurately described only in mathematical terms, and existing in an inconceivable four-dimensional

complex wherein space is the time between objects and time is the space between events, there were bold scientific thinkers who were able to envisage the possibility of still other dimensions besides those with which we are still grappling in a not-yet-successful attempt to correlate them. It would have been easier for those pioneers to break away from the rigid system which took space and time for separate absolutes if they had lived to see the bewildering world the scientist has presented us with since the advent of nuclear physics and the general theory of relativity. Under the influence of these new—but by no means final—realisations, the once dominant ideas of space and time have faded into subjective conceptions, just as subjective as left and right, front and behind, are in ordinary experience. The only really objective factor ascertainable to us at present is the space-time continuum, which may be thought of as containing an objective record of the motion of every particle in the universe, a history which is known as the world line of the particle concerned. In this way of looking at the universe objects have ceased to exist and their place has been taken by series of events, or causal continua, in the one fixed frame of reference, the four-dimensional space-time continuum.

It has long been known to certain persons, and strongly suspected by others, that there is not, nor can there be, a means of relating our subjective impressions of the external world to any objective reality existing outside our consciousness. In trying to discover the real nature of the world by sensory perception and intellection we are, as one writer has put it, in no better position than a fish which should strive to become clear as to what is water.

It is all the more strange, therefore, that there should be any lingering belief that the discoveries of science at any given point represent the totality of possibilities in that particular direction. To the philosopher who is engaged in relating all aspects of knowledge and arranging them into a comprehensive system, the contribution made by science is only one of many in the vast sum of data provided by human experience, and it is something that by itself is no more conclusive than are any of the others taken separately. The philosopher may, and should, correct his theories where established scientific fact requires it, but he is under no obligation to imprison his thought behind doors that science itself is fast breaking down.

Among the factors of experience which cannot be ignored is the testimony from innumerable sources all down the ages to the

existence of certain beings who appear to belong to a different order of nature, and because of this have been regarded as supernatural. No study of anthropology is complete without them, for in the guise of nature spirits, tribal deities, angels, djinns and the fairies of folklore they are found at the centre of all primitive cults and the earliest forms of religion. If their appearance were confined to the history of man in pre-scientific ages they could be dismissed as fantasies of the dream-world which primitive man finds difficult to distinguish from reality, but this is far from being the case.

Apart from the phenomena of the modern séance room there have been remarkable instances from the remotest antiquity up to recent times of people finding themselves in communication with non-human entities of various kinds. One of the most impressive of such cases in Europe was that of Emanuel Swedenborg. It was outstanding by reason of the fact that Swedenborg was among the most distinguished scientists of his day, a man of penetrating intellect and unimpeachable integrity who could neither have been subject to delusions nor impelled by desire for notoriety. His possession of clairvoyant powers was demonstrated on more than one occasion, but further than this he claimed that he had received proof of the existence of a heavenly hierarchy, which he made to correspond roughly to the angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim of Judeo-Christian tradition. He had seen and talked with radiant beings of different ranks and had passed freely from plane to plane of the extra-terrestrial system they inhabited. In many ways the experiences he described recall those of the mystics of all religions, but aside from the necessarily Christian terminology Swedenborg used in accounting for them in accordance with his own religious ideas, they bear a most marked resemblance to the Buddhist conception of the conditions prevailing in the realms of the devas.

Are we to suppose that these similarities of mystical or extra-sensory experience are coincidental? Or that they arise from a common infirmity of the human mind?

Or, as a third alternative, may it not be more likely that they are all instances of the same kind of experience, a real experience which requires no further explanation than the possibility of an extension of consciousness to areas outside the particular space-time continuum in which our consciousness normally functions?

To ask where, in the world of material objects, these beings can exist is irrelevant. In a universe where space and time are fused

into one concept, and where absolute points of reference have ceased to be and even the exact simultaneity of events is impossible to determine, it were as relevant to enquire *when* they can exist. It is clear that any such question is wrongly posed, because it is based on the assumption that the world we know is precisely as it appears to us, and further that our particular plane of experience is the only possible one, whereas not only is there no valid ground for that assumption but all the inferences are against it.

Considering that the world as we know it subjectively does not correspond to the actual objective world of physics, and that every attempt to bring them together results in a paradoxical situation, we must admit that we already have knowledge of two discrete and seemingly incompatible worlds, the subjective and the objective, in which somehow we contrive to have made the subjective our natural habitat. In some way the subjective appears to derive from the objective; but since the latter itself becomes subjective when we examine it—or rather, since what we cognise is only another subjective version of it—the truth may well be the other way round. The plain fact is that no individual can establish philosophically the existence of any other being in the world outside his own consciousness. And this absurdity is the only result that formal logic can lead us to.

The model cosmology of Buddhism is not hampered by any such considerations. It is constructed on the assumption that the plane of human experience is only one out of many. The perfection of insight-wisdom is to abolish the artificial constructions of subjective and objective which are both equally void of reality. This being so, it is not important what view we choose to take, and one is as valid as another. For example, the world of an animal's sensory apperceptions is not the same as that of a human being, and this despite the fact that both animal and human being are living in the same objective world and gaining their information about it from much the same kind of sensory apparatus. The world of the fish is completely real and valid, so long as the fish does not strive to become clear as to what is water. Only then does the fish receive intimations of another kind of world outside the one it has always known, but what that world is like must remain an enigma to it unless it can develop a different kind of psycho-physical organism to enable it to live in the different conditions. The same kind of barriers exist between animals and human beings sharing the same environment; each interprets it differently, according to his

capacity and the selective processes of his consciousness. Only the points of contact between the various currents of consciousness of different beings sustain the apparent reality of a world common to all of them.

The Buddha's teaching was concerned with suffering, its cause and its eradication; it was, as He often emphasised, a pointer to the way of release from conditioned existence and was not to be entangled in any of the conflicting views that originate in man's misinterpretation of phenomena. The Buddha himself did not erect any cosmological system, but only stipulated that any concepts that were held should be in conformity with the general principles of causality. As a consequence, the early Buddhists adopted the Vedic cosmology that was current at the time. It was a typical pre-scientific cosmology, and any attempt to reconcile its physical features with those of the earth as it actually is would be vain. It would also be a misguided effort, for in Buddhist hands the system was never intended to be an exact geophysical account of the world, but a metaphorical description of cosmological processes, and the early Buddhists adapted it to that design when they took it over. For this reason its Buddhist form agrees in certain important respects with a hypothetical model of the universe based on scientific principles. Alone among pre-scientific cosmologies it has no need of a First Cause, but is self-existent and self-renewing by natural laws; it is cyclic, one universe disintegrating and vanishing to be succeeded by another which consolidates from the atomic debris of the former; and it admits of a multiplicity of world-systems existing contemporaneously.

Such were some of the modifications which Buddhist thought, influenced by the Buddha's insights, produced in the earlier Vedic design, and it is these general principles which distinguish it from all other attempts on the part of pre-scientific man to visualise the kind of world in which he lived. The advance in thought which it represents must be immediately apparent to anyone who compares it with the primitive creation myths of Egypt, Assyria and other ancient centres of world culture. It can justly claim to be the prototype of all models of the universe which have rational principles as their foundation.

With these facts in mind we are better able to approach the next stage of our enquiry, which concerns the nature of the celestial worlds (*deva loka*) and their position in the Buddhist cosmological system.

III

For a better understanding of what follows, the reader is recommended to refer to the Chart of the Thirty-one Abodes and its key.

There are three categories of existence in *saṃsāra*, corresponding to three types of consciousness which are the result of past *kamma*. The three categories are: the sense-desire sphere, the fine-material sphere and the immaterial (formless) sphere. Each category contains several different classes of beings; in one of them, the *Asaññasatta* Brahma-loka of the fine-material sphere (22), consciousness is in a state of suspension and the *Brahmās* of this class consist only of material form, the reason for this will be seen later.

The world of human beings and animals is physically the same world, and forms part of the sense-desire sphere. Below it, but still in the same category, are the realms of beings in states of deeper misery, while above it are the realms of the sense-desire *devas*. The boundaries between the human world and those immediately above and below it are not always sharp, and there is the possibility of communication between them. In the case of human beings and animals, although the worlds they inhabit are distinct worlds, there is no physical difference between them; the boundary is purely psychological. This fact gives us the key to the truth that the reality of all the separate spheres of being lies in the realm of consciousness rather than in that of objectivity.

All the diverse classes of beings have been born in their respective worlds by reason of actions, good or bad, performed in the human sphere of worldly (i.e., sense-desire) activity. When the Karmic result-current of the deeds, which caused their rebirth in these worlds, is exhausted they pass away and are reborn elsewhere. The human world is the realm of moral choice and volitional activity where *kamma* is generated, so that it is possible for a human being to guide his destiny by his actions. But beings in the realms of misery (1 to 4) are merely the passive sufferers of the evil consequences of bad *kamma* performed in past lives as human beings; they have no moral sense and therefore no ability to produce good *kamma* while in their present State. When their bad Karmic result-current is exhausted they die and are reborn according to the nature of residual or "stored up" *kamma* from previous lives, which has not hitherto had an opportunity of fructifying. If that *kamma* is good they may be reborn as human

beings, or even as devas.

Here it is necessary to note that the statement that beings in the lower worlds are not capable of performing good actions is a broad generalisation; there are exceptions to it. The more intelligent species of animals are often capable of moral action, and although the mental impulse towards it (*kusala-citta*) is much weaker than in human beings, still it can be present.

The position of devas in-the sense-desire sphere is also one of limited moral responsibility. For the most part they are passively enjoying the pleasurable results of good karma performed in previous human lives and are not confronted with the necessity for moral choice that devolves upon human beings. Their pleasures are of an aesthetic nature, and the worlds they inhabit are those which have given rise to the belief in a happy after-death state in all religions. Any of the traditional descriptions of heavens, paradises or Isles of the Blest can be applied to them, with one important exception: they are not eternal.

The devas of these realms are beings of varying degrees of intelligence, but as was mentioned earlier they are in some respects at a disadvantage as compared with human beings. Since they are in general unable to produce fresh wholesome kamma themselves, they are compelled to acquire further merit vicariously, by participating in the good activities of human beings. From this fact comes the "sharing of merits with the devas" which is a feature of Buddhist life. When a Buddhist gives charity or performs some other good deed, he invites the devas to share the merit. Those devas who are aware of the moral law of causality are then able to produce in themselves good mental impulses (*kusala-citta*) by approving the good action, and since intention is the basis of all activity the mental impulse thus produced constitutes good kamma. This practise of sharing merits is also extended to intelligent beings in the realms of suffering, on the same principle.

The devas of the sense-desire sphere are not enlightened personalities, and many of them are more deeply immersed in delusion than are some human beings. Their birth as devas was not in consequence of their having been Buddhists, for any human being, no matter what his faith, may be reborn as a deva. It was the result simply of some good action, quite irrespective of creed. Therefore they carry with them into the deva-life whatever beliefs, true or false, they may have held as human beings, and there is

nothing in the conditions of the deva worlds to disillusion them. On the contrary, the immensely long life-span of the devas encourages the belief that they are immortal, and many imagine that they have attained the eternal heaven of the religion they followed as humans. Others believe that they are indeed Gods. Brahmās of the higher spheres are liable to the same delusion, for in the *Dīgha Nikāya* it is related that Mahā Brahmā imagined himself to be Almighty Brahmā, the Most High, the Invincible One, the Omniscient One, the Ruler, the Lord, the Creator, the Maker, the Perfect One, the Preserver, Controller and Father of all that was and will be. Even when he realised that he was mistaken he continued to maintain the deception before the minor Brahmās of his retinue (abodes 12–14).⁴⁸ Elsewhere, in the *Aggañña Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 27), the Buddha explains how theistic religion originated as the result of this kind of error. Those devas who are subject to such delusions of grandeur see no need for acquiring fresh merit, and when they ultimately pass away from that state they are reborn in some other world on the strength of residual kamma, good or bad, in the same way as are the beings below the order of humans.

From this it will be understood that the nature of devas in the sense-desire sphere varies enormously. Although they are devas because of some good kamma of the past, their present nature is not necessarily good. An interesting example of this is the case of Māra, the Tempter, who figured so largely in the life of the Buddha from the time of His Enlightenment until the final passing away.

Māra is the Kāma Deva of Hinduism, the beautiful young god of sensual desire who corresponds to the Greek Eros. Because of his sensual nature and his intense will to prevent other beings from gaining their release from saṃsāra he is known to Buddhism as Māra and Namuci, the personification of suffering and death. The Buddha referred to him always as the Evil One. The connection between the God of Love and the God of Evil is not so difficult to trace as it may seem; even in the Hindu *Purāṇas*, Kāma Deva appears in this role in the legend of his endeavour to tempt Siva from his asceticism. In some Buddhist

48. In contrast to this we find Sakka, a king among the Sense-desire devas, asking the Teacher of Gods and Men for religious instruction. Just so do worldly men occasionally show more good sense than some philosophers!

texts Māra is the name given to a subdivision of devas belonging to the Yāma realm (abode 8), but more often it stands symbolically for the passions and impurities of the mind. In a characteristic passage (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* XXIII, 35) the Buddha dismisses the Māras as nothing more than a personification of the personality-groups that bind beings to the wheel of rebirth. In this we may see an illustration of the way in which subjective and objective cease to exist as separate concepts in the light of absolute knowledge and insight. But the Māra who is an objective being of the sense-desire sphere is himself destined ultimately to become a Silent Buddha.

IV

We have already noted that the existence of other realms of being, normally invisible to us, has been taken for granted from the earliest times on the statements of those who claimed to have made contact with them through what is nowadays called extra-sensory perception. This faculty, or set of faculties, is a subject that is now engaging the serious attention of psychologists, among them Dr. J. B. Rhine who, to quote Prof. Thouless, has "confirmed the findings of previous students of telepathy that the mind could acquire knowledge without the use of the senses and even make correct reports of events that lay in the future."

The light that this may shed on the experiences of Swedenborg and others is not yet very clear. What is clear, however, is that we may no longer dismiss those experiences as hallucinations; they bear a relationship to the world of actual events which can be examined and tested by experiment.

The Buddhist view is that it was experiences such as those of Swedenborg and the mystics, which gave rise to the universal belief in heaven, hell and after-death states in general, and so laid the foundations of the different religions by wrong interpretation. This view assumes the actual existence of worlds other than our own, but to determine what grounds, other than psychical experience, there may be for the assumption requires that we should first of all come to an understanding of what our world really is.

This is far from being a simple task. We know the world to be the outcome of natural processes which are rational and intelligible, and whose laws science has shown itself capable of explaining satisfactorily up to a point. But its complexity is such

that there are still many principles unknown to us, besides others recently discovered which are hard to reconcile with principles formerly accepted. One example of this is the way in which Einstein's special theory of relativity has upset the principles of Euclidean geometry, and in doing so has outraged the "common sense" thought-habits of centuries. Einstein's mathematics proved that space in the vicinity of matter was not like the space of Euclid's geometry at all. In effect this means that in such space the angles of a triangle would not add up to two right angles.

The statement that the three angles of every triangle together must equal two right angles is a basic proposition of Euclidean geometry. Almost every other proposition that Euclid proved subsequently depended upon it; but the initial proposition itself rested on another proposition, which could not be proved. All attempts to prove it on the part of later geometers were unsuccessful, and although it was not self-evident it had to be treated as an axiom. When it was finally decided that no sound proof was possible, the experiment was tried of constructing a non-Euclidean geometry, in which it was assumed that the sum of the angles of a triangle was less or more than two right angles. The geometry that results from either of these assumptions is not that of the space we know, but it will be a complete geometry and one that is self-consistent. If it is not true of the space we know, it will be true of a possible space. Such a space might exist, and there is no physical reason why it should not.

Now the important point in this lies in the answer to the question of whether the angles of triangles merely do add up to two right angles, or whether they must do so. If the answer had been that they must, the Euclidean geometry would necessarily hold good for all possible kinds of space; but since there are logical and self-consistent geometries in which they need not, it becomes evident that our space, and the kind of universe we live in, is not the only possible one.

But besides the non-Euclidean nature of space in the neighbourhood of matter, our world contains many other phenomena, which, because they are undetectable to our senses, have remained unknown up to the present. Sound waves of frequency above 15,000 cycles per second are inaudible to humans, but can be heard by some animals; large areas of the spectrum are invisible to us, and electromagnetic waves and cosmic radiations are imperceptible without special instruments. Our visible world, in fact, contains within itself another world which would forever

have remained unknown and unsuspected had it not been for the development of highly specialised scientific techniques. For countless ages man has lived side by side with this invisible, intangible world without feeling its presence or being conscious of anything lacking in his total picture of the universe. And yet the world he lived in was itself dependent upon this other world with its complementary physical laws.

These extra data do not help us very greatly in our effort to form a mental picture of the world we live in; there are too many seeming contradictions for all of them to be accommodated within the framework of a single logical system of the kind to which we have been accustomed. The only remedy for this situation is to seek a definition of the word "world" which shall be free from unnecessary encumbrances, yet exact enough to preserve its meaning in all contexts. We speak of a "dream world," a "world of the mind" and a "world of the senses," and in everyday speech we make a distinction between the world of one man and that of another, as when we say that a Chinese farmer lives in a different world from that of a society debutante. These common usages point to a basic psychological meaning of the word: a world is a realm of conscious experience irrespective of whatever reality it may have as its objective base. It is in this sense that Buddhism speaks of the realm of animals and that of human beings as two distinct worlds. If we take as our point of reference the sensible world of human consciousness we can describe that of animals and other sub-human beings as infra-sensible, and those of devas as supra-sensible worlds.

Taking this standpoint, there is no question of the deva worlds being supernatural; they can exist in a space-time complex different from our own, yet still subject to natural laws of causality, the laws appropriate to the kind of geometrical space in which the deva-consciousness functions. Buddhist relativity takes account of this when it deals with the life-span of the deva worlds, which by human standards is enormous. In the Tāvātīṃsa deva Loka one day and night are said to be equal to a hundred terrestrial years. Since the life span in that particular world is one thousand years it equals thirty-six million years of terrestrial time. In the higher Brahmā worlds one life span covers several cycles of the disintegration and reformation of the universe. These vast chronological stretches may appear fantastic, but we have only to consider the nature of time in relation to the light-years of interstellar space, and to remember that man himself is

comparatively a newcomer on the vast stage of geological time, to realise how arbitrary are our conceptions of time as it is measured out for us by the movements of the earth. In certain circumstances our subjective experience of time is something that does not at all agree with the clock; but subjective time is so much stronger than its objective measurements that we speak of time dragging or speeding by, as though the universe slowed down when we were bored and accelerated when we were happy. And the mind's time in dreams can telescope hours into seconds. The transition of consciousness from one time-scale to another would therefore appear to rest upon an adjustment in the sense of duration. So we find that in the forty-five years between the Buddha's Enlightenment and his passing away, which corresponds to something less than twelve hours in the life of a Tāvatiṃsa deva, beings from the deva and Brahmā worlds came to him repeatedly for religious teaching. This could be possible only by an adaptation of the deva time-consciousness to the time relations prevailing in our own world. Abhidhamma psychology, which explains the processes of consciousness in terms of a succession of inconceivably rapid thought-moments "geared," as it were, to the vibrational frequencies of matter,⁴⁹ offers suggestive lines of speculation as to how such an adjustment could come about.

The whole question of contact between the human and the supra-sensible worlds is connected, though not in a very important sense, with the theory and practise of Buddhist meditation. The connection is not important because the object of meditation in Buddhism is not to obtain extra-sensory faculties such as clairvoyance, clairaudience and the like, but to gain liberation from saṃsāra; but meditation is a means of extending consciousness,

49. Buddhism teaches that matter is composed of atoms (*paramāṇu*) and is in a continuous state of flux. In modern terms we should say that it consists of waves or vibrations in the space-time continuum. The arising and passing away of the units of consciousness, which is also flux, bear a certain relation to the frequencies of the flow of matter which causes the impression that there is an enduring "thing" while in fact there is only a process.

An analogy may be found in the seeming continuity of a film, which is made up of separate still pictures passing through the projector. In certain circumstances the illusion breaks down. When the revolutions of a wheel on the screen do not synchronize with the rate of the separate pictures of it, nor with the rate of visual perception, the wheel appears to be revolving backwards while the carriage is moving forward!

and so these latent faculties are developed in it incidentally. On the other hand, there are yogic and mystical systems which have the cultivation of the psychic faculties as their chief, if not sole aim. It is in these that the "gods" are seen as all-powerful entities, and all kinds of myths come to be attached to them.

Ah! Happily do we dwell, owning nothing;
We shall live on joy itself, like the Radiant Gods.

Dhammapada 200.

So far we have discussed the devas of the sense-desire sphere, but it is when we turn to a consideration of the fine-material and formless spheres that we find the connection between the supra-sensible worlds and meditation practises becoming more intimate. All the beings in these worlds have been born there as the result of some degree of attainment in one-or other of the jhānic practises, or states of trance characterised by mental absorption. Five of these states, corresponding to the five worlds in the fine-material sphere, 23 to 27, are attainable only through meditation leading to insight into the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. The beings who are reborn as Brahmās in these worlds are those who in their human life have practised the Buddhist meditation up to the attainment of the fourth stage of purification, that of *anāgāmi* or non-returner. For the *anāgāmi* who dies before reaching the last stage, arahatship, only one more birth is possible and it takes place in one of these worlds. From there, on the expiration of his life-span, he passes into final Nibbāna. These are the only realms in the Thirty One Abodes from which it is possible to pass straight into Parinibbāna without being reborn as a human being.

All the other Brahmā worlds, up to the Asañña-satta Brahmāloka, are accessible through meditation practises found in other systems besides Buddhism, but those systems cannot give final release from the Saṃsāric spheres of conditioned existence because they are lacking in the psychological elements which eradicate the grasping and rebirth-producing tendencies; so also they do not give rise to insight-wisdom. When the Buddha attained enlightenment his first thought was to impart the doctrine to his former teachers, the ascetics Ālāra Kālāma and Udaka Rāmaputta; but he found that they had both died, and in consequence of their jhānic practises had been reborn in Brahmā worlds where they were unable to profit by his discovery of the superior method.

Reference has already been made to one peculiar world in the fine-material sphere, the *Asañña-satta Brahmāloka*, where existence is only in material form, with consciousness suspended. Rebirth on this plane comes about as the result of a type of meditation directed towards the suppression of consciousness, on the theory that escape from suffering lies in unconsciousness. Ascetics who are successful in this particular form of concentration achieve their objective, but it is not the final goal. When the kammic effect they have produced is exhausted consciousness re-arises in them and they pass away from that state to be reborn into sentient existence again.

All the *Brahmā* worlds from 12 to 22 are connected with various levels of attainment in the four *jhānas*. To those who practise the *jhānas* they are immediately accessible, for in the trance state the yogin is actually existing in those worlds although his physical body is on earth. When he returns to human world consciousness he retains the memory of his experiences in the *Brahmā* worlds and this, as we have already noted, is how the various theories of a Creator-God, an immortal soul and an eternal heaven have been propagated. It is probable that the more primitive religions originated from contact with the lower *devas*, while the higher religions, or the higher forms that evolved from the primitive, owe their inspiration to yogic experiences of the *Brahmā* worlds. Such experiences are open to anyone, no matter to what creed he may belong, so that the errors of interpretation are as many and various as the individual experiences. One who sees a *deva* or *Brahmā* will naturally identify what he sees with whatever God he happens to believe in. To complicate the situation still further, the being he sees may himself imagine, like *mahā Brahmā*, that he is the supreme deity! This accounts for the similarities, as well as the differences, between the great religions of the world. The cult of a tribal God from the sense-desire sphere who demands burnt offerings may in time have born within its fold a man of superior nature who has cultivated meditation in a previous life. This man through trance experiences becomes aware of the existence of a higher type of being, or hierarchy of beings, which he takes to be God the Creator and his angels. He then teaches a higher creed, one in which the emphasis is on love rather than on crude power, but still in the name of the tribal god of his ancestors, which is the only god he knows. The nature of the god then appears to have altered, and the yogi-prophet's new teaching may be accepted or

not, according to circumstances. What usually happens is that a new religion branches off from the old. So there comes about an organic growth in religious ideas, coupled with a multiplicity of creeds. In several of His discourses the Buddha described the origin of religions in yogic trance experiences of this nature.

It is understandable that primitive man has contact more readily with beings of the infra-sensible worlds and the lower worlds of the sense-desire sphere, so that the cruder forms of religion, animism, shamanism and nature-worship, are the first to appear and continue to survive in very similar forms all over the world. For this reason it is not possible to mark any clear division between primitive religion and demon-worship.

The four worlds of the immaterial sphere belong to the types of consciousness developed in the meditation on the formless. In the highest of them, the realm of neither-Perception-nor-non-perception, (abode 31) the consciousness is so subtle that it cannot be said to be either perceptive or non-perceptive. The remaining three are connected with the meditations on the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness and the realisation of the void respectively; these are known as the *arūpāyatana* jhānas and have as their base an abstract concept unrelated to forms.

The worlds in which consciousness exists without a physical base and without functioning as consciousness the way we understand it, by discrimination and intellection, are the most difficult for us to visualise. Because the human mind is dependent on a physical organ, the brain, we have come to identify it with its material medium. When a particular area of the brain is damaged, consciousness is impaired correspondingly; the damage is complete, consciousness is apparently destroyed. And even this is not the whole story; any damage to the neurological system in any part of the body may cause changes in the mental processes, a fact which seems to indicate at the same time that the mind cannot be exclusively identified with the brain, but is associated with the total physical organism. Yet with all this it has not been proved that the material organism is absolutely indispensable to consciousness. Even if we grant that human consciousness cannot subsist apart from its physical base, which is by no means certain, it does not follow of necessity that all forms of consciousness are subject to the same rule. Far from eliminating the possibility of other dimensions of being, governed by laws distinct from those of our own world, science has shown that they are practically possible.

Whether we are willing to accept this in theory or not, two points are deserving of attention in order that we may avoid prejudiced thinking. They are 1) that the science that deals with our world cannot be expected to prove or disprove the existence of other kinds of universes where different scientific principles may prevail, and 2) that if science denies them, in the face of evidence from other sources, the onus lies on science to prove that they do not exist. Since science can do neither the one nor the other it must be considered neutral until further data are obtained.

At the present stage it is useless to appeal to science except in refutation of some belief which requires supernatural additions to the order of the physical universe. It is only then that science is competent to utter an emphatic No. We may for instance believe, as many responsible scientists now do, that our earth has been visited by inhabitants of other planets, without offending against scientific principles. We may go further, and credit these visitors with possessing faculties far superior to our own, still without passing beyond the limits of scientific tolerance. But if we were to believe that they were capable of miraculously interfering with the order of nature we should be overstepping the bounds of what science considers to be possible. Now that so many of the barriers between the possible and the impossible have crumbled away, this is the only kind of boundary that can still be recognised between a belief that is scientifically possible and one that is super-naturalistic and irrational. And even that may have to be enlarged in the near future to accommodate the results of the latest investigations in para-psychology.

VI

In view of these facts, should we not widen our conception of the universe? Have we not evidence that even the reality immediately surrounding us is much vaster than the limitations of our sense experience would lead us to suppose? And if so, are we not justified in seeking other modes of awareness that will expand the horizons still further?

There is only one way in which we can obtain real knowledge of other planes of being, and that is by the extension of our own consciousness through meditation. The experiences so gained will be purely personal ones, of course, and will not convince anyone else. Nor is it necessary that they should do so,

for that kind of “conviction” is not required for an understanding of the truths taught by Buddhism. Those truths stand equally for one world or an infinite multiplicity of worlds. And they are to be tested not by speculation or theorising but by practical application.

From the standpoint of the Buddha, the teacher of Gods and Men, all beings revolving in saṃsāra are of the mundane order. They are impermanent, subject to sorrow and devoid of self-essence. From the most insignificant forms of life up to the highest Brahmā worlds there is to be found the primal nescience and the craving that leads to repeated birth, old age and death. The delusions of divinity are no more important in the reckoning than are the instinctive urges of the animal seeking its food. To all beings with the capacity for understanding the compassion of the Buddha offered one gift—the Doctrine of Deliverance.

Are the worlds of saṃsāra reality, symbol or dream? That is for each of us to find out for himself. Whatever answer we may find in our own minds, beyond it all there is the supreme reality of Nibbāna, transcending the world of both Gods and Men, and all that is conditioned.

“For, O Bhikkhus, if there were not the Unconditioned, in which there is neither arising nor passing away, there could be no release from the conditioned. But since there is that Unconditioned, there is also the release from the conditioned with its arising and its passing away.”

If all the saṃsāric worlds are in the ultimate sense unreal, transient phases of the unenlightened consciousness, it follows that Nibbāna, in which they cease to be, is the sole reality. As it was for the Teacher of Gods and Men, so it can be for us.

14. COSMOLOGICAL THOUGHT IN BUDDHISM AND MODERN SCIENCE

At the outset it must be realised that the Buddha did not profess to give any specific instruction regarding the formation of the universe. He laid down, as an essential part of His system of philosophy only such principles as were general and universal because it is these alone which have a bearing on man's own nature, and must be understood in order to bring the mind out of delusion into the state of enlightenment.

At the time of the Buddha's ministry, certain ideas belonging to the schools of Vedic Brahmanism were current regarding the physical world, and, since the Teacher himself did not categorically deny them, they passed into Buddhist thought with only such modification as was imposed by the central tenets of the philosophy. The view held by the compilers of the Upanishads was that the universe, which is essentially illusory (*māyā*), is a projection of the eternal, self-existing Brahman: that is to say, of the *Nirguṇa Brahman*, the neuter, or attributeless Brahman, as distinct from the personalised, or *Saguṇa Brahman*. It was supposed to come about by the interpenetration of *prakṛti* (matter) and *puruṣa* (spirit). It was thus the play (*līlā*) of the divine principle which comprehended all things and permeated them, in a single unity. It is this view which is held today by the school of Advaita, or absolute monism. There is also a school of qualified monism, but since it shares the central concept of divine creation, or projection, what may be said of it in relation to Buddhism is the same as may be said of Advaita.

It was this theory of a primal moving spirit, which Buddhism discarded, substituting for the Brahman the universal law of inter-dependence and causality. If there were a creator, Buddhism argues, he would himself be subject to some law whereby he could perform the act of creation. His being itself requires laws, for to exist is to function, and there must be principles, anterior to and above the functioning, to make the functioning possible. To put it in another way, every action presupposes alternatives, and these alternatives must exist as potentials before the action can be possible. When we say that an action is *possible*, we postulate a law or principle of possibility, and that principle must exist prior to the action. Therefore there cannot be a First Cause in the absolute sense. There must be a

prior condition to the existence of anything, including God. This principle was actually acknowledged in the earliest Upanishadic thought under the name of *Rta*—the law to which even God is subject. But the Upanishadic schools never pursued this concept of necessity to its logical conclusion. Buddhism does so, and the result is the rejection of a First Cause entirely. The intermediate agent, God as creator, being found unnecessary, Buddhist thought concerns itself solely with the laws of being, and there is no attempt to present them in anthropomorphic guise.

But Buddhism agrees with Vedantic ideas in accepting the concept of cyclic evolution and devolution of universes. In Hinduism a world period represents a day of Brahmā; it is a period during which a complete cycle of evolution and decline, leading up to the dissolution of the universe, takes place. This is followed by the period of quiescence, or night of Brahmā, between the collapse of one universe and the arising of the next. Leaving out the poetical symbology of the days and nights of Brahmā, the Buddhist Cyclic system follows the same pattern.

The measurement of cosmic time is the "great *kappa*" (Sanskrit: *kalpa*), which may be termed an aeon. Its duration is said to be incalculable: "Imagine a mountain consisting of a solid cube of rock, one league in length, in breadth and in height. If with a piece of cloth one were to rub it once at the end of every hundred years, the time that it would take to wear away such a mountain would not be so long as the duration of a great *kappa*." The great *kappa*, according to Ledi Sayādaw, is not a period so much as a notion of time itself. It corresponds to the idea of an eternity.

The great *kappa* is itself divided into four subsidiary *kappas*, each representing a cyclic period of a particular world-system. These periods which may be denoted as aeons, too, are not calculable, and may vary in length. And while there are four such aeons to an eternity, each of them in turn is subdivided into shorter *kappas* or ages, of more or less measurable duration. The third type of *kappa* is that which corresponds to the maximum life-span of any particular being.⁵⁰ The fourth and last *kappa* is the period that intervenes between the destruction of one universe and the formation of another.⁵¹ During this vast period of time—or timelessness, for time exists only in relation to events—the substance of the entire cosmos is reduced to its primal elements and distributed throughout space in an undifferentiated mass. In terms of modern physics we would say

that the sub-atomic forces are disintegrated and dispersed. This may come about in two ways: the universe may expand until it reaches the point at which the force of repulsion overcomes that of attraction, and the particles of matter are scattered widely throughout space, or it may shrink until the opposite effect is brought about, and an intense condensation of matter occurs. If, on the other hand, the universe is a "steady-state" system, neither expanding nor shrinking, the breaking up of its constituents might occur through a disturbance of the interior forces of equilibrium. Anyone of these causes could bring about nuclear fission at some stage of the process. All that would then be left of the cosmos would be the released electronic nuclear energy, with which the whole of space, whether expanded, contracted or stable, would be uniformly filled.

In this condition the quiescence would not be altogether complete; so long as a residuum of energy remained, there would be the potentiality of renewed differentiation of matter and a reconstruction of the universe in accordance with natural law. Like the pendulum which swings to its greatest extremity and after a moment of equipoise swings back, or like a vast pulse beating to an unvarying rhythm, the cosmos repeats its past history. Movement within the distribution of matter begins to increase; clots of matter begin to form, and over immeasurable ages the island-universes begin to take shape once more. The process may commence with a tremendous cosmic explosion, or in the case of a "steady state" system, with a number of minor individual explosions where the concentrations of matter are greatest. In either case the result is the same: the matter forms itself automatically into stellar clusters and nebulae, and in the course of time space again assumes the general aspect with which we are familiar. And life again begins to evolve.

50. In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, where it is stated that the Buddha could, had he wished, have lived on to the end of the *Kappa*, the period there signified is said by some to be the normal duration of a human life, which is taken as being one hundred years. Others consider that it means until the end of a world-period, at which point all material things pass away.

51. *Niyāma Dīpanī*, by Ledi Sayādaw Mahāthera, transl. by Beni Barua, D. Litt, M.A. and U Nyana Patamagyaw. Rangoon 1921, page 18ff.

The *Cakkavāḷa*

Each universe is said to comprise a number of world-systems, or *cakkavāḷas*, and the number of these world-systems contained in the whole cosmos is incalculable. The term universe denotes a particular system, having its own gravitational field and revolving about a centre. Such are the spiral and cloud nebulae and other groups which constitute the island-universes of outer space. The *cakkavāḷas* are local world-systems embedded in these, as our own solar system is believed to be. According to the evidence available at present, our solar system is situated in one of the arms of a vast galaxy of the flattened disc type, resembling the great spiral nebula in Andromeda. This galaxy is estimated to contain about 150,000 million stars, and the distance between them increases the further they are removed from the centre of concentration around which they all revolve. Our solar system, which is 30,000 light years away from the galactic centre, makes one full revolution around it in approximately 250 million years. This is known to present-day astronomers as one cosmic year. If we accept that the age of our earth is in the region of 3,500 million years, and that the entire planetary system is as old, the earth is about 15 to 16 cosmic years old. That is to say, our solar system since its inception has made some 15 to 16 revolutions around the centre of the galaxy.⁵²

Most of this is scientific conjecture at present, but it is based on reliable data and must be accepted until or unless future discoveries show it to be inaccurate. I quote it here for the bearing it has upon the older cosmological concepts of Buddhism. Agreement between them is found in the common hypothesis of a cyclic breaking-up and restoration of the cosmos in accordance with natural law, and in the rejection of any word for a First Cause or creative agency. In both concepts the act of creation is perpetual, and is the outcome of natural necessity—it results from the nature of energy and the laws which govern it.

The second important point of contact is the agreement as to a multiplicity of world-systems, the *cakkavāḷas* of Buddhism and the solar systems of present-day astronomy. "In our metagalactic system there are hundreds of millions of galaxies and each galaxy may be composed of hundreds of thousands of millions of stars. Even in our galaxy which numbers approximately 150,000

52. *The Universe*, by A. Oparin and V. Fesenkov, p. 60.

million stars, there may be hundreds of thousands of planets on which life is likely to originate and develop. Our infinite universe must also contain an infinite number of inhabited planets.⁵³

There are in the texts of both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism innumerable references to the multiplicity of worlds that bear sentient life. But it is only in the Commentaries, not in the words ascribed to the Buddha himself, that any detailed description of them is given.

