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Nirvāna, Nihilism, and Satori

Douglas M. Burns, MD

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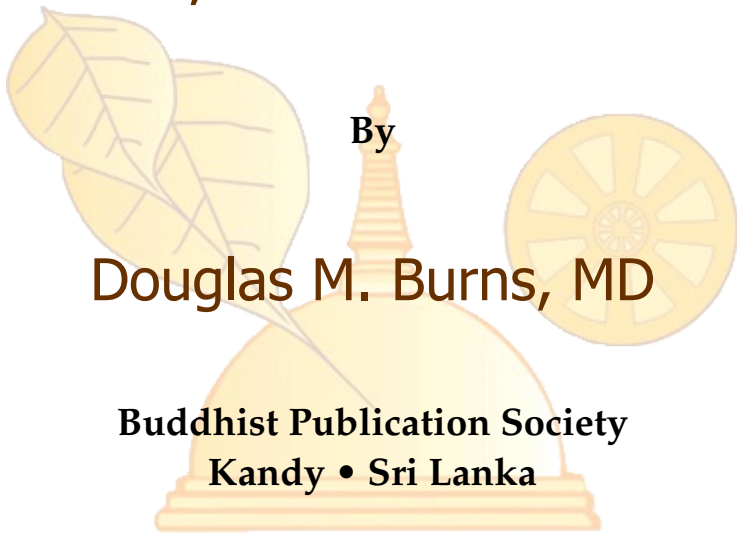

By

Douglas M. Burns, MD

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Preface

As heirs of a great religious and cultural heritage covering 2,500 years of history, the Buddhists of today are faced with the challenge of a new age. In the unending quest for human fulfilment, men continue to look to the mystical, the supernatural, the occult, and the divine. But the new age appears as an age of reason, intellect, pragmatism, and technology. Even the age-old traditions of metaphysics and philosophy appear to wither before the onslaught of science and psychology. Where once there were forests, now there are farms; where once farms, now cities; where once silence, now noise. Ethics, morals and traditions, once the guidelines of human values, are now tottering and groping for new bases, new foundations other than the dogmas of antiquity (the dictates of our ancestors).

The penetrating and stirring insights of the Lord Buddha have filtered through the paths of history. Through the centuries, the Buddha Dhamma has often taken on new meanings and new interpretations depending on the

cultural circumstances and emotional wishes of the people who call themselves "Buddhists." True, Buddhism as the impersonal Truth is universal, transcending the bounds of race, nation or culture. But as a social, personal organization or movement, the true and valuable insights of the Enlightened One sometimes were all but lost, buried in the maze of metaphysics, ritual, folklore, and mythology.

We are proud that Dr. Burns' present writing is one of unique quality. It traces Buddhism back to its earliest known teachings and clearly explains them impartially, as free from cultural and personal bias as possible. It then jumps across 2,500 years of history and presents the Dhamma in its uncoloured form to the modern world. In an era where scepticism seems paramount, even the most critical reader will surely be impressed not only with the wisdom of Buddhism but also with its reasonable and practical application to the lives of all of us today.

Princess Poon Pismai Diskul
President
World Fellowship of Buddhists

Introduction

It has been said, and probably correctly, that Buddhism is the least understood and most misunderstood of all major religions. To whatever extent this is true of Buddhist doctrine in general, it is doubly true of the goal toward which that doctrine is directed: Nirvāna.

Nirvāna has been variously explained as Oneness with God, Cosmic Consciousness, deep trance, self-annihilation, Pure Being, non-existence, regression to intrauterine life, and a psychedelic ecstasy. Yet none of these explanations agree with the accounts given by the Buddha and others who are alleged to have realized it. Not only are we confronted with the problem of what Nirvāna is, but arising from this consideration are a number of secondary but important questions: Is Nirvāna really attainable, and if so, is it worth the effort? Just how is it attained, and has anyone in recent history done so? Must we have faith to realize what is yet unknown to us? Is it not a selfish goal or an escapist one? These concerns and others are discussed in detail.