And there, as we should expect, the picture presented has some features in common with other ancient cosmologies: the earth is by implication flat, with a great mountain, Meru, at its centre. There are seven great oceans encompassed by seven rings of mountains, and four great continents are situated respectively at the four cardinal points of the compass. The southern continent is Jambudīpa, the Land of the Rose Apple, or India. Between the four great land masses there are smaller islands. The sun, moon and planets were supposed to revolve around Mt. Meru, night occurring on Jambudīpa when the mountain obscured the sun, and it was day on the Northern continent, Uttarakuru.

There are two points to be noticed in connection with this peculiar view of the earth. The first is that, if it were indeed the picture currently accepted at the time of the Buddha—and some very ancient texts from the Tipiṭaka tend to show that it was—it would not have been to the purpose of the Buddha, who was a teacher of spiritual truths, to correct it. Had he attempted to do so, his time and efforts would have been wasted. Few would have understood, and the understanding would not have benefited them spiritually. The majority would have dismissed it as the theory of a lunatic. Furthermore, Pali is an undeveloped language, in which a vocabulary of relatively few words had to be made to express all ideas. Lacking the necessary terminology, which modern languages have developed and expanded as the growth of thought required, the Buddha would have been handicapped by these limitations of language, even had he wished, to describe the motions of the planets and the physical construction of the solar system. In Pali a word, the primitive meaning of which is very simple, is made to serve for highly complicated ideas, owing to the absence of any borrowings from other sources, or the evolution of new verbal forms. Thus the word *khandha*, which philosophically stands for an aggregate of

53. V. Fesenkov. Op. cit. p. 232.

physical and psychological factors, means in its original sense merely a "lump" of something. It is even used physiologically to denote "shoulder." With such a restricted vocabulary ideas tend to remain rudimentary, or to be misunderstood. We therefore have no means of knowing whether the terms employed to describe a world-system are to be taken literally or as makeshift approximations, analogies or poetic fictions.

However that may be, it is a striking fact that the true picture of the solar system as we now have it, is actually in closer conformity with the Buddha's teaching of universal principles that is the traditional one held by the Buddhist commentators. It carries out the principle of uninterrupted revolution denoted by the wheel (*caṅka*) and that of having no point of commencement, of which the physical symbol is the sphere. If, in fact, we would seek for a material illustration of the law of recurrence, of cyclic progression under the domination of incessant change, we should find its perfect expression in the revolving island-universes, the solar systems and the structure of the atom.

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya (II 178), the Buddha speaks of the succession of *kappas* in the following words: "Undetermined, Bhikkhus, is the beginning of this world. The past extremity (*pubba-koṭi*) of beings running on in birth after birth bound by ignorance and the bonds of craving is not manifest."

The Pali word translated here by "undetermined" *anamata* (=a-mata), meaning that which is unknown and unascertained. The sense, therefore, is that the past extremity or ultimate beginning of the cycles is not to be known by calculation. There is no limit by which it can be defined. "The past extremity ... is not manifest" is equivalent to saying that it does not exist. A similar use of the phrase is found in the collection of texts, the Saṃyutta Nikāya (II, 52), here the Buddha asks: "If, Ānanda, there be no birth, can old age and death be manifested?" To which Ānanda replies: "Truly, they cannot, Lord." From this is clear that "to be manifest" means to exist, and "not manifest" means not to exist.

The proposition contained in the words "The past extremity is not manifest" can therefore only mean that, although each *kappa* has its beginning, middle and end, there is no beginning to the succession of great *kappas* in general.⁵⁴ The cyclic successions have existed always, the reason being that they do not exist *in time*, but time, as a progression of events, exists *in them*. The time

54. Ledi Sayādaw, *Niyāma Dīpanī*, p. 19.

of Bergson, which is absolute duration, not susceptible of measurement other than that which is brought about by cutting into the flow of specific events in these more or less arbitrary divisions that we commonly mean when we speak of time. A beginning of time in the state of timelessness is clearly an impossibility it is only *periods* of time that can have a beginning an end. We shall have occasion to deal further with the philosophical difference between time as a symbol of space and time which is absolute duration when we discuss the nature of the flux of becoming, later on.⁵⁵

Stages of the Great Cycles

In the *Anguttara Nikāya* (Vol. II, p. 142; *The Fours*, No. 156), the Buddha says:

There are four incalculable epochs, Bhikkhus. The four are: the enveloping epoch; the enveloped epoch; the developing epoch; the developed epoch. The epoch, Bhikkhus, during which there is cosmic envelopment is not easy to reckon as so many years or centuries, or tens or hundreds of centuries.

The enveloping epoch is the period during which the world-system is in decline, the enveloped epoch is that in which it is in the state of dissolution. The developing epoch is the period of growth when life evolves from lower to higher stages; the developed epoch is that in which evolution has reached its highest peak. Having once been reinstated, while the world-system continues to be in that state it is said to be developed.⁵⁶ Each of these periods is a fourth part of a great *kappa*, so it will be seen that every great *kappa* involves the full development of sentient life followed by its total disappearance from a world-system.

It is perhaps of rueful interest to note that the ancient Buddhist ideas regarding the destruction of worlds tally in important respects with those held by other religious and philosophical systems. Three types of destruction are postulated: by thermodynamic action, by liquidation and by atmospheric disturbance. These causes correspond to three of the great primaries of which matter is (in philosophical terms) composed. Earth or solidity alone is excluded as a possible agent of destruction.

55. Henri Bergson, *Philosophy of Change*, p. 15.

56. Ledi Sayādaw, *Niyāma Dīpanī*, p. 20.

The idea is that from time to time there is a disturbance of balance between the primary constituents, and when one or other of them increases to such an extent that it passes the critical point, it gains ascendancy over the others. There are at present in the cosmos planets and stellar systems in a state of combustion, others in liquidation and others in a condition of atmospheric disturbance. All suns are fiery masses, whilst some planets are in the molten stage, others have their surface covered by liquid, and some are enveloped in dense atmospheres of gases noxious to organic life. As one example of the latter we may take the planet Jupiter in our own system. This member of the solar family is known to be surrounded by dense clouds of ammonia and methane in a state of violent perturbation, with possibly a layer of ice or nothing more than a thick slushy layer, perhaps of ammonia particles, surrounding a rocky core. Saturn also has a stormy and unwholesome atmosphere composed of ammonia, methane and hydrogen.⁵⁷ They, like so many other bodies unknown to us, are not at present able to sustain highly organised life, but whether they will be able to do so at any future time must depend upon either a radical change in their condition or else a wider range of adaptability in living organisms than we are at present able to conceive. Despite its carbon dioxide and possible formaldehyde clouds, Venus alone in our family of planets seems to offer possibilities of being the cradle of future life. But at present, if the theories of Menzel and Whipper are correct, its actual surface is covered completely by a liquid mantle, a large, continuous ocean.⁵⁸

I have described the ancient belief that worlds may end by combustion as a rueful one because of the possibility that man might eventually bring it about himself, a possibility which at the time of writing seems to be in the increase. There is, in any case, a clear connection in Buddhist thought between the total kamma of beings taking birth in a given world-system and the fate of that system considered as a physical entity. While universes, like all other phenomena, are subject to the law of dissolution and must after the lapse of ages pass away, the manner of their destruction is in a certain sense determined by the accumulated kamma of the beings inhabiting them. Perhaps there is a mythological shadowing forth of this truth in the almost worldwide tradition

57. Fred L. Whipper, *Earth, Moon and Planets*, pp. 163, 181.

58. V. Fesenkov, *The Universe*, p. 225.

of a great deluge which brought a former epoch to an end.⁵⁹ A universe almost entirely subject to mechanical laws of growth and decay it is man who is the sole willing and independently acting agent, and as such he plays a unique and decisive role in the process of cause and effect. His actions are capable of disturbing the harmony of nature to a degree that can be catastrophic. This idea is found not only in Buddhism but in the Taoist conception of man's relation to the cosmos, where in fact it occupies a central place. It can be a contributing factor in the destruction of a world-system, either directly or indirectly; but whether it is or not, an end must come in accordance with natural law. On the other hand, the re-formation of the universe after a period of quiescence is brought about by unexpended residual kamma of the beings who formerly lived in it. Thus we find it stated in the *Dīgha Nikāya*:

“Now there comes a time, brethren, when, sooner or later, after the lapse of a long, long period, this world-system passes away. And when this happens beings have mostly been reborn in the World of Radiance, and there they dwell made of mind, feeding on joy, radiating light from themselves, traversing the air, continuing in glory, and thus they remain for a long period of time.

“Now there comes also a time, brethren, when, sooner or later, this world-system begins to re-evolve. When this happens the Palace of Brahmā appears, but it is empty. And some being or other, either because his span of years has passed or his merit is exhausted, falls from that World of Radiance, and comes to life in the Palace of Brahmā. And there also he lives made of mind, feeding on joy, radiating light from himself traversing the air, continuing in glory; and thus does he remain for a long period of time.”

(*Brahmajāla Sutta*, tr. by T. W. Rhys Davids)

Every world-system in its complete state comprises thirty planes of existence in addition to that occupied by human life. These planes are spoken of in the popular cosmology of Buddhism as being ranged one above another, with Mt. Meru ascending in their midst, but as we have seen, they have no definite spatial location

59. In Mesopotamian tradition, in the Bible, in the Hindu *Purāṇas* and even in ancient South American civilisation.

in reality, but interpenetrate one another on different vibrational frequencies. Nevertheless, it is necessary to map them in ascending order, to make their relationship to one another explicit, just as they are found in the Buddhist treatises on the subject. When this is done, the result is a chart of *saṃsāra*, showing all the states comprising what is known as the three worlds (*tiloka*), namely the realm of sense-desire (*kāma-loka*), the fine-material realm (*rūpa-loka*) and the non-material realm (or world of formlessness, *arūpa-loka*). (See the Chart above). Of these thirty-one abodes, those that constitute the sphere of sense-desire (*kāma-loka*) are the numbers 1–11 in our chart, including the inferior states, the human world and the lower heavenly planes. Above these the numbers 12–27 are worlds of fine substance, but still having form (*rūpa*) and differentiation. In all of these worlds, the beings are equipped with both mind and body, with the sole exception of No. 22 where the Brahmās have form only. The reason for this peculiar sphere will be given later. The chart numbers 28 to 31 constitute the non-materials, or formless, worlds inhabited by a highly-developed class of beings that exist solely on the psychological level, as zones of mental energy:

The fine-material realm includes a group of five worlds (the Pure Abodes or *Suddhāvāsa*, Chart 23–27) which are accessible after death only to those who, before their death, have attained the third of the four stages of Holiness, i.e. that of an *anāgāmi*, or non-returner. On the expiration of the life-span in that sphere, the *anāgāmi* passes straight into *Parinibbāna*, having attained to the state of sainthood in these Pure Abodes, which belong to the Brahmā-worlds. They are worlds of form because it is not possible to attain enlightenment without the realisation of impermanence, suffering and not-self in the physical as well as the mental constituents of personality.

The spheres above them (abodes 29 to 31) are the four non-material, or formless worlds which correspond to the four formless *jhānas*. They are the planes on which are reborn those who have obtained the mental absorption of the infinity of space, infinity of consciousness, of nothingness and of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, but who have not transcended them by ultimate realisation and the complete destruction of the elements of attachments. These Brahmās at the end of their life-span are reborn in one of the lower planes.

It is these states that were conceived as being the ultimate goal by the Vedic teachers prior to the Buddha, and are so still by

modern Hinduism. They represent the “union with Brahmā” which was attained by Siddhattha Gotama’s first teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta.

The sphere of the sensationless beings (*asaññasatta brahmaloka*) whose nature consists only of material form without any accompanying mental aggregates (*nāmakkhanda*), is where ascetics are reborn who on earth have attained in their meditations the temporary subsidence of mental activity, under the mistaken belief that suffering is solely a characteristic of the mental life. After exhaustion of the kamma causing that form of existing, they are reborn again in a lower sphere where both material form and mind exist.

Between some of these worlds of beings and others there is no great physical separation, and in some instances they occupy the same dimensional space, as in the case of the human and animal worlds. Others interpenetrate one another so closely, although their vibrational frequencies are different, that by an adjustment of their mental frequencies beings belonging to one plane are able to manifest on others. It is for this reason that the phenomena of spiritualism are so often confused and baffling. The entities that are contacted during spiritualist séances often belong to worlds lower than the human, more particularly the world of Petas, or unhappy spirits, who by excessive attachment are “earthbound,” until such time as their unwholesome kamma is expended.

When it happens that psychic manifestations from the higher planes appear, it can only be from those worlds that are but very slightly above the human, that is to say, the lower planes of the deva-loka. It is from these comparatively happy realms of existence that spiritualists derive the comfort that the psychic evidence for survival affords them; but the entities reborn on this level have no greater knowledge concerning the ultimate truths of existence than we have ourselves. Often, indeed, their knowledge is less: The only fact of which they are certain is that they are living in pleasant surroundings and that their happiness is increased by their ability to communicate with the human world. For the most part they seem to be unaware that they must eventually pass away from their present condition to be reborn elsewhere. In psychic communications there is, however, the recurring theme of transitoriness: the entities are said to pass on to higher realms after a period of supposed preparation. In reality they are frequently reborn as human beings or in some still lower world. From other communications received by psychic mediums it is evident that the

state between one human birth and another is not always the "Summerland" which spiritualism, for the consolation of the bereaved, emphasises so strongly.

Communication with the higher realms of being in the fine-material plane is possible only to those who have strenuously cultivated the meditation practises, the "seers" or adepts of developed psychic power. In the case of the formless worlds a specially high attainment is necessary. Only those who have cultivated the four jhānas associated with the sphere of infinite space, infinite consciousness, no-thingness and neither-perception-nor non-perception (an indescribably subtle and refined state of consciousness) can make contact with the beings of those realms. To Hinduism this is known as "Union with Brahmā," and is believed to be the ultimate attainment. The Buddha who was a Knower of Brahmā in the sense that he had himself made contact with the Brahmā-world, attributes to this faculty on the part of other sages, who had not gone beyond the realm of form, the belief in a Creator-god. The reference to this is to be found in the Brahmajāla and Aggañña Suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya.⁶⁰

It is written that at the destruction of a world-system, either by fire, water or wind, the realms of existence are demolished from the lowest plane up to the highest Brahmā-world.

At the end of the cycle, the beings from the lower worlds, by attaining the jhānic states, become reborn among the Radiant Gods of the Brahmā-world. From there, after the lapse of the Enveloped Period, they again descend to be reborn in the human world, which has by then been reconstructed by the cyclic process of natural law and has become sufficiently evolved to manifest the higher forms of life once more. The faint memories they then carry with them of their former state of being form the foundation of all the primitive cults of survival and are the starting-point of man's religious instinct.

"Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home,"

60. In these two Discourses the Buddha describes how, after encountering in the trance state a Brahmā of radiant form who himself believed that he was the creator of the universe. Sages of the past taught this theory as revealed religion. See *Buddhism and God Idea* (The Wheel No. 47), p. 9.

as Wordsworth wrote in one of those inspirational gashes which relate poetry to the race-memories of mankind.

Evolution

When, in the course of a developing epoch a world reaches the stage at which life becomes possible, inorganic matter, by a natural process which biochemists may now be on the point of being able to duplicate, becomes transformed into cellular structure which exhibits the characteristics of life; that is growth and the assimilation of nutriment from its surroundings.

Since doubt began to be felt about the theory of the supernatural creation of life on our planet, scientists have been seeking other explanations of its origin: According to a report of C. Meunier, Louis Pasteur had conducted a series of experiments to ascertain whether viable bacteria or their spores existed in carbonaceous meteorites, the object being to discover whether the germs of life had reached the earth in debris of a shattered planet of our system. His results were negative and remained unpublished; but even had the panspermic theory, as it is called, proved to be correct it would still not have solved the problem of the ultimate beginning of life, but only shifted it a stage further back. At the time of writing it is generally believed by those who are studying this question that wherever life may have arisen in the universe it has done so independently.

The latest researches have revealed certain steps in the process of evolving living organisms which seems to give an outline of the necessary conditions and stages for life to appear. It has been known for a long time that some very rudimentary organisms, such as viruses, occupy a borderline position between the organic and inorganic, and these may well be the pattern of life in its initial stages. It now seems probable⁶¹ that at some point of the earth's development a process of direct hydration of hydrocarbons occurred as the result of their combining with whole molecules of water. The organic compounds then by interaction with ammonia yielded nitrous derivatives of hydrocarbons together with derivatives of oxygen. The data furnished by organic chemistry show that low molecular hydrocarbons and their oxygen and nitrous derivatives when in a humid atmosphere or an aqueous solution go through a far-

61. See Oparin, *The Universe*, p. 34f.

reaching polymerization and condensation, which eventually leads to the formation of very complex substances, very closely resembling those that are found in the composition of living organisms. In the earth's primary hydrosphere many types of sugars and other carbohydrates could have been formed, and recent experiments have shown that such complex and at the same time widespread substances in organisms as porphyrines, nucleotides, and others can be synthesised from the simplest carbon and nitrogen compounds.

The next stage, that of the formation of the protein molecule, depends only upon the formation of amino acids, which are its basis. This has been illustrated by the experiments of S. Miller, who after passing electrical sparks through a mixture of methane, hydrogen, ammonia and water vapours was able to detect by the method of paper chromatography the presence of glycine, alanine and other amino acids in the solution. From these and other experiments which have shown how amino acids may be polymerized into chains of amino acid particles to form the basis of the protein molecule, a general plan of the process whereby the primary synthesis of proteins and other complex organic compounds could have taken place on the liquid surface of our planet is now made clear.

The problem, however, does not end there. To become living cells the protein bodies have to acquire the property of continually regenerating themselves from the substances that form their external environment. This process of self-regeneration and self-reproduction is not found anywhere in the inorganic world. It is metabolism which is the distinguishing characteristic of life. This involves a highly complicated series of co-ordinated activities in the organisation of living bodies. Hundreds of thousands of chemical reactions must take place in a living body, and these not only combine harmoniously in a single sequence, but the entire order of events must be regulated to condition the self-preservation and reproduction of the vital systems, in conformity with the conditions of the external environment. Therefore the origin of life is essentially the origin of metabolism, the processes of assimilation and dissimilation of nutriment and this, apparently, to a specific end. The stage at which it arose in the simplest living organisms represented the vital point of transition from inert substance to living cell structure.

Buddhism gives four modes by which living organisms come into existence, corresponding to four genetic types of

beings, the oviparous (born of eggs), the viviparous (born alive), the moisture-generated and the abiogenic, or spontaneously arisen beings. It is said that in the Developing Epoch beings were first born abiogenically, through the action of their past kamma operating on matter. Later on, this spontaneous arising of life gave place to sexual transmission of the seed, and beings became either oviparous or viviparous. Some commentators include fish and worms among the moisture-born, but there is no canonical authority for this; it was their own interpretation in the light of a belief which persisted even in England until the 18th century.⁶²

In the Aggañña Sutta (Dīgha Nikāya) we are told that there was a period in the early history of the earth when great downpours of water covered its surface. It was in this liquid world that the spontaneously-arisen beings first appeared. They then lived subsisting on the nutriment they extracted from the surface of the water. It is not difficult to see in this, when allowance is made for the nature of the Pali language and the ideas it was capable of expressing, a very close approximation to what science now supposes to have occurred: When solutions containing individual protein substances such as those we have been discussing are mixed together, the protein molecules which at first were evenly distributed throughout the solvent begin to unite in molecular piles. When one of these piles reaches a critical point in size, containing perhaps several millions of molecules, it separates into drops, which are called coacervates.

All the proteins that were diffused in the solution now concentrate in these drops, while the surrounding liquid becomes deprived of any. Now these protein coacervate drops, despite their liquid consistence, evidently possess some kind of internal, very elementary organisation. They have a marked ability to absorb different substances from the solution around them. The assimilated substances then begin to interact chemically with the substance of the drops themselves, chiefly with the proteins. In this way observation has shown that rudimentary processes of disintegration and synthesis of various substances are likely to take place in the drops. If by reason of their individual composition and structure, synthesis takes place more rapidly than disintegration under the given conditions of environment, the drops become dynamically stable formations so long as the

62. Ledi Sayādaw, *Niyāma Dīpanī*, p. 56.—Dr. Johnson believed that eels came into existence spontaneously in water.

given conditions exist, and they may not only persist for an indefinite time but can increase in bulk. They thus exhibit the two primary characteristics of life, assimilation and growth, although they have not yet attained the status of living organisms in the technical sense.

Just as in the laboratory tests which have demonstrated these facts, there must have been a time when the proteins or protein-like substances which originated in the water of the earth's primary hydrosphere, had to form these complex coacervates. This in turn had to lead to the origination of a "natural selection" of these individual systems. The present theory as to how this came about rests on the assumption that the primordial waters were a solution of various organic substances and inorganic salts. These materials were absorbed by the coacervate drops and entered into chemical reaction with the substances of the drops, giving rise to the processes of synthesis and disintegration. The efficiency of these parallel processes was determined by the internal organisation of each individual drop. Consequently it was the drops which in the given circumstances of environment were endowed with a certain dynamic stability, on account of which the processes of assimilation and growth were faster than those of disintegration, which were able to exist for any length of time. Those which were not so suitably organised failed to survive for long, and contributed nothing to the future evolution of organic matter. They vanished from the scene, while the drops which had the most perfectly adjusted organisation, their power to absorb fresh elements being in excess of the process of decomposition, continued to grow. They would increase in size until they reached a critical point once more, and then they would divide, forming smaller drops which each went its way, inheriting the basic dynamic stability which had characterised the original drops.

Such appears in outline the manner whereby nonliving matter became changed into rudimentary forms of life. It led ultimately to the origin of protein bodies with a fully organised metabolic system, the first truly living beings to appear on this planet.

Now, this is all very well, but does the mechanistic view explain everything, when it has explained how life could originate abiogenically? Even when we grant that in the remote epoch we are discussing, there probably was an increase in the amount of organised substance and in the number of coacervate

drops in the hydrosphere, and that the organisation of these drops was constantly changing to meet alterations in the environment, with those changes subject always to the rigid control to natural selection, it still seems very doubtful whether life would have evolved beyond the stage of the most perfect adaptability for survival, if there had not been some other factor besides natural selection at work. Man has gone a long way beyond the point at which he became best fitted to survive; his directional trend now is, if anything, towards the acquirement of faculties more likely to lead to self-destruction than to further progress. And it would not be by any means the first time that natural selection had led a species to destruction. Using the case of mankind to illustrate the point it may be arguable that it is when natural selection has reached the stage of perfect adaptability to environment that its effect is to work in reverse, precisely because it is a mechanical, not a purposeful, process. But notwithstanding the powerful arguments in support of this view the fact that in the course of evolution nature produced beings which are not satisfied merely with coming to terms with their environment, but desire satisfactions that have nothing to do with survival—often, in fact, militating against it—introduces a disturbing element into the picture. To ignore it would be to deny the existence of factors in human life that are at least as important as those of growth and procreation. What need of evolution is served, it might be asked, by those qualities which most distinguish man from the lower forms of life? Such qualities as, for example, self-sacrifice, idealism, concern for the welfare of others? Even among certain animals these characteristics, or something approaching them, are not entirely lacking; yet neither in man nor beast do they conform to the pattern of an activity governed only by natural selection. From that point of view they appear as nothing but aberrant forms of behaviour.

More than that in a world of mechanistic principles no cause can be assigned to them that would explain them away as sports of behaviour parallel to the sports of genetics. And a phenomenon without a cause is a fatal flaw in the system. If these are merely a superior form of conditional reflexes on the higher evolutionary rungs we are still under the obligation to discover by what they are conditioned and why these particular conditionings became effective in some individuals but not in others. So far as I am aware, there is no theory which plausibly accounts for them on the lines of evolutionary necessity.

Returning to the Buddhist view of evolution, we find it to be inseparable from the concept of moral order. But the moral order, instead of being imposed from without, as part of a preconceived plan, is something which is inherent in the law of causality. The evolutionary ascent is preceded by a descent of beings whose deterioration led them to birth in grosser material forms. Thus, before the advent of the first unicellular micro-organisms it is said in the Aggañña Sutta that beings from the Brahmā-worlds came to spontaneous birth in planes adjacent to the terrestrial sphere, where they remained for a long time.

(Here the Author's manuscript ends)

15. EXPANDING UNIVERSE AND STEADY-STATES UNIVERSE

The universe visualised by de Sitter is a pulsating system. In this view the entire universe comprising all the galactic systems scattered throughout space, expands during a period of many million years, and, having reached its extreme limit of expansion begins to contract at the same rate. The reason for this, as explained by Eddington, is that two principles operate throughout the universe: the accepted Newtonian attraction between the Milky Way systems, and a principle of cosmological repulsion. The density of matter in the de Sitter universe is extremely low, so that the force of Newtonian attraction may be considered negligible. This being so, the cosmological repulsion operates without hindrance, and the universe expands. If more matter is somehow introduced into the system, the reciprocal gravitational attraction tends to hold the mass together, and counteracts the expansion. As the amount of matter is increased, so the rate of expansion is retarded. If such a process takes place it can reach a point at which the Newtonian attraction between the galaxies is just strong enough to equal the cosmological repulsion, with the result that there is no expansion. This is the world as conceived by Einstein, a balanced system. If still more material is added to the mass, the attraction becomes stronger than the repulsion and the result is a contracting universe. Eddington puts forward a further theory, to the effect that "at one time the system expanded itself to much greater size than it is now, that then it shrank and now again expands. Accordingly it was possible that great velocities were produced by a force directed inwards, whilst the inward velocities were converted to outward velocities and in that way the system was forced to swing through a state of equilibrium" (Quoted by D. Anton Kropatsch (Vienna) in *The Maha Bodhi*, Vol. 70, No. 5, 1962).

Tolman is one of those who favour the hypothesis of successive cycles of expansion and contraction of the universe. This state of things, in his view, is due to variations in the material masses in the universe. But it so happens that we are at present aware only of the passing away of matter, and Tolman's hypothesis seems to require at some stage a creation of fresh matter. It is possible, however, that the radiation dissipated in space somehow transforms itself again into material particles—

that is, into electrons, atoms and molecules—and so matter is “reborn.” Not the same matter, but a force-result (energy-resultant) of matter that has existed previously. These particles would then gather automatically into larger masses, which again through the effect of their own gravitation would become agglomerated into nebulae, suns and finally galactic systems, and in this way the cycles of the universe could go on repeating themselves endlessly. This view receives substantial support from Einstein’s theory of the equilibrium of mass and energy, and in fact experiments have already shown that the photons of the higher radiation energy, such as gamma-rays, can under certain conditions be transformed into pairs of electrons and positrons. It may be that the law of entropy which we see in operation, whereby the final death of the world seems inevitable, is only a section of a much more comprehensive process—the process, in effect, of the death and rebirth of the universe. This view affords a striking correspondence to the doctrine of the death and rebirth of sentient beings as it is understood in Buddhism, for in this model of the universe there is no abiding substance, but only the actual process, as it appears through the cyclic transformations of energy, of recurring situations.

Bertrand Russell in *The Scientific Outlook* joins issue with Eddington and Jeans for professing to see in these theories ground for assuming the operation of a creative principle, and calling it God. In this conflict of scientific minds Buddhism takes a middle and unique course. It finds no reason for presuming an active and intelligent principle behind the process, but maintains that there is an impersonal law which in its manifestations appears to be intelligent because it is intelligible. Because we ourselves are formed in accordance with the laws of causality, and can become capable of understanding them, it must appear to us at a certain stage that there is a mind similar to our own at work in the processes of nature. Because we find much to approve in the orderly working of the universe, and much that appears to have been designed, we are ready to overlook the many ways in which, from the humanistic point of view, it could have been constructed better. And we overlook also the fact that our sense of its design derives from the fact that we ourselves are part of that design, and cannot see it in any other way than that in which it reflects our own nature. In the same way it appears to us that flowers must have been made beautiful for our satisfaction, whereas the truth is that we see flowers as beautiful only because

we ourselves are conditioned to see them in that way. The flower's beauty is part of its functional design; if circumstances had forced it to be different in every way, our sense of the beauty of flowers would be different also. Our aesthetic values are conditioned by the forms of nature, not the other way round. Similarly, when we see beauty in the mathematical laws of the cosmos, it is not because they emanate from a mind similar to our own, but because our minds are formed in accordance with the mathematics of our world.

16. THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN⁶³

Man has always thought of his gods as dwelling on the heights. "Lift up thine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh thine aid," sang the Old Testament psalmist; and in ancient times the holy places, the fanes and altars of sacrifice where the priests went to make their offerings and take counsel with the tribal deities were nearly always on some lofty eminence. In Buddhist countries, too, the stupa or pagoda is given a commanding situation, from whence it dominates the surrounding countryside and can be seen many miles away, the first object to be lit by the rays of dawn and the last to reflect the gold of the setting sun.

It is in the high places that the gods have their abode. Towering, inaccessible peaks seem always to have exercised an awesome fascination over the minds of men. It is little wonder, then, that the holy mountain has been an archetypal feature of mythology from the earliest times: it expresses man's wonder and fear in the presence of unknown powers veiled in cloud and swirling snow-invisible powers that presided over the storm, hurling the shattering thunderbolt down into the trembling valley, or else calmly, silently contemplating the puny affairs of mankind from century to century in a timeless, brooding eternity.

The cosmography of ancient India had its sacred mountain, Meru, sometimes called Sineru, Sumeru, Hemameru or Mahāmeru. It was thought to be situated in the exact centre of the Cakkavāḷa, or world-system, and so north of the southern continent, Jambudīpa. The fact that Meru was located in the north of the system suggests an identification with the Himalayas, and the name Hemameru gives support to this possibility. There can be little doubt that in early times the idea that an immense peak lay beyond the tall, mysterious boundaries of the Himalayan range, which cut off the horizon from the plain-dwellers below, took hold of the imagination, and it was in those high, remote solitudes that the gods of the storm and blizzard—the first nature gods—were believed to have their home. A memory of it may have been preserved by the branch of the Aryan race which travelled westward, giving rise to the Olympus of the Greeks, the abode of Zeus, wielder of the thunderbolt, and all his divine hierarchy. For Hindus, Mount Kailasa, a real Himalayan peak,

63. From *The Maha Bodhi*, vol. 75, No. 7; 1967.

has been a holy place revered for centuries as the seat of Siva and his consort Parvati. Even today it is the resort of *sanyasis* following the tradition of the *rishis* of old who were said to practise their austerities on the lower slopes of Mount Meru. It was with the rise of the Saivite cult that Kailasa gradually came to take a more important place in legend than the Mount Meru of Vedic times. With the advent of Tantra later on, Meru was taken into the yogic systems as a symbol of the spinal column, and an elaborate connection was built up between it and the various *chakras* to exemplify the principle of macrocosm and microcosm. The mystic formula of "As above, so below," familiar to Western occultism through the Kabbala was equally well known to the Tāntrikas, who saw the human body as the universe in miniature and made Meru its vital core. The principle is seen to be really logical when we consider that the atom is a universe on the microcosmic level.

The Buddha was not concerned with teaching geography, and the early Buddhists did nothing to change the ideas prevalent in Vedic India with regard to the conformation of the earth. The existence of Mount Meru was taken literally and a precise description of it was given together with other details of *cakkavāḷa*. According to this cosmology there is an infinite number of *cakkavāḷas*, and each is a closed system having the general features of all the rest. Each *cakkavāḷa* has a Mount Meru as its centre, surrounded by four great continents. With the scrupulous attention to statistics which distinguished the early Buddhists, exact dimensions are given. Mount Meru has its base 84,000 *yojanas* below sea-level and rises above it to the same height—again the principle of "As above, so below." On its summit is situated the Tāvatiṃsa deva-loka, the heaven of the Thirty-three (Gods) under the rulership of Sakka, the Buddhist equivalent of Indra. This is the lowest one of the Kāma-loka heavens. At the base of the mountain lies the Asurabhāvanā, home of the Asuras or Titans, who are perpetually at war with the gods. The Asuras are the "Fallen Angels" of Indian mythology. Just as Yahweh in Judaic tradition is supposed to have cast the archangel Lucifer and his rebellious cohorts out of heaven, after which they became powers of evil, so Indra is said to have thrown the Asuras down from Tāvatiṃsa when they tried to usurp his authority. The two myths are so similar that it is difficult to believe that they had not a common origin or that one was not derived from the other, particularly in view of the fact that both have a parallel in the

Greek myth of Zeus casting Prometheus, leader of the Titans, out of heaven for an offence of the same kind. This would seem to be another of the archetypal myths that have been preserved from prehistoric times. It may have originated in an attempt to explain what man, having a confused recollection of former happiness in a higher state of being, a deva or Brahmā-loka, felt forced to regard as his present fallen state, of which the Genesis legend of the Fall offers another example. On the other hand, the widespread legends of a war in heaven may have had their origin, in an actual physical event, a cosmic disturbance such as that described by Immanuel Velikovsky in "Worlds in Collision."

To complete the geographical description of the earth as it appeared to Vedic Brahmanism and early Buddhism, Meru is surrounded by seven circular and concentric mountain ranges, between which lie the great oceans. Four great islands (*mahādīpa*) of continental size lie at the four cardinal points and midway between the base and summit of Mount Meru and scattered between them are two thousand smaller islands. The outermost ring of mountains is the boundary of the *cakkavāla* and the entire system is said to be supported by water (*āpo*) and ultimately by air (*vāyo*). Later Hindu myths introduced the idea that the earth was upheld by either a tortoise or an elephant, but it seems clear that before the time of the Purāṇas it was not considered necessary that the earth should have any substantial support. The Purāṇas represent a decline of thought into pseudo-realism; they tried to give an account of the situation based upon common observation.

Precise measurements are given for all details of the world-system: the areas of the continents, the extent of the oceans and the respective heights of the encircling mountains are all set down with assurance. The *cakkavāla* itself is represented as being flat and constructed on the principle of a layer-cake, with successive strata of soil, rock, iron etc., one above the other. On the underside is a layer of the nutritive essence (*oja*) which was the first food of material beings when the universe was reconstructed at the beginning of the world-cycle.⁶⁴

Each *cakkavāla* is a complete and self-contained unit, furnished with its own heavens and subhuman spheres of

64. Referred to in the Vinaya, where Mahā Moggallāna Thera is said to have offered to turn the *cakkavāla* upside down so that the bhikkhus could obtain nourishment during a severe famine.

existence. It has its own devas and Brahmās, and they even bear the same names as those of our own world, the names being not so much personal appellatives as the titles belonging to offices and functions. It follows therefore that each world-system also has its own Buddhas. More is made of this point in the Mahāyāna Sutras than in Theravada. References to the infinity of worlds and of Buddhas are very frequent in the literature of Sanskrit Buddhism, and by the same token it contains more allusions to Mount Meru than are to be found in the Pāli Tipiṭaka. The composers of the Mahāyāna Sutras, some five or six centuries after the Parinibbāna of the Buddha, delighted in aggrandising their descriptions by the introduction of innumerable world-systems.

From the isolated condition of each distinct world-system it would seem that beings do not transmigrate from one to another in the course of rebirth. I have not found any text to support the idea that transmigration occurs between one *cakkavāla* and another. When a world-system is destroyed by natural forces at the end of an aeon (*kappa*), all that remains of it is the formless Brahmaloḥa, and it is there that all beings are obliged to be reborn until a new cycle of the development of the universe (*saṃvatti*) takes place.⁶⁵ It appears that beings revolving in saṃsāra are inseparably connected with one particular *cakkavāla*, the history of which is like that of an individual being: that is to say, it is the history of a causal continuum, not of an abiding entity. Just as the individual dies, leaving nothing behind but the potential of his kamma, which in the sequence of cause and effect produces another psycho-physical organism to carry on his identical world-line of conditioned phenomena, so a universe also comes to an end, but in due course another one comes into existence in the same line of cause and effect, through the kamma of the totality of beings belonging to it. Thus every being is in some sense identified with his world-system, and his world-system with him, until such time as he puts an end to the association by attaining Nibbāna.

The cosmography of which Mount Meru is the centre is a very detailed construction, and it is repeated in space and time to infinity. The pattern is unvarying and is known down to its minutest particular. Where and how all this information was obtained must always remain a matter for conjecture. It is disturbing to the modern mind to find the imaginative creations

65. Brahmajāla Sutta etc.

of the past taken for sober truth; but ancient thinkers were not committed to factual accounts. Experience, for them, was something almost entirely subjective, and it is on the subjective and subliminal level that we have to seek out the meaning of this strange geography.

Its most characteristic and striking feature is that uniformity which I have stressed. It bears the marks of an attempt to achieve orderliness within the diversity of experience, to reduce to a comprehensible pattern the contradictions and irrelevancies that confront us and to draw an inferential picture of the laws that govern them. The same kind of striving for geometrical design shows itself in the stylized art of ancient Egypt, in the rigid formalism of the Japanese *No* play to assert the continuity and harmony of life from its lowest to its highest aspects, to disclose an order of reality that is not apparent in the surface phenomena of nature. The need to reveal a structure, or where it seems to be absent to impose it upon the world of experience, is a universal one. Man is not secure in a chaotic world; he demands of the universe that it should make sense. At different times this deep unconscious need has expressed itself in art, mythology, philosophy and science, and often in all of them simultaneously. The Magic Mountain is a symbol, and we are entitled to ask of a symbol nothing more than that it should suggest something which cannot be expressed directly. Man is the image of all that is; he is himself the *cakkavāḷa*, his body made up of the four great elements, his arterial blood the great oceans that course between his vital organs and the encircling bones. And just as Mount Meru stretches from the depths up to heaven, the bridge that makes it possible for every human being to strive towards the highest, so the vital core of man's structure, the great column through which the nerve-impulses flow, unites his being, from the lowest organs up to the seat of consciousness, in one integrated whole. Indeed this fathom-long body contains the world, its origin and its cessation, not in any figurative sense but in literal truth. When the yogin sits in *padmāsana*, his spinal column straight "like coins piled upon one another," his form is that of the cosmos, supported and united by Mount Meru. And when man first adopted the upright posture which distinguishes him from all other animals, it was the outward sign of his power to discriminate and command his life. Mount Meru was set up between heaven and earth, and all things, good and bad, fell into place.

The universe as we know it today has no "up" or "down." Nadir and Zenith have become relative and interchangeable terms, and man has suffered a vertical disorientation. Yet the symbolism of Mount Meru has not lost its validity, if we choose to accept the Values it stands for. And it is well that we should do so, for they are abiding values, with their justification in our own being, irrespective of the view we take of the external world. It does not matter that heaven is beneath as well as above us; the heaven of our own experience is situated outside of space and time and there is no direction where it is or is not. It does not matter that no modern Moses goes up into Mount Sinai to commune with his God, nor that no Zeus hurls his thunderbolts from the summit of Olympus nor Indra from his citadel above the snowline of Hemavant; Mount Meru, the Magic Mountain of legend, is always with us, the eternal challenge to seek, to toil upwards—the call to stand erect and forge our destiny out of the materials and with the tools within our reach,

Each of us has at the centre of his cosmos a mountain that he must eventually climb. The path is steep and rugged, and there is only one—conquest of the self. But when he reaches the summit he can take the final leap that will separate him forever from the world of sense-desires and of suffering. It is only from the loftiest height of human attainment that we can at last see Nibbāna face to face.

17. IS THERE A BEGINNING?⁶⁶

Buddhism does not so much deny the theory of a Creator-God as make the hypothesis not only unnecessary, but actually incompatible with the known facts. If, in order to exist, the world must have had a pre-existent Creator, how did this Creator himself come into existence, and by what laws was his own nature governed? If such a being was able to exist without a creator, the sole reason for assuming his own existence is removed, because the world itself can equally well exist without a prior cause. Can it indeed be said that the universe and the life process had any beginning, or are we constrained to think in the terms of beginnings only because of the limitations of our own mind?

A beginning is an event which has to take place at a specific point of space and time. It cannot occur in timeless void because the three conditions of time—past, present and future—which are necessary for the occurrence of any event, cannot obtain in a timeless state. For any event to take place, there must be the time before its occurrence (past), the time of its occurrence (present) and the time after its occurrence (future). But time is an altogether relative concept: there must be events taking place to enable time to exist, and it is only by the regular occurrence of certain events, such as the diurnal rotation of the earth and the seasonal changes, that can be known and measured.

The occurrence of events necessitates the existence of things. By things we mean objects that occupy space, and which by their movements in relation to one another mark not only divisions in time, but also measurable areas in space. Space and time, therefore, are a unity; a qualitative whole with quantitative parts, or relationships. We may consider them separately, but we cannot make any statements concerning the ones which do not in some way involve the other. This, stated broadly, is the basis of the theory of relativity. The knowledge of space and time depends upon consciousness and position without any fixed point of observation. Spatial and temporal movement is common to both the observer and the object observed, so that what can be known is not a “thing” but merely a relationship.

When this is understood it follows that there could never

66. From *The Young Buddhist*, Year Book of the Buddhist Societies of the University of Singapore and the Singapore Polytechnic, 1968/1969.

have been a beginning—an origin out of nothingness of the universe or the life process. It is true that the universe as we know it evolved out of the dispersed matter of a previous universe, and when it passes away its remains, in the form of active forces, will in time give rise to another universe in exactly the same way. The process is cyclic and continuous. The space-time complex is curved, and in a curved construction of inter-relationships there can be no point of origin or departure, so that in this series of related causes it is useless to look for any First Cause. We tend to look for first causes and think them to be necessary only because our minds are conditioned to spatial and temporal relativity; the mind, by its very nature, must operate within the mechanism of which it is itself a part; it can deal only in relationships. This is why it is said in Buddhist texts: “the origin of phenomena is not discoverable, and the beginning of beings obstructed by ignorance and ensnared by craving is not to be found.”

In the same way that one universe gives rise to another through the residual energy which is continually renewing itself—that is, through the principle of the indestructibility of matter—so the life of one being gives rise to another being which is not the same in identity and without involving an unchanging, permanent self. That which links them is called in Buddhism “*kamma*”, or volitional activity; the continuation of the causal process is called “*saṃsāra*,” or the cycles of rebirth; the actuality of rebirth and of existence without any unchanging principle of identity or self is called “*anattā*.”

When it is said that world cycles or world periods, known in Buddhism as *kappas*, are of immeasurable duration, it must be remembered that all time concepts are relative; we measure them from our own standpoint. In an immeasurably vaster space context, the time context is correspondingly enlarged, so that events covering millions of years by our calculations can be measurable in terms of seconds. The brain may reel at the concept of an infinite of space-time constructions fitting into or impregnating one another endlessly in all directions, but it is not entirely outside the scope of human imagination. It figures quite largely in Buddhist thought; there are an infinite number (conventionally expressed as “ten thousand”, or “incalculable”) world-systems and thirty-one planes of existence having vast differences in time measurement.

What is unthinkable is a state of non-causality where neither space, time nor events have any existence. This has to be

understood by direct perception, which means bursting the bonds of relativity and its concepts and processes, and contacting within oneself the *asaṅkhata* or unconditioned element. The thinking, reasoning and discursive mind, having exhausted its exploration of phenomena and discovered them to be all impermanent and void of essential reality, must transcend this mechanism, call a halt to the generative impulses, and thus bring about final liberation from all processes. This final liberation is called *Nibbāna*.

18. BUDDHISM AND THE ORIGIN OF LIFE⁶⁷

The Buddha did not give any specific teaching regarding the origin of the universe or of life. The question was said to be unanswerable from the level of ordinary mundane intelligence. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya it is said: "The origin of beings revolving in saṃsāra, being cloaked by *avijjā* (ignorance) is undiscoverable." At the same time it is laid down, as a natural consequence of the law of Dependent Origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*) that in the ceaseless cycle of cause and effect there cannot be any link in the sequence that can be designated a first cause. Each effect in its turn becomes a cause, and the beginning is nowhere apparent; it is a closed circle of related conditions, each factor being dependent on the preceding ones.

The early Buddhists, because of this silence on the part of the Buddha, and His unwillingness to attempt the hopeless task of explaining the inexplicable, took their ideas concerning the nature of the universe from the Brahmanical teachings already current in India. These, because of their remarkable correspondence to modern scientific concepts, are well worth examination.

In the first place, it must be realised that the Vedic teachings, because of the lack of technical and scientific knowledge and the necessary vocabulary in which to express such modes of thought, used allegory and symbolism, much of it being of a primitive and animistic kind. The early Buddhists found the concepts of Brahman and Ātman unnecessary and, while adhering in outline to the Brahmanical idea of the universe, they considered it to be self-sustained by laws inherent in its own nature, the whole group of laws being part of the universal law of kamma, or cause and effect. The universe consists of innumerable *cakkavālas* or world systems. These come into being and pass away again in an endless cycle covering periods of millions of years, called *kappas* and *yugas*. The system of chronology is complicated and unthinkably immense, as is the number of inhabited world-systems in this cosmic mechanism. It is unnecessary to go into the divisions of time in detail, but a sufficient indication of their tremendous span can be gained from the fact that a *yuga* is equivalent to several millennia, and that eight of these *yugas*, representing a cycle, makes one small or *antara kappa*. Twenty

67. From *Burma*, Rangoon, Vol. III, No. 1; 1952.

small *kappas* constitute a middle or *asaṅkheyya kappa*, and a full cycle of four middle *kappas* is called a great or *mahā kappa*, which is the largest unit of calculation. Each great *kappa* is the cyclic period of a world-system, during which the entire process of coming into being, existence, decay and destruction is brought into operation. After the destruction of a world-system another immense period of time elapses, at the end of which the process begins over again, the whole being repeated ceaselessly, without beginning or end.

Turning to the Brahmanical theory we find a similar general pattern of events. Vedānta teaches that the cycles of the universe are divided into the "days and nights of Brahmā." In the beginning the whole of the basic material substance of the universe is evenly distributed throughout space. This material substance is called *Prakṛti* (matter) and is to be considered as atomic units in a state of almost complete balance and almost complete inertia. Gradually, over unimaginable aeons of time, a slight movement in this vast ocean of matter gathers impetus and gradually the mass comes to life. In Vedāntic phraseology it is said that *Prakṛti* is animated by *Puruṣa* or Spirit; the Brahman is manifesting through the material substance. This substance becomes differentiated into worlds, and living beings appear. Cosmic evolution then comes into play and the cycle of the universe runs its course, through development and degeneration to decay. When the period of the cycle is completed the universe disintegrates and returns to the same state of undifferentiated material elements as before. Again the process repeats itself, without beginning and without end.

The Buddhist view is much the same, except that, as stated before, in place of the Brahman or any controlling deity Buddhism substitutes the law of cause and effect; one universe or world-system arises from the kamma, or causal genesis, of the one preceding it.

The *Visuddhimagga* summarises the process thus:

*Na h'ettha devo brahmā va
saṃsārass'atthi kāraṇo,
Suddhadhammā pavattanti
Hetusambhārapaccayāti.*

"There is no god or Brahmā who is the creator of this world.

Empty phenomena roll on, all subject to causality."

The astronomers Jeans and Eddington are among those who have attempted some speculation regarding the origin of the universe. Eddington, calculating the recession of the spiral nebulae from the colour changes in the spectrum, has formed the theory that the entire universe is in process of expansion. The countless planets and solar systems comprising it are governed by the law of cosmic attraction and repulsion, which is a law inherent in the nature of matter. It is this law which holds together all the material substance of which the universe is composed, from the smallest atomic units to the largest planet. It is believed that in the course of expansion of the universe one of two things will, eventually, happen: either it will reach its maximum point of expansion and the law of cosmic repulsion will cause the atomic elements to scatter throughout space, or else the law of cosmic attraction will gain the upper hand and the process will be reversed, causing the universe to shrink back on itself. In either case, the ultimate result will probably be the same; that is, the atomic elements will become uniformly distributed throughout space. Eddington has also hazarded the guess that this is the primal state from which the universe first took form, that is to say that his imaginative picture of it before "creation" is very similar to that of the Vedantic and Buddhist conception. Again, we are to imagine the whole of space filled with atoms, electrons and neutrons in an almost perfect state of balance and homogeneity. In this undifferentiated mass there is only a slight movement or vibration, but over incalculable aeons the movement becomes more pronounced as the law of cosmic attraction and repulsion comes into play. Gradually the even distribution of substance forms clots, masses of electronic particles being drawn together, so that in time whirling masses of gaseous matter are formed, and from these emerge what astronomers call the "island universes"—that is to say, systems forming themselves round a central nucleus, like our own solar system. It is obvious that this process, as in the Buddhist system, can be repeat over and over again.

In this way science does away with the need for a creator god, but still it has not explained the origin of the movement in the inert matter, which carries the process forward. Buddhism explains it as being kamma, that is, the principle of the indestructibility of force or energy. The movement is the residuum of activity from the previous universe, which never entirely ceases, though that universe itself has ceased to exist.

When we examine the operation of kamma as it functions in the rebirth of living organisms it becomes possible to relate it to the cosmic process and trace the parallel between the kamma of a sentient being and the kamma of material phenomena.

From this comparison of modern scientific ideas and the teachings of over two thousand years ago it will be seen how strikingly they agree. The question then arises: How was it possible for the sages of that remote period to penetrate the illusion of material substance and find that it was composed of electronic forces, and to form so accurate an idea of the nature of the universe and its processes? The answer can only lie in the belief that they were able to raise their consciousness beyond the sphere of the mundane, through the practise of *jhāna* or meditation. They had no laboratory equipment, no microscopes or telescopes and no mathematical formulae to guide them; and, when they had made their discovery they had no technical language or common basis of knowledge by which to impart their discoveries to others. It would indeed have been hopeless for the Buddha to attempt a description of the nature of the universe on these lines; no one of his time would have been capable of understanding him.

That is why he refused to answer questions concerning the origin of the world or whether it was eternal or not eternal. Had He given an affirmative reply or a negative one to either question it would have been in a sense untrue. The Buddha's reply, in effect, was that such questions were not conducive to release from rebirth; but the implication always remained that the true knowledge could be gained by oneself, through insight, though it could not be imparted to others. The *iddhi*, or so-called "supernatural powers" gained by the Arahats were simply the knowledge of hidden laws of the universe and how to make use of them, but by the Buddha they were regarded as only another and greater obstacle to the attainment of freedom and the quenching of desire.

The law of causality is like an iceberg; only one eighth of it or less is visible above the surface. We observe the effects while remaining ignorant of the causes, just as when we switch on the electric current and the light appears. The scientist Max Planck wrote: "What sense is there, then, it may be asked, in talking of definite causal relations in regard to causes where nobody in the world is capable of tracing their function? The answer to that question is simple. As has been said again and again, the concept

of causality is something transcendental—quite independent of the nature of the researches, and it would be valid if there were no perceiving subject at all ... We must distinguish between the validity of its [application]. This means that even the scientist has to admit causes beyond his comprehension. The Buddha stated: “Whether Buddhas arise or do not arise (to perceive and reveal the Law) the law of causality, the principle of the dependence of this upon that, the causal sequence of events, remains a fixed and unalterable law.”

“The concept of causality is something transcendental.” This is a significant phrase indeed, coming from a scientist. It is just in this transcendental concept of the causal law that Buddhism establishes the moral principle of kamma. The materialist rejects the idea of God and Soul; and because he sees no evidence of a spiritual or other purpose in life, he rejects all belief in the moral order of the universe as well. Buddhism also is independent of a theistic creator and of a soul or ego principle, but Buddhism maintains the validity of the moral law. Buddhism admits the infinite multiplicity of worlds and the apparent insignificance of man—yet man is the most significant of all beings, according to Buddhism, man is of more significance than the gods. Why is this? Because the gods are merely enjoying temporarily the results of good actions in the past, but man is the master of his own destiny—on the battlefield of his own mind he can conquer the ten thousand world-systems and put an end to saṃsāra, just as did the Buddha. But to do this he must understand the nature of kamma. The principle that governs his internal and external world.

According to the *Aṅguttaranikāya*,⁶⁸ to believe that the cause of happiness or misery is God, Chance or Fate, leads to inaction. Our spiritual evolution depends upon ourselves and ourselves alone. If there is any force behind the moral laws, any exercise of free-will in the choice between good and evil, right and wrong, it stands to reason that there must be the possibility of advancing or degenerating, evolution. If progress upwards were a mechanical process and a foregone conclusion, there would be no point in any freedom of choice in a world of opposites.

The nineteenth-century Darwinists believed that the course of biological evolution represented a steady upward progression

68. The Threes, No. 61; translated in *Aṅguttara Nikāya, an Anthology, Part I*, (The Wheel No. 155/158), p. 43.

from rudimentary to complex forms of life, and hence from primitive social structures to higher states of civilization. On this too-facile assumption, with its essentially materialistic basis, they built up an edifice of optimistic belief in the destiny of mankind. It was thought that humanity itself would automatically improve with the increase of knowledge, and perhaps evolve into a yet higher species. Later knowledge showed that their supposition was fundamentally false; they did not at that time know enough about the processes of natural selection or the history of the various links in the biological chain. Evolution, we now know, does not move consistently upwards nor, as Karl Marx postulated, in an ascending spiral. It progresses in waves, and the currents produced by it are continually changing direction, often turning back to their point of origin. Some species improve, while others degenerate and disappear. Evolution may be depicted on a graph as a succession of ascending and descending curves, but its most representative form is that of a circle. Whatever steady upward movement there may be is more an individual movement than a collective one. It is essentially the individual that evolves, and the illusion of collective evolution follows upon the appearance of groups (e.g., the human species) whose individual members have reached a certain level of being with sufficient uniformity to constitute a type. This comes about through the operation of incalculable factors in their past personal history, which science does not take into account because they are not normally open to scientific investigation. Those unknown factors are the karmas, or activities, which relate man's being to the moral principles of the universe.

If it were true that evolution takes place solely on a physical basis and is consistently progressive, all human beings at any specific stage would display uniform characteristics; it is only by taking the individualist and spiritual view that we can explain the appearance of a Buddha, or, indeed of any lesser leader who has shown himself to be far in advance of his contemporaries.

The analogy of a wave or ripple, travelling in a circle, is perhaps the best symbol of the individual evolutionary current. Just as in biological evolution there are advances and recessions, successes and failures, so in spiritual evolution the individual sometimes rises and sometimes falls. There is no stability and no constant direction to his course. Because of his actions he may take birth as a human being, only to fall from that relatively high estate to become once more an animal. This is what the Buddha

called “drifting in the ocean of saṃsāra” and those who see the processes of biological evolution also as a purposeless, meaningless drifting, can trace a close correspondence between the manifested material laws and the invisible spiritual ones that motivate them. The materialist who declares that life has no ultimate purpose is making a safe deduction from the evidence available to him. In the material sense it has no purpose, and can never arrive at a state of perfection. But he is only considering the material aspect of life and ignoring its spiritual undercurrents, which are in reality the true determining factors behind phenomenal appearances. It is to those that we have to turn when we seek for a meaning and objective in our mundane existence. Knowledge—or rather, *paññā*—gives us sight of the goal and the means of attaining it. We do not find the meaning of life within the circle of evolutionary Processes, but outside it.

The astronomer Jeans has voiced the spirit of modern scientific logic in his conclusion that the more we come to know of the universe and its Workings, the more surely are we driven to the belief that it is in some way the manifestation of thought, or of some kind of mental process comparable to our own. Where other scientists quarrel with his view is on the ground that it appears to savour of a return to the discarded idea of a personal creator-god. It is precisely here that Buddhism bridges the gulf between religious and scientific thought. For Buddhism, while endorsing the view that the ultimate basis of the universe is mind, does not require a god, or any external agency, to provide that mind. The processes of the evolving (*saṃvatta*) and devolving (*vivatta*) universe are carried on by the mental activities of the sentient beings that are a part of it. It is this mind-force, not that of any god, that causes the physical universe to materialise and go through the stages of growth, decay and dissolution.

The starting-point of all mental and bodily activities is craving—the *taṇhā* of Buddhist philosophy. In the lowest grades of evolution this craving is supreme, and there it means cravings of purely sensual and material kind. The individual evolves spiritually by rising above these, but at any stage of his progress he is liable to become possessed once more by the lower forms of craving, and so may sink down again. As a human being he becomes a battleground in which the lower cravings struggle against higher ones, represented by cravings that we may class as intellectual, aesthetic or even spiritual. When the higher cravings triumph we call it in modern parlance “sublimation,” but this

sublimation is merely the replacement of grosser cravings by more intellectualised ones. To put an end to the aimless drifting in saṃsāra, even these sublimated cravings must be abandoned. They are called *rūpa-rāga* and *arūpa-rāga*—desire for life in the worlds of form and in the formless, purely intellectualised spheres. For example, the artist who has sublimated his lower instincts into an aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of nature and the human form, provided he has lived in accordance with moral laws (which sublimation enables him to do), is likely to re-manifest in the sphere of the *rūpa deva-lokas*, where beauty of form is the characteristic quality. But a philosopher, or ascetic who has sublimated his instincts into a love of abstract thought, meditation or any such activity divorced from material contexts, qualifies himself for rebirth in the *arūpa brahmā-lokas* where existence is non-material and consists purely of zones of mental force. This is the highest type of evolutionary existence in saṃsāra, in which craving is reduced to its lowest ebb and most etherealised form; yet, because craving is still present, the being who has attained this condition may still continue to drift in the currents of saṃsāra. Complete release from the cycle of existence only comes with destruction of craving and the ego-delusion. This is Nibbāna.

From the foregoing account of the physical universe as it is viewed by Buddhism and modern science—that is, as a cyclic process extending over unimaginable aeons—we see that it is incorrect to equate the beginning of life with the beginning of the earth, the solar system or even this particular universe. The question still remains in what way did life originate, however far back in time its beginning may have been?

Science does not provide any solution. It puts forward a tentative theory that sentient life appeared on this earth through a technical process combined with the action of cosmic rays and the heat of the sun. But this is only a theory, and may well be modified, though it is interesting to note in passing that the Buddhist doctrine that living beings appeared through the action of *tejo* (kinetic energy) combined with *utu* (*utuja* meaning arisen from seasonable circumstances and physical law of causation), offers a similar explanation so far as mundane life is concerned. This, in any case, only carries speculation back to the beginning of life on this planet, but the actual origin we seek is the beginning of life from a point where there was no preceding cause, and this cannot be found.

Theistic religion also fails to answer the question. In ascribing the origin of living creatures to a Creator-god it still leaves unanswered the problem of how and why the god himself came into being. If a god can exist, though uncreated, there is no reason why the other phenomena of the universe should not exist without having been created also.

The actual truth is that the idea of the necessity for creation or, in other words, the search for a beginning of the causal process, springs from the limitations of the human mind, which can only conceive phenomenal things in their arising, decay and dissolution. In the circle of causal links there is no First Cause. The universe could not have been created out of nothingness because in a condition of void, empty of phenomena and events, there could be no pro-existence of time. As a concept, time can only exist in relation to physical bodies and their movements in space; this is the basis of Einstein's "space-time continuum." It is apparent, therefore, that time could not have existed prior to the existence of the physical universe on which it depends. But, for an act of creation to take place, there must be time already in existence because creation requires the three phases of time; i. e., past (before the thing created came into being), present (the phase of its momentary existence) and future (the time of its continued existence and ultimate cessation). Without the existence of time in these three phases there could not be any point at which a thing not existing previously could come into being. And without the physical universe there cannot be any concept of time unrelated to change, spatial movement or events. All human reasoning ends in a paradox because it follows the periphery of a circle, the sphere embracing time, space and phenomena. All that reason can do is to show that the process of saṃsāra is without any discoverable beginning and that a first cause, in the sense in which we understand it, is not only unnecessary, but impossible. The truth can only be gained by Insight, in accordance with the teachings of the Exalted Buddha, which means rising above the realm of relative and conditioned factors. That point being gained, it will be found that there is no answer to the problem, but that the problem never existed, save as an illusory product of ignorance (*avijjā*).

19. DIVINE CREATION OR LAWFUL GENESIS?⁶⁹

No matter what might be said against the age we live in, no one could deny that it is an exciting one. Perhaps never before in history has there been so much to stimulate the imagination with vistas of new knowledge, fresh discovery and penetration into the unknown. It is as though the sealed book of the universe had suddenly, in a few short years, been broken open and its pages were being turned over rapidly before our eyes.

Who could have guessed, fifty years ago, that we should now be on the verge of sending the first explorers to the moon? Or that already travel into even deeper regions of space, beyond our solar system, was being seriously contemplated? The practical difficulties are being solved one by one. Even now, space travel on a large scale is theoretically possible.

Leaving aside space exploration, and confining ourselves to the surface of the earth, there are prospects of thrilling discovery just round the corner. Bio-chemistry is almost, it would seem, on the point of revealing the nature of life itself—that is to say, of finding out just how it came about that inert matter became transformed into living organisms. The mystery that has baffled mankind for thousands of years may not perhaps remain a mystery very much longer. Scientists have succeeded in isolating the most rudimentary forms of life, in the shape of micro-organisms that lie on the borderline between organic and inorganic matter, and all that remains to be done is to find out exactly what chemical or nuclear changes take place to effect the transformation. It has been claimed already that experiments have resulted in artificially producing cells which display the chief characteristic of living matter, the ability to grow, out of non-living substances.

To thoughtful people this is a far more striking and significant advance in knowledge than any connected with the conquest of space. Direct observation of different forms and stages of life on other planets might give opportunities for empirical study such as we do not have on earth, where life in its various forms is well established and fixed in definite patterns, but it will still be a long time before such observations at close

69. An uncompleted essay. Title supplied by the Editor.

quarters can be made, and there is no need to wait. It may be that we can reproduce the beginnings of evolution with the materials to hand. The experiments that are being carried out in our laboratories at the present time give us plenty to think about.

In the first place, we already know enough to have exploded, once for all, a myth that has dominated religious thought in the West for centuries. That is, the belief that life is a supernatural faculty divinely bestowed, and that man is a special creation. It was always taken for granted, even after Darwin, that living creatures owed their existence to a Creator, a higher being who fashioned them and infused them with the vital principle. Most people saw no other way in which, at least originally, it could have come about. It was the chief argument for the reality of God; he was thought to be necessary on account of his function as creator. Man, it was argued, might be able to make tables and chairs, jet-propelled aircraft and even television apparatus, but he could not make a living being—not even a worm. That was a thing which only God could do. Therefore God must exist. It was as simple as that—at least in the popular mind, though Christian theologians always felt it necessary to search for other reasons as well.

What has finally done away with this idea is the knowledge we now have that life arises as the consequence of certain natural processes, beginning with properties already inherent in the cosmos. To prove it, scientists are trying to reproduce the right conditions by which these processes are brought into operation, and by all accounts they seem to be meeting with success.

But before we go any further, it is essential to get one thing straight. In what they are doing, the scientists are not creating life. They are merely bringing about, artificially, the situations in which, all the factors being present, living organisms inevitably come into being. The distinction is an important one, as I propose to show. What the experiments have confirmed so far is our dawning realization that there is nothing supernatural about the arising of living creatures. They are not created out of nothing by divine command. They are the result of nature's chemistry; they grow and develop in accordance with nature's laws.

Here, it may seem, there is another loophole for God. If God did not create life, in the sense hitherto believed, can it not be said that he created the laws by which life comes into being? If God did not, who did?

This puts the question right back at its starting-point. For if God himself is a living, willing and acting being, there must be laws by which he himself lives, wills and acts; and those laws must have been in existence prior to God. He could not have created and established the laws of nature before he existed himself.

Let us see in more detail what is meant by that. I am sitting at my typewriter reluctantly hammering out this article. In doing so I am making use of a number of very complicated movements, both mental and physical. To begin with, ideas are presenting themselves to my mind, and certain areas of my brain are functioning in response to the stimuli they receive. One idea serves to introduce a host of others, from among which certain ideas are retained whilst others have to be rejected, as being irrelevant or leading to unprofitable side-issues. This cerebral activity is all being carried out because there are natural laws by which the human brain works, and these laws existed before my brain existed. There is, for instance, the law which governs the causal association of ideas, and so regulates the continuity of thought. That is a psychological law; there are others that preside over the purely physical changes in the brain cells. Then from my brain impulses are being conveyed like signals through nerve channels to my arms, hands and fingers. Again, this neural energy functions strictly according to physiological laws—that is, laws which govern the body as an integrated whole. These laws are the same for your body as for mine; in a slightly different form they are the same laws for the body of an animal. And as laws they certainly existed before my body, or yours or the animal's. Had they not done so there could be no means whereby my body, or yours or the animal's, could carry out any actions whatsoever.

It is clear, then, that if God is a living being, willing and acting in any manner, he must from the beginning have done so because there were already laws, mental and physical, which enabled him to do so. In other words, the laws must have preceded God; he could not have created them.

So there is, after all, no loophole here for God. We are back again at natural law, which could not have been created by anyone, since the very act of creation needs some law by which it can be performed.

But, the theologian will object, this is a very anthropomorphic conception of God, and the idea of him as a kind of super-human being is no longer held.

Very well; but behind every theistic religion, no matter how carefully concealed, there is the idea of a personal God—bodiless, maybe, yet still having the mental properties of personality, a being in every important respect like ourselves. It cannot be otherwise, for if God is stripped of all personality he becomes nothing but natural law, mere abstraction. It is only an anthropomorphic God, a God in the likeness of man, that can be loved, worshipped and endowed with moral qualities. Only a God who has personality can have love, pity and concern for human beings. These are mental qualities; in the language of psychology they are personality-traits. One cannot love the law of gravity, or the force fields of nuclear physics. As H. G. Wells pointed out, unless God is a person he is nothing at all.

If the scientist is able to produce living cells in a test tube, it might be supposed by some people that the scientist has become God. There is in fact a growing tendency to look upon the science laboratory as a temple. But to follow out the analogy we must regard the scientist not as God but as a High Priest. Of what? Of natural law. He is the interpreter, the revealer and the adept of natural law. He strives to master its secrets so that he can manipulate it. Thus he is also the priestly intermediary between man and the natural laws which are above, within and around him; he, the scientist, seeks to use these laws to man's advantage and to protect man from the consequences of misusing them.

But the scientist is still himself man. He cannot usurp the functions of God as a creator because, as we have seen, even God cannot perform such functions. Whilst the scientist can legitimately hope to understand natural law, he cannot hope to alter it. Whatever effects he may be able to produce must potentially be already in existence, and must have been so always, because they are effects which cannot be brought about independently of natural law.

When a sculptor carves a block of marble he releases from it a form that was already potentially in it, together with an infinite number of other possible forms. So it is with the scientist; the block of marble out of which he conjures his various results is the universal natural law, or aggregate of laws, which contained within themselves the potentiality that he has been instrumental in realizing. He can no more create a new set of natural laws than the sculptor can create or fundamentally alter the nature of his medium, the block of stone. The scientist, like the sculptor, has always to respect the material with which he works. Only in that

way can he get good results, or any results at all.

The real object of knowledge, therefore, is not the thing produced, but the laws that condition its production. We are on the way towards understanding the origin of life on this planet by studying the laws of its nature, the patterns of causality that regulate its moment to moment existence. In those laws its past, present and future are all contained, just as in a seed there is not only its present condition but the tree that produced it and the tree it will become.

But what, precisely, is meant by a law? In nature the word stands for a causal process, a continuity of events that, given all the constituents, could not have proceeded differently. Much confusion has been brought about by thinking of natural law in terms of legal enactments. It is probably this which has befogged the issue, making it appear that a God was necessary to formulate the laws of the universe. In reality, law is identical with the nature of phenomena; a thing is what it is because of its nature. Here the Pali word *dhammatā* expresses the idea better than any other. *Dhammatā* means just this identification of a thing or condition with the natural order to which it belongs. Everything observable has its own *dhammatā*, its own place in the pattern of causal continuity, and its own mode of being. And this peculiar and irreversible condition governs it throughout the innumerable stages between its arising and its passing away. The leaf, from green and moist, becomes yellow and shrivels up, until it is brown and dry, after which it disintegrates. Everything that constitutes it changes—or rather, one state succeeds another, with nothing remaining to identify one state with another except their causal dependence upon one another—but its *dhammatā*, the characteristic and inevitable nature of its processes, is a part of it, the only constant part, from first to last.

Whilst the bio-chemists are trying to manufacture living cells, the physicists are making their own contribution to the study of life. They have made electronic devices which after a fashion react to stimulus in the same way as do living organisms. The electronic tortoise is one example of this; it is a machine so constructed that it has a variety of responses to meet different situations. This is made possible by the principle called 'negative feed-back' by which, when one response is insufficient or unsuitable to meet the requirements of the action to be carried out, another, different, response is substituted by compensation. Basically, the principle is the same as that employed in

thermostatic control of temperatures. The reactions thus produced correspond so closely to those of living organisms that the machine seems to have a kind of will. It appears to choose what actions it shall perform. In reality, of course, there is no free choice; what actually happens is that out of a large but limited number of possible responses, one is brought about because it is the inevitable result of a particular combination of causes. It is therefore fully predictable. But the similarity between this and human and animal reactions is so striking that it suggests (1) that they too are nothing more than highly complicated electronic machines, and (2) that their freedom to act is as illusory as that of the mechanical tortoise. Both the machine and the animal, it is thought, are wholly dominated by causal necessity; they respond to external influences as they have been conditioned to do by their built-in range of possible actions. The theory is certainly one that has to be taken seriously if for no other reason than that it gives powerful support to the already substantial evidence in favour of mechanistic determinism. We shall need to examine its philosophical implications more closely later on.

For the present, let us turn back to the cell-tissue which is, according to reports, absorbing nourishment and developing along the lines of organic life in the scientist's test-tube. Let us go a little further than the biologists themselves and suppose that a living, sentient organism of a rudimentary kind has been produced artificially. We have already seen how this situation affects the theory of a creator-god; let us now take a look at it from the Buddhist viewpoint.

One of the cardinal doctrines of Buddhism is that of dependent origination: All phenomena in the universe, seen and unseen, arise through the combination and interaction of causes. Of these causes, some are visible—the purely physical causes—and others are invisible. The latter are the psychological causes, of which we see the results but cannot see the forces which bring them about. These forces, nevertheless, are not in any sense supernatural; they are as much a natural part of the causally-regulated universe as are the physical processes. Buddhist dependent origination* or 'arising by way of condition', may be called a closed system, in that it has no alternate beginning and needs no external support. It is a self-sustaining process, not subject to the boundaries of the space-time complex and therefore needing no point of origination. To ask when it began is to pose a question as irrelevant as that of how it began. Since it contains

within itself the principle of pure duration, which is time itself, manifested in change, it does not require any external time in which to locate a beginning: To introduce a God, or a first cause in any shape, would be like putting an extra wheel into an already perfect piece of mechanism. It would only jam up the works.

It follows from this that the life which began on this earth, or in this universe, was not the first life to be manifested. No matter how the present universe may have begun there were other universes before it and they too evolved sentient life, which ran its course and disappeared with them. It is quite immaterial whether the theory of the pulsating universe or that of the steady-state cosmos is true; the principle of cyclic continuity holds good for either. Whatever exists must have had an antecedent cause, of the same general nature as itself.

So when we are considering the origin of life on our planet we are not thinking of the first appearance of something that never existed before. We are dealing, instead, with an isolated section of a process continuous in relation to space and time. A process, in fact, without which space-time itself could not exist.⁷⁰

70. Here the manuscript ends.—Ed.

20. BUDDHIST MEDITATION

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 tranquillize 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. 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 whom he already knows; the Hindu visualizes the gods of the Hindu pantheon, and so on. When Sri Rāmakrishna Paramahansa, the Bengali mystic, began to turn his thoughts towards Christianity, he saw visions of Jesus in his meditations, in place of his former eidetic images of the Hindu Avatars.

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 existence, 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, 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 recognize 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* (ignorance) conjoined with and reacting upon *taṇhā* (desire). These two causes form a vicious circle; on the one hand, concepts, the result of ignorance, and on the other hand, 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. *Saññāvipallāsa*, hallucination of perception, *citta-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*, *ghaṇa*, *jīvā*, *kāya* and *mano* (*āyatana*). 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 more than an intellectual understanding of this truth, to liberate ourselves from the delusion and thereby put an end to both 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 psychopathology.

In the Buddha's great discourse on the practice of mindfulness, the *Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, 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 elements (*mahābhūta*), 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" (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*)? 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 this is true in Buddhist psychology, because the man *is* his actions. In the truest sense they, or the continuity of kamma and *vipāka* (consequence) 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

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 (*ekaggata*, 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.

In the first place he is without fear. Fear arises because we associate mind and body (*rūpanāma-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 realizing that the five *khandha* 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.

Ānāpānasati

One of the most universally-applicable methods of cultivating mental concentration is *ānāpānasati*, 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 at the tip of 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 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 stabilized. It is the first direct experience of the *dukkha* (suffering) which is inherent in all phenomena—the realization within oneself of the first of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Truth of Suffering *Dukkha Ariya Sacca*. 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.