In this writing I have used the Sanskrit word *nirvāna* instead of its Pali equivalent *nibbāna* because the former is now widely known in the West and familiar to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. For the same reason I have used the

Sanskrit *karma* in preference to the Pali *kamma*, but the Pali *dhamma* is used instead of the Sanskrit *dharma*. However, the explanation of Buddhism presented in this writing is based upon the early Theravāda teachings, and unless otherwise indicated all of the references and quotations are attributed directly to the Buddha and his disciples as quoted in the Suttas and Vinaya of the Pali scriptures. The internal diversity of Mahāyāna Buddhism prohibits any all-inclusive statements as to the similarities and dissimilarities between the two schools regarding their respective views of Nirvāna. But in general it can be said that the Mahāyāna approach is heavily based upon dialectic, metaphysics and mysticism, and hence contrasts sharply with the Theravādin experiential approach as discussed in the following pages.

Chapter IV concerns *satori*, the enlightenment of Zen Buddhism. The relationship between satori and Nirvāna is discussed as well as the relationship of satori to LSD experiences, Christian conversions and other psychological phenomena.

The references to Pali scriptures, which follow the quotations and are listed in the bibliography, are numbered in accordance with the volumes of the Pali Text Society, London. However, not all translations are from this source.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Venerable Khantipālo of Wat Bovoranives, Bangkok; the Venerable Nāgasena of Wat Benjamabopit, Bangkok; the Venerable Khemānando of Wat Pleng, Dhonburi, Thailand;

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I. Cardinal Features of Buddhist Thought

The Realm of Change

To understand the word Nirvāna, one must be acquainted with the other major tenets of Buddhism. For on a conceptual level (but not on an experiential level), Nirvāna is an important part of a well-integrated philosophical system. Thus, to begin our discussion of Nirvāna let us first speak of its antithesis, saṃsāra, the so-called "world of becoming." In Buddhism the word *saṃsāra* designates the entire universe of physical and psychological existence: time, space, matter, thought, emotion, volition, perception, karma, and so forth.

The Buddhist version of the beginning of existence is unique among the world's religions. For it teaches that there is no discernible beginning; there never was a Primal Cause which at a given instant in eternity produced or began to produce the universe. Rather, the Buddha taught that every object and condition is the result of other objects and conditions which preceded it; and these in turn are the results of still earlier ones, and so on back into the

beginningless past. We live in a world governed by impersonal laws of cause and effect; so it has been throughout all eternity, and so shall it be into the unending future. But while saṃsāra may endure forever, not one of its components can do the same. Accompanying the Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect is the equally important teaching of *anicca*, or impermanence. Every living being; every thought, mood and feeling; every hill, mountain and river; is a temporary phenomenon, which in time will give way to new conditions that it has helped to create. The universe then is eternally dynamic, a never-ending process of interacting and interdependent forces and factors, no one of which is eternal, static, immortal, self-formed, or self-willed. Within saṃsāra it is only the law of change which does not change. The earth and sun themselves will in the course of time perish and be no more, but the Buddha further taught that as old earth-sun systems die, out new ones evolve and come into being. [1]

But cosmology is a relatively insignificant facet of the Dhamma (the teaching of the Buddha). The primary significance of the eternal principles (change, and cause and effect), is the way they relate to the process of human existence: to the hopes, fears, sorrows, and joys which give meaning and purpose to the lives of all conscious beings. This brings us to another important feature of saṃsāra, that is, *anattā* or soullessness. The *anattā* doctrine states that all thought, emotion, memory, sensation, perception, and all other forms of our consciousness are temporary, dynamic

and interdependent. Without such mental states the notion of oneself can have no meaning, and yet there is not one of these states which alone can be called one's true self, "the real I." One is the composite of all of these, and of no place within these dynamic aggregates does one find some unchanging essence or other stable entity that can be designated as a soul or immutable being.

Buddhism does not deny the existence of the personality; it only states that the personality is compounded and dynamic, a process rather than an entity. Our moods, thoughts, expectations, and emotions change from day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute. Is one at the age of two the same person one finds 10 years later at the age of 12? And is one's 12-year-old self the same person as the 20-year-old self, or the 40 or 60-year-old self? Thus from the Buddhist viewpoint, it is more accurate to say that the two-year-old is a psychophysical phenomenon which in the course of time will be modified by its interactions with other phenomena as well as the interactions of its own internal components. This evolution will result in the respective personalities of ages 12, 20, 40, and so forth.