Devices in Meditation

In *kammaṭṭhāna* (mediation exercises), it is permissible to use certain devices, such as an earth or colour *kaṣiṇa* (disc), as focal points for the attention. A candle flame, a hole in the wall, or some metal object can also be used, and the method of using them is found in the Pali texts and the *Visuddhi-magga*. In the texts themselves it is to be noted that the Buddha gave objects of meditation to disciples in accordance with their individual characteristics, and his unerring knowledge of the right technique for each one came from his insight into their previous births. Similarly with recursive 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, or the “cemetery meditation.” Here the aim is to counterbalance attraction by repulsion, but it is only a “skilful means” to reach the final state, in which both attraction and repulsion cease to exist. In

the arahant, there is neither liking nor disliking: he regards all things with perfect equanimity, as did Thera Mahā Moggallāna when he accepted a handful of rice from a leper.

Beads

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 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 Pali formula of the qualities of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, beginning “*Iti pi so Bhagavā*” with the first bead, starting again with the second and adding the next quality: “*Iti pi so Bhagavā, Arahaṇ*” 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 Sangha 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), *ṭhiti* (static) and *bhaṅga* (disappearing) phases. Each of these wholesome *cittakkhaṇa* 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

Samatha bhāvanā, the development of mental tranquillity with concentration, is accompanied by three benefits: happiness in the present life, a favourable rebirth, and the freedom from mental defilements that is a prerequisite for attainment of insight. 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, an aspect 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 image can calm and pacify a mind distraught with worldly hopes and fears. It is the certain and visible assurance of Nibbāna.

Vipassanā Bhāvanā

Vipassanā bhāvanā is realization 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 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 perception and sensory-responses remains 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 becomes actual knowledge, in precisely the same way that we “know” when we are hot or cold, hungry or thirsty. The mind that has attained this knowledge is established in the Dhamma, and *pañña*, 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*, the basic moral rules, 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* .

The Practice of *Mettā Bhāvanā*

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.

The classic formulation of *mettā* as an attitude of mind to be developed by meditation is found in the Karaṇīyametta Sutta [see Appendix]. It is recommended that this sutta be recited before beginning meditation, and again at its close, a practice which is invariably followed in the Buddhist countries. The verses of the sutta embody the highest concept to which the thought of loving-kindness can reach, and it serves both as a means of self-protection against unwholesome mental states and as a subject of contemplation (*kammaṅgahāna*).

It is taught in Buddhism that the cultivation of benevolence must begin with oneself. There is a profound psychological truth in this, for no one who hates or despises himself consciously or unconsciously can feel true loving-kindness for others. To each of

us the self is the nearest object; if one's attitude towards oneself is not a wholesome one, the spring of love is poisoned at its source. This does not mean that we should build up an idealized picture of ourselves as an object of admiration, but that, while being fully aware of our faults and deficiencies, we should not condemn but resolve to improve ourselves and cherish confidence in our ability to do so.

Mettā bhāvanā, therefore, begins with the thought: "May I be free from enmity; may I be free from ill-will; may I be rid of suffering; may I be happy."

This thought having been developed, the next stage is to apply it in exactly the same form and to the same degree, to someone for whom one has naturally a feeling of friendship.

In so doing, two points must be observed: the object should be a living person, and should not be one of the opposite sex. The second prohibition is to guard against the feeling of *mettā* turning into its "near enemy," sensuality. Those whose sensual leanings have a different orientation must vary the rule to suit their own needs.

When the thought of *mettā* has been developed towards a friend, the next object should be someone towards whom one has no marked feelings of like or dislike. Lastly, the thought of *mettā* is to be turned towards someone who is hostile. It is here that difficulties arise. They are to be expected, and the meditator must be prepared to meet and wrestle with them. To this end, several techniques are described in the *Visuddhimagga* and elsewhere. The first is to think of the hostile personality in terms of *anattā*—impersonality. The meditator is advised to analyse the hostile personality into its impersonal components—the body, the feelings, the perceptions, the volitional formations and the consciousness. The body, to begin with, consists of purely material items: hair of the head, hair of the body, skin, nails, teeth and so on. There can be no basis for enmity against these. The feelings, perceptions, volitional formations and consciousness are all transitory phenomena, interdependent, conditioned and bound up with suffering. They are *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, impermanent, fraught with suffering and void of selfhood. There is no more individual personality in them than there is in the physical body itself. So towards them, likewise, there can be no real ground for enmity.

If this approach should prove to be not altogether effective, there are others in which emotionally counteractive states of

mind are brought into play, as for example regarding the hostile person with compassion. The meditator should reflect: "As he (or she) is, so am I. As I am, so is he. We are both bound to the inexorable Wheel of Life by ignorance and craving. Both of us are subject to the law of cause and effect, and whatever evil we do, for that we must suffer. Why then should I blame or call anyone my enemy? Rather should I purify my mind and wish that he may do the same, so that both of us may be freed from suffering."

If this thought is dwelt upon and fully comprehended, feelings of hostility will be cast out. When the thought of loving-kindness is exactly the same, in quality and degree, for all these four objects—oneself, one's friend, the person toward whom one is neutral, and the enemy—the meditation has been successful.

The next stage is to widen and extend it. This process is a threefold one: suffusing *mettā* without limitation, suffusing it with limitation, and suffusing it in all of the ten directions, east, west, north, south, the intermediate points, above and below.

In suffusing *mettā* without limitation (*anodhiso-pharaṇa*), the meditator thinks of the objects of loving-kindness under five headings: all sentient beings; all things that have life; all beings that have come into existence; all that have personality; all that have assumed individual being. For each of these groups separately he formulates the thought: "May they be free from enmity; may they be free from ill will; may they be rid of suffering; may they be happy." For example, he will specify the particular group which he is suffusing with *mettā* as: "May all sentient beings be free from enmity, etc... May all things that have life be free from enmity, etc." This meditation embraces all without particular reference to locality, and so is called "suffusing without limitation."

In suffusing *mettā* with limitation (*odhiso-pharaṇa*), there are seven groups which form the objects of the meditation. They are: all females; all males; all noble ones (those who have attained any one of the states of sainthood); all imperfect ones; all devas; all human beings; all beings in states of woe. Each of the groups should be meditated upon as described above: "May all females be free from enmity, etc." This method is called "suffusing *mettā* with limitation" because it defines the groups according to their nature and condition.

Suffusing with *mettā* all beings in the ten directions is carried out in the same way. Directing his mind towards the east, the meditator concentrates on the thought: "May all beings in the

east be free from enmity; may they be free from ill will; may they be rid of suffering; may they be happy!" And so with the beings in the west, the north, the south, the north-east, south-west, north-west, south-east, above and below.

Lastly, each of the twelve groups belonging to the unlimited and limited suffusions of *mettā* can be dealt with separately for each of the ten directions, using the appropriate formulas.

It is taught that each of these twenty-two modes of practicing *mettā bhāvanā* is capable of being developed up to the stage of *appanā-samādhi*, that is, the concentration which leads to a *jhāna*, or mental absorption. For this reason it is described as the method for attaining release of the mind through *mettā* (*mettā cetovimutti*). It is the first of the Four Brahmavihāras, the sublime states of which the Buddha says in the Karaṇīyametta Sutta: "*Brahmaṃ etaṃ vihāram idhamāhu*"—"This is divine abiding here, they say."

Mettā, karuṇā, mudita, upekkhā—loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and detachment—these four states of mind represent the highest levels of mundane consciousness [see Nyanaponika Thera, *The Four Sublime States*, Wheel No. 6]. One who has attained to them and dwells in them is impervious to the ills of life. Like a god he moves and acts in undisturbed serenity, armoured against the blows of fate and the uncertainty of worldly conditions. And the first of them to be cultivated is *mettā*, because it is through boundless love that the mind gains its first taste of liberation.

21. BUDDHIST MENTAL THERAPY

It has been estimated that one out of every four persons in the world's great cities today is in need of psychiatric treatment, which is equivalent to saying that the percentage of neurotics in present-day civilisation runs well into two figures.

This high incidence of personality disorders is believed to be a new phenomenon, and various factors have been adduced to account for it, all of them typical features of modern urban life. The sense of insecurity arising from material economic discord; the feeling of instability engendered by excessive competition in commerce and industry, with booms, slumps, redundancy and unemployment; the fear of nuclear war; the striving to "keep up" socially and financially with others; the disparity between different income levels combined with a general desire to adopt the manner of life of more privileged groups; sexual repression which is at the same time accompanied by continual erotic titillation from films, books and the exploitation of sex in commercial advertising — all these and a host of subsidiary phenomena are characteristic of our age. As a disturbing influence not least among them is the need to feel personally important in a civilisation which denies importance to all but few.

Each of these factors is doubtless a potential cause of psychological unbalance. Taken all together they may well be expected to produce personality maladjustments of a more or less disabling nature, particularly in the great capitals where the pressures of modern life are felt most acutely. The widespread emotional unbalance among the younger generation which has developed into an international cult with its own mythology and folklore and its own archetypal figures symbolic of the "beat generation" seems to substantiate the belief that we are living in an era of psychoneurosis.

Yet it is necessary to review this startling picture with caution. We have no statistical means of judging whether people of former days were less subject to neuroses than those of the present. The evidence of history does not entirely bear out the assumption. Patterns of living change radically, but human nature and its themes remain fairly constant in the mass. When Shakespeare, in the robust and full-blooded Elizabethan era, drew his picture of neurosis in Hamlet he was drawing from models that had been familiar from classical times and could

doubtless be matched among his contemporaries. Greek and Roman history records many outstanding cases of behaviour which we now recognise as psychotic, while the Middle Ages abounded in symptoms of mass neurosis amounting to hysteria. The fear of witchcraft that held all Europe in its grip for three centuries was a neurosis so prevalent that it constituted a norm, while almost the same may be said of the more extravagant forms of religious behaviourism characteristic of that and later periods. The extraordinary Children's Crusade of 1212, when thousands of children from France and Germany set out on foot to conquer the Holy Land for Christendom, and never returned, is one example. Here the influence of a prevailing idea on young and emotionally unstable minds is comparable to the international climate of thought which in our own day has produced the "beat generation."

There is no strict line of demarcation between a religious ecstasy and a nihilistic expression of revolt, as we may learn from Dostoyevsky, himself a neurotic of no mean stature. The private mystique of the neurotic may be caught up in the larger world of mass neurotic fantasy, where it adds its contribution to a world that is apart from that of its particular age but which reflects it as in the distortions of a dream. Because of this, the neurotic is often found to be the spokesman and prophet of his generation. Modern communication has made this more than ever possible, creating a mental climate of tremendous power that knows no barriers and can only with difficulty be kept within the bounds of the prevailing norm. Adolph Hitler turned a large section of German youth into psychopaths, first because his personal neurosis found a response in theirs, and then because he was able to communicate it to them directly by means of radio, newspapers and other modern media of propaganda. At the same time, the unstable personality of the neuropath drew support and an intensification of its subliminal urges from the response it evoked in countless people who had never come into personal contact with the source. The real danger of neurosis today is its increased communicability; people are in contact with one another more than they have ever been before. The tendency to standardize, undesirable in itself, has the further disadvantage that it too often results in the wrong standards being accepted. Epidemic diseases of the mind are more to be feared than those of the body.

But those who are inclined to believe that personality disorders are a phenomenon of recent growth may draw comfort

from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. There we have a compendium of cases of individual and collective neuroses gathered from all ages, showing every variety of hallucinatory and compulsive behaviour ranging from mild eccentricity to complete alienation from reality classed as insanity. Psychopathic degeneration, criminality, alcoholism, suicidal and homicidal tendencies are as old as the history of mankind.

Nor is there any real evidence that people living in simpler and more primitive societies are less prone to psychological disturbances than those of modern urban communities. The rural areas of any European country can show their proportion of neurotics in real life no less than in fiction, while in those parts of the world least touched by Western civilisation the symptoms of mental sickness among indigenous peoples are very common, and are prone to take extreme forms. Where an inherent tendency to confuse the world of reality with that of dreams and imagination is worked upon by superstitious fears, morbid neurotic reactions are a frequent result. The psychosomatic sickness produced by the witch-doctor's curse, which so often culminates in death, is even more common than are the mentally-induced diseases of the West that are its counterpart.

In one respect primitive societies are superior to those of today, and that is in the preservation of initiation ceremonies. These give the adolescent the necessary sense of importance and of "belonging"; they serve as tests which justify the place in tribal life that the initiate is to take up. By their severity they satisfy the initiate that he is worthy. Initiation rites have survived to some extent in the boisterous "ragging" given to new arrivals in most institutions for the young, but they have no official sanction and do not confer any acknowledged status. To be psychologically effective an initiation ceremony must be either religious or in some way demonstrative of the new manhood or womanhood of the initiate. It then dispels feelings of inferiority and the self-doubtings which are a frequent cause of neurosis, and sometimes of delinquent behaviour in young people. Primitive societies, however, have their own peculiar cause of mental disturbance and it is a mistake to suppose that they are superior in this context to more sophisticated social structures.

More attention is given to minor psychological maladjustments today than in former times. Departures from the normal standards of behaviour are more noticeable in civilised than in primitive societies. The instinct to run to the psychiatrist's

couch has become a part of contemporary mores. It is true that modern life produces unnatural nervous stresses; but strain and conflict are a part of the experience of living, in any conditions. There has been merely a shifting of points of tension. The more man is artificially protected from the dangers surrounding primitive peoples, the more sensitive he becomes to minor irritants; yet man in a completely safe environment and free from all causes for anxiety—if that were more than theoretically possible—would be supremely bored, and boredom itself is a cause of neurosis.

Human beings can be psychologically as well as physically overprotected. As the civilised man falls a prey to psychological conflicts brought about by situations which are much less truly anxiety-producing than those that menace the lives of primitive peoples every day. Habituated by education and example to expect more of life than the human situation gives him any reason to expect, the modern man feels the impact of forces hostile to these expectations more keenly than he need do. Modern commercial civilisation is continually fostering and propagating desires which all men cannot satisfy equally and desire, artificially stimulated only to meet with frustration as a prime cause of psychological disorders. Herein lies the chief difference between our own and former eras. There is a need for periods of true relaxation which many people deny themselves in their desire to be continually entertained.

The systematic study of abnormal psychology began with the work of J.M. Charcot in 1862. The advent of psychoanalysis closely followed, bringing the subject of personality disorders into prominence. Then came a breaking down of distinctions formerly made between normal and abnormal psychology. The two became merged in what is now called dynamic psychology. It was found that the obsessions and compulsions of neurosis are not something distinct from the ordinary modes of behaviour but are only extreme and sharply-defined forms of the prejudices and habit patterns of the "normal" person. In defining abnormality it has become the custom to place the line of demarcation simply at the point where the extreme symptoms make some form of treatment necessary for the person who deviates persistently from the average standards of his group. Thus "normal" and "abnormal" are purely relative terms whose only point of comparison is that provided by the generally-accepted habit patterns of a particular group. If the group itself is collectively

abnormal its units must be considered “normal,” with the result that we are compelled to make a reinterpretation of what is meant by these terms of reference.

All behaviour is a form of adjustment, and this is true equally of behaviour that is socially acceptable (the “norm”) or socially unacceptable. It is really the active response of a living organism to some stimulus or some situation which acts upon it. The ways in which certain persons deviate from normal standards in behaviour are nothing but individual ways of meeting and adjusting to situations. This new way of regarding the problem is of the utmost importance, particularly when we come to examine the Buddhist system of psychology. In Buddhism, all modes of consciousness are seen as responses to sensory stimuli, and these responses are conditioned by the predetermining factors from past volition. For example, where one person sees an object and is attracted to it, whilst another is repelled by the same object, the cause is to be found in mental biases set up in the past: All reactions, furthermore, are conditioned by a universal misapprehension of the real nature of the object as it is cognised through the senses.

There is therefore a common denominator of misunderstanding which takes the form of collective delusion; it constructs the world of sensory apperceptions and values out of the abstract world of forces which is the actuality of physics. Where there is in reality nothing but processes and events, an ever-changing flux of energies, the mind construes a world of things and personalities. In this world the human consciousness moves selectively, clinging to this, rejecting that, according to personal preferences of habit and prior self-conditioning. The dominating factors known to Buddhism as *avijjā* (nescience), *moha* (delusion) or *vipallāsa* (misapprehension) are a condition of mental disorder, a hallucinatory state. The Pali axiom *sabbe puthujjanā ummattakā*,⁷¹ “all worldlings are deranged,” indicates the whole purpose of Buddhism is to apply mental therapy to a condition which, accepted as the norm, is in truth nothing but a state of universal delusion.

The *puthujjana* or “worldling” who is thus described is the average man; that is, all human beings except those who have entered on the four stages of purification, the *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer), *sakadāgāmi* (once-returner), *anāgāmi* (non-returner) and

71. *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā*.

arahant (saint). The *puthujjana* is characterised by mental reactions of craving for states which are impermanent, subject to suffering, devoid of reality and inherently impure. These he wrongly imagines to be permanent, productive of happiness, invested with self-existence and pleasurable. His hankering for them is accompanied by mental biases (*āsavas*), mind-defiling passions (*kilesa*) and psychological fetters (*samyojana*), which in Buddhism are seen as the root causes of wrong action and consequent unhappiness. What we call the “norm” is an average balance of these mental factors and their opposites, in exactly the same way that a state of normal physical health is merely the “balance of power” between the various classes of bacteria in the body. If one class of bacteria gains ascendancy over the others it begins to have a destructive effect on the living tissues, and a state of disease supervenes. Psychologically, an increase in any one of the mental defilements constitutes the change over from a normal to an abnormal psychology. Since all “worldlings” are deranged, what we are concerned with in dynamic psychology is the degree of derangement and its underlying causes. This is the case also in Buddhist psychology.

Freudian psychoanalysis works on the assumption that when the origin of a personality disorder is known its influence on unconscious motivation will automatically disappear. Freud endeavoured to trace all psychic traumas to experiences in infancy or early childhood, and made the libido the basis of his system. His work opened up many hitherto unsuspected areas of personality and made a great contribution to our knowledge of the subject. But the defects of Freud’s theories can be understood in terms of his system, for he tended to exaggerate certain motives unduly, and in deliberately searching for these he worked on a method of personal selectivity that was bound to become apparent to Jung and others among his successors. His therapeutic methods may also be questioned, for the conflicts engendered by unconscious motivation do not always cease when the original cause of the trauma is brought to the surface. For this and other reasons psychotherapy has not so far produced the benefits which were once expected of it. In many cases the most it can do is to enable the subject to come to terms with himself and “live with” his condition. The limited nature of its success is indicated by the need to resort to physical treatment for cases that have passed from neurosis to psychosis, such as electroconvulsive therapy for acute depressive moods, insulin

injections for the early stages of schizophrenia, frontal lobotomy for prolonged anxiety states and the use of the class of drugs known as tranquillizers which act upon the vegetative interneurotic circuits of the brain.

In contrast to the expedients of Western psychiatry, Buddhist mental therapy aims at total integration of the personality on a higher level. Since craving is the root cause of suffering it is necessary to diminish, and finally extinguish, craving. But desire is also the mainspring of volition, so the first stage of the process must be the substitution of higher objectives for the motivations of the libido and their offshoots. The libido-actuated urges must give place to the consciously-directed motives of the *adhicitta* or higher mind. It is here that Buddhism introduces a point of reference which Western psychotherapy has been unable to fit comfortably into its theories—the field of ethical values.

The discarding of many conventional and religious moral attitudes, on grounds they are for the most part contingent and arbitrary, has left the psychologist without ethical determinants in certain important areas of his work. Whilst accepting as the norm the standards of contemporary life he has not been able to work out any universal basis on which what is “right” and what is “wrong” in some aspects of human conduct can be established. The defect has been a serious handicap in the treatment of anti-social and delinquent behaviour. The psychiatrist confronted with examples of deviationist and unacceptable behaviour finds himself unable to decide on what authority he is setting up as the “norm” a standard which he knows to be mostly a product of environment and social convenience. Clinical diagnoses and moral judgements do not always point in the same direction.

Buddhist ethical-psychology cuts through the problem by asserting boldly the measure of immoral behaviour is simply the degree to which it is dominated by craving and the delusion of selfhood. This at once gives an absolute standard and an unchanging point of reference. It is when the ego-assertive instinct overrides conventional inhibitions that behaviour becomes immoral and therefore unacceptable; it is when the over-sensitive ego fears contact with reality that it retreats into a fantasy of its own devising. The neurotic creates his own private world of myth with its core in his own ego, and around this revolve delusions of grandeur, of persecution or of anxiety. Neurosis then passes imperceptibly into psychosis. The ordinary

man also, impelled by ego-assertiveness and the desire for self-gratification, is continually in danger of slipping across the undefined border between normal and abnormal behaviour. He is held in check only by the inhibitions imposed by training. The attainment of complete mental health requires the gradual shedding of the delusions centred in the ego; and it begins with the analytical understanding that the ego itself is a delusion. Therefore the first of the fetters to be cast away is *sakkāyadit̥ṭhi*, the illusion of an enduring ego-principle.

The doctrine of non-self (*anattā*) is a cardinal tenet of Buddhism and the one that distinguishes it from all other religious systems, including Hindu Yoga. Ever since the time of Aristotle the "soul," the *pneuma* or *animus* which is supposed to enter the body at birth and permeate its substance, has been taken as the entelechy of being in Western thought. Buddhism denies the existence of any such entity, and modern psychology and scientific philosophy confirm this view. Everything we know concerning states of consciousness can be postulated without reference to any persisting ego-principle. Like the body, the mind is a succession of states, a causally-conditioned continuum whose factors are sensation, perception, volition and consciousness. Introspective examination of the states of the mind in order to realise this truth is one of the exercises recommended in Buddhism.⁷²

Understanding Buddhist principles of impermanence, of suffering (as being the product of craving) and of non-ego brings about a re-orientation of mind characterised by greater detachment, psychological stability and moral awareness. But Buddhism points out this is not an effect which can be obtained by external means; it is the result of effort, beginning with and sustained by the exercise of will. First of all there must be the desire to put an end to suffering, and that desire must be properly canalised into *sammappadhāna*, the Four Great Exertions; that is, the effort to eliminate existing unwholesome states of mind; to prevent the arising of new unwholesome states; to develop new wholesome states and to maintain them when they have arisen. The unwholesome states of mind are nothing but products of mental sickness that derive from the ego and its repressed desires.

72. This is part of Satipaṭṭhāna on which see *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera (BPS) and *The Wheel* No. 18; 60; 121/122.

Here it should be pointed out Buddhist teaching is non-violent, and non-violence is to be exercised towards one's own mind as well as towards the external world. To repress natural desires is merely to force them below the surface of consciousness where they are liable to grow into morbid, obsessions, breaking out in hysteria or manic depressive symptoms. Buddhism does not favour this rough treatment of the psyche, which has produced so many undesirable results in Western monasticism. Instead of repression Buddhism works by attenuation and sublimation. Visualising the passions as fire, Buddhism seeks to extinguish them by withholding the fuel. For example, sensuality is reduced in stages by contemplation of the displeasing aspects of the body so there comes a turning away from the sources of physical passion. Attraction is replaced by repulsion, and this finally gives way to a state of calm indifference. Each impure state of mind is counteracted by its opposite.

Techniques of meditation (*bhāvanā*) in Buddhism are designed for specific ends according to the personality of the meditator and the traits necessary to eliminate. They are prescribed by the teacher just as treatment is given by a psychiatrist; the mode of treatment is selected with the requirements of the individual patient in view. The forty subjects of meditation, known as *kammaṭṭhāna* (bases of action), cover every type of psychological need and every possible combination of types. Their salutary action is cumulative and progressive from the first stages to the ultimate achievement. From the beginning, the Buddhist system of self-training makes a radical readjustment within the mental processes, a readjustment which is founded on the acceptance of certain essential concepts that differ from those ordinarily held. The old scale of values, with its emphasis on the cultivation of desires, is seen to be false and a source of unhappiness; but this realisation does not result in a psychic vacuum. As the old, unwholesome ideas are discarded, new and invigorating ones take their place, while the lower motivations give place to consciously-directed impulses on the higher levels of being. So the personality is moulded anew by introspective self-knowledge.

One defect of psychoanalysis as practised in the West is that it often reveals ugly aspects of the personality before the patient is ready to accept them. This sometimes has highly undesirable side effects and may even cause disintegration of the personality. The Buddhist system of mental analysis teaches us to confront

every revealed motivation in a spirit of detached and objective contemplation in the knowledge there is nothing "unnatural" in nature, but that an impulse which is "natural" is not necessarily also desirable. The Buddhist who has brought himself to think in terms of the kinship of all living organisms, a concept inherent in the doctrine of rebirth, is not appalled by the coming to light of subconscious desires that are contrary to those permitted in his particular social environment.

The distinction between human and animal conduct, which science has done much to prove illusory, is not sharply defined in Buddhist thought, where all life is seen as the product of craving-impulses manifesting now on the human, now on the animal level. Where sadistic or masochistic impulses exist they are viewed realistically and with detachment as residual factors of past motivation, and they can be dealt with accordingly. Terms such as "perversion," already obsolete in modern psychology although they survive in popular writing and speech, have never existed in Buddhist thought. All Buddhism recognises is craving and its various objects and degrees. Because of this, the moral climate of Buddhist thought as it concerns libidinal impulses and inclinations is different from that of the West with its Judeo-Christian discriminations.

The distinction that this craving is "good" while that is "bad" is foreign to Buddhism, for Buddhism is not concerned with the morality of fluctuating social conventions but with a concept of mental hygiene in which all craving is seen as a source of misery, to be first controlled and then eradicated. Thus, although its ultimate ideals are higher, the rational morality of Buddhism as it still operates in many Buddhist communities is not so destructive in its effects as the discriminative theological morality prevailing in the West. No Buddhist feels himself to be a "lost soul" or an outcast from society because his desire-objects are different from those of the majority, unless his ideas have been tainted with Judeo-Christian influences. The Western psychiatrist who seeks to reassure a patient whom he cannot "cure" suffers from the disadvantage that he has the whole body of theological popular morality against him and nothing can remove this devastating knowledge from his patient's mind. Hence we find that guilt and inferiority complexes, a dangerous source of psychological maladjustment, are certainly more prevalent, coming from this particular cause, than they are where standards common to the antique world still survive.

The three unwholesome roots of conduct, greed, hatred and delusion, are nourished by unhealthy thoughts that arise spontaneously in association with memories of past experiences. The mind also absorbs a great deal of poison from its environment. Through the channels of sense perception there is continual exposure to suggestions from the outside world. This, together with the natural desire to conform to the behaviour patterns and ways of thinking characteristic of one's particular generation or society, brings an almost compulsive pressure to bear upon the individual. The norms of primitive societies are directed towards conformity with the laws of the tribe, enforcing respect for taboo and inter-tribal relations; but in the complex civilisations of today, disruptive influences that deny or at least weaken the traditional patterns of behaviour, often bringing them into contempt, are gathering force and momentum. An increasing part is being played in this process by the media of mass entertainment.

It would be well if more attention were to be paid by present-day moralists to the cult of violence that has arisen as the outcome of commercially-exploited sadism in films, popular literature and "comics" which give children and adolescents a morbid taste for the torture and extermination of their fellow-beings. Aggression is another instinct natural to man, but to encourage it for profit is certainly one of the true sins against humanity. Here again, of course, we have nothing entirely new; cruelty is a prominent feature of many traditional and classic stories for children. What is new is the enormous quantity of such entertainment and the facility with which it is distributed on a global scale to create an international climate of thought and a subconscious reversal of all the standards that civilisation nominally upholds. We should not feel surprised at the psychological dichotomy it produces. Sooner or later we shall again have to pay heavily for the cult of outrage we have encouraged.

This however is a question of social psychology; we are now dealing with individual psychology as it is affected by modern conditions and in the light of the Buddhist axiom, *Sabbe puthujjanā ummattakā*. We have already noted the four stages of mental purification beyond the *puthujjana* state begin with the attainment of *sotāpatti-magga*, the "path" of one who has "entered the stream" of emancipation. This is followed immediately by *sotāpatti-phala*, the "fruit of stream winning." It is at this point the erstwhile *puthujjana* becomes one of the four (or eight) classes of Noble Persons. In the scheme of the ten *saṃyojanas* (fetters) he has

eliminated the first three fetters: ego-delusion, doubt as to the truth, and addiction to vain rituals which have no place in the higher endeavour. He then goes on to the next stage, that of the *sakadāgāmi*. This is marked by the weakening of the next two fetters in the series: sensuous passion and ill-will.

In the next phase of development he completely frees himself from these first five, which are called the "lower fetters." The remaining five fetters are attachment to existence on the higher levels of being (intellectualised existence), craving for existence on the purely mental plane (the spiritual life freed from the body), pride (the "pride of the saint in his sainthood"), restlessness (the perturbed condition of the mind distracted by desires) and nescience. The last of these is the root-condition referred to previously; it is only eliminated in full at the last stage. The aspirant has then gained the full mental liberation of an Arahant. While the mental and bodily formations continue to function he experiences *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*, or Nibbāna with the elements of existence still present: At death this becomes *an-upādisesa-nibbāna* or *parinibbāna*, the complete extinction of the life-asserting, life-sustaining factors. No form of Nibbāna can be attained before this last stage; the three classes of Noble Personalities that precede it gain assurance of the reality of Nibbāna but they do not experience the actual *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna* until all the defilements are removed.

It is not the purpose of this article to deal with the state of Nibbāna, but merely to indicate the difference between the condition of the "worldling" with his illusions and cravings, and that of the fully-emancipated and mentally healthy being. Buddhism itself is concerned more with the path than with the end, since it is the path which has to be followed, and the end must automatically reveal itself if the path is followed rightly. It is true the goal Nibbāna is never very far from Buddhist thought; it is the motivating principle and *raison d'être* of the entire Buddhist system.

But the stages on the way are our immediate concern. They involve an approach which is fundamentally therapeutic and progressive. Buddhist meditation is of two types, complementary to each other: *samatha-bhāvanā*, the cultivation of tranquillity, and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, the cultivation of direct transcendental insight. For the latter it is necessary to have a teacher, one who has himself taken the full course of treatment, but much benefit can be obtained by an intelligent application of Buddhist ideas in the

preliminary stages without a guide other than the original teachings of the Buddha. Everyone can, and should, avoid what he knows to be unwholesome states of mind, should cultivate universal benevolence in the systematic Buddhist manner, should endeavour to impress on his deepest consciousness the truths of impermanence, life-suffering and its cause, and the unreality of the ego. A period of quiet meditation, in which the mind is withdrawn from externals, ought to be set aside every day for the purpose. By this method Buddhism enables every man to be his own psychiatrist, and avoids those dependences on others which so often produce further emotional entanglements in the relationship between the psychotherapist and patient.

Any philosophy of life which does not include rebirth must be incomplete and morally unsatisfactory, and the same is true of psychological systems. Some psychological disorders have their origin in past lives: they are then often congenital and sometimes involve the physical structure of the brain or neural system. These are the psycho-somatic conditions which call for the use of surgery, drugs and the other physical treatments already mentioned. As resultants of past kamma they may respond to treatment or they may not; all depends upon the balance of good and bad kamma and the interaction of causes, not excluding external and material ones. But in any case, the knowledge that no condition is permanent, and the certainty that the disorder will come to an end with the exhaustion of the bad kamma result, be it in this life or another, gives courage and fortitude to the sufferer.

By understanding our condition we are able to master it, or at least to endure it until it passes away. This salutary understanding can also be applied beneficially in the case of those who have developed personality disorders through bad environmental influences, childhood traumas or any other cause traceable in this preset life. Feelings of inadequacy, grievances against the family or social framework, emotional maladjustments can all be understood in terms of kamma and rebirth. The question "Why has this thing happened to me?" with the sense of injustice that comes from experiencing undeserved pain, is answered fully and logically by Buddhism. With that comes the beginning of an adjustment to circumstances which is in itself therapeutic. Together with this, the knowledge one can be the sole and undisputed master of one's own future fate comes as the most effective psychological tonic and corrective that can be administered.

22. BUDDHIST LAY ETHICS

The life of the Buddhist layman is, or should be, regulated by the five precepts. These constitute the minimal requirements for ethical day-to-day living, to be of benefit both to the individual and to the community. All effort towards higher spiritual achievement must begin with virtue (*sīla*), for without virtue mental concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*pañña*) are not attainable. And without the self-discipline that *sīla* inculcates, civilised life is not possible.

Aside from these obvious truths, the five principles of moral conduct were laid down by the Buddha, the supreme physician, for another reason also. They are to serve as a prophylactic against unwholesome kamma and the misery that results from it; they are the basic rules of mental and spiritual hygiene.

Observance of the precepts is a form of insurance against the risk of rebirth in states of greater suffering, a danger that is always present unless strenuous efforts are made to overcome the taints (*āsava*) and defilements (*kilesa*). Every human being born into this world has in his character an accumulation of unwholesome tendencies from the greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*) of the past, mixed with good ones, for if he were free from the craving, antagonisms and ignorance that accompany the illusion of selfhood he would not have been reborn in this or any other sphere. He has to maintain a constant vigilance against these harmful qualities, whose greatest menace is directed towards himself.

Virtue does not develop automatically; it calls for diligent cultivation, sustained by self-analysis and unwavering self-discipline. In the *kāmāvacara-bhūmi*, the realm of sense-desires, there is a natural bias towards self-gratification. It takes many forms, some of them highly deceptive so that we are often victims of the disease to a greater extent than we realise. For this reason it has to be resisted, not spasmodically but all the time, as gravity must be resisted when climbing uphill. Descent is easy and rapid, but ascent is always toilsome and slow.

We do not lack reminders of the inexorable nature of cause and effect, the universal law, for we see evidence of it everywhere. All around us people are suffering the results of their unwholesome kamma of the past. They expiate it in disease, poverty, deformity, mental deficiency, frustration of their efforts

and countless other kinds of misfortunes. There is no truth more obvious than that *dukkha* predominates in life, heavily outweighing man's gleams of momentary and fragile happiness. The happiest man cannot say when misfortune will strike him, or what form it will take; and neither wealth, position nor skill can avail to ward it off. Yet men, even though they have been taught the moral law by a Supreme Buddha, still recklessly pursue their wilful ends, as though intoxicated—which indeed they are. They are intoxicated by craving for sense-pleasures and by the mental defilements which, like the flow of impurity from a suppurating wound (the *āsavas*), work like a poison in the bloodstream, driving them madly on, oblivious of danger.

Just as flies swarm round a jar of honey, crawling to their doom over the bodies of other flies already caught in the alluring trap of death, so men disregard the warning signs given by the suffering of others they see all about them, and are drawn into the same trap by their craving for sense-gratification and the evil courses into which it too often leads them. Like the flies, they see their fellows suffering for their folly, yet they go on to the same end, regardless of the inevitable result. And just as the flies crawl over the struggling bodies of other flies already trapped, so men themselves often go to their doom trampling on the prostrate bodies of their fellow men. This is the grim picture the world presents, a fit subject for compassion. We may look in vain for any evidence of a merciful deity in this amoral wilderness; its creator is ignorance, and its ruler, desire. If it were not for *sīla*, the pitiless jungle law would prevail everywhere.

The Five Precepts of the layman, as distinct from the augmented Eight and Ten Precepts to be observed on Uposatha Days, are meant to be followed by Buddhists at all times, the object being to establish a habit-formation of virtuous and restrained conduct, in opposition to the unwholesome tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion that form a part of human nature and the ego-assertive instinct. Thus they serve a dual purpose, being at once a barrier to unwholesome mental impulses and deeds, protecting one who observes them from generating bad kamma for which he would have to suffer in the future, and a necessary purification to make clear the way for wisdom, insight and ultimate liberation from the round of births and deaths.

From this it naturally follows that the regular observance of the Five Precepts is more beneficial than the occasional observance of the Eight or Ten Uposatha Day vows. The extra

precepts added to make up the eight or ten are not ethical rules but vows of a mildly ascetic nature whose purpose is to subdue the senses and strengthen the will. In daily life, it is the moral principles involved in the Five Precepts which, colouring all our associations with other people, go to build up a consistently moral character. More sustained effort is required to keep the Five Precepts all the time than to keep eight or ten on special occasions. It is a mistake to assume, as some people seem to do, that the strict observance of Uposatha Day vows will compensate for a life that is spent, on the whole, in disregard of the five basic precepts. Ideally, both should be observed; but if a choice is to be made it should be in favour of the more difficult task, that of following the rules of disciplined conduct at all times and in all circumstances.

When moral restraint is regarded as psychological treatment, as it is in Buddhism, there is no excuse for allowing it to degenerate into a once-a-week or once-a-fortnight practice—a pious formality carried out as a kind of magic ritual to win the favour of some supposed god, and to ensure good fortune. It is a mental health regimen, and as such must be followed daily, just as one follows the rules of physical hygiene. If human society could develop an ethic that by common consent led people to regard the man who regularly breaks these five basic rules of morality as they regard one who does not bathe, clean his teeth or change his dirty clothes, we should be on the way to evolving a perfect civilisation. Unfortunately, this is far from being the case. In modern society, physical impurities are not tolerated but many impurities of character and conduct are not only tolerated but are actually encouraged. The man who boasts of his conquests with women is not condemned—except by husbands whose marriages he has broken up; and society holds out no particular sanctions against gambling and drunkenness. Lying is accepted as a necessary device from the highest diplomatic circles down to the sphere of the petty shopkeeper who adjusts his prices to the appearance of his customer; while killing is considered a virtue in hunting, fishing and shooting circles; perhaps the only virtue that they recognise. As for theft, if it is done on a large enough scale and successfully, it is considered highly respectable. So, while *sīla* is a necessary part of civilised living, it is interpreted with great elasticity in practice, according to the mores of the particular group in question. While most people subscribe to certain abstract principles, there is no general agreement as to what

constitutes the fundamentals of right conduct in specific details. The conventions of society, therefore, offer no reliable guide to one who is seeking universal principles. On the contrary, they have often led to a great deal of confusion.

The English philosopher Hobbes saw man as a being motivated in all his actions by the desire for self-gratification; even the exercise of charity he attributed to this self-regarding urge. Repulsive though this view may appear at first sight, it has never been seriously challenged. All religions tacitly acknowledge it when they hold out hope of rewards for virtue, and the Buddha expressly declared that a man's first duty is towards himself:

"Let one not neglect one's own good for that of others, however great it may be. One should pursue one's own good, knowing it well."

Dhammapada, v. 166

In Buddhism, one's own good coincides with the good of mankind as a whole, for the Buddha's Teaching was always directed towards the ultimate good of attaining the selfless and therefore desireless state. Those who mistakenly see their own "good" in the gratification of their desires at the expense of others are *bāla*, fools in the realm of morality, and *andhabāla*, mentally blind fools in respect to their own spiritual welfare. In the Buddha's discourses the fool always signifies one who is immoral; that is to say, impure in thought, word and deed. "That man in this very world destroys his own roots" (*yo naro ... idhevam eso lokasmiṃ mūlaṃ khanati attano*, Dhṃp 247). There is no mistaking the powerful emphasis the Buddha laid on the admonition: here, in this very world, the fool destroys himself by his misdeeds.

In view of this, the question whether ethical behaviour is to be considered a means to an end, or the end itself, vanishes. Considered solely as an end, moral activation may be often unsatisfactory in that it fails to produce immediate results in the form of an improvement in worldly conditions or a happier subjective experience; but viewed as a method of attaining supramundane states, it justifies itself both as end and means. In a world that is apparently without moral purpose, the rationalist concept of ethics as a code of conduct to be followed solely for the satisfaction it brings and without any expectation of results, lacks the force that is required to make it universally acceptable. As a way of life unsupported by any solid religious structure or frame

of defined principles, it is scarcely even relevant to the human situation, since notions of what constitutes moral conduct have varied widely from age to age and in different parts of the globe. How weak is the simply humanist foundation of ethics in a sceptical and materialistic world is shown clearly by the decline in human standards that we see taking place where religion has lost its hold on the people. There is a weakness also in the fact that in most instances law itself derives its authority from religion, and divine authority has too often been called upon to justify man's acts of selfishness and barbarity. But on the whole, the moral sanctions of religion have provided a sound guide for the development of civilised values. At least, no better has yet been found.

The rules laid down by the Buddha differ from those that characterize the theocratic laws of other religions in that they do not demand any obedience to an unseen, unknown deity, nor do they include any observances of a purely formal, ritualistic and non-ethical type. Whereas other codes lay down prohibitions concerning food, and even in some instances clothing, which may have been useful in certain places at certain periods but cannot be universally adopted and serve no purpose outside the historical context in which they were formulated, the precepts of Buddhism contain only one item dealing with a man's treatment of his own body, and that is a perfectly rational and universal one, the vow to abstain from intoxicants and drugs. The use of intoxicating liquor and stupefying narcotics is the only way in which moral character can be affected by what is taken in by the mouth; so, while elsewhere the Buddha specified for his monks ten kinds of animal flesh (e.g. snakes, elephants, etc) as being unsuitable for consumption, dietary prohibitions form no part of the Five Precepts and are not to be considered in any sense mandatory.

Another fact that renders the Buddhist precepts unique is that they do not make impossible psychological demands. Faith cannot be produced to order, yet many religious commandments literally order the devotee to have faith in what cannot be proved. They also command him to love his fellow-men. Like faith, love cannot be conjured up by command, and Buddhism recognises this truth. *Metta*, or universal benevolence, has to be cultivated systematically; it is no more possible to produce it instantly by willing than it is to grow a new limb. A psychological reorientation away from "self" is necessary before the perfection of loving-kindness, which is one of the *brahma-vihāras*, can be realised.

As exercises in moral restraint, the Five Precepts are necessarily expressed in negative form. The intention is to tell the devotee what he should avoid doing. They are concerned with outward behaviour while the exercises in mental development (*bhāvanā*) are concerned with the development of subjective states tending to the attainment of insight wisdom. While *sīla* (virtue) is essential to the practice of *bhāvanā*, *bhāvanā* itself fortifies *sīla*; the two are mutually-supporting, and grow side by side. It is as this growth takes place that the positive side of the precepts asserts itself. From the negative vow to refrain from taking life there emerges the positive and active principle of benevolence towards all sentient beings. In time it becomes impossible to break any of the precepts because the will to do so has perished. It fades out from inanition, having no ego-craving on which to subsist.

It is sometimes argued that the first precept to abstain from taking life is a counsel of perfection that cannot be followed in its entirety. Man's existence on earth is subject to the same laws of survival as obtain in the animal realm where it is a question of "kill or be killed." Human beings do not have to fight for existence continually as do the animals, yet if many creatures inimical to man were not destroyed, human life itself would eventually disappear from the planet.

This objection is based on a misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of the Precepts. They are not commandments; they originated as advice on the course of conduct most favourable to the production of good kamma, and are taken voluntarily as vows, with this end in view. The follower of the Buddha is invited to make a choice between the "good" of expediency, which often turns out to be an ethical cul-de-sac, and the highest moral and spiritual good, which is certain and undeviating in its results. The householder who has property and worldly interests to guard, and who owes a duty to society and its laws in return for the protection it affords him, may not always find it possible to observe the first precept. He is in that position because his desire for possessions and family ties has placed him in it. Having made that particular choice he has also chosen to risk whatever consequences may come of it. The dilemmas that confront him at every turn are of his own making. So long as he remains in that position, the only course he can adopt is to minimise as far as possible the need to perform unwholesome actions. There are many ways in which he can do this, the first being to ensure that he engages only in undertakings that do not cause moral

confusion (*anākulā ca kammantā*) and supports himself by work of a pure and blameless character (*anavajjāni kammāni*). This comes under Right Livelihood in the Noble Eightfold Path. If this is not sufficient and he aims at the highest moral perfection, he may renounce all worldly responsibilities and connections and enter the Sangha. There he is free to pursue the highest good, unfettered by the demands of mundane life. It was for this purpose that the Buddhist Sangha was established, and so long as it remains there is a refuge for those who wish to shun evil in all its aspects. The standards of perfection in Buddhist ethics do not make them impossible as some have believed. It is an ideal that can be actualized.

The Buddha did not lay down laws for the conduct of human affairs in any but a strictly personal sense. He gave advice to rulers, as he did to ordinary householders, but did not attempt to formulate principles of state policy, as some religious teachers, with varying success, have attempted to do. His Teaching was for those who wish to liberate themselves from *saṃsāra*, not those who desire to improve its conditions. Nevertheless, those teachings, pointing to a goal beyond conditioned existence, have an application in the world of practical affairs. Nibbāna may be an individual, not a collective goal, but the path to it, followed by the individual for his own highest good, has beneficial repercussions on the whole of society. Every man or woman who observes the five precepts and conscientiously tries to follow the Noble Eightfold Path, makes it easier for someone else to do the same. One who works for his own highest good confers blessings on all mankind.

23. THE PLACE OF ANIMALS IN BUDDHISM

In an article on evolutionary ethics, Sir John Arthur Thomson, Regius Professor of Natural History, Aberdeen University, makes the striking observation that "Animals may not be ethical, but they are often virtuous."

If this opinion had been expressed by a Buddhist writer, it might have met with scepticism from those who hold "commonsense" practical views on the nature of animals. Perhaps it would have met with even more incredulity from those whose religion teaches them to regard man as a special creation, the only being with a "soul" and therefore the only one capable of noble and disinterested action. Scientific evidence that man differs from the animals in the quality of his faculties, but not in essential kind, has not yet broken down the age-old religious idea of man's god-bestowed uniqueness and superiority. In the minds of most people there is still an unbridgeable gulf between the animal world and the human. It is a view that is both convenient and flattering to *Homo sapiens*, and so will die hard, if it dies at all, in the popular mind. To be quite fair to theistic religious ideas, the anthropocentric bias is just as strong among people who are pleased to call themselves rationalists as it is among the religiously orthodox.

But Prof. Thomson's verdict is that of an unbiased scientific observer and student of behaviour and must command respect. Furthermore, most open-minded people who have been in close contact with animals would endorse it. The full implication of his statement lies in the distinction between the "ethical" and the "virtuous," a distinction that is not always understood. Ethical conduct is that which follows a code of moral rules and is aware, to some extent, of an intelligible principle underlying them. It is the result of a course of training in social values, many of which are artificial in the sense that they have no connection with any standards but the purely relative and adventitious ones that govern communal life. Virtue, on the other hand, is rooted more deeply. It expresses itself in instinctive and unanalysable conduct; its values are personal and seem to flow from levels of awareness that behaviouristic soundings cannot plumb. This is the source from which spring ethically uncalled-for acts of kindness, self-abnegation and heroism, prompted by a primal and spontaneous urge of love.

It is not an ethical sense that makes the female animal defend her young with her life, or a dog remain with its unconscious master in a burning house rather than save itself. When, as Prof. Thomson points out, animals "are devoted to their offspring, sympathetic to their kindred, affectionate to their mates, self-subordinating in their community, courageous beyond praise," it is not because they are morally aware or morally trained, but because they possess another quality, which can only be called virtue. To be ethical is man's prerogative because it requires a developed reasoning faculty; but since virtue of the kind found in animals takes no account of rewards or punishments it is in a certain sense a higher quality than mere morality. Moral conduct may be based on nothing more than fear of society's disapproval and retaliation, or the expectation of reprisals from a punitive god. In morality there may be selfishness, in virtue there is none.

No one is benefited by extravagant claims made for him, and what has been said is not intended to deny that for the most part animals are rapacious and cruel. It cannot be otherwise when they live under the inexorable compulsions of the law of survival. But what of man, who has been called the most dangerous and destructive of animals? Would the majority of human beings be much better than animals if all restraints of fear were removed? Are not most of man's moral rules only devices for holding society together in the interests of mutual security? Is not man the only being who kills unnecessarily, for mere amusement?

But just as there are vast differences between one man and another in nature and conduct, so there are between animals. Anyone who has taken pleasure in feeding monkeys in a wild state will have noticed that there is usually one old male who tyrannizes over the females and their young, greedily snatching more than he needs himself rather than let the weaker members share the food. That does not mean that all monkeys are egoistic bullies; it only shows that they share more characteristics in common with man than do most other animals. A few years ago, it was reported from India that a monkey had jumped into a swollen river and saved a human baby from drowning, at great peril to its own life. The incident is noteworthy because it concerns a wild animal; such actions by domesticated animals are so frequent that they often pass unnoticed. It suggests a special relationship between wild animals and those human beings who live at peace with them; perhaps a rudimentary sense of gratitude

or even a dim idea of the need for mutual help against the hostile forces of nature. Monkeys are treated with kindness by the Indian villager, and all the higher animals are well able to distinguish between friendliness and enmity. At least, that is how it used to be in India; but now one wonders sadly whether respect for Hanuman-ji will be able to prevail over the demand for polio vaccine.

Regarding the human-animal relationship, Prof. Thomson also has something to say and his words have a special significance for Buddhists. He writes that although there is no warrant for calling animals moral agents, for the reasons we have seen, "a few highly-endowed types, such as dog and horse, which have become man's partners, may have some glimpse of the practical meaning of responsibility," and that there are cases in which possibly "ideas are beginning to emerge." That there is the possibility of such ideas being formed in the animal mind, and that they can be encouraged and cultivated, is nothing strange to Buddhist thought. The evolution of personality is as much a certainty as the evolution of biological types, and since it is concerned with the mind it is often much more rapid.

Buddhism takes into full account the animal's latent capacity for affection, heroism and self-sacrifice. There is in Buddhism more sense of kinship with the animal world, a more intimate feeling of community with all that lives, than is found in Western religious thought. And this is not a matter of sentiment, but is rooted in the total Buddhist concept of life. It is an essential part of a grand and all-embracing philosophy which neglects no aspect of experience, but extends the concept of personal evolution to all forms of sentient life. The Buddhist does not have to ask despairingly: "Why did God create obnoxious things like cobras, scorpions, tigers and tuberculosis micro-bacterium?" The kitten on the lap and the uninvited cobra in the bed are all part of a world which, while it is not the best of all possible worlds, could not be different, since its creator is craving. The universe was not brought into existence solely for man, his convenience and enjoyment. The place man occupies in it is one he has created for himself, and he has to share it with other beings, all of them motivated by their own laws of being (*dhammatā*) and will to live.

So in the Buddhist texts, animals are always treated with great sympathy and understanding. Some animals indeed, such as the elephant, the horse and the Nāga, the noble serpent, are used as personifications of great qualities. The Buddha himself is

Sākya-sīha, the Lion of the Sākya clan. His teaching is the lion's roar, which confounds the upholders of false views.

The stories of animals in the canonical books and commentaries are often very faithful to the nature of the beasts they deal with. Thus the noble horse, Kanthaka, pined away and died when its master, Siddhattha, renounced the world to attain Buddhahood. That story has the ring of historical truth. The Canon also records one occasion, at least, when the Buddha himself found brute society more congenial than human. The incident calls to mind Walt Whitman's poem: "Sometimes I think that I could live with animals..." On this occasion an elephant, Pārileyyaka, and an intelligent monkey were the Enlightened One's companions when he retired to the forest to get away from quarrelling bhikkhus. In the story, after the troublesome monks' bad conduct had caused the Teacher to leave them, they found themselves abandoned by their lay supporters, and the lack of food and necessities quickly brought them to their senses. The Buddha, meanwhile, was being kept supplied with all he needed in the way of fruits and drink by the devoted animals. If the reader finds the story hard to believe, he may take it as allegorical. In either way its meaning is clear enough, for bhikkhus as much as for laymen.

Then there was the case of the elephant, Dhanapālaka, which suffered from homesickness in captivity and refused food.

The Buddha immortalized it in the stanza;

*Dhanapālako nāma kuñjaro
katukappabhedano dunnivārayo
baddho kabalam na bhuñjati
sumarati nāgavanassa kuñjaro.*

"The elephant Dhanapālaka,
in rut and uncontrollable,
eats nothing in captivity,
but longs for the elephant-forest." (Dhammapada 324)

Also from the *Dhammapada Commentary* is the tale of Ghosaka, a child who was laid on the ground to be trampled on successively by elephants and draught-oxen, but was saved by the compassionate beasts walking round instead of over him. The suckling of this child by a she-goat is reminiscent of other stories, such as that of Romulus and Remus, suckled by a wolf, and Orson by a bear. These are accounted legendary, but there have

been well-attested cases in recent times of human children being nurtured and raised by animals. It is known to have happened in India and Ceylon.

The good nature of animals is the subject of several *Jātaka* stories, the best known being that of the hare in the moon (*Sasa Jātaka*) and the story of the heroic monkey-leader who saved his tribe by making his own body part of a bridge for them to cross the Ganges (*Mahākapi Jātaka*). In both cases the animal-hero is said to have been the Bodhisatta in a previous birth. Mahāyāna Buddhism in particular emphasises that the Bodhisattvas (the Skt. form of Bodhisatta) manifest themselves in the animal world just as in the human. This is pictorially represented in the Tibetan wheel of life, which has the twelve *nidānas* of dependent origination around its rim, while inside are shown six major divisions of saṃsāric existence: the purgatories, the world of unhappy spirits, of angry spirits (*Asuras*), of radiant spirits (*devas*), of humans and of animals. In each of them a Bodhisattva is depicted teaching the Law.

Among the less well-known of the *Jātaka* tales there are many others that give a prominent place to animals. Among them there is the *Chadanta Jātaka*, in which the Bodhisatta appears as a six-tusked elephant; the *Saccamkira Jātaka*, which contrasts the gratitude shown by a snake, a rat and a parrot with the base ingratitude of a prince; and the curious tale of the *Mahākusala Jātaka*, where a parrot, out of gratitude to the tree that sheltered it, refuses to leave the tree when Sakka causes it to wither as a test of the bird's constancy. There is even an elephantine version of *Androcles and the Lion*, in which a tusker gives itself and its offspring in service to some carpenters out of gratitude for the removal of a thorn from its foot. The theme of animal gratitude runs very strongly through all these tales. They are obviously intended to teach humans the importance of this high virtue, in which men show themselves all too often inferior to the brutes.

Whether we choose to take these last examples literally, as events that occurred in previous world-cycles when animals had more human characteristics than they have now, or as folk-tales of the *Pañcatantra* type, is immaterial. Their function is to teach moral lessons by allegory. But they are also important as illustrating the position that animals occupy side by side with men in the Buddhist world-view. By and large, the *Jātakas* do not exalt animals unduly, for every tale of animal gratitude or affection can be balanced by another, showing less worthy traits

that animals and men have in common. There is at least one, however, which satirises a peculiarly human trait—hypocrisy. In the *Vaka Jātaka*, a wolf, having no food, decides to observe the *Uposatha* fast. But on seeing a goat, the pious wolf at once decides to keep the fast on some other occasion.

If the story were not intended to be satirical, it would be an injustice to wolves. Whatever other vices it may have, no animal degrades itself with sham piety, either to impress its fellows or to make spiritual capital out of an involuntary deprivation. For better or worse, animals live true to their own nature. Pretentious sanctimoniousness is not one of their characteristics.

It is worth remarking as a curious fact of history that even in the West, animals have been regarded as morally responsible beings, although this has seldom worked to their advantage. It brought them within the punitive scope of the law without giving them any corresponding rights. For example, Plato, in *The Laws*, prescribed that "If a beast of burden or any other animal shall kill anyone, except while the animal is competing in the public games, the relatives of the deceased shall prosecute it for murder." Moses, too, legislated for animals, as we find in Exodus xxi, 28: "And if an ox gore a man or woman to death, the ox shall be surely stoned." But he was also considerate enough to prohibit the muzzling of an ox that was trampling on the grain. In western Europe there was a legal custom of bringing animals up for trial, which survived until quite recent times. Such proceedings against animal offenders were brought in both the civil and ecclesiastical courts. The animals were provided with counsel, were summoned to appear, and were duly tried with all the formalities of the law. Extenuating circumstances in their favour were solemnly taken into account, and their sentences were sometimes commuted on the grounds of youth, exiguity of body, or previous good character. As late as 1750, a she-ass was condemned to death in France, but was pardoned because of her otherwise good reputation. Some interesting evidence of this European attitude towards animals can be found in *The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals*, by E. P. Evans (New York, 1906) and in *Proces au Moyen Age contre les Animaux*, by Leon Menabrea (Chambery, 1846). It does not appear, however, that animals were ever given legal right to prosecute human beings. Man's capacity for feeling moral concern has always been limited. Even today there are countries in which the law gives animals no protection, and many others where only a partial recognition is given to their rights.

There is abundant evidence of natural intelligence in animals, as well as of virtue. Research by a group of scientists at Oxford has shown that monkeys have a system of communication by sound which may be classed as a rudimentary language. Many of their "words" have already been listed. It may be that all animals possess a means of sound communication adapted to their limited needs and thought-processes. This appears to be the case even with fish, which rank rather low in the accepted evolutionary scale. A group of workers at the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography has obtained proof that fish, although they cannot produce "sound" as we know it, are able to communicate with one another by means of a variety of underwater vibrations which they produce by means of the air-bladders that control their depth in the water, or by the snapping of their fins and movements of the gills. By the use of tape recorders and underwater cameras, the research group has been able to establish definitely that certain sounds produced in this way relate to specific activities and have clearly-defined meanings. The recordings have been collected for further study and already form a quite comprehensive bio-acoustics library.

Since the time when Darwinism reversed the dictum of Pope by suggesting that the proper study of mankind is animals, science has made unlimited use of the subhuman order of beings for research and experiment. It cannot be denied that much knowledge of the origin and treatment of disease has been gained in this way; but all the same, no humane person can feel quite happy about the sufferings undergone by animals in experiments on living organisms. Many of these experiments have to be made with only partial anaesthesia or none at all, in order that neural reactions can be observed; and while in all civilised countries vivisection is carried out under more or less exacting legal requirements, the suffering undergone by animals for the benefit of mankind in the torture chamber of our laboratories still amounts to a man-made hell in our midst. Beside it, the swift death of the slaughterhouse becomes almost humane. The question it poses—whether man is justified in inflicting so much prolonged agony on other creatures for his own advantage—is one that even so conscientious a thinker as Schweitzer has either to by-pass or to bury uneasily under an appeal to the superior claims of humanity. But even if it is held that these claims are ethically valid, the argument still has serious weaknesses. There

are no records to show how many animals suffered, or for how long, to perfect the technique of the operation for pre-frontal lobotomy. Now it is a completely discredited operation, one of the dead-ends of science. Years of experiments on various kinds of animals went into the perfecting of penicillin and the sulfa drugs; now they are regarded with distrust, and some have been declared to be actually harmful. Even the use of certain antibiotics has to be approached with extreme caution. And recently the world received a horrifying shock from the effect on human babies of thalidomide, an anti-emetic prescribed to their mothers during pregnancy.

For the Buddhist, the problem is clarified by the knowledge that the innate *dukkha* of sentient life will always prevail over science and that, no matter what remedies are found for specific diseases, new forms of bacteria and virus will emerge by mutation or adaptation, so there can never be an end to the need for experiments on animals, and no ultimate good to be expected from them. Viewed in the light of *kamma* and *vipāka*, there can be only one answer to the question. Morally, man is not justified in subjecting animals to prolonged pain for his own ends. Moreover, it is not in his own best interest to do so, since he is thereby creating the karmic conditions that will eventually nullify whatever temporary benefits he may have gained. It would be far better if science, now that it has succeeded in tracing the biological processes to their physical source, were to seek methods of controlling disease without further recourse to experiments on living creatures. That animals should be compelled to go on paying so heavy a price in order that man may have the privilege of destroying himself by nuclear warfare or commercially contaminated food instead of succumbing to natural sickness, is too illogical a proposition to find support even in a man-centred morality. Perhaps when science is at last satisfied that it cannot eradicate disease by perpetually disturbing the balance of nature⁷³ but can only bring about fresh tribulations, a higher science may be evolved: one that takes as its field of research the mental and spiritual origins of suffering—the

73. I refer particularly to the modern passion for artificially sterilizing the system. The best feature of present-day toothpaste is that they do not do what the advertisements claim for them. If they literally did destroy all oral bacteria they would be about the most pernicious products of commercialism.

vipāka from the past and the unwholesome karma that man in his ignorance is creating in the present. Then it may be found that Pope was right after all: the proper study of mankind is man.

Buddhism shows that both animals and human beings are the products of ignorance conjoined with craving, and that the differences between them are the consequences of past karma. In this sense, though not in any other, "all life is one." It is one in its origin, ignorance-craving, and in its subjection to the universal law of causality. But every being's karma is separate and individual. So long as a man refuses to let himself be submerged in the herd, so long as he resists the pressures that are constantly brought to bear on him to make him share the mass mind and take on the identity of mass-activities, he is the master of his own destiny. Whatever the karma of others around him may be, he need have no share in it. His karma is his own, distinct and individual. In this sense all life is not one, but each life, from lowest to highest in the scale, is a unique current of causal determinants. The special position of the human being rests on the fact that he alone can consciously direct his own personal current of karma to a higher or lower destiny. All beings are their own creators; man is also his own judge and executioner. He is also his own saviour.

Then what of the animal? Since animals are devoid of moral sense, argues the rationalist, how can they be agents of karma? How can they raise themselves from their low status and regain human birth?

The answer is that Buddhism views life against the background of infinity. *Samsāra* is without beginning, and there has never been a time when the round of rebirths did not exist. Consequently, the karmic history of every living being extends into the infinite past, and each has unexpended potential of karma, good and bad, which is known as *kaṭattā-kamma*. When a human being dies, the nature of the succeeding life-continuum is determined by the morally wholesome or unwholesome mental impulse that arises in his last conscious moment, that which follows it being his *paṭisandhi-viññāṇa*, or rebirth-linking consciousness. But where no such good or bad thought-moment arises, the rebirth-linking consciousness is determined by some unexpended karma from a previous existence. Animals, being without moral discrimination, are more or less passive sufferers of the results of past bad karma. In this respect, they are in the same position as morally irresponsible human beings, such as

congenital idiots and imbeciles. But the fact that the animal has been unable to originate any fresh good karma does not exclude it from rebirth on a higher level. When the results of the karma that caused the animal birth are exhausted, some unexpended good karma from a previous state of existence will have an opportunity to take over, and in this way the life-continuum is raised to the human level again.

How this comes about can be understood only when the mind is divested of all belief in a transmigrating "soul." So long as there is clinging, however disguised or unconscious, to the idea of a persisting self-entity, the true nature of the rebirth process cannot be grasped. It is for this reason that many people, although they maintain that "all life is one," fail to understand or accept the Buddhist truth that life-currents oscillate between the human, the animal and many other forms. However comforting it may be to believe that beings can only ascend the spiritual ladder, and that there is no retributive fall for those who fail to make the grade, that is not the teaching of the Buddha.

It is now necessary to introduce a qualification to the statement that the higher rebirth of animals must depend upon unexpended good karma. Within the limitations we have noted, it is certainly possible for animals to originate good karma, notwithstanding their lack of moral sense. As Prof. Thomson suggests, contact with human beings can encourage and develop those qualities which we recognise as virtue in the higher animals, and even bring about in them a dawning consciousness of moral values. When the compulsions of the law of survival are removed, as in the case of animals under the protection of man, we get examples of those endearing and even noble qualities in them which have sometimes put human beings to shame, and have even caused non-Buddhists to ask themselves doubtfully whether man really is a special creation of God, and the only being worthy of salvation.

24. ACTION

Kamma is simply action or a 'deed'. Actions are performed in three ways: by body, mind and speech. Every action of importance is performed *because there is desire for a result*; it has an aim, an objective. One wishes for something specific to happen as the result of it. This desire, no matter how mild it may be, is a form of craving. It expresses the thirst (*taṇhā*) for existence and for action. To exist is to act, on one level or another. Organic existence consists of chemical action; psychic existence consists of mental action. So existence and action are inseparable.

But some actions, those in which mind is involved, are bound to have intention. This is expressed by the Pāli word *cetanā*, volition, which is one of the mental properties. There is another word, *chanda*, which stands for wishing, desiring a result. These words all express some kind of desire. And some form of desire is behind practically every activity of life. Therefore 'to live' and 'to desire' are one and the same thing. (There is one ultimate exception to this statement, which we shall come to later. It is that of the *Arahat*.)

An action (kamma) is morally unwholesome when it is motivated by the forms of craving that are associated with greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). It is morally wholesome (in ordinary language, good) when it is motivated by the opposite factors, disinterestedness (greedlessness), amity and wisdom. An act so motivated is prompted by 'intention' rather than 'craving'. Yet in every act of craving, intention is included. It is that which gives direction and form to the deed.

Now, each deed performed with intention is a *creative act*. By reason of the will behind it, it constitutes a force. It is a force analogous to the other great unseen, yet physical, forces that move the universe. By our thoughts, words and deeds we create our world from moment to moment in the endless process of change. We also create our 'selves'. That is to say, we mould our changing personality as we go along by the accumulation of such thoughts, words and deeds. It is the accretion of these and the preponderance of one kind over another that determines what we shall become, in this life and in subsequent ones.

In thus creating our personality, we create also the conditions in which it functions. In other words, we create also the kind of world we are to live in. The mind, therefore, is master of the world. As a man's mind is, so is his cosmos.

Kamma, then, as the product of the mind, is the true and only real force in the life-continuum, the flux of coming-to-be. From this we come to understand that it is the residue of mental force which from the point of death kindles a new birth. It is the only actual link between one life ('reincarnation') and another. And since the process is a continuous one, it is the last kammic thought-moment at the point of death that forms the rebirth-linking consciousness—the kamma that reproduces. Other kamma, good or bad, will come into operation at some later stage, when external conditions are favourable for its ripening. The force of weak kamma may be suspended for a long time by the interposition of a stronger kamma. Some kinds of kamma may even be inoperative; but this never happens with very strong or weighty kamma. As a general principle, all kamma bears some kind of fruit sooner or later.

Each individual's kamma is his own personal act, its results his own personal inheritance. He alone has complete command over his actions, no matter to what degree others may try to force him. Yet an unwholesome deed done under strong compulsion does not have quite the same force as one performed voluntarily. Under threat of torture or of death a man may be compelled to torture or kill someone else. In such a case it may be believed that the gravity of his kamma is not as severe as it would be had he deliberately chosen to act in such a way. The heaviest moral responsibility rests with those who have forced him to the action. But in the ultimate sense he still must bear some responsibility, for he could in the most extreme case avoid harming another by choosing to suffer torture or death himself.

This brings us to the question of *collective kamma*. As we have seen, each man's kamma is his own individual experience. No one can interfere with the kamma of another beyond a certain point; therefore no one can intervene to alter the results of personal kamma. Yet it often happens that numbers of people are associated in the same kind of actions, and share the same kind of thoughts; they become closely involved with one another; they influence one another. Mass psychology produces mass kamma. Therefore all such people are likely to form the same pattern of kamma. It may result in their being associated with one another through a number of lives, and in their sharing much the same kind of experiences. "Collective kamma" is simply the aggregate of individual kmmas, just as a crowd is an aggregate of individuals.

It is in fact this kind of mass kamma that produces different kinds of worlds—the world we live in, the states of greater suffering and the states of relative happiness. Each being inhabits the kind of cosmic construction for which he has fitted himself. It is his kamma, and the kamma of beings like himself that has created it. This is how it comes about that in multi-dimensional space-time there are many *lokas*—many worlds and modes of being. Each one represents a particular type of consciousness, the result of kamma. The mind is confined only by the boundaries it erects itself.

The results of kamma are called *vipāka*, 'the ripening'. These terms, *kamma* and *vipāka*, and the ideas they stand for, must not be confused. *Vipāka* is predetermined (by ourselves) by previous kamma. But kamma itself in the ultimate sense (that is, when resisting all external pressures and built-up tendencies) is the product of *choice* and free will: choice between wholesome and unwholesome deeds, good or bad actions. Hence the Buddha said: 'Intention constitutes kamma'. Without intention a deed is sterile; it produces no reaction of moral significance. One reservation, however, is here required; if a deed done in 'culpable negligence' proves harmful to others, the lack of mindfulness, circumspection or consideration shown will constitute unwholesome kamma and will have its *vipāka*. Though the harm done was not 'intended', i.e. the deed was not motivated by hate, yet there was present another 'unwholesome root', delusion (*moha*), which includes, for instance, irresponsible thoughtlessness.

Kamma is action; *vipāka* is result. Therefore kamma is the active principle; *vipāka* is the passive mode of coming-to-be. People believe in pre-determinism, fatalism, merely because they see results, but do not see causes. In the process of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) both causes and effects are shown in their proper relationship.

A person may be born deaf, dumb and blind. That is the consequence of some unwholesome kamma which manifested or presented itself to his consciousness in the last thought-moment of his previous death. Throughout life he may have to suffer the consequences (*vipāka*) of that deed, whatever it may have been. But that fact does not prevent him from forming fresh kamma of a wholesome type to restore the balance in his next life. Furthermore, by the aid of some good kamma from the past, together with strong effort and favourable circumstances in the

present life (which of course includes the compassionate help of others), the full effects of his bad kamma may be mitigated even here and now. Cases of this kind are seen everywhere, where people have overcome to a great extent the most formidable handicaps. The result is that they have turned even the bad *vipāka* to profit for themselves and others. One outstanding example of this is the famous Dr. Helen Keller. But this calls for almost superhuman courage and will-power. Most people in similar circumstances remain passive sufferers of the effects of their bad deeds until those effects are exhausted. Thus it has to be in the case of those born mentally defective or in the lower states of suffering. Having scarcely any capacity for the exercise of free will, they are subject to pre-determinism entirely until the bad *vipāka* has run its course.

So, by acknowledging some element of pre-determinism, yet at the same time maintaining the *ultimate* ascendancy of will, Buddhism resolves a moral problem which otherwise seems insoluble. Part of the personality, and the conditions in which it exists, are predetermined by the deeds and the total personality of the past; but in the final analysis the mind is able to free itself from the bondage of past personality-constructions and launch out in a fresh direction.

Now, we have seen that the three roots of unwholesome actions—greed, hatred and delusion—produce bad results; the three roots of wholesome actions—disinterestedness, amity and wisdom—produce good results. Actions which are performed automatically or unconsciously, or are incidental to some other action having an entirely different objective, do not produce results beyond their immediate mechanical consequences. If one treads on an insect in the dark, one is not morally responsible for its death. One has been merely an unconscious instrument of the insect's own kamma in producing its death.

But while there is a large class of actions of the last type, which cannot be avoided, the more important actions in everyone's life are dominated by one or other of these six psychological roots, wholesome and unwholesome. Even where a life is physically inactive, the thoughts are at work; they are producing kamma. Cultivation of the mind therefore consists in removing (not suppressing) unwholesome mental states and substituting wholesome ones. Modern civilisation develops by suppressing unwholesome (the 'anti-social') instincts. Consequently they break out from time to time in unwholesome

eruptions. A war breaks out and the homicidal maniac comes into his own: murder is made praiseworthy. Buddhism, on the other hand, aims at *removing* the unwholesome mental elements. For this, the special techniques of meditation (*bhāvanā*) are necessary.

Good kamma is the product of wholesome states of mind. And to be certain of this, it is essential to gain an understanding of the states of consciousness and one's most secret motives. Unless this is done, it is next to impossible to cultivate exclusively wholesome actions, because in every human consciousness there is a complex of hidden motivations. They are hidden because we do not wish to acknowledge them. In every human being there is a built-in defence mechanism that prevents him from seeing himself too clearly. If he should happen to be confronted with his subconscious mind too suddenly he may receive an unpleasant psychological shock. His carefully constructed image of himself is rudely shattered. He is appalled by the crudity, the unsuspected savagery, of his real motivations. The keen and energetic social worker may find that he is really actuated by a desire to push other people around, to tell them what is best for them and to force them to do his will. The professional humanitarian, always championing the underdog, may find to his distress that his outbursts of high moral indignation at the injustices of society are nothing more than an expression of his real hatred of other humans, made respectable, to himself and others by the guise of concern for the victims of society. Or each may be compensating for hidden defects in his own personality. All these facts are well known to present-day psychologists; but how many people submit themselves to the analyst's probings? Buddhism teaches us to do it for ourselves, and to make ourselves immune to unpleasant or shocking revelations by acknowledging beforehand that there is no immutable personality, no 'self' to be either admired or deplored.

An action (kamma), once it is performed, is finished so far as its actual performance is concerned. It is also irreversible.

*The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on: nor all your piety nor wit
Can lure it back to cancel half a line—
Nor all your tears wash out one word of it.*

(Edward Fitzgerald, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*)

The moving finger is no mystery to one who understands kamma and vipāka. Ask not whose finger writes upon the wall. It is your own.

What remains of the action is its potential, the inevitability of its result. It is a force released into the stream of time, and in time it must have its fruition. And when, for good or ill, it has fructified, like all else its force must pass away—and then the kamma and the vipāka alike are no more. But as the old kammās die, new ones are created—every moment of every waking hour. So the life-process, involved in suffering, is carried on. It is borne along on the current of craving. It is in its essence nothing but that craving, that desire—the desire that takes many forms, is insatiable, is self-renewing. As many-formed as Proteus; as undying as the Phoenix.

But when there comes the will to end desire a change takes place. The mind that craved gratification in the fields of sense now turns away. Another desire, other than that of the senses, gathers power and momentum. It is the desire for cessation, for peace, for the end of pain and sorrow—the desire for *Nibbāna*.