When asked "Who, Lord, is it who feels?" the Buddha replied:

> It is not a fit question. I am not saying [someone] feels. If I were saying so, the question would be a fit one. But I am not saying that. If you were to ask thus: 'Conditioned now by what, Lord, is feeling?' this

were a fit question. And the fit answer would be, 'Feeling is conditioned by [sense] contact.' (S II 13/SN 12:12)

And again he states:

"He who does the deed and he who experiences [its result] are the same." This, Brahmin, is one extreme. "He who does the deed is not the same as he who experiences." This, Brahmin, is the other extreme. The Buddha, not approaching either of these extremes, teaches a middle doctrine. (S II 76/SN 12:46)

The Dhamma teaches that mind and body are interdependent. Neither can come about or endure without the other. [2] When the body dies the mental states which preceded death become the causes of new mental conditions that occur with the birth of a new personality. This is the Buddhist concept of postmortem survival and is termed "rebirth." Those psychological factors preceding death which determine the time, place and form of the new birth are known as karma (or *kamma* in Pali).

However, karma (*karma-vipāka*) [3] is not confined to the process of rebirth. Rather it is an ever-present principle of psychological cause and effect: each state of mind is a condition which becomes the cause of other states of mind that will arise in the future. Karma may be classified as

wholesome, unwholesome and neutral (*avyākata*), which means that a given mental state is of such a nature that its results will be either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral (*adukkham-asukha*) respectively. Examples of unwholesome karma are greed and hatred, while wholesome karma is seen in compassion and kindness. [4]

Because one's karma is complex and must act interdependently with other aspects of saṃsāra, some of its results will be immediate, while others will be delayed for days, months or years. Or in some cases karma is rendered inoperative by other portions of the karma of that same personality and thus produces no effect. Thus Buddhism teaches that each man is the product of what he has done or thought in the past, and his present thoughts and actions will determine the future. Though karma is often explained, in an ethical context, it must not be confused with social mores or other cultural standards of good and evil, for it operates independently of these. Also, it should not be assumed that karma accounts for all pleasant and unpleasant experience. In addition to one's karma, factors external to oneself act upon personality with pleasant and unpleasant consequences. [5]

Buddhism uses the word "rebirth" to distinguish its position from the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation via an immortal soul. The distinction between the two religious teachings is best illustrated in terms of an analogy. To understand the Hindu position one may imagine a row of various kinds of containers such as a drinking glass, a cup, a

bowl, a pot, and so forth. One takes a marble and deposits it in the first container, then lifts it out and puts it in the second, and so on down to the end of the row. The marble represents the soul and the containers the various bodies successively inhabited by the soul. Though each container is different, the marble is essentially unchanged throughout the entire process. To contrast the Buddhist view, imagine that one lights a match and then with the match, lights a candle at the same time extinguishing the match. Then with the candle one lights a Coleman lantern (pressure lantern) and extinguishes the candle. Now we ask the question: Is the flame which once burned in the match the same flame now burning in the lantern? One can answer the question either "yes" or ṅo," both replies being equally appropriate.

While the child is not the same as the adult, the food the child eats, the values he incorporates and the education he receives will strongly determine the nature of his adult existence. And similarly for successive births.

Life, Living and Empiricism

The above paragraphs briefly describe the Buddhist world view, that is, the conceptual or theoretical framework in which Buddhism has traditionally explained saṃsāra. In addition there is the empirical, experiential approach to saṃsāra as explained in the following paragraphs. This

latter approach is actually the more important, as it transcends any need for faith, dogma and theory. It is possible to explain Buddhism from either an exclusively conceptual, theoretical approach, or from an exclusively experiential one. To give a complete picture, both should be mentioned. It is said that one who pursues Buddhist mental development to its maximum possible degree can have experiential certainty of the theoretical concepts.