Now this desire is incompatible with all other desires. Therefore, if it becomes strong enough it kills all other desires. Gradually they fade out; first the grosser cravings springing from the three immoral roots; then the higher desires; then the attachments, all wilt and fade out, extinguished by the one overmastering desire for *Nibbāna*.

And as they wilt and fade out, and no more result-producing actions take their place, so the current of the life-continuum dries up. Unwholesome actions cannot be performed, because their roots have withered away; there is no more basis for them. The wholesome deeds in their turn become sterile; since they are not motivated by desire they do not project any force into the future. In the end there is no craving force left to produce another birth. Everything has been swallowed up by the desire for the extinction of desire.

And when the object of that desire is gained, can it any longer be a desire? Does a man continue to long for what he has already got? The last desire of all is not self-renewing; it is self-destroying. For in its fulfilment is its own death. *Nibbāna* is attained.

Therefore the Buddha said, 'For the final cessation of suffering, *all* kamma, wholesome and unwholesome, must be transcended, must be abandoned. Putting aside good and evil, one attains *Nibbāna*. There is no other way.'

The Arahant lives then only experiencing the residuum of his life-span. And when that last remaining impetus comes to an end the aggregates of his personality come to an end too, never to be reconstructed, never to be replaced. In their continual renewal there was suffering; now there is release. In their coming together there was illusion—the illusion of self. Now there is Reality.

And Reality is beyond conception.

25. KAMMA AND CAUSALITY

'Does everything happen in our lives according to kamma?' This question is not one that can be answered by a plain affirmation or denial, since it involves the whole question of free-will against determinism, or, in familiar language, 'fatalism'. The nearest that can be given to a simple answer is to say that most of the major circumstances and events of life are conditioned by kamma, but not all.

If everything, down to the minutest detail, were pre-conditioned either by kamma or by the physical laws of the universe, there would be no room in the pattern of strict causality for the functioning of free-will. It would therefore be impossible for us to free ourselves from the mechanism of cause and effect; it would be impossible to attain Nibbāna.

In the sphere of everyday events and the incidents of life such as sickness, accidents and such common experiences, every effect requires more than one cause to bring it about, and kamma is in most cases the pre-disposing factor which enables the external influences to combine and produce a given result. In the case of situations that involve a moral choice, the situation itself is the product of past kamma, but the individual's reaction to it is a free play of will and intention. For example, a man, as the result of previous unwholesome (*akusala*) kamma either in the present life or some past birth, may find himself in a situation of desperate poverty in which he is sorely tempted to steal, commit a robbery, or in some other way carry into the future the unwholesome actions of the past. This is a situation with a moral content, because it involves the subject in a nexus of ethical potentials. Here his own freedom of choice comes into play; he has the alternative of choosing further hardship rather than succumb to the temptation of crime.

In the *paṭicca-samuppāda*, the cycle of dependent origination, the factors belonging to previous births, that is, ignorance and the actions conditioned by it, are summarised as the kamma-process of the past. This kamma produces consciousness, name-and-form, sense-perception fields, contact and sensation as its resultants, and this is known as the present effect. Thus the physical and mental make-up (*nāma-rūpa*) is the manifestation of past kamma operating in the present, as also are the phenomena cognised and experienced through the channels of sense. But

running along with this is another current of action, that which is controlled by the will and this is known as the present volitional activity; it is the counterpart in the present of the kamma-process of the past. It governs the factors of craving, grasping and becoming.

This means, in effect, that the current of 'becoming' which has its source in past kamma, at the point where it manifests as individual reaction—as for example in the degree of craving engendered as the result of pleasurable sensation—comes under the control of the will, so that while the subject has no further control over the situations in which he finds himself, having himself created them in the past, he yet has a subjective control over his response to them, and it is out of this that he creates the conditions of his future. The present volitional activity then takes effect in the form of future resultants, and these future resultants are the counterpart, in the future of the kammic resultants of the present. In an exactly similar way it dominates the future birth-state and conditions, which in the *paṭicca-samuppāda* are expressed as arising, old age and death etc. The entire cycle implies a dynamic progression in which the state conditioned by past actions is at the same time the womb of present actions and their future results.

Kamma is not only an integral law of the process of becoming; it is itself that process, and the phenomenal personality is but the present manifestation of its activity. The Christian axiom of 'hating the sin but loving the sinner' is meaningless from the Buddhist standpoint. There is action, but no performer of the action; the 'sin' and the 'sinner' cannot be dissociated; we are our actions, and nothing apart from them.

Modes of Conditioning

The conditioned nature of all mental and physical phenomena is analysed under twenty-four heads, called in Pāli *paccaya* (modes of conditioning). Each of the twenty-four *paccayas* is a contributing factor to the arising of conditioned things. The thirteenth mode is *kamma-paccaya*, and stands for the past actions which form the base, or condition, of something arising later. The six sense organs and fields of sense-cognition—that is, the physical organs of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and mental awareness—which, as we have seen, arise at birth in association with name-and-form, provide the condition-base for the arising of subsequent consciousness, and hence for the mental

reactions following upon it. But here it should be noted that although kamma as volition is associated with the mental phenomena that have arisen, the phenomena themselves are not kamma-results. The fourteenth mode is kamma-result condition, or *vipāka*, and stands as a condition by way of kamma-result to the mental and physical phenomena by establishing the requisite base in the five fields of sense-consciousness.

That there are events that come about through causes other than kamma is demonstrable by natural laws. If it were not so, to try to avoid or cure sickness would be useless. If there is a predisposition to a certain disease through past kamma, and the physical conditions to produce the disease are also present, the disease will arise. But it may also come about that all the physical conditions are present, but through the absence of the kamma-condition, the disease does not arise; or that, with the presence of the physical causes the disease arises even in the absence of a kamma condition. A philosophical distinction is therefore to be made between those diseases which are the result of kamma and those which are produced solely by physical conditions; but since it is impossible to distinguish between them without knowledge of past births, all diseases must be treated as though they are produced by merely physical causes. When the Buddha was attacked by Devadatta and was wounded in the foot by a stone, he was able to explain that the injury was the result of some violence committed in a previous life plus the action of Devadatta which enabled the kamma to take effect. Similarly, the violent death of Moggallāna Thera was the combined result of his kamma and the murderous intention of the rival ascetics whose action provided the necessary external cause to bring it about.

Causality

The process of causality, of which kamma and *vipāka* are only one action-result aspect, is a cosmic, universal interplay of forces. Concerning the question of free-will in a causally-conditioned universe, the view of reality presented by Henri Bergson, which when it was postulated was new to the West, throws considerable light on the Buddhist concept. Life, says Bergson, is an unceasing becoming, which preserves the past and creates the future. The solid things which seem to be stable and to endure, which seem to resist this flowing, which seem more real than the flowing, are periods, cuts across the flowing, views that our mind takes of the living reality of which it is a part, in which it lives and moves,

views of the reality prescribed and limited by the needs of its particular activity.

Here we have a Western interpretation of *avijjā* (ignorance)—‘views of the reality prescribed and limited by the needs of its particular activity’—and of *anicca*, the unceasing becoming, the principle of change and impermanence. Bergson also includes in his system *anattā* (no-self), for in this process of unceasing change there is the change only—no ‘thing’ that changes. So, says Bergson, when we regard our action as a chain of complementary parts linked together, each action so viewed is rigidly conditioned, yet when we regard our whole life-current as one and indivisible, it may be free. So also with the life-current which we may take to be the reality of the universe; when we view it in its detail as the intellect presents it to us, it appears as an order of real conditioning, each separate state having its ground in an antecedent state, yet as a whole, as the living impulse (*kamma*), it is free and creative. We are free, says Bergson, when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express that personality. These acts are not unconditioned, but the conditions are not external; they are in our character, which is ourself. In other and Buddhist words, our *saṅkhāra*, or *kamma*-formation of the past, is the personality, and that is conditioned by nothing but our own volition, or *cetanā*. Bergson details an elaborate philosophy of space and time to give actuality to this dynamic view, which he calls ‘Creative Evolution’, and his general conclusion is that the question of free-will against determinism is wrongly postulated; the problem, like the indeterminate questions of Buddhism, cannot be answered because it is itself a product of that peculiar infirmity, that ‘special view of reality prescribed and limited by the needs of a particular activity’, which in Buddhism is called *avijjā*, the primal nescience.

The concept of causality in the world of physics has undergone modifications of a significant order in the light of quantum physics and the increase of our knowledge regarding the atomic structure of matter. Briefly the present position may be stated thus: while it is possible to predict quantitatively the future states of great numbers of atomic units, it is not possible to pre-determine the state or position of any one particular atom. There is a margin of latitude for the behaviour of the individual unit which is not given to the mass as a whole. In human terms, it may be possible to predict from the course of events that a certain nation, Gondalia, will be at war by a certain date; but it is not

possible to predict of any individual Gondalian that he will be actively participating in the war. He may be a conscientious objector, outside the war by his own decision; or he may be physically disqualified, outside the war because of conditions over which he has no control. We may say, 'Gondalia will be at war', but not 'That Gondalian will be in the war'. On the other hand, if we know that one particular Gondalian is not physically fit we may say confidently that he will not be in the war; the element we cannot predict with any degree of certainty is the free-will of the Gondalian individual, which may make of him a chauvinist and national Gondalian hero, or a pacifist and inmate of a concentration camp.

How Kamma Operates

Coming to the details of the ways in which kamma operates, it must be understood that by kamma is meant volitional action only. *Cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*—'Volition, intention, O Bhikkhūs, is what I call kamma', is the definition given by the Buddha. Greed, hatred and delusion are the roots of unwholesome kamma; unselfishness, amity and wisdom are the roots of wholesome kamma. As the seed that is sown, so must be the tree and the fruit of the tree; from an impure mind and intention, only impure thoughts, words and deeds can issue; from such impure thoughts, words and deeds only evil consequences can result.

The results themselves may come about in the same lifetime; when this happens it is called *diṭṭhadhamma-vedanīya-kamma*, and the line of causality between action and result is often clearly traceable, as in the case of crime which is followed by punishment. Actions which bear their results in the next birth are called *upapajja-vedanīya-kamma*, and it frequently happens that people who remember their previous life remember also the kamma which has produced their present conditions.

Those actions which ripen in successive births are known as *aparāpariya-vedanīya-kamma*; these are the actions which have, by continual practice, become habitual, and tend to take effect over and over again in successive lives. The repetition condition (*āsevana-paccaya*) is the twelfth of the twenty-four *paccayas*, and relates to that kamma-consciousness in which the preceding impulse-moments (*javana-citta*) are a condition by way of repetition to all the succeeding ones. This is known to modern psychology as a habit-formation, and is a very strong conditioning factor of mind

and character. Buddhism urges the continual repetition of good actions, deeds of *mettā* and charity, and the continual dwelling of the mind on good and elevating subjects, such as the qualities of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, in order to establish a strong habit-formation along good and beneficial lines.

The three kinds of kamma described above, however, may be without any resultants if the other conditions necessary for the arising of the kamma-result are lacking. Rebirth among inferior orders of beings, for instance, will prevent or delay the beneficial results of a habitual kamma. There is also *counteractive kamma* which, if it is stronger than they, will inhibit their fruition. Kamma which is thus prevented from taking effect is called *ahosi-kamma*. Just as there are events which occur without kamma as a cause, so there are actions which, as potentials, remain unrealised. These actions, however, are usually the weak and relatively unimportant ones, actions not prompted by any strong impulse and carrying with them little moral significance.

Functionally, the various kinds of kamma operate according to four classifications. The first is *generative kamma* (*janaka-kamma*) which produces the five-aggregate complex of name-and-form at birth and through all the stages of its arising during the life-continuum. The second category is that of *sustaining kamma* (*upatthambhaka-kamma*), which is void of kamma-results and is only capable of sustaining kamma-resultants that have already come into being. In the third category comes *counteractive kamma* (*upapīḷaka-kamma*), which by reason of its moral or immoral force suppresses other kamma-results and delays or prevents their arising. Last in this classification according to functions comes *destructive kamma* (*upacchedaka-kamma*); this is kamma of such potency that it utterly destroys the influence of weaker kamma and substitutes its own kamma-results. It may be strong enough to cut short the life-span so that it is destructive kamma in the literal sense.

The light and insignificant actions which we perform in the course of our daily lives have their results, but they are not dominant factors unless they become part of a habit-formation. Important actions which become habitual either wholesome or unwholesome, are known as *bahula-kamma*, and their effects take precedence over those of actions which are morally insignificant or rarely performed. Those actions which are rooted in a very strong moral or immoral impulse, and take a drastic form, are known as *garuka-kamma*; they also tend to fall into the

ditṭhadhamma-vedanīya-kamma class and take effect in the same lifetime, or else in the next existence. Such actions are: drawing the blood of a Buddha, the murder of an Arahāt, the killing of parents, and attempts to disrupt the Sangha. Although these are the chief demeritorious actions, there are many others of lesser weight which bear results in the next birth in the absence of *garuka-kamma*. The same applies to good *garuka-kamma*.⁷⁴

Ditṭhadhamma-vedanīya-kamma provides us with data for studying the operation of the law of cause and effect objectively. In the usual course of things crime brings its own consequences in the same lifetime, by a clearly traceable sequence of events, but this does not invariably happen. For a crime to receive its due punishment, a complicated machinery of causes has to be brought into operation. First there has to be the act of crime, the kamma. Its punishment then depends upon the existence of criminal laws, of a police force, of the circumstances which enable the criminal to be detected, and many subsidiary factors. It is only when all these combine that the crime receives its due punishment in the same lifetime. If the external factors are missing, the kamma alone will not bring about its consequences immediately, and we say the criminal has gone unpunished. This, however, is not the case; sooner or later either in the same lifetime or a subsequent one, circumstances will link together, albeit indirectly, and give an opportunity for the kamma to produce its results. Hence from the Buddhist standpoint the question of capital punishment rests not on considerations of mercy to the murderer, which must always be a source of contention since mercy to a criminal implies a social injustice to the victim and lack of protection to potential victims; it rests on a consideration of the kamma-resultants to those who are instrumental in punishing him with death, since it is kamma of the worst order to kill or cause another to take life.

It is not possible here to enter into a discussion of the moral difference between the action of one who kills another from greed or anger and one who carries out a sentence of death in the course of his duties to society. That there is a difference cannot be doubted, yet for Buddhist psychology it is clear that no act of killing can be accomplished without the arising of a hate-impulse in the mind. To take life quite disinterestedly, as advocated in the

74. *Niyata micchādīṭṭhi* (Chronic scepticism and tenaciously held pernicious views) is also a demeritorious *garuka kamma*.

Bhagavad Gītā, is a psychological impossibility; there must, in any case, be desire for the accomplishment of the act, or the act itself could never be carried out. This applies to every action except those performed by the *Arahat*. Since there is no 'unchanging Ātman' no distinction can be made between the deed and the doer.

Rebirth

The mode, circumstances and nature of the next birth are conditioned by what is known as the *death-proximate kamma* (*maraṇāsanna-kamma*), which is the volition, wholesome or unwholesome, that is present immediately before death. With this is associated the *paṭisandhi-viññāṇa* or connecting consciousness between one manifestation and another. At the moment just preceding death, the death-proximate kamma may take the form of a reflex of some good or bad deed performed during the dying person's life. This sometimes presents itself to the consciousness as a symbol, like the dream symbols of Freudian psychology. It may bring with it an indication of the future existence, a glimpse of the realm (*loka*) in which rebirth is about to take place. It is due to the arising of some unwholesome consciousness from past kamma that the dying sometimes exhibit fear, while others, experiencing wholesome death-proximate kamma, die with a smile on their lips, seeing themselves welcomed by celestial beings or their friends who have passed away before them. Everyone who has been present at death beds can recall examples of both kinds.

When none of these kamma-manifestations is present, however, as with those who die in a state of complete unconsciousness, the next birth is determined by what is called *reserved kamma* (*kaṭattā-kamma*). This is the automatic result of whatever kamma of the past is strongest, be it good or bad, and has not yet borne fruit or exhausted its force. This may be weighty or habitual kamma.

Heedfulness in Dying and When Living

The importance of keeping the consciousness active and faculties alert up to the moment of death is stressed in Buddhist psychology. Part of the benefit of *maraṇānussati*, the meditation on death, is that it enables one to approach the thought of death undismayed, in full possession of one's faculties and with control of the mental impulses. Instead of charging us to remember our

sins and approach death in fear, Buddhism instructs us to call to mind our good actions, put aside terror and meet death with the calm confidence of one whose destiny is under his own control. It is a positive attitude in place of the negative and depressing mental state encouraged by other religions. Modern psychology advises the cultivation of such an optimistic attitude throughout life. Buddhism goes further, and shows it to be a necessary safeguard when we stand on the threshold of a new existence.

It has already been said that those who are able to remember previous lives can trace the course of kamma and vipāka from one birth to another. They are the only people who are in a position to differentiate clearly between the events that occur because of kamma and those that are caused by external agencies. It is certain however, that predominantly good kamma will save us from most of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or help us to rise above whatever obstacles are set in our path. *The need for human endeavour is always present*, for in the very enjoyment of the fruits of good kamma we are generating a new series of actions to bear their own results in the future. It cannot be too often or too emphatically repeated that the true understanding of the law of kamma is the absolute opposite of fatalism. The man who is born to riches on account of his past deeds of charity cannot afford to rest on his laurels. He is like a man with a substantial bank balance; he may either live on his capital until he exhausts it, which is foolish, or he can use it as an investment and increase it. The only investment we can take with us out of this life into the next is good kamma; it therefore behoves every man who is, in the common phrase, 'blessed' with riches, to use those riches wisely in doing good.

If everyone understood the law of kamma there would be an end to the greed of the rich and the envy of the poor. Every man would strive to give away as much as he could in charity—or at least spend his money on projects beneficial to mankind. On the other hand there would be no burning feeling of injustice on the part of the 'have-nots', since they would recognise that their condition is due to their own past kamma, while at the same time its crushing effects would be alleviated by the generosity and social conscience of the rich. The result would be a co-operative scheme of sharing, in which both would prosper.

This is the practical plan of living that Buddhism suggests to us; it is sane, ethical and inspiring, and it is the one answer that a free world can make to the anti-religious materialistic ideologies.

To put it into practice would be the greatest step forward in mankind's social as well as spiritual progress, and one that must be made if we are to save our civilisation from the terrible consequences of greed, hatred and delusion. It is not enough to have knowledge of the law of kamma: it must be used as applied science in the ordering of personal and national life for the realization of a happier, more stable and more regulated phase of human history.

26. KAMMA AND FREEDOM

The problems encountered in relating the Buddhist doctrine of kamma to the issue of causality and freedom, are largely ones of meaning. They particularly revolve around the meaning of such concepts as causation, conditioning and determination. Buddhism does not deny that man is largely conditioned by his circumstances and environment. But the conditioning is not absolute. It may almost amount to determinism, and the margin of free-will may be very slight indeed, but it is always present. In Buddhist ethico-psychology great importance is given to the thought-moment of choice—that moment of conscious response to a situation in which we are free to act in a number of different ways. Now it may happen that the predominant propensities of the past impel almost irresistibly towards a particular course of action; but it must be remembered that our past habits of thought and deed are never all of the same kind. Human character is very fluid, and in the critical moment it is never absolutely certain what kind of urge will come uppermost. The whole point of any character development is to systematically cultivate the good urges and eradicate the bad ones.

Then again, some precise definition of the specifically Buddhist terms is necessary, in order to grasp what is meant by kamma. Kamma is simply action, a deed. Its result is called *vipāka*, and the two should not be confused or telescoped into a single concept under the same word, as is done by Theosophists and some popular writers on Hinduism. But the two terms considered together, as *kamma-vipāka*, 'action-and-result', do denote a moral principle in the universal order. Thus a cruel action, because its genesis is mental (*cetanā*), will in course of time ripen as a painful experience of a similar kind for the same person who did the cruel deed—perhaps in this life (the murderer who is hanged) or in a subsequent one.

As to whether it is the *same* person who experiences the result—that can neither be absolutely affirmed nor absolutely denied; its answer lies in the concept of personality and identity held by Buddhism, which can be found in writings dealing with rebirth. The sole identity that can be claimed for a personality, even through the course of one lifetime, is the world-line represented by his kammic continuity. While an individual at any given moment is simply the end-result of what his previous

actions have made him, he is also projecting himself into the future by his present acts, and it is in these that his freedom of choice lies. He is no more determined absolutely by his own past than he is by his environment or his heredity. Buddhism teaches the principle of multiple causality: that is to say, every phenomenon is the product of more than one cause. And the will, although it is greatly modified by these causes, is itself free to choose between a number of different causes operating upon it from the past. *We are free to select the causes that will determine our action in the moment of choice.* That is why conflicts arise which are sometimes so difficult and painful to resolve. There is always the existential anguish in freedom of choice.

At any time we can see how this works out in concrete instances. A man may have been reared in an atmosphere of squalor, want and anxiety, in which everything pushes towards crime. But in the moment of deciding whether or not he shall commit a crime, other, perhaps latent, causes are at work within him. He may have been taught earlier that crime is morally wrong, or some good influence from a previous life may be stirring within him, or he may have realized, quite simply, that 'crime does not pay'. He may be deterred by some memory of a painful result, imprisonment or flogging, from the present life. Whether these deterrent factors are noble or ignoble, they are always present, and he has to make a choice between the causes that will determine his present action. And very often he will choose not to commit the crime. If this were not so, the moral improvement of individuals and society would not be possible.

We might find it difficult to see that an individual born in an environment of destitution, deprivation, ignorance, want and hunger can be said to be born in such circumstances due to past evil deeds. But in fact what we 'cannot see' is precisely what the Buddha taught. All attempts to reconstruct the Buddha's thought, leaving out rebirth, are doomed to failure. We might be able to have rebirth without the moral order represented by *kamma-vipāka*—in which case it would only be an infinite extension of the amoral, meaningless life-process envisaged by the epiphenomenalists—but we cannot have a moral order without rebirth.

Why so? Simply because not all murderers get hanged! (And it may be added, neither do they get punished who by their indifference, selfishness and brutality help to make others criminals; at least, not in the same life. Too often they prosper—

but the principle of kamma-vipāka is never cheated. At some time they have to pay for it.)

The world is so dominated today by the concepts of materialism that some Buddhist Kierkegaard ought to write another *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* to clear up the muddle. Not anti-scientific, be it understood, but simply *un-scientific*. Not bounded by the dogmas of nineteenth century Darwin-Marx-Huxley materialism, which today is taken for science. We should be ready to accept what is true in this materialism, without fearing to go beyond it.

And what *is* true in that concept of man? That he is conditioned by his environment? Certainly, nobody in their senses would deny it, and the Buddha did not. But no man is *entirely* conditioned by anything, not even by his own accumulated habits of thinking and acting. No character is irrevocably fixed—except that of an *Ariya* (saint), whose destiny is assured. (It is necessary to make this exception, although here it is something of a digression.) The ordinary man is, as I have said, a fluid process; his identity from one moment to another is nothing but the world-line of his continuity as a process in time. Consequently he is always acting ‘out of character’. Have not great and noble men arisen from the most sordid environments of want and deprivation? And conversely, have not criminals and degenerates appeared where all the social, economic and even hereditary factors were the most favourable that the world has to offer?

Let it be granted that *in the majority of cases* men are what their circumstances make them. Buddhism teaches that it is they who have created these circumstances by their past kamma. But their present kamma, which moulds their future, is in their own hands. However slight the margin of free-will, it is always there. Without it, life would be altogether without meaning, and it would be absurd to try to seek any meaning. In fact, it would be impossible, and we ourselves would not be puzzling over Buddhism! The mere fact that these questions have presented themselves to us shows that we are not automatons, not just cybernetic mechanisms, bound to run like a street car or a train along set lines, but free-swimming organisms—thinking, willing personalities, not plants.

Kamma is not solely responsible for every phenomenon and every experience. The physical aspects of life also have their share in the totality. Still, in the last resort, the mind and will are able to

prevail over everything else. Not always by a single act of will, but by repeated acts of the same nature, having the same final goal. Life without suffering is impossible, because of the conditions, physical and psychological, that our desire for personalized life imposes as the condition of our being-in-the-world. But the mind can develop itself—can stop creating and imposing those conditions.

We must distinguish clearly between what we have to submit to—the circumstances of the present which we have made for ourselves by our past actions—and the future we can make for ourselves by our present thinking and doing. That distinction is most important: it represents the whole difference between absolute determinism and free-will. The root cause of phenomenal existence is the double one of ignorance conjoined with craving, each being dependent upon the other. When these two joint conditions are removed, all other conditioning comes to an end. That is the whole point of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, the formula of conditioned arising—that it can be reversed by repeated acts of decision. Man can always swim against the current; if he could not, his evolution would be impossible.

It should not be thought that, as a corollary of the above, Buddhism *approves* of poverty, hunger and want. Buddhism approves of nothing in the world except the striving to gain release from it. Its view of the world is realistic. Poverty, hunger and ignorance exist in the world, and they will continue to do so as long as people, by their own infliction of these evils on others in previous lives, cause themselves to be born in such circumstances. We should try to diminish these evils, but it can never be done by purely physical means. The effort is good merely because it represents a good volition which will bear fruit in the future rather than because of any likelihood of its succeeding completely. If the entire world acted according to Buddhist principles of unselfishness, generosity and compassion, there would be no more deprivation, no more slums, no more oppression or exploitation of man by man. Yet still, bad kamma of the past would have to produce its vipāka by some other means. We can be certain that if all the wealth in the world were to be equally distributed one morning, there would be the rich and the poor again by evening. It is a fundamental fact of nature—which hates equality more than it hates a vacuum. There will be equality when all the past and present thoughts and deeds of all men are equal—and when can that be?

The economic structure of society accurately reflects man's muddled, illogical and selfish nature. It will be changed only when that nature is completely transformed. All improvement must come from within, for 'mind creates all phenomena' out of the raw material of the universe. The world-stuff is neither good nor bad; it is man's thinking which makes heaven or hell out of it.

The Buddha said: "In this fathom-long body, equipped with sense organs and faculties, O Bhikkhus, I declare to you is the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation thereof.' Philosophically speaking, these words are the most profound, most comprehensive and most illuminating ever uttered. We create the world literally. The world, in turn, conditions us, but it does not create us. That is the great difference. Since we, each of us individually, are the creators of our world, even the conditioning it imposes is ultimately traceable to ourselves.

27. COLLECTIVE KARMA

From time to time the question of whether there is 'collective karma', or not, keeps coming up. Is it possible for groups of people—whole nations or generations—to share the same karma? Or is karma a strictly individual and personal thing?

The Buddha treated karma, everywhere and always, as a personal inheritance:

“Owners of their karma are the beings, heirs of their karma, their karma is the womb from which they are born, their karma is their friend, their refuge. Whatever karma they perform, good or bad, thereof they will be the heirs. (*Majjhima Nikāya*, 135)

None can suffer from the karma of another, nor profit by the karma of another. But it may happen that large groups of people, through being guilty of the same misdeeds—as for instance racial persecutions, mass killings and tortures etc.—come to make for themselves almost identical karma. Can this be called 'collective karma'?

In a sense it can; yet the term is deceptive. The so-called 'collective karma' is made up of individual karmas, each of which must have its individual fruition. No man necessarily shares the karma of others of his national or other group simply by reason of being one of that group. He is responsible only for his own particular share in its deeds. If he does not share them, his own karma will be quite different.

Most of the confusion of thought arises from the misuse of the phrase 'the law of karma'; and the spelling of the word betrays the source from which the idea of a 'law' of 'collective karma' comes. The Pāli word is *kamma*.

Kamma simply means 'action'—a deed performed by bodily action, speech or thought. Its result is *vipāka*. There is a law of causality, and it is because of this law that kamma, the cause, is invariably followed by *vipāka*, the result. 'The law of karma' has a mystical sound, and suggests a kind of fatalism. People who say, resignedly, 'It is my karma,' are using the word wrongly. They should say, 'It is my *vipāka*'. This would remind them that their kamma, the really important thing, is under their control: they are fashioning it from moment to moment. As their kamma is now, so will their *vipāka* be in the future. We should avoid confusing the cause with the effect.

Kamma is individual because it is *cetanā*—volitional action of an individual mind.

“Volition, (*cetanā*) O Bhikkhus, is what I call action; for through volition one performs actions of body, speech and mind.” *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, 6:63

To what extent can one person dominate and direct the volition of another? Sometimes to a very dangerous extent: but only if there is a surrender of the will to the external influence. That itself involves an act of *cetanā*, a voluntary submission to another person’s will. Such a submission should only be made to a spiritual *guru*; and even then the moral sense should not be suspended. The case of *Āṅgulimāla* is a warning against a too unquestioning submission to the dictates of an unworthy teacher. *Āṅgulimāla* was fortunate later in encountering the greatest Teacher of all, who saved him. People of today have to protect themselves against spiritual quacks, and it is not always easy to discriminate.

Apart from this, there is the question of indoctrination, a very great problem in the modern world. We have seen the phenomenon, unknown before in history, of whole nations behaving under a compulsion imposed on them from without. We have seen the development of techniques for manufacturing a mass-mind capable of incredible atrocities. Propaganda, brain-washing, mass-suggestion leading to mass-hysteria—all these are features of the new technique of power. Can these produce ‘collective karma’? The answer is that they can certainly produce individual kmmas that are practically identical; but they still remain personal kmmas, even though they are instigated. No matter to what influences a man is subjected, his reaction to them together with its *vipāka* remains his own.

But supposing (not, alas, a very far-fetched supposition these days) a man is forced on pain of torture or death to participate in mass atrocities?

To begin with, it must be his past kamma that has placed him in such a terrible position; it is his *vipāka* from some previous unwholesome kamma. He has two alternatives before him: either he can submit, and for the sake of preserving his life continue to make, more bad kamma for himself—or he can refuse and let his enemies do what they like. If he chooses the latter course he will probably exhaust the bad *vipāka* in suffering, in his current life. His act of self-abnegation, his refusal to participate in

deeds of violence and cruelty, will be a positive good. He will have perfected his *sīla*, his moral purity.

In either case his kamma, be it wholesome or unwholesome, will be his own.

But what about the sharing of merits?

This again depends upon *cetanā*, an act of will. When a good deed is performed and the merit is shared with others, there must be the will to share it on their part. By approving the deed they produce a similar good *cetanā* in themselves. Their attention must be drawn to the deed, so that they can rejoice in it and generate a good mental impulse connected with *dāna* (liberality), or whatever the meritorious deed may be. Again, the 'sharer' makes his own kamma. We cannot share demerit, because nobody would be willing to share it with us!

The troubles we inherit from our parents' mistakes cannot be said to be sufferings resulting from their kamma. A child that is born in a country devastated by war, if it suffers it is suffering because the situation in which it has been born makes it possible for the child's own bad kamma to fructify. There must always be more than one cause to produce a given result. Another child, in precisely the same situation, and whose parents were even more directly responsible for the mistakes that led to the country's ruin, may be materially in a much better position. Its parents may have made a fortune in the war that brought others to destitution. This child, too, is experiencing the results of its own kamma, not that of the parents. They will have to suffer for theirs.

There are different kinds of causes, and different kinds of effects. Kamma is one kind of cause; *vipāka* is its corresponding effect. The important thing is to distinguish clearly between the individual cause and effect that carries over from one life to another—the personal kamma and *vipāka*—and other chains of cause and effect that operate through circumstances in the external world.

28. BEAUTY AND THE BUDDHIST

I remember a golden afternoon that I sat and watched transform itself into an orange and purple evening by the sea at Ambalangoda on the Ceylon coast. Far out to the horizon the ocean lay like an expanse of rippled silk, iridescent under the changing light, and the sand glowed with silver heat like metal molten from the furnace. Palms and beach and waves were negligently thrown together under an enormous, impersonal emptiness that throbbed with pure light.

Into my mind, as the light lessened its intensity and the sinking sun began to suffuse the sky with crimson, there came a phrase, read many years ago, with which H. de Vere Stackpoole opened one of his romances: "The sunset held a cloud, red as a flamingo's wing, over Korea." I have always thought this, in its simple brevity, one of the most evocative descriptive phrases I have ever known. The sunset, the single cloud like a flamingo's wing, and the distant coast of Korea together formed a picture that stirred my imagination and left one of those indelible imprints on the mind that we carry with us from childhood all through life. I was many miles from Korea and Japanese waters—in fact, I have never been there—but the phrase is one that had sprung unbidden to my mind many times before, in even more distant places and less likely settings—the coast of Brittany, Cornwall and County Donegal.

It started a train of musings connected with all those places and many more, the spots where earth had seemed to me a fair and lovely thing, and where I had gathered the magic of a hundred poets about me to testify to beauty. It was Robert Bridges who wrote,

I love all beauteous things,
I seek and adore them;
God hath no higher praise
And man in his hasty days
Is honoured for them.

These are the words of a man who loved loveliness, an artist who knew no other honour than to be a creator of beautiful images, phrase's of glowing splendour and soaring imagination; who hymned the wonder of life and its endless diversity.

But into this gallery of memories steps the portrait of the artist as Buddhist, and the key of the composition changes. For long before I could fashion out of my own bewildered sense of beauty those formal and enduring images of it that the artist gives us as testimony to his vision, I had learned to look upon nature, upon life itself, with different eyes. It was no longer the masterpiece of a supreme artist; no longer, for me, the transcendent fact of truth in creation. Instead, I had become aware of the subjective nature of this love of beauty, of how much it is fashioned from habits of thought and an accustomed aesthetic approach. I had begun to question the very principle of beauty, those canons which change from generation to generation and so widely differ among different races. I had become aware of a diversity of standards—the standards of the African and the Chinese, of the men who found beauty in the distortion of natural forms; and also of those who, like the Stoics, opposed an austere intellectual and moral beauty to the beauty that captivates the senses.

It has been my experience that people who live out their lives in the midst of natural beauty seldom have any spontaneous appreciation of it. The farm labourer and villager look upon the glories of the sunset only with a calculating eye to tomorrow's weather, and the changing moods of nature pass them by almost unobserved save when they have some practical bearing on their needs. The nature poet is an urban product, a phenomenon thrown up by the unnatural conditions of industrialism and centralization. Those who, like the Etrick Shepherd, really were countrymen, simply followed the prevailing literary fashion of their time; had they not read or been told about the beauties surrounding them, by other poets to whom these were exotic elements, it is doubtful whether they would have noticed them. Primitive poetry is poetry of action, in which purely descriptive passages are only incidental, and then often limited to formalized, familiar phrases. It is a far cry even from the *Odyssey* of Homer to Gray's *Elegy* and the romantic poets of the English lakes.

The real countryman of every land takes a severely utilitarian—not to say economic—view of nature, and who shall say he is wrong? For him, life is a struggle, his strength pitted against earth and elements, and every man's first concern is to live. He is a part of nature, of the unceasing *Sturm und Drang*, not the detached observer from the urban reservation where—like the American Indian—men of all kinds lead a life divorced from its primitive background of physical stress and conflict. The illiterate

peasant, living in close intimacy with nature, has no illusions about it. Like the Buddhist, he realises that under the enchanting variety of its forms and moods an unceasing war is being waged. Every foot of verdant grassland on the peaceful slopes of the Sussex downs has as much pain, fear and death hidden in it as any battlefield; it shrieks aloud in the jungle-agony of life that is incessantly becoming death. Every drop of water from the still, clear lake is a minute concentration of Armageddon, the horrific battleground of microscopic monsters. Titanic contests are fought to their bitter and bloody conclusion in the hedgerows, beneath the trees, in the tunnelled earth itself. Rapacious and devouring, life stalks through the silence of midday and night; and death, that seems to be its opposite, is ever beside it. We take a second look at life, and we find that it is death. They are one and the same.

Linnaeus, the great Swedish naturalist, who had the heart of a poet, fell on his knees at the first sight of the flaming gorse on Putney Heath and gave thanks to his God for creating such beauty. But rather he ought to have meditated on that concatenation of causes that had given him aesthetic appreciation. For beauty does not reside in the object but in the reaction of the observer, which in its turn is conditioned by many external factors. Supposing, for instance, we were visitors from another planet, where all the natural forms of animals, flowers and even topography, were different from those on earth. In such a case we should see, perhaps, only a vulgar or hideous assault on the eye in the flaming gorse, or in the vivid colour of a gold mohur asserting itself against a curtain of green and purple. We should long, perhaps, for the grey, mud-coloured fungoid growths of our remote planet, where the rays of the sun had never attained enough power to work the alchemy of pigmentation, had never conjured rich and glowing colour out of the drab chemicals of earth. For us, then, these would constitute beauty; for beauty's magic can work only in two ways—either by the shock of surprise or by the perfection of accustomed standards. And even when it comes with the shock of astonishment, it must have in its composition some element with which we are already familiar—of colour, of shape, of harmony in proportion and design. The most revolutionary painter, sculptor or composer has never devised a new form of his art that bears no relation whatever to what has gone before. If it is a reversal of the accepted modes, it still asserts a relationship to them; it cannot come out of nowhere and exist in majestic isolation.

And so with nature, we unconsciously train ourselves to see through the eyes of others the anticipated glories of dawn and sunset, and we accept them as beautiful because we know no other standards of beauty. The too-often quoted lines of Keats: "Beauty is truth; truth, beauty. That is all we know and all we need to know", exemplifies the traditional poetic attitude. In its highest sense it does express a truth of the spirit; the laws of the cosmos are beautiful in their regularity and precision, and the justice of kamma is the perfection of beauty in the abstract. But if we interpret it to mean the beauty of phenomenal things, then we are plunged not only into mental confusion but deeper into that craving which is the basis of the round of rebirths. Confusion, because we take relative and arbitrary forms, sounds and so on to be the substance of a real and enduring beauty, whereas their aesthetic value lies only in our own conditioned appreciation of certain modes of phenomena limited by our experience. We have no yardstick by which to measure beauty, no standard of the absolute—only these familiar things between which we discriminate and on which we set up our own scale of values.

And these values tend to be increasingly individualistic as time goes on. By a process of elimination we become more and more restricted in our range of appreciation, and less ready to conform to the world's general standards. Or at least we should do so. The refining trend of maturity should make us selective, and this is one means that can be used to haul us out of the sticky swamp of saṃsāra. Becoming less avid for life, we become more critical of what it has to offer us—harder to please, in fact. The Epicurean merges imperceptibly into the Stoic. At the point where we come to be disillusioned about even the beauties of nature, seeing in them only impermanence, suffering and unreality, we stand on the threshold of the last and most enduring temple of beauty—that beauty which is indeed truth—and we hold in our hand the ticket of admission.

But I must say it is very hard for a Buddhist to be a poet, if by poetry we understand a song of gladness, of exultation in the act of living. Perhaps, it is significant that the more recent trends in poetry, from T. S. Eliot onwards, have been towards a definitely Buddhistic outlook on life. And if they are pessimistic, it is only because they lack that final assurance of truth behind illusion, of order emerging from disorder, and that supreme insight, beyond even the poet's vision, that only the Dhamma can give.

29. OMNISCIENCE AND THE BUDDHA⁷⁵

The range of knowledge of a Supreme Buddha (*Sammā-sambuddha*) is said to be *acinteyya*, 'that which is unthinkable, incomprehensible and impenetrable'. It passes beyond not only that of the ordinary worldling (*puṭhujjana*), but even that of an Arhat. Whereas the Arhat has eradicated the āsavas and the kilesas and has attained the extinction of suffering, with or without the higher spiritual powers (*abhiññā*), the Buddha has not only done this but has acquired certain additional faculties, and above all certain superior forms of insight which constitute his knowledge regarding causality and relationships in the world of phenomena. Many of these insights he cannot pass on to others because no one else is capable of understanding them. For this reason it is profitless to discuss whether the Buddha was aware of all the facts known to science today, and much else besides, or whether he deliberately confined his attention to those things which were directly concerned with his ministry. We have it on his own assertion that he knew many things which he had not passed on to his disciples; but they were all things irrelevant to the needs of one seeking emancipation. It is not at all unreasonable to assume that the Buddha, with his complete knowledge of the nature of causes and effects, could have worked out for himself all the discoveries of present day science, had he wished to do so. Since scientific knowledge can be approached only by stages, each new discovery being an extension or modification of knowledge already possessed, a Buddha who knew all the facts 2500 years ago would have been unable to teach them to minds totally unprepared for them. Einstein's theory of relativity is a logical outcome of the multiplication tables learned in kindergarten, but it is a long way removed from them and no one would dream of trying to explain relativity to the child who had just mastered the fact that five plus five makes ten.

But there were many more useful ends to which the Buddha could apply his supernatural knowledge. One example of the difference between a Buddha and even the most distinguished and accomplished of his disciples (*sāvaka*) is seen in a story related about Sāriputta. It appears that Sāriputta preached to a Brahmin who was on his deathbed, taking as his theme the means

75. An uncompleted essay.—Ed.

of obtaining rebirth in the Brahmā worlds. When asked by the Buddha why he had selected this subject, Sāriputta replied that, knowing the longing of Brahmins for union with Brahmā, he believed that this kind of discourse would have the strongest appeal, and so the most potent influence for good, on the mind of the dying man. But the Buddha said that the Brahmin in question had actually possessed the good predispositions for attaining Arhatship in that very life, and would have done so if Sāriputta had preached to him on penetrative insight. In the result, however, he had been reborn in the Brahmā world and his emancipation had thereby been delayed for the enormous period of a Brahmā's life-span. The Ven. Sāriputta's error in judgment was the consequence of his not possessing the full insight into the nature of others which constitutes part of Buddha's knowledge. The term *sabbaññū* is often found applied to the Supreme Buddha. It is formed of the combination *sabba* (all, everything) and *aññū* (the knower), and where it occurs in the form *sabbaññūta-ñāṇa* it is generally taken as being all-comprehensive in knowledge. However, although these words are of fairly frequent occurrence, especially in the later texts of the Pāli canon, the word does not find a place in the formal list of the Buddha's attributes which begins *Bhagavā Arahāṃ Sammā-sambuddho, Vijjācaraṇa-sampanno*, etc. This appears to be the oldest description of the Buddha, and the one given and approved by himself, and it has therefore been questioned whether the Buddha did make for himself the claim of *sabbaññūta-ñāṇa*, and if he did, precisely what the term signifies. In English it is generally translated 'omniscience', but before this word can be given full approval for Buddhist use it is well to consider some of the implications it carries, and to define it in such a way as to make sure that its use is not infected with meanings foreign to Buddhism. That is what I propose to do in the discussion that follows.

Theological omniscience

In theistic religion, omniscience is given as one of the chief attributes of a personal⁷⁶ God. It is then coupled with another attribute; that of omnipotence. Omniscience means all-knowledge, and omnipotence means all-power. In giving these

76. I do not intend to deal here with the idea of an impersonal God, the neuter Brahman of Advaita philosophy. A God without attributes *ipso facto* cannot be discussed, and is to that extent meaningless.

attributes to God, however, certain philosophical difficulties have been created. If God is all-powerful, it has been said, man's actions are entirely under God's control, and no freedom of choice is open to man. An echo of this is found in the Old Testament Bible, where God 'hardens the heart' of Pharaoh and causes him to resist Moses' supplication to let the Israelites go out of captivity. In the eyes of the ancient theologians it would have been a presumption to allow Pharaoh, the creature, power to oppose his own will to that of God, his creator, and to prevail against him, even if only temporarily. So to avoid the difficulty they were obliged to make God work against himself, with Pharaoh as the inert victim. He opposed God's will, as expressed through Moses, only because God willed him to do so.

A more sophisticated theology of later days sought to overcome the difficulty of reconciling God's omniscience with man's moral responsibility in choosing between good and evil in a different way. It asserted that in order to give man free will, God had voluntarily limited his own omnipotence. But this carries the suggestion that God might have withdrawn himself completely from participation in human affairs, as indeed appeared to be only too likely, judging by the state of the world at various times in history. Certain Christian churches, such as the Calvinist, never accepted this theory of God's self-limitation as an attempt to save man's free will. They insisted that since God is omnipotent all things are under his control and the whole course of events has been laid down from the beginning. This is the doctrine of predestination; and it follows from it that all those who are to be saved have been saved from the moment of creation, while those who are damned are irremediably doomed to that end, having no control over their destiny at all.

Then what of omniscience? In the theistic sense, omniscience stands for full knowledge of everything existing in the past, the present *and the future*. In the omniscient consciousness of God, the knowledge of past, present and future exists in a state of timelessness which is sometimes called the Eternal Now. This theory would mean that the familiar time sequence of past, present, future has no real existence outside man's consciousness. There is much to be said in favour of this view, apart from its connection with theology, and it deserves a little closer examination.

The picture it offers is something like this. Our consciousness resembles a man walking along a winding path

bounded by high hedges. The spot he is on at any given moment is the *present* for him, and when he has left it behind it remains in his memory as the *past*. He has thus two objects of knowledge; he knows the present by direct experience of his immediate situation, and he knows the past by his recollection of it, or such recollection as is consciously present to him at a particular moment. He has no knowledge of what lies ahead of him on the road. He may make guesses, and more or less intelligent ones, but he has no certain knowledge even that there is any continuation of the road beyond the next bend. So his knowledge of it embraces only those parts of the road that he knows for certain to exist, namely, those he has traversed and the one he is on. Nevertheless, the road does continue beyond the point he occupies, and its continuation forms the unknown future *which is already in existence* and has been fixed beforehand. But to an observer looking from above, all parts of the path are equally visible at the same moment, as, for example, the paths of Hampton Court maze would be to someone looking down on it from a helicopter. This is the theory which Dunn put forward in his book *An Experiment With Time*, and it is such a vision of the past, present and future all existing simultaneously, that is said to constitute God's omniscience. It clearly states that the future is already present as *now* in the consciousness of God, though not in that of man. What it also implies is that the future cannot be altered by man, though it may presumably be altered by God if he wishes to use his omnipotence to that end.

At this stage the analogy becomes a rather difficult one to pursue, for the following reasons. (1) We have to assume that the man's form of locomotion is such that he is impelled to walk forward (he cannot stand still, because time cannot be stopped, except subjectively), and he cannot turn around and retrace his steps along the path he has already taken. We cannot reverse our motion through time (or time's motion through us, as the case may be) and re-enter the past. (2) For the picture of the road ahead to be seen by the omniscient eye absolutely accurately, it must include the man traversing the road at, every point in the future, so long as he is on it, as well as in the past. The number of points in a line being infinite, it follows that an infinite number of pictures of the road and of the man on it, must be present to the omniscient consciousness simultaneously. It does not matter whether there is equal awareness of all of them at the same time, or whether different points can be selected for attention by the

omniscient consciousness. What is significant is the conclusion that every position of the man in the future is equally true, because to be knowable it must be a fact. If it were merely conjecture, no matter how probable it might be, in terms of conjecture, it would still not be a fact, and so could not be an object of direct knowledge. What is seen by the omniscient eye, therefore, is a something which we have not yet seen, but which is bound to happen. This conclusion seems to me to be inescapable.

Here it becomes advisable to make a distinction between certain concepts which frequently become confused in the discussion of free will and determinism. We will begin with prediction.

There are two possible forms that prediction can take. The first is the forecasting of future events on the basis of probabilities. Thus a professor may predict that a certain student will pass his examination, on the basis of the student's class record. Or a doctor may predict that a patient will die within a certain time because the disease he is suffering from is a fatal one. (And here the word 'fatal' merely means that the disease in question can normally have only one ending). But it is not absolutely certain that the student will pass his examination; he may be distracted from his studies before the course is over by falling in love, or he may be stricken with an attack of nervousness in the examination hall. Neither does the doctor know *for certain* that his patient will die, since many people have recovered from diseases that are *usually* fatal; and besides, a new wonder drug may be discovered in time to save the patient's life. In both these instances, what we mean by 'prediction' is merely an informed guess, founded upon a knowledge of causes and their (usual) effects. The knowledge involved in them does not extend beyond the past and present, what lies in the future being only an assumption derived from that knowledge. The claimed predictions of astrology belong to the same class, although they are believed to include causal factors that are not admitted to be such in a scientific view.

The other form that prediction can take is radically different from this. It embraces all kinds of experience in which a future event is actually *seen* as occurring, and is reported before it takes place. The clairvoyant who claims to see pictures of forthcoming events in the crystal, the person who sees a future event in a dream and the waking visions of events that have not yet

happened, all come within this class of experience upon which prediction can supposedly be based. But if they are veridical, i.e., if the experience of seeing an event is followed by the event occurring precisely as it was seen in the crystal, dream or vision, then it has been a subject of *foreknowledge*. That is to say, the event was not conjectured, as in the previous instances, but actually known beforehand as a certainty and a fact. The implication from this, I think, is clear: it must mean that the event so known actually existed in the otherwise unseen future, at the time when it was seen in the present.

This form of foretelling the future is therefore, as I have said, completely different from predictions belonging to the first class, in the nature of the information on which it is based. The professor who predicts that his star student will pass his examination is aware when he makes his prediction that many other events may intervene to prevent his prediction from coming true. The 'seer' who predicts on the basis of what he has *seen* is able to ignore cause-effect interference when he makes his prediction, for the fact that he has seen the future occurrence is proof to him that it will come about; in fact, that it has already occurred. His experience is precognition, or *fore knowledge*, and his prediction is only a by-product of that foreknowledge.

It will be seen at once that if only prediction in the first sense is possible, as it is usually assumed to be, there is room for the exercise of choice in one situation after another. The student, for example, may decide for reasons of his own that he does not want to follow the profession for which he has so far been studying, and may wilfully fail his examination as a way out. But if a crystal-gazer sees the student in his graduation gown, receiving his diploma, and his vision is veridical, it is knowledge of something that exists as a fact, and nothing can prevent the student from passing his examination, neither external causes nor his own will to fail. It means, in effect, that he is bound not to fail. In that case, the future is fixed; it has already been predetermined at the time when the clairvoyant saw the picture. This is the meaning of the concepts fatalism, determinism and predestination. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, if such pre-knowledge is possible, freedom of choice and of action are not merely limited (as we know them to be, from observation), but they are completely absent. What we will, or think we will, to do is simply what we have been predestined to will from the beginning of our lives, and before. It is necessary to insist upon

this point, because it represents the greatest stumbling-block raised by attributing omniscience to God. Just as God's assumed omnipotence deprives man of free choice, so also does God's alleged omniscience. In order to save free will, theology has had to put forward the doctrine that God intentionally restricts his omniscience just as he does his omnipotence.

But the two cases are not exactly on all fours with one another. Omnipotence may circumscribe its own power (in fact, an omnipotence which could not do so would obviously not be omnipotent); but whether God voluntarily limits his power of foreknowing, or does not, the fact remains that if such foreknowledge is possible (whether it is exercised or not) the future is already fixed; and the conclusion is still a rigid determinism. And it is not the determinism of science, which, however rigid it may appear, can never entirely exclude man's free choice as a causal agent in the course of events, but a determinism that is absolutely inflexible precisely because it is not subject to causality; it is a pattern that cannot be changed by the interference of fresh causal factors. And it would appear that this necessarily follows from omniscience if it is to be considered as a fact, whether it is attributed to the Buddhas or God.

It should be understood that what I have just asserted is true only if all events can be precognized. Here there is a possible way out of the dilemma, and I shall return to it later. But if only some events, and not all, can be the subject of foreknowledge, an omniscience that extends into the future is not possible. By definition, the word omniscience excludes any possibility that there can be events outside its range. If there is any possibility of such events, then omniscience does not include complete knowledge of the future.

Knowledge and belief

We have seen that prediction is belief based upon inference, whereas precognition can be called knowledge of the future. We shall now turn to another aspect of the problem.

So far, I have been using the word 'knowledge' without giving attention to the epistemological issues that it raises. Precisely what do I mean when I say that I know something to exist or to be true? Here, it is possible to err rather badly by oversimplifying terms and their meanings. Nevertheless, the risk must be taken, since the problems of epistemology are too complex to be discussed at length in this paper. All that is needed for the

present purpose is to clarify some common misconceptions. This can be done by recapitulating a few of the basic axioms that have been accepted since the time of Plato.

The first definition that offers itself is that knowledge is what is directly perceived through the senses. This proposition means that perception is infallible, because for any individual the way he perceives things is the way they are. If a man says that the curry he is eating is hot, he is stating what to him is a fact, and he knows it to be so. But it is not so for a man who is more used to hot curries, and to whom the same dish may be very mild. This idea of knowledge therefore leads to solipsism and a relativistic view of truth. It excludes all possibility of ever knowing what is objectively true.

Then, can knowledge be defined as correct belief? The idea that it could be so called seems very plausible, but on examination it reveals fatal defects. A certain belief may agree with the objective fact to which it relates, yet the grounds for holding it may not be correct. It may be the result of indoctrination or prior conditioning, whereas for it to be true knowledge a full understanding of what is known is required. Furthermore, when holding a belief that happens to be true, one may form a judgment which is accurate but which nevertheless is based upon false or insufficient grounds. A belief about something which is true may be arrived at without any knowledge whatever of the matter it concerns.

A third possibility is that knowledge consists of true belief, together with the ability to give an account of it. But a belief which the holder of it can express in words, even if it be a true belief, is not necessarily accompanied by knowledge; the account given of it may be an acquired formula. Even if the account includes an accurate enumeration of all the elements that enter into and form the belief, it still does not amount to knowledge. For example, the difference between a physiologist who knows how the human body works, and a medical student who has a correct belief about it does not consist solely in the fact that the former can give a correct description of all the organs and other parts of the body. (The case is a hypothetical one, for in fact there is no physiologist who knows in all details how the body works; but it will do for our purpose). Evidently, something more than this is required to differentiate knowledge from belief. It may be held that to give an account of a thing means to be able to describe the features that distinguish it from other things. But the

ability to mark and specify the characteristics that differentiate one object from another is an essential ingredient even of true belief about the objects; so that, too, is not enough to supply the need. Finally, the fact that a true belief can be put into words is not enough for it to constitute knowledge, for it makes no difference either to the truth or falsity of a belief, or to the reasons for holding it, whether the belief is expressed in words or held silently. In either case it is just a belief, and nothing more.

It would seem, therefore, that knowledge cannot be given a single definition. It requires a set of definitions, of which no one shall contradict another at any point. It is belief plus another element, and that element must be either derived from something that has a real existence outside the realm of subjectivity, or else is a factor of universal experience. Whatever the element may be, we are still left with the difficulty of deciding how we can know that it exists, for we cannot entertain a definition of knowledge which includes knowledge itself.

The objects of knowledge

In the light of what has been said above, I am constrained to use the word 'knowledge' in what is more or less its commonly accepted sense. That is, I shall take it to mean a correct belief, or mental picture, arrived at by correct discernment of objective facts, and relating to an existing fact, event, or state of affairs. Using this as a working definition, although its semantic value may be questioned on semantic grounds, I shall try to show its bearing on the present problem by asking some simple questions regarding the objects of knowledge.

The first is this: Must an object in the external world, or an event in time, be an object or an event that exists, in order to be an object of knowledge? Or, expressed conversely, Can something that does not exist be an object of knowledge?

Here I think the answer must be that an object or a fact, an event or a state of affairs must be in existence before it can be an object of knowledge. It may be advanced as an objection that dragons and unicorns do not exist, but that nevertheless they are objects of knowledge. That is not the case, however; not because it conflicts with the definition of knowledge which I am using, but because it appeals to a category of thought that cannot be included under knowledge, in whatever sense one may be using the term. Mythological animals are objects of imagination, not of knowledge. They are made up of diverse elements taken from

objects that do exist, such as the body and legs of a horse combined with a horn, and the body of a serpent joined to the body of a bat. We know that these things exist separately, but we do not know that they exist in combination as unicorns and dragons. We can say, correctly, that we know, these animals have been thought to exist, and that we know what has been said of them but we cannot correctly say that we know there are unicorns and dragons. It has been asserted that God must exist, because he is an object of thought, and we cannot think about something that has no existence. But in this respect God is in the same case as unicorns and dragons: the mental image of God is composed of various features, such as the attributes of a loving father, of a just and stern king, and of a watchmaker, etc. all of which are drawn from the world of common observation and experience. Whatever other attributes we may choose to add to these in our picture of God, they must all be taken from items already known to us, to form the composite picture. When we think of God, it is in reality these features or characteristics that we think about, either separately or in combination. It is for this reason that I have ejected the 'attributeless' God from this discussion, for nothing can be postulated of him except that he is without attributes. The volumes of theology that have been written around the nature of God prove only one thing: that God is not an object of knowledge, though he can be an object of thought, imagination and speculation. And in order to be an object of thought he has to be personalized and endowed with features that are known to exist. Any other kind of God, impersonal or unmanifested, is a concept without meaning.

The next question requiring an answer is: On what grounds am I justified in saying that I know something? Here we have to exclude all matters that are only subjects of belief or of faith, not of knowledge. As an example of its application I shall take knowledge and belief in connection with the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

Regarding the first of them, *dukkha sacca*, we may correctly say that we know that conditioned existence is bound up with suffering, because this is an empirical fact so far as the existence we know is concerned. If there are forms of existence which are not conditioned, not subject to change and hazard, our knowledge does not include them; but we are amply justified in believing that there are no such forms of existence, because the analysis of what constitutes existence—that is, a process of

incessant change taking place in time and subject to arising and passing away—shows that suffering is an essential part of it, if we take suffering to include, as we rightly should, unsatisfactoriness, agitation and restlessness. So what we can rightly say about the first Truth is that we know it is true as regards life on earth, but that we only believe, though on very strong grounds, that it is also true of all forms of life, wherever they may be found.

On similar grounds we may say of the second Truth, *dukkha samudaya sacca*, that, we know suffering is brought about by ignorance conjoined with craving, because this, too, is something that can be verified by experience, of our own life and that of others. What we cannot say is that we *know* the ignorance and craving to have been operative in previous lives. So long as we are not able to recall our previous existences this must remain a matter of belief, and cannot be termed knowledge. All we can correctly *affirm* is that we believe it to be so, not necessarily or solely because the Buddha said it was so but because the theory has much to commend it on logical grounds, and nothing decisively against it. In other words, it explains a good many things which call for explanation if life is to appear meaningful, and which cannot be explained so satisfactorily in any other way. A possible alternative to it is that life does not have any meaning, and that human value-judgments in terms of justice and right and wrong, good and evil, have only a limited validity for man himself, and none for the universe at large. This is not to deny that there are other interpretations, besides these, but they have little to commend them, and they must rest entirely upon unfounded assumptions, such as that suffering and death are the punishment for original sin.

When we come to the third Truth, *dukkha nirodha sacca*, we cannot say that we know anything about it at all. Nibbāna, the cessation of craving and ignorance and of the process of becoming to which they give rise, is not a thing that can be verified by experience until the state of Arahatsip is reached. Until then it must remain a matter of belief. But it is belief founded upon substantial grounds, in that it follows logically from the propositions accepted earlier regarding the nature of life and the causes (or rather, conditioning factors) of the life-process. We know it to be true that ignorance can be replaced by knowledge, and that craving can be controlled and reduced, so there is no reason why they should not be eliminated altogether. And if they are finally eradicated, the state of peace, tranquillity

and undisturbed security must be the result. If indeed there were previous lives in which the present sufferings were engendered through ignorance and craving, the series of such lives must come to an end with the removal of these factors. On the other hand, even if there is no such continuity of life after death, the benefits of reducing ignorance and craving can be experienced, and so known, in this present life. Thus the belief justifies itself pragmatically, as the Buddha pointed out.

The appeal to pragmatism, however, was only secondary, and for the sake of those who could not feel sufficient confidence in the statements about past and future lives to take up the course of training on the strength of them. A great deal of the evidence for believing in the third Truth comes from the testimony of those to whom Nibbāna was an object of knowledge, a direct experience, and who would hardly have declared it to be so if it was not. In this connection it is not without significance that the Bodhisatta had gained what the Brahmins considered to be *Mokṣa* (final deliverance) before he had attained Buddhahood, and was not satisfied with it. Such a Teacher would scarcely have been the person to be deceived in his own state of mind later on, and still less likely is it that he would have succeeded in deceiving others. For the experience of Nibbāna, as is shown by the minute analysis of mental factors in the stages by which it is reached, is no mere state of exaltation or self-induced fantasy; it is the goal of an exact discipline and is recognisable when it is reached.

The fourth Truth, *dukkha-nirodha-gāmini-pañipadā sacca*, the Path to Nibbāna, is also a matter of belief, not of knowledge. But it is belief that is gradually transformed into knowledge as the path is followed and its results are increasingly experienced. The belief in the Noble Eightfold Path is also a logical outcome of the earlier propositions, to which consent has been given, for it is evidently an effective way of putting an end to craving. There is another important reason for believing in it, and that is the assurance given that if we follow it to the end, we shall actually experience its results in the present life; an assurance that opens up the possibility, at least, that we shall eventually be able to say of it that we know it to be true. So we are shown a graduated scale in which belief, initially prompted by observed facts, becomes strengthened until it turns into confidence (*saddhā*), and confidence ultimately gives place to knowledge.

If a distinction is to be made between belief and faith, as I think it should be, it is that belief is a state of mind less

emotionally coloured than faith. It contains less of the element of wishful thinking. One may believe that there will be a third World War, but few people would say they have faith that there will be a third World War. The nearest approach to confusing the two attitudes is the case of the inveterate pessimist who hopes for the best, while confidently expecting the worst. Faith can exist where there are absolutely no grounds for belief. It is this kind of faith that theistic religion insists upon; and considered as a virtue, faith is most commendable when there is least reason for it. Paul had faith in something which 'to the Greeks was foolishness' and a scandal; Tertullian, in what he declared 'impossible'; and Kierkegaard, in what was 'utterly absurd.' Of course, the word 'belief' could be used in these contexts as well, but the total surrender of the intellect which is implied demands a stronger word, a word more emotionally charged, and 'faith' fills the bill. Such faith may be a virtue; I am far from saying that I *know* it is not. But quite obviously it makes the way clear for every kind of irrationality, mythomania and intolerance. History has shown that faith and hope are not always accompanied by charity.

Logical positivism, which admits only sense-data as legitimate objects of knowledge, would doubtless be dissatisfied with the definition of knowledge which I have adopted, *and* with the above attempt to distinguish between knowledge and belief. But I am not trying to lay down criteria for what constitutes knowledge. My present purpose is only to indicate, in a general way; what is meant by knowing as distinct from believing, and using as an example the fundamental principles of Buddhism. We may now go on to consider what bearing this has upon the question with which we started.

The answer given to that question was that it is only an object or a state of affairs which actually exists that can properly be called an object of knowledge. From this it follows, if the statement is true, that when a clairvoyant sees an event in the future, thereby making it an object of knowledge, that event must be really in existence as a fact at the time of being seen, i.e., *before it has happened*.⁷⁷

77. Here the manuscript ends.—Ed.

30. THOUGHTS ON THE DHAMMA

FROM THE AUTHOR'S NOTE BOOKS

Desire

Many people are dismayed at the idea that all desire has to be abandoned; they cling to the belief that some desires are proper and even beneficial. But there is no absolute standard by which some desires can be said to be "good" while others are "bad." In that respect, desire is like beauty—its basis is conditional and relative. So we find that "beauty" and "desirability" are often synonymous. A beautiful woman who is loved by many men, may be undesirable in the eyes of some. Any object of desire, in fact, may be an object of repulsion to certain people and to most people in certain circumstances.⁷⁸

It is our desires that bring us into conflict with others, and any desire may do this.

Furthermore, every desire carries with it the possibility of unfulfilment and is therefore a potential source of sorrow. Also, desire renews itself, fixing on one object, then another. When one object is gained, desire does not die out, except for that particular object. It transfers itself to a new object, and renews itself all over again.

* * *

When people lack purpose in life it is because their desire is weak, or crossed by conflicting desires, for desire is purpose. Moreover, whatever is desired above all contending desires, with the full concentration of one's being, that desire must surely be realized eventually. But when it is achieved the desire may have subsided. So it is with the poor man who struggles for a lifetime to acquire wealth, and finally gets it only to find that his lust for it is gone—worn out in the expenditure of his vital energies. His desire then has to transfer itself to another object, or his life becomes void and meaningless. In the pursuit itself, not in the goal, lies the purpose of all worldly activity.

78. This idea has been expressed by Āryadeva (3rd century C. E.), a Buddhist philosopher of the Madhyamika school, as follows:

"By the same thing, lust is incited in one, hatred in another, and delusion in the next; hence sense-objects are without (inherent) value." *Catuhśātaka*, ch. VIII, v. 776. (Editor, 'The Wheel')

Thus it is the coming-to-be, or striving-to-be, this, that or the other, that matters. When the desired state is gained it becomes of necessity unwanted. As a state of being it loses the reality it had as an objective.

The “immortal soul” in eternity would not value its happiness because felicity would no longer be an object of desire. Sooner or later the soul would rise up against the futility of an aimless existence. Perhaps that is the symbolic meaning of the revolt of Lucifer. The knowledge of freedom and action depends upon desire. If all good desires are satisfied, the necessity of expressing the selfhood in will must seek objects of desire that are evil.

Saṃsāra

Towards man’s aspirations and needs the universe is coldly indifferent. At its best it is a shop keeper from whom we can buy what we want; it never cheats, but it drives a hard bargain.

Pascal—a quote and comments

“Seeing the blindness and misery of man, the astonishing contradictions which appear in his nature, and beholding the entire universe mute, and man without light, abandoned to himself and as though straying in this corner of the universe, without knowing who has placed him here, what he has come here to do, what will happen to him after death, I become terrified like a man who has been conveyed, asleep, to a frightful desert island, and who awakes not knowing where he is and not having any means of escape; and thereupon I marvel how it comes about that one does not succumb to despair of so miserable a state.”

—Pascal, quoted by Voltaire in *Lettres Philosophiques*. Transl. F. St.

Comment on Pascal

Voltaire criticises this passage severely. But I consider it very fine—the actual state of man without the Dhamma. It shows depths of insight into la condition humaine which the cool rationalism of Voltaire could never-encompass. If he could have shaken off the fetters of theology, what a fine Buddhist Pascal would have made, and how his tortured soul would have responded to it! And then we should have had one splendid passage of literature the less ...

This sad, comical world which owes so much of its beauty to man's disease of mind and body, to his passions and torments and his wild beatings against the bars of an iron necessity that he is unaware he has created to imprison himself, will always be fundamentally the same. It will go on repeating itself with endless variations of the same themes, demonstrating the nature of continuity in change, so long as the unwholesome conditions are present to keep it going. (1968)

Thoughts on Dhammapada, verse 37

“Faring far, wandering alone,
bodiless, cave-dwelling.
those who control this mind
are freed from Māra's bonds.”

The mind is ‘faring far’ because its power of projecting itself is limited only by the boundaries of conceptuality. It stops only at those things which are unthinkable. There are four ‘unthinkable’ (*acinteyya*) things which transcend the ordinary range of human thought: the sphere of a Buddha (*Buddha-visaya*); the sphere of the jhānas (*jhāna-visaya*); karma-result (*kamma-vipāka*), and cosmic speculation (*loka-cintā*), that is to say, the effort to comprehend the world in all its complexity, and especially to try to assign an origin to it.

Apart from these unthinkable matters the mind is able, to roam from subject to subject, over vast expanses of space and time, and it is beguiled by this capacity. As a result there can be day-dreaming, fantasies of the imagination or, in mental disturbances, hallucinations. On the positive side, the mind's ability to roam at large can produce great creative works of art and insights that lead to major scientific discoveries. But for these ideas to be fruitful they must be the result of disciplined thinking; not of aimless mind-wandering.

The mind is wandering alone because essentially every man's mental world is isolated. At certain points it touches others, and communication helps to throw bridges across the gulf that separates one man's subjective experience from that of another; but in the depths, every individual's life is lived alone. The consciousness of that solitude is a cause of anxiety.

John Donne wrote: “No man is an island.” In one sense it is true. Socially, man lives committed to others and in a situation of mutual responsiveness. His actions, even his thoughts

unexpressed, affect others, and theirs have an influence upon him. His collective and public life is one of responsibility to people he has never seen, connected with him by intricate and invisible threads of action and counter-action, so that a movement in one place affects every other section of the web.

But in a more radical sense, man is an island. It is within himself, and alone, that he must confront his uniqueness in the world and find his salvation. 'Be islands unto yourselves', the Buddha said. The meaning was not that man is not an island, but that he must realise his self-responsibility in isolation. To know that he is an island, one with all, yet essentially alone, must become his strength. It is when there is need of dependence, but nothing to depend upon, that fear arises. We have to accept the truth of our solitude, our solitariness in the inner world of the mind, and make it our strength.

The mind is *incorporeal*. Here we have another truth that is beyond the mind's power to grasp. For mind and body are so intimately associated and stand towards each other in a relationship of such close interdependence that the two appear inseparable. The state of the mind affects the body, for good or ill. The body just as certainly affects the mind. Disease in either, or damage to either, can have its repercussions in the other. But the cerebral cortex is not the mind, as Max Loeventhal has pointed out. The mind itself has no location. It appears to be situated in the body only because the senses furnish it with the information about the external world which is required for the processes of thought.

Mind is the name of an activity, a continuing process. That is how it was viewed by William James and is described in most systems of psychology today. It is perhaps unfortunate that in English, "mind" is usually accompanied by the definite article. When we speak of "the mind" we seem to be referring to something if not substantial, at least having a hylozoic nature and a consistency of being that distinguishes it as an entity which it has not and is not.⁷⁹

79. Uncompleted—Ed.

31. SAṂSĀRA

In Buddhism *saṃsāra* means literally “revolving in the cycle of rebirth.” This cycle of rebirth ranges over the whole of the manifested universe, comprising thirty one abodes of beings with the various forms and degrees of consciousness appropriate to their condition. Technically it is not associated either with *rūpa* (form) or *arūpa* (formlessness) since it includes both conditions. Therefore its material factors are not an essential part of *saṃsāra*; it does not mean either the world, or the physical universe, as those terms are commonly understood. They are terms relating to a part or aspect of *saṃsāra* but are not synonymous with it.

Saṃsāra is a condition; but a “condition” ordinarily implies a “something” which is subject to the condition, and which can assume fresh conditions from time to time. The philosopher Bergson maintained that change is the only reality, and this agrees so closely with the Buddhist view of the spatial and temporal universe that we can take it as our first definition of *saṃsāra*. The only reality of *saṃsāra*, then, is change—the state of impermanence (*anicca*). There is, let us say, a reality of change which corresponds to the relative reality of the universe considered from the standpoint of conventional truth (*sammuti sacca*). On this level we deal with things as they appear to us in association with other things. If we try to isolate any particular object from its surroundings we find that we cannot do so. There is nothing that can be predicted about the object except in relation to other objects or ideas in the context of which it has its existence. If we say, for instance, that the object is square, we are dealing with its shape in relation to other shapes known to us. If we say that it is hard we are comparing its tactile effect with that of other objects which are softer. If we say that it is green we are contrasting its colour with that of other objects which produce a different sensation in our visual consciousness. The whole of our knowledge of the object is, in this sense, subjective. We can never know the object itself, but only its reflection in our own consciousness through the six doors of sensory cognition.

Can we be certain, then, that there is any object in reality? If there is, it must be a thing distinct from our knowledge of it. But we can find no proof of the existence of such a thing. A man who is red-green colour blind will see our green object the same colour as a red one. Now, supposing the green object we are examining

is a leaf. In course of time the green leaf withers and becomes red. In the process its shape, texture, colour and other qualities will undergo transformation, yet we call it the same leaf although we cannot find any factor of identity between the red, withered leaf and the green, fresh one. In other words, we cannot find an object called a "leaf" which has changed; all we can discover is the process of change.

This can be applied to all the phenomena of the universe, not excepting human personality. There is the process of change, but no "thing" that changes. This is the Buddhist concept of *anattā*; but it was also noted by Plato, who pointed out that we cannot have any certain knowledge of qualities which are fluctuating and relative, because the thing which possesses those qualities cannot truly be said to be anything at all, since it is always half-way on the road to becoming something else. Plato was compelled to take the Buddhist view that the familiar world must be regarded as a world of becoming, rather than as a world of being, since it never truly is anything at all. He therefore concluded, in complete agreement with Buddhism, so far as he went, that we cannot have certain knowledge of the familiar world which is manifested to us through our sense-experience, precisely because that world is not wholly real. In Buddhism there is no word corresponding to "existence;" the Pali word *bhava* means "becoming," not "being."

Plato was driven to the desperate expedient of splitting his concept of the universe into two aspects, transcendence and immanence. These, in Platonic philosophy, divided the universe into two halves, between which it is impossible to establish any connection. Plato could not define in what way the real was related to the unreal, which is not surprising, since by its very nature the real cannot be related to anything. In the same way, the Vedantic idea of the *paramātman*, the eternal, unchanging soul of things, cannot be in any way connected with the phenomenal attributes of human personality such as body, mind, character, disposition, emotions and other psychic factors. It is clear that if there were any such eternal, unchanging soul, it would bear no relationship whatever to the impermanent, ever-changing human personality. It is therefore vain to imagine that this phenomenal ego possesses a soul-factor which identifies it with the *paramātman*. The phenomenal ego, just like the leaf or any other object of the familiar world, is *anattā*—devoid of any essential being or reality. What we call the "leaf" is a causal process of change, but no "thing" that changes.