Buddhism begins its understanding of saṃsāra on a strictly empirical basis, that is, one's immediate conscious experience. Direct experience is the only absolute certainty of which man is capable, and whatever lies beyond experience can only be inferred with varying degrees of probability. For example, no matter how strongly one may believe in God (be it the Moslem Allah, the Hindu Brahma or the Christian Jehovah) one does not have complete certainty that that god exists. But the one thing of which the believer can be sure is that he believes, that is, he experiences the state of mind known as believing. Likewise a scientist may formulate a theory about the structure of a certain molecule. Since he has never seen this molecule (or any molecule), the validity of his theory is a matter of probability, derived from inductive reasoning. The real certainty which the scientist has is first the existence of his idea or belief as to the molecular structure, and, second, the existence of the memories of the facts and observations (which he assumes to be correct) that led to his theory. Finally, any given sensory experience may be either a

dream, hallucination, illusion, or an actual physical reality, but the one thing of which the recipient can be certain is the conscious experience itself. Or as expressed in the Buddha's own words:

> What, bhikkhus, is everything? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells, the tongue and tastes, the body and touch, the mind and objects of mind. This, bhikkhus, is called everything. Whoso, bhikkhus, should say, "Rejecting this everything, I will proclaim another everything," it would be mere talk on his part, and when questioned he could not make good his boast, and further would come to an ill pass. Why so? Because, bhikkhus, it would be beyond his scope to do so. (S IV 15/SN 35:23)

From this it should not be assumed that Buddhism denies the reality of physical existence apart from human awareness. For such is not the case. Nor does the Dhamma state that consciousness is some sort of metaphysical absolute upon which all else is founded. On the contrary, the Buddha clearly stated that human consciousness is dependent upon a physical substrate, that is, a body. [6] Furthermore, while it is true that memory, emotion, sensation and thought cannot exist without consciousness; it is equally true that consciousness cannot exist without at least one of these other four (that is, memory, and so forth). To have consciousness one must be conscious of something. Pure consciousness is not to be found. [7] In other words

consciousness is an interdependent phenomenon, as are all other aspects of saṃsāra.

However, the most important aspect of conscious existence, the most significant thing in life, is that we have feelings both pleasant and unpleasant. The human mind is far more than a computer which gathers and analyzes information. From the dim awareness of an insect, fish or reptile to the most highly complex and sensitive realizations of humanity, one feature alone is paramount: the pursuit of happiness, pleasure and enjoyment, and conversely the avoidance of pain, sorrow, frustration, and fear. Without such feelings there would be no such thing as value, purpose, meaning, and significance; motive and incentive could not exist, and there would be no reason to think, speak or act. Man is unique in this regard only in his relative ability to experience a greater diversity and complexity of pleasurable experiences, such as creativity, music and abstract contemplation. Even the most dedicated rationalists and the most self-sacrificing idealists assume their respective roles because they find some level of satisfaction, happiness or peace of mind in so doing. The Christian and Moslem conceptions of Heaven and Hell are but symbolic simplifications of this pleasure-pain principle.

According to Buddhist doctrine, it is man's thirst for pleasurable experiences that generates new karma (*vipāka*) and perpetuates his existence. Enjoyable experience itself is "kammically" neutral, but what does produce karma (*vipāka*) is our craving (*taṇhā*), the unquenchable yearning

for repeated, sensory and emotional stimulations of whatever sorts they may be.

It is craving that sustains our existence. But what does it mean to exist? In terms of experience life is nothing more than each conscious moment: the moments of reading this manuscript, of travelling, of bathing, of studying, of day dreaming, of planning, of worrying, of rejoicing, of striving, of relaxing, of talking, of working. All these and more are life. Each endures for an instant and never again returns exactly the same as before. Which ones do we live for? Which are the ones that justify our desires for continued existence? And conversely how many are of negative value: painful, irritating, disappointing, worrisome, boring, frustrating, empty, or any of the other unpleasant states of mind, all of which Buddhism groups under the one word *dukkha*?

All manifestations of saṃsāra come about through cause and effect, and the nature of life is to avoid or minimize dukkha while endeavouring to realize a maximum of rewarding or meaningful experiences. Therefore it follows that the key to living is to discover, understand and eliminate those factors which are causes of dukkha while at the same time developing and cultivating those which lead to true happiness and well-being.

On the basis of the above, the Buddha repeatedly summarized his doctrine in terms of the Four Noble Truths:

1. Dukkha is an inherent aspect of saṃsāra.

2. The cause of dukkha is *taṇhā*, or misdirected pleasure seeking.
3. It is possible to realize an end of dukkha.
4. This end is achieved by means of the Eightfold Path, which is the multidimensional Buddhist practice of spiritual and psychological maturation.