"The world is imperfect; it is, indeed, shot through with evil and suffering. Moreover, being filled with change and decay, it cannot, as Plato insists, be wholly real." Thus writes Prof. C. E. M. Joad in his book, *Philosophy* (English Universities Press). Here is the doctrine of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* coming from one who, on his own statement, had never studied Indian philosophy. Now, *saṃsāra* is known by these three qualities: impermanence, suffering and absence of essential reality. They are qualities, but like the process of change we have been examining, they are qualities without any substratum of a "thing" to possess them. Just as there is change, but nothing that changes, so there are these qualities without any "thing" to support them.

Idealism claims that there is no existence of the phenomenal world whatever, but that it is solely an idea. Materialism maintains that the material world is the only reality, and that mind and consciousness, discrimination and volition are only its by-products. Both theories involve the same contradiction as Plato's doctrine of transcendence and immanence, in that each ignores the gulf it creates between the known world and the world of reality. Materialism cannot be true because we have already seen that there is by definition nothing essentially real in physical phenomena or material substance. Idealism equally cannot be true because it ignores the fact of a common standard of agreement concerning knowledge of the universe. If Berkleyan idealism were true it would mean that each individual lives, like a lunatic, in a world of his own mental creation with his own laws, and there would be no basis of agreement between one man's view of it and that of another. Idealism attempts to overcome this difficulty by holding that the existence of other individuals is itself only an idea; in other words, that when we take leave of our friend and he goes out of our sight and hearing he ceases to exist. But we know that he continues to exist independently of our knowledge of him, because when we next meet him he can tell us all that happened to him in the time between. If he ceased to exist when we parted we should have to assume that we too ceased to exist the moment we were outside his field of cognition; but we know very well that we continued to exist and that our current of experience, like his, carried on in the interim.

Buddhist philosophy avoids these two extremes of idealism and materialism, though it leans, if anything, towards the idealist position. The Buddhist position is anti-substantialist; there is no eternal self-existing matter. Similarly there is no eternal self-

existing quiescent substance known as mind, having a prior existence, which is merely stimulated into activity when brought into contact with the sense objects by means of the sense organs. Mind, according to Theravada doctrine, is rather a product brought into being by the interaction of the *indriya* and *visaya* (the psychic faculties and their range of activity). The word *mano* (mind) is derived from the root *ma*, to measure. It therefore signifies the act of calculating, evaluating and judging. Technically it may be rendered "reason"; but it can also mean simply "mind" in the same sense as *citta*. The Mahāyānists, however, who maintain that the whole universe is but the creation of mind, and that nothing exists outside the mind,⁸⁰ use in this connection the word *citta*, not *mano*. Occasionally the word *viññāṇa* is used in place of *citta*.

The three principal schools of Buddhist thought from which all the later sections developed were the Sthaviravādins (Theravādins), Madhyamikas and Yogacarins. The first believed in the existence of the external world and its constituent parts, the *dhammas*. The second categorically denied the existence of the world and the *dhammas*, and did not even trouble to classify the *dhammas*. This school came nearest to Berkleyan idealism. The third believed that the universe, though an ejection or reflection of the consciousness, has yet a relative existence and that, in fact, the *dhammas* are but stages of the mind's unfolding.

It is this last school which most successfully avoids the pitfalls of the extremes, and which comes most into line with present day knowledge of the universe. The *dhammas*, primary elements of the familiar world, exist independently of our knowledge of them, yet the energy that sustains them through the four stages of arising, maturing, decay and disappearance is a mental force, and their existence is only transitory and relative. Thus, the object of the familiar world which we recognise by sense-cognition may not necessarily bear any relationship to the external series of events which produces the impression in our consciousness; yet, nevertheless, the series of events is actually taking place. There is, in fact, a discrete and logically connected sequence of such events taking place all the time in the spatial-temporal complex of *saṃsāra*.

Sammuti sacca, relative truth, as opposed to *paramattha sacca*, ultimate truth, has its basis in *avijjā*, or nescience. In the sense of

80. McGovern, W.M. 1968. *An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism*.

sammuti sacca the universe, as the Sthaviravādins claimed, is real; in the sense of *paramattha sacca* it has no existence whatever, and the Madhyamikas are right. To get a full grasp of truth, both these standpoints have to be taken into account, for both are "one" on their own level. Where all are in agreement is that thought and volitional action are the cause of the arising of the *dhammas* both as units and as aggregates. The qualities are present though they may be interpreted differently by individuals, and there is a common level of relative consciousness on which they compose a logical pattern. But neither philosophy nor science can lift human consciousness out of the network of *saṃsāra* to be able to view that pattern as a whole and understand its origin. Buddhism frankly admits that this can only be achieved through meditative insight; it makes no claim that ultimate truth can be discovered by dialectics.

For ages philosophers have disputed among themselves concerning the nature of the universe without coming to any conclusion. The Greeks had philosophy, but did not know what to do with it; their transcendental speculations always remained a rather uncomfortable appendage to their real religion, which was a warm and sensuous love of life itself. The scholiasts of the Middle Ages wrangled about theological points that today only raise a smile. And if it should seem that the Buddhist concept of *sammuti sacca* and *paramattha sacca* is only another way of expressing Plato's idea of transcendence and immanence, carrying with it the same difficulties and objections, the answer is that in Buddhism philosophy is only an intellectual exercise, a game with logical rules played out in the sphere of relative truth. Buddhism shows a higher way towards realisation: the way of direct insight, free from the fetters of conceptual thinking. Buddhist philosophy analyses the components of the phenomenal universe very precisely, and in accordance with methods used by the best minds throughout the ages; but it does not pretend that this method will do anything more than exhibit the transitory, painful and illusory nature of *saṃsāra*. "This," says Buddhist philosophy in effect, "is *saṃsāra*, the round of existences created by ignorance. It is relatively true, but to discover that which is absolutely true, the *asaṅkhata dhammā*, you have to destroy the relativities of thought and speculation, and the only way to do so is by training the mind, tranquilising its restlessness and putting an end to its cravings."

32. THE WAY OF DISPASSION

Gotama Buddha, the Lord of compassion, incomparable Teacher of gods and men, praised and exalted the holy life of purity, and commended the virtuous disciples who practised self-renunciation. In many ways he showed his mercy to the world, setting forth the noble doctrine of emancipation, so that all beings, hearing his gentle voice, were uplifted and inspired. Himself the greatest exponent of renunciation, who through many births had perfected the ten pāramis of a Bodhisatta, he gave the fruits of his virtue freely and ungrudgingly to the world, and taught the Truth for the welfare of all.

When he descended from the Tusita Heaven into his mother's womb for the last birth, he came into a world sunk in the threefold misery of *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*. Then, as now, men harboured in their hearts delusion and hatred; they were led away by wild and inordinate cravings, and under their influence perpetrated deeds of cruelty and violence towards one another. They held in light esteem the claims of others to justice and benevolence, and thought only of their own material advantage. Their minds were aflame with craving, and passion was the arbiter of their lives.

Nowhere could they find happiness, for the satisfaction they sought could never be attained in a life governed by the three characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. Yet they desperately strove to make their pleasures permanent, thinking that by repeating the momentary sensation over and over again, or by pursuing fresh experiences when the old ones grew stale, they could live perpetually in the enjoyment of the senses.

But rich or poor, strong or feeble, they were subject to the infirmity of the flesh, to sickness, old age and death; and the delights they hankered after, and for the sake of which, they brought ruin upon themselves, became as nothing, swallowed up in the jaws of time, the destroyer of all compounded things.

Then came the Buddha, proclaiming:

“Passion and hatred arise from the self:

Evil thought, delight and horror also arise therefrom.

Arising, they torment (the mind) as boys (torment) a crow.”

Sūciloma Sutta (Sn 2.5)

The Enlightened One perceived that the self was the cradle of all the passions, and it could only be by surrender of that false,

deceptive ego that peace and tranquillity could enter the mind. Looking with infinite compassion on all sentient beings, he saw them without distinction of good or bad, high or low. All are actuated by the same self-motive, and it is under that primal delusion that beings return again and again to the round of existence, drawn back irresistibly by their attachment, to work out their self-imposed destiny in accordance with their *kamma*.

Foremost among the virtues that tend towards conquest of self the Buddha proclaimed *dāna*, or universal charity. To put the needs of another before one's own is but the first step in the practice of *dāna*: its consummation and final flowering is to realise that there is no individual self—that whatsoever one does to another is done, as it were, to oneself. At that point even self-sacrifice ceases. There being no self, there is no sacrifice—only the all-comprehending benevolence of Buddhahood, that permeates the universe of living creatures with love, above, below and in all quarters. Fear and hatred, deception and greed cannot enter the mind that is released from self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), nor can the darkness of ignorance obscure it. Luminous and serene, the light of the arahant shines forth; even in the flux of impermanence he finds the changeless eternity of Nibbāna.

“Being untainted by the world, delighting in charity, established in the precepts and virtues, practising renunciation of the world, and obtaining excellent knowledge, may I be replete with strength and power!”

“The Aspiration of Buddharakkhita,”
Jinālaṅkāra 248.

Disinterested charity therefore is essential to spiritual progress, and must be cultivated by whosoever would aspire to the bliss of Nibbāna. It extinguishes the grasping tendencies that are the cause of rebirth and suffering, and makes renunciation a habitual attitude of mind. The Bodhisatta gave his possessions and even life itself for the welfare of others. Such sacrifice can be possible only when it has ceased to be sacrifice as we understand it and has become instead the expression of a complete reorientation in thought. Expounding the principle of the non-self, the Vajracchedikā Sutta says: “And, O Subhūti, the *pāramī* of the highest perfection of endurance (*khanti*) belonging to the Tathāgata, that also is no *pāramī*. And why? Because, O Subhūti, at the time when the king of Kāliṅga cut my flesh from every limb, I had no idea of a self, of a being, of a living being, or of a

person; I had neither an idea nor no-idea. And why? Because, O Subhūti, if I at that time had had an idea of a self, I should also have had an idea of malevolence.”

The Sutta continues concerning *dāna* thus: “A Bodhisatta, after putting aside all ideas (concepts based upon phenomena), should raise his mind to the highest perfect knowledge, he should frame his mind so as not to believe in (depend upon) form, sound, smell, taste or anything that can be touched. For what is believed is not to be depended upon. Therefore the Tathāgata preaches: a gift should not be given by a Bodhisatta who believes in (depends upon) anything; it should not be given by one who believes in form, sound, smell, taste or anything that can be touched.”

Here the Yogācārin psychology is clear. It is to the effect that for the complete perfection of *dāna pāramitā* all idea of giver and recipient must be abandoned, as also all belief in the thing given—that is to say, as to its essential reality. The significance becomes transferred entirely to the action (*kamma*): it has no egocentric reference whatever.

The Buddha’s Way of Dispassion leads to complete integration of the psychic faculties: it gives the penetrating vision that sees directly into the nature of causality, and beyond it, to the uncaused and uncompounded. That having been attained, no external events, no happenings in the realm of relative reality can give rise to sorrow, resentment or desire. The mind is finally liberated, poised on the wave crest of the ocean of *saṃsāra*, never to be submerged beneath the seething waters.

“Knowing this body to be as foam and understanding its mirage-like nature, one will escape the tight grip of the King of Death, having destroyed the power of Māra.”

Dhammapada

No longer is there friend or foe for him who is thus liberated. Those who ignorantly consider themselves his enemies he enfolds with loving compassion, protecting them from their own evils, striving only to prevent them from harming themselves. Against their malevolence he puts up his dispassion, neutralising their hatred as water neutralizes a corrosive acid, and overcomes them with the weapons of harmlessness and purity.

The state of sublime equanimity is to be reached through understanding the nature of the five-*khandha*-process—that it is impermanent, lasting no longer than an instantaneous flash of

light, that it is a mere aggregate of physical form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and states of consciousness, and that it is without any persisting ego-entity. A continual unfolding of empty phenomena, conditioned by antecedent tendencies, it cannot form any basis for happiness: it can only give rise to new and ever unsatisfied desires. In ignorance we desire pleasure, but our real quest is for the self that enjoys the sensations. Since that self is nowhere to be found we remain unhappy, unable to perpetuate the present moment or anchor it to any firm ground of reality. The essence of the experience eludes us: in the moment of grasping it is gone.

We are urged to relinquish this hopeless effort to find satisfaction in the world of *anicca*, *anattā* and *dukkha*, and instead, to fix the mind steadfastly on the state of *virāga*, dispassionateness. In some texts the word *virāga* is used almost as an equivalent for Nibbāna (*tanhakkhaya virāga nirodha nibbāna*). This *virāga* consists in the extinction of attachment to sense-objects, the giving up of the concept "I" as the performer of actions and the ground of merit and demerit. It differs from suppression of selfhood, in that it cuts deeper than the mere inhibition of desires and reactions by any effort of will. The Tathāgata condemned forceful exertion of will-power in austerities. They are only a different expression of violence—violence directed against the unreal—in place of violence against the equally unreal not-self. The practice of such austerities in an extreme form serves only to divert the current of self-consciousness or to dam it, thus increasing its pressure. The psychological tension mounts, and instead of being extinguished the ego becomes magnified. The hold on self must be relaxed, not tightened, and this it to be brought about gradually and naturally by creating an opposite impulse, a tendency that manifests in disinterested activity for the welfare of others.

Benevolence as taught by the Buddha is an active principle that directs to one goal the purposes of heart and mind. By its cultivation the mind is freed from the *asavas* and the heart is made capable of a love that is universal and dispassionate, without attachment to ideas or objects. The mind of an arahant who has attained this beatitude of selfless, dispassionate benevolence, shines in the darkness of *samsāra* clearly and steadily, like the flame of a lamp in a sheltered place; and when the fuel is exhausted, for him there is no rebirth.

33. NIBBĀNA

Author's Note

There is only one Nibbāna (Skr.: Nirvāṇa) and it is the same for a Supreme Buddha, a Silent Buddha and an Arahant. It is the extinction of the fires of greed, ill will and delusion; the attainment of realisation-by-insight which destroys craving and so brings rebirth in conditioned existence to an end.

But two aspects of Nibbāna are distinguished. The first is *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*, the Nibbāna that is experienced in *samādhi* while the Arahant is still living. This establishes the state of unchanging mental equanimity and bliss that can come about only when all forms of craving have ceased and the anxieties, fears and hatreds engendered by desire no longer trouble the mind.

The second is *anupādisesa-nibbāna* or Parinibbāna, the final Nibbāna reached at the end of the Arahant's life, from which no further process of contingent "becoming" can arise.

It is the second of these which I have chiefly discussed in the following pages.

—F. S.

Nibbāna

The ultimate goal of the Buddhist life is the attainment of Nibbāna, but many people do not feel certain as to what Nibbāna really is.

One view, for which there is no support whatever in Buddhist doctrine, is that it is eternal life. The opposite is that it is annihilation. There is more reason for holding the latter view, but nevertheless it conveys a false idea.

It is not surprising that there should be such misunderstandings, because, by what we are accustomed to call "common sense" reasoning, it must be either the one or the other.

But it is precisely these two pitfalls that the Buddha took great care that we should avoid. That is why most of the references to Nibbāna are in negative terms. Wherever the Buddha used terms with a positive meaning, such as *Amata*, the deathless, and; *Dhuvā*, the Permanent, to describe Nibbāna, he did so in a more or less metaphorical sense. As descriptions the words are true, but they must not be taken in exactly the same

sense as that in which we ordinarily use them. Nibbāna is without death because it is without birth; it is permanent because it is not subject to time and conditionality.

In order to form an idea of what Nibbāna really means, we must first of all understand what is meant by the words "life" and "living"; and that, to begin with, is not so easy as it may appear. We may have a ready-made definition, but find that it does not apply in all circumstances, or that it does not cover everything we mean. What exactly are the characteristics of a living being, and what is the nature of the characteristics themselves?

By "living" we normally mean being conscious, being aware of our own identity, of our surroundings and of events taking place around us. It is that which makes the difference between a living person and a dead body; the one is conscious, the other is not. This does not mean that an unconscious person or thing is always dead; but a dead body is always unconscious. There are many ways of being alive yet not conscious, as in the case of plants, but that is not what we usually mean by living; it is little more than existing, as a lifeless object does. Life of this kind consists simply of organic growth and decay.

To be exact, a living organism is any aggregation of cells that sustain themselves, grow and multiply, by drawing nourishment from their environment. But this, at its simplest, is merely vegetable existence. Usually, when we speak of "life" we think of it in terms of consciousness, the awareness of selfhood that may be ascribed even to an insect, but which is lacking in a plant.

Thus we instinctively connect the idea of life with the experience of pleasure and pain. Sensations that emerge into consciousness are an inseparable part of our idea of living, and they contribute, also, to our sense of identity and separateness. We may tell ourselves incessantly that all life is one; but so long as we have not experienced the liberation from a body that feels sensations which others do not feel, and a mind that thinks as others do not, we cannot experience the idea of oneness as a reality. It amounts to claiming a transcendent position with regard to the world, without having had a transcendental experience, on the mere basis of an intellectual attitude. At the beginning, the notion that one can attain realisation by repeating formulas is a charming one; but repeated collision with the brute facts of a life in which every being is distinct from all others makes the attitude difficult to hold. This is perhaps the commonest cause of disappointment to those who have not understood that Nibbāna is

something for which we have to strive, and that if we only try to persuade ourselves that we have already reached it, we are leading ourselves up a spiritual cul-de-sac.

When we say "life," we mean in general the quality of being conscious and aware of what is going on. Having this kind of awareness means that the living being is also conscious of time, because events cannot occur without a time-sequence. For anything to happen there must be the past, before it happened; the time of its happening, which we may call the present, and the time after it happened, which is the future. Thus we see that if life is consciousness, it must be consciousness of something that is existing or happening in time. It is only in contrast to being conscious of "something" that we can be conscious of "nothing," so that the "something," whatever it may be, is always present in consciousness, either in the past, present or future.

Now, that "something," when everything is brought down to a single fact, is change. The future does not exist until it becomes the present; then in the instant it becomes the past, and again does not exist, except in memory. Even our knowledge of the difference between one thing and another, as between trees and houses, comes from our awareness of a change in our consciousness when we turn our attention from one to the other. The differences between light and dark, heat and cold, are also based on change, the change that takes place in our sensations when light gives place to darkness, heat to cold. And so it is with everything we associate with life.

There is continual change going on in our bodies as well as in our minds, just as there is in the organic life of plants. Nothing ever remains the same for very long, but one state is continually moving into another in a ceaseless flow. So we see that change is one of the essential characteristics of life; without change, or impermanence, there is no life as we understand it. Death itself is only another kind of change, in which the body ceases to function and breaks down into its chemical elements, while the craving-force (*bhava-taṇhā*, the will to live) and the Karma of the past produce a new being from the mental life of the former one. Death and rebirth are both part of the process of incessant change.

This continual flux of transformations consists, really, of the perishing of the old and the arising of the new; it is not the changing of things, but rather an unbroken succession of events, that constitutes *anicca*, the impermanence of *saṃsāra*. And

whether it be the changing modes of our consciousness, or the unconscious changes going on in our bodies, it never finds any permanent point of rest. It seems to indicate a chronic state of dissatisfaction; the body and the mind both seem always to be wanting to become something other than what they are from moment to moment. It is like a journey to nowhere in particular. If the mind is satisfied at any point it cannot remain so for long.

When we are feeling extremely happy we should like that state of mind to remain with us forever, but we find that after a time the happiness passes and some other mental sensation takes its place. Everybody knows that we cannot cling to happiness; its fleeting nature has been a subject for poets to lament over ever since poets first began stringing words together.

If we make a serious attempt to find out why this is, we come to see that it is due to that essential condition of life by which nothing can remain static for long; and also to another law which always accompanies the law of change, namely, that we can experience one thing only by contrast with its opposite. We should never know what happiness was if we could not also experience misery. And if we experienced happiness unchanging for an extremely long time, without anxieties or painful sensations of any kind, we should finally forget what unhappiness was like. Then our happiness would cease to exist because we should be taking that state for granted, and should no longer be aware that we were happy. So it is obvious that a living being can be happy only if it is also capable of being unhappy. Happiness and misery, like heat and cold, light and dark, are things that exist only by way of contrast, and the contrast is an indispensable part of this process we call living.

Now, most thoughtful people, especially those who are capable of feeling the pain and unhappiness of others in a sympathetic way, are agreed that on the average there is more suffering than happiness in life. The great mass of living beings in the world are experiencing a life that is, on the whole, more painful than pleasurable. They are sustained chiefly by the hope, which is another feature of life and an indispensable one, that their condition will improve and that they will be happy at some future time. But the element of change which they rely upon to bring them happiness is also bound to destroy that happiness after a time, even if at last it comes, as we have already noticed.

So, taking everything together, we see that life, which is perpetual change, is on the whole unsatisfactory. When we are

happy we may feel that life is good, like Robert Browning with his nonsensical "God's in his heaven; all's right with the world"; but when we are suffering either mental or physical pain we are inclined to take the view that "life is not worth living." Our feeling about life is therefore entirely subjective unless we can get away from our personal feelings for a time and look at it in a larger context.

Then, if we review our own total experience, and add it to what we can see of the total experience of other people, to say nothing of animals—which after all are living beings as well—we must admit that on the whole life is a very sorry business indeed. Not for nothing is it said that man lives by hope. And it has been observed often enough that in many instances the hope is better than the realisation. If we could be happy long enough to get thoroughly accustomed to it, we should no longer be happy. The heaven of delight would become a hell of boredom.

In this connection we may recall that the early Christian Fathers held that the happiness of the blessed in Paradise would be greatly enhanced by the sight of the damned, eternally burning in the nether regions. Their authority for this was the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16: 20–31. It was before it had become fashionable to dismiss everything we do not like in ancient scriptures as being symbolic, and not to be taken literally; and in more recent times the good Fathers have been reproached with an excessive zeal for revenge. But they may also have had it in mind that Lazarus, in the bosom of Abraham, would be in need of some distraction to relieve the appalling monotony of his eternal life. Heaven, they may have recognised, was woefully deficient in the element of contrast which man requires for a full appreciation of his happiness.

Either he must suffer himself at times, to make his happiness known to him, or he must see someone else suffering. It is a condition imposed by his own nature. Eternal, unchanging bliss requires for its maintenance a state utterly unlike any that can be associated with ordinary human consciousness.

Consciousness, as we have been discussing it, includes sensations and perception, but personality to be complete needs another factor, that of willing. We are not only conscious of the outside world, but also feel an urge to act on it in some way, and this will to act comes from the desire to achieve some particular object. The manner in which we tend to act constitutes our character, and it is formed by habits of thinking and acting in the

past. There is nothing stable or fixed about this part of human personality, either. It is merely a tendency. So we notice that the man whom we have labelled "selfish" because he is selfish in general, is not invariably so. Neither is the "honest" man invariably honest. Human character is as fluid as any other part of the life-process. A good man may act badly at times, while a bad man may be capable of some very good impulses; and often these conflicting trends are so mixed-up that it is impossible to decide what the predominant characteristics are. To labour this point may seem unnecessary, but it has an important bearing on our inquiry, because we are trying to find something in life that is not subject to change.

So far we have not found anything that does not alter. Looking at the overall picture of life we see that it has these features of impermanence or changeableness, by which it flows on from one state to another, and of unsatisfactoriness which can range from mild displeasure to acute misery. We see that there is nothing constant and abiding in it; therefore, there is no essence to which we can point and say "This is my Self," because the personality changes at different stages from infancy to old age, and indeed from one moment to another. The only connection that can be found between one state of the personality (or consciousness) and another is the fact that each one is caused by the one that existed prior to it, and that there is a connecting link of memory between them.

There is also the general proneness to think and act as we have been accustomed to do in the past; and this, as we have seen, is no more than a tendency. It is a mistake to regard it as an unalterable part of oneself, or as the Self with a capital letter.

Now it is just this that Buddhism means when it says that life has three characteristics: impermanence, liability to suffering and lack of "selfness." And the striking truth becomes clear to us that every kind of life as we know it must have these same characteristics. If there were no change there would be no life. If there were no suffering there would be no happiness, and if there were a permanent self that never alters it would be equivalent to a state of no change—and therefore no life. In mathematical terms we may say that these three characteristics give us the co-ordinates which add up to what we understand by "life."

So eternal life, which could be nothing but eternal change, could never produce any lasting satisfaction. With continual birth and death following upon one another we already have "eternal

life," in fact, though not personal immortality. The question we should ask ourselves is: "Is it desirable?"

We may answer "Yes" or "No" according to our circumstances at the time. But whether the answer is yes or no, the fact that we have to face is that eternal life could not be in any conditions very much better than the life we are experiencing at present with its contrasts and alternations. If it were without these features it would not be "life."

A state which is without change and contrasts must be in all respects different from anything we can imagine from our own experience. We have nothing with which to compare it and no framework of ideas to fit it into. For one thing, it would be timeless, because time exists only where there is change. It could also contain no distinctions, for the differences which make us conscious of "myself" and "others" could not exist without these conditions of contrast and transition. For the same reason space as we conceive it could not exist, either. Unless, of course, we can visualise a space of one dimension, or a non-dimensional space. In any case, it is clear that the world of "things" and of people simply could not come into being where there was no possibility of change. Therefore a personal immortality of eternal duration is out of the question.

At the same time, we have already seen that the idea of "nothing" itself cannot exist without the opposite idea of "something" being present, if only as a possibility: If Nibbāna were nothingness, it would also be "somethingness" by implication. Every affirmation depends upon the existence of a negation which is its opposite.

Our whole difficulty in conceiving Nibbāna lies in the fact that our thinking is bounded by opposites of this kind. We imagine that since Nibbāna is not eternal life it must be eternal death—the annihilation of something. But death itself is only a part of the life-process, as we have seen; it is just one of the many different kinds of changes that are going on all the time, and which are inseparable from life. Eternal existence and eternal non-existence are opposites of the same kind as light and darkness, heat and cold; neither of them has any real or absolute meaning. They are concepts which depend upon one another: they are aspects of merely relative truth.

It is the same with "beginning" and "ending." We know that there cannot be an ending of anything unless there has been a beginning. What is more difficult for us to grasp is that there,

equally, cannot be a beginning unless there has also previously been an ending. Yet such is the fact. If we ask, "How did the life-process begin?" We can choose between two answers, both of equal truth. One is that it had no beginning; the other is that it has its beginning with every fresh moment of conscious existence. But try as we may, we cannot find any point at which life started from nothing, or was created out of nothing. If it was created at any stage, its creator must have been in existence before it, which leaves us still no nearer to finding the absolute beginning of life. It only pushes the inquiry further back, to no purpose.

In this situation we have to fall back upon the second answer as being the more manageable one for our discussion. If life begins at every new moment of conscious experience we see that its beginnings are dependent upon its previous endings, and this agrees with our already-formed picture of life as a flowing process, a flux of "becoming" which never quite reaches the goal of "being." This helps us considerably, because it opens up the possibility of the life-process coming to an end. In other words it means that there can be a point at which, after ending, it can be prevented from beginning again. And since life is propagated by desire, the way to accomplish this is to eradicate the mental impulse of craving. So Nibbāna is the annihilation of craving, the extinction of the fires of greed, ill will and delusion.

This, then, is cessation of the life-process, which is not the same as the annihilation of a being. Where there has never been any real being there cannot be annihilation; but where only a process is concerned we can quite properly speak of its cessation. This is not a mere verbal quibble, but a distinction which points to something of tremendous importance.

With the attainment of Nibbāna, it is a process of change that comes to an end, and with its ending there cease to arise all the other things which we have seen to be a consequence of that process, including suffering and the illusion of personality. So the Nibbāna that is entered into at the last passing away of a Buddha or Arahant is a state absolutely devoid of all the features of life as we have seen it to be. To try to describe it in terms of what we have experienced in our life of change and of opposites would give a false and misleading conception of it. It is outside all of these categories; or, alternatively, we may say that the categories have no basis for arising in it. If we choose to class all the categories of things, events and experiences of life as passing phases, and therefore unreal—or only temporarily and relatively real—then

Nibbāna becomes the sole eternal (*dhuva*) reality, if they are considered negative, Nibbāna must be the only true positive.

To put the case in another way: Nibbāna is not just another opposite in all the categories of opposites that make up our thinking. It is itself the absolute opposite of those opposites, the state in which they cannot possibly arise.

Here it is pertinent to stop and consider two propositions that have been put forward regarding Nibbāna. The first is that “Nirvāna and saṃsāra (the round of births and deaths) are one.”

To get this statement into perspective, it is necessary to distinguish between the experience of Nibbāna known to the Arahant while he is still living, and the Nibbāna after death. The first is called in Pāli, *sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*: Nibbāna with all the components of individualised personality still present. The second is called *anupādisesa-nibbāna*: It is Nibbāna without any substratum of personality in the present, and without the possibility of its arising in the future. This is the Nibbāna in which present and future do not exist, since it is free from all conditionality.

It is clear, from the descriptions given of the lives of disciples subsequent to their attainment of Arahantship, that, although they could induce the Nibbānic consciousness whenever they wished, they were not, in their ordinary state, exempt from the pains of the flesh. Only their minds remained unaffected. Physically, they suffered from sickness and injury, as all mortals must do. Even the Buddha himself endured much in this way towards the end of his life. He told Ānanda that it was only when he withdrew his consciousness from the physical plane that he could obtain bodily ease.⁸¹

Sa-upādisesa-nibbāna, therefore, is only intermittent release from suffering: as a continual state of consciousness for a living being it would be incompatible with the maintenance of life. Remaining in it constantly, the physical organism would perish. Far from being one with saṃsāra, it is the state in which all saṃsāric experience is suspended, so long as the Arahant remains in it. If he intends to live out his course, he has to emerge from the contemplation of Nibbāna so that he can again function within the modes, and according to the laws, of conditionality.

The Nibbāna after death is the same as that which the Arahant is capable of experiencing in life, but it is the absolute and final withdrawal from saṃsāric conditions. It is in this sense

81. *Parinibbāna Sutta, Last Days of the Buddha*, The Wheel No. 67/69.

that it becomes “permanent.” As the Buddha taught it, Nibbāna is desirable because it is the cessation of births and deaths, and all the suffering they entail.

One may live with the intellectual understanding that all existence is *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* and one may reach the full interior experience of it while still living; but neither of these is equivalent to that Nibbāna which is the total release from conditioned existence and its necessary suffering. A Bodhisatta is able to continue the round of rebirths while he qualifies himself to become a Supreme Buddha, but only by stopping short of the attainment of Arahantship. He does not experience Nibbāna and saṃsāra as identical. To him, Nibbāna is certainty because he has confidence. But it is a certainty belonging to the future, not to his present condition and daily activities. It may indeed be said that saṃsāra contains the potentiality of Nibbāna; but potential states and actual ones should not be confused: Nibbāna in its fullest sense means the complete extinction of craving, not in one form only, but in all its manifold guises; and where craving is extinguished, there can be no re-arising of saṃsāric existence. This is the whole point and essence of the Buddha’s Doctrine.

The second theory that has been advanced about Nibbāna—though never by instructed Asian Buddhists—is that it is in some way equivalent to God. Not, of course, to the personal God of Western tradition, but rather to something resembling the *Paramātman* or *Nirguṇa Brahman* of Vedānta. That is to say, an impersonal God devoid of attributes, but from whom (or rather, which) all things have emanated.

It is certain that this idea of God arose after the time of the Buddha.⁸² It was in fact a rather desperate expedient to preserve the idea of a Supreme Power on a higher level than the mythical Creator whom Buddhism had shown to be unnecessary. It is difficult to see why, if this is what the Buddha meant by Nibbāna, he did not say so, instead of leaving it to others. But actually, the authors of the Upaniṣads themselves did not say that Nibbāna was equivalent to the *Nirguṇa Brahman*. Their intention seems to have been only to free God from the limitations of personality which the Buddha had shown to be defects.

The chief objection to the theory is that, by definition, Nibbāna is the cessation of the world, whereas the *Nirguṇa*

82. L. M. Joshi, *Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism*, The Wheel No. 150/151.

Brahman, at one remove, is still its origin and the cause of its perpetual re-creation. Because of this, he, or it, is responsible for all the obvious evils of the world, just as much as for whatever is good. The will to create, itself, implies desire on the part of the Supreme Power, and desire for anything argues a state of imperfection. If the *Nirguṇa Brahman* were complete unity and bliss, as it is represented, the emanation of the universe from it could only be a step down from perfection to imperfection. The idea that God created saṃsāra, with all its ills, as a plaything, from the emanations of his own divine essence, is inherently repulsive.

Apart from these considerations, Nibbāna, as we have seen, is described as the state of ultimate peace and security from ill. But the supposed Supreme Self is eternally agitated, being perpetually engaged in the creation, absorption and re-creation of the universe. In these circumstances there can be no release or unchanging peace for the individual self that becomes united with it. In this system of thought the term *mokṣa* is used, rather than Nibbāna: but it seems to denote an exaltation of the self, rather than a release from its limitations. And here again we find the tendency to confuse potential states with existing ones, for the disciple is assured "You are That," meaning the *Paramātman*. But while every being has the possibility of making himself divine, a "deva by purification", as Buddhism has it, it is surely very unsafe to imagine oneself God while still subject to human cravings and moral imperfection.

Whatever meaning one may give to the word God, any attempt to make it inter-changeable with Nibbāna is totally unacceptable. One of the strongest points of the Buddhadhamma is that it has no need of theistic myths that create problems without really solving any. The central doctrine of a Creator who is responsible for the world has become a sore embarrassment to theistic religion today; so much so that in some quarters serious attempts are being made to discard it. On this account there is some envy of Buddhism, which has never been marred by such relics of primitive thinking and has remained uncontaminated by them through the centuries. If there were in fact such a Creator, or if he were necessary to explain the existence of the world, the unique Buddhist concept of Nibbāna would still stand above and beyond him, as something he has not yet attained.

When he was asked whether the Arahant (one who has attained Nibbāna) exists or does not exist after death, the Buddha

refused to answer the question. He said that it was wrongly put. And if we have followed the arguments just given we shall see that it was indeed wrongly put, because neither statement is applicable. When it was carried further, with the question whether the Arahant neither existed nor did not exist after death, the Buddha still maintained the same silence.

And, rather than misrepresent the truth, he preserved his silence even when some people concluded that because he did not answer he did not know. But he gave an answer that was of a different order, and more convincing than any fanciful description could be. He said: "Practise the method of attaining Nibbāna that I have given in the Noble Eightfold Path. Then you will come to realise the truth for yourself."

That is the only way in which we can really come to understand what Nibbāna is, by realising it ourselves and so seeing the truth face to face. We will then understand why it is that all questions relating to it, so long as they are couched in terms of opposites and alternatives, are wrongly put. Such questions puzzle us only because of the limitations of the mind bound by *avijjā* (ignorance) and the peculiar nature of life as we experience it.

But while the Buddha refused to describe or define Nibbāna, he never hesitated when asked to make a positive affirmation. The reply then was always "Nibbāna is."

Of Related Interest

REBIRTH AS DOCTRINE AND EXPERIENCE

Francis Story

Essays on the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth, along with investigated cases of spontaneous memories of former lives; all of these make fascinating reading.

BP 402S

272 pp.

A COMPREHENSIVE MANUAL OF ABHIDHAMMA

Bhikkhu Bodhi, General Editor

This is the classical introduction to the study of Abhidhamma, the Buddhist philosophy of mind and mental processes. The work contains a translation of Acariya Anuruddha's Abhidhammattha Sangaha along with the Pali text and a detailed explanatory guide to this ancient philosophical psychology. A long introduction explains the basic principles of the Abhidhamma. Includes 48 charts and tables.

BP 304S

426 pp.

COLLECTED WHEEL PUBLICATIONS

Various authors

Each volume contains fifteen numbers of the renowned Wheel Publication series, dealing with various aspects of the Buddha's teaching.

FACETS OF BUDDHIST THOUGHT

Collected Essays

by K.N. Jayatilleke

This book by one of the best-known Buddhist scholars in Asia presents a brilliant account of Theravada Buddhism and embraces a wide variety of themes ranging from the birth of Buddhism to the Buddha's prophetic teachings regarding the future of mankind.

BP 428H

506pp

THE BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or write an e-mail, or a letter to the:

Administrative Secretary
Buddhist Publication Society
P.O. Box 61
54 Sangharaja Mawatha
Kandy • Sri Lanka

E-mail: bps@bps.lk
web site: <http://www.bps.lk>
Tel: 0094 81 223 7283 • Fax: 0094 81 222 3679