Thus the essence of Buddhism is its way of life. It is the fourth of the Four Noble Truths, that is, the techniques, the practices, the insights, and the disciplines that restructure the personality to produce either a relative or a total end of dukkha. However, in this writing I wish to give primary concern to the Third Truth, the goal toward which the Fourth Truth is directed.

A study of the Suttas of the Pali Canon (which are the most authentic existing records of the teachings of the Buddha) reveals that the Buddha taught there are *two* ways in which one can deal with the problem of existence. One is to continually act in such a manner as to create wholesome karma, in other words, to constantly produce conditions which will enhance satisfaction, happiness and well-being. The other is to totally and completely end one's existence within saṃsāra, that is, to achieve Nirvāna. The two are not entirely separate paths, for, to a considerable extent, they overlap. The further one progresses towards a complete realization of the former, the closer one will come to attaining the latter. However, the Buddha placed major emphasis and importance on the latter goal, the cessation of

one's being in saṃsāra. For, while dukkha can be minimized within saṃsāra, it can never be totally eliminated, and every situation in which one may invest one's hopes, affections and feelings will eventually perish. Furthermore, let us imagine that one acquires an understanding of saṃsāra and how to deal with it, and is then able to carry this knowledge over into successive lives for one's continual happiness and prosperity. But even such knowledge itself is created and temporary, and thus like all other creations will eventually perish leaving the personality once again to act blindly towards those laws which mould human destiny.

Thus the Buddhist version of salvation, either of the relative or absolute sort, is something resulting primarily from one's own volitions and can neither be imposed upon one nor granted to one by some external agent. The Buddha's mission was to enlighten men as to the nature of existence and advise them as to how best to behave for their own benefit and the benefit of others. Consequently, Buddhist ethics are not founded upon commandments which men are compelled to follow. From the Buddhist viewpoint each conscious being is an individual free to act as one sees fit. The Buddha only advised men as to which conditions were most wholesome and conducive to long-term benefit. Rather than addressing sinners with such words as "shameful," "wicked," "wretched," "unworthy," and "blasphemous," he would merely say, "You are foolish and acting in such a way as to bring sorrow upon yourselves and others." Often he said, "You yourselves must make the effort. Buddhas are

only teachers." [8] Consequently the Buddha did not condemn those who chose to enjoy sensuality and the pleasures of worldly existence. He even advised such persons on how to achieve their ends providing no harm would come to others, but he also cautioned them as to the dangers and reminded them that to maintain such pleasures they must be willing to pay the price: continual effort and diligence. A good example is related in the Vyaggahapajja Sutta:

> Once the Exalted One was dwelling amongst the Koliyans in their market town named Kakkarapatta. Then Dīghajānu, a Koliyan, approached the Exalted One, respectfully saluted him and sat on one side. Thus seated, he addressed the Exalted One as follows:
>
> "We, Lord, are laymen who enjoy worldly pleasure. We lead a life encumbered by wife and children. We use sandalwood of Kāsi. We deck ourselves with garlands, perfume and unguents. We use gold and silver. To those like us, O Lord, let the Exalted One preach the Doctrine, teach those things that lead to weal and happiness in this life and weal and happiness in future life."
>
> "Four conditions, Vyagghapajja, conduce to a householder's weal and happiness in this very life. Which four? The accomplishment of persistent effort, the accomplishment of watchfulness, good friendship

and balanced livelihood."

"What is the accomplishment of persistent effort?"

"Herein, Vyagghapajja, by whatsoever activity a householder earns his living, whether by farming, by trading, by rearing cattle, by archery, by service under the king, or by any other kind of craft; at that he becomes skilful and is not lazy. He is endowed with the power of discernment as to the proper ways and means; he is able to carry out and allocate [duties]. This is called the accomplishment of persistent effort."

"What is the accomplishment of watchfulness?"

"Herein, Vyagghapajja, whatsoever wealth a householder is in possession of, obtained by dint of effort, collected by strength of arm, by the sweat of his brow, justly acquired by right means; such he husbands well by guarding and watching so that kings would not seize it, thieves would not steal, fire would not burn, water would not carry away, nor ill-disposed heirs remove. This is the accomplishment of watchfulness."

"What is good friendship?"

"Herein, Vyagghapajja, in whatsoever village or market town a householder dwells, he associates, converses, engages in discussions with householders or householders' sons, whether young and highly

cultured or old and highly cultured, full of faith, full of virtue, full of charity, full of wisdom. He acts in accordance with the faith of the faithful, with the virtue of the virtuous, with the charity of the charitable, with the wisdom of the wise. This is called good friendship."

"What is balanced livelihood?"

"Herein, Vyagghapajja, a householder knowing his income and expenses leads a balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, knowing that thus his income will stand in excess of his expenses, but not his expenses in excess of his income … ."

"The wealth thus amassed, Vyagghapajja, has four sources of destruction: debauchery; drunkeness; gambling; and friendship, companionship and intimacy with evildoers … "
(A IV 280–282/AN 8:54)

II. The Nature of Nirvāna

We now come to what is one of the most frequently asked questions in Buddhism: What is Nirvāna? In the above paragraphs we have already stated that it is the ending of rebirth, the final termination of one's existence within saṃsāra. And in the Pali Canon we read, "The ceasing of becoming is Nirvāna." [9] The origin of the word itself carries this same implication. One common etymological explanation is that *nir* means ṅot," and *vāna* can be rendered as "the effort of blowing." This was probably a simile referring to a smith's fire which goes out if not repeatedly blown upon; the implication being the extinction of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion. [10] Thus it is not surprising that many critics of Buddhism have considered Nirvāna to be a sophisticated version of suicide, a goal of self-extinction, complete nihilism, and, absolute zero.

Such a conclusion, however, is one-sided and superficial. The Buddha himself rejected and cautioned against the two extremes of philosophical dualism, one extreme being eternalism or existence and the other being annihilationism or non-existence. Though this was usually taught with reference to the existence or non-existence of the personality after death, it is equally appropriate to Nirvāna. The whole

tradition of Theravāda Buddhism has emphatically rejected the nihilistic interpretation of Nirvāna and a significant portion of the writings of the famed fifth century *Theravādin* scholar, Buddhaghosa, was directed at refuting the notion of Nirvāna as non-existence. [11]

Perhaps most significant is that the Buddha and many of his disciples experienced Nirvāna, that is, they were aware of it, as the Buddha said, "here and now in this present life." And in the Suttas we find statements that the Buddha and the other Arahants [12] "enjoyed the peace of Nirvāna." It is referred to by such terms as "profound," "deep," "hard to see," "hard to comprehend," "peaceful," "lofty," "inaccessible to reason," "subtle," "the true," "the other shore," "to be known by the wise." [13] In the Dhammapada the Buddha says:

> There is no fire like lust,
> No crime like hatred.
> There is no misery like the constituents of existence,
> No happiness higher than the Peace of Nirvāna.
>
> Hunger is the worst of diseases.
> Component existence is the worst of distresses.
> Knowing this as it really is (the wise realize)
> Nirvāna the highest bliss.
>
> Health is the highest gain.
> Contentment is the greatest wealth.
> A trusty friend is the best of kinsmen.
> Nirvāna is the supreme bliss. (Dhammapada 202–204)

Arahantship is said to be an irreversible condition, for once achieved it is impossible that one can fall back into lust and delusion. Thus an arahant is completely incapable of greed, anger and egotism, and generates no unwholesome karma. In many respects he (or she) will continue to act, think and feel as any normal person until the time of death, and his demise is sometimes termed *pari*Nirvāna the complete cessation of existence in saṃsāra, the final end of rebirth. Nirvāna has nothing to do with occult powers or supernatural wonders, and many of the arahants at the time of the Buddha stated that they had no such abilities. [14] While with Nirvāna one is liberated from grief, sorrow, despair, worry, frustration, and all other psychological forms of dukkha, one is still subject to physical discomforts until such time as the body passes away. Throughout the Suttas we read of occasions when the Buddha sustained a backache, [15] fell ill with intestinal wind, [16] had his foot pierced by a stone splinter, [17] and so forth, and in each instance there was accompanying physical pain. But never was there an emotional reaction or psychological discomfort resulting from the pain.

As best can be determined from the scriptural sources, an arahant is not experiencing Nirvāna in every waking moment but is capable of experiencing it at will. Persons who have had such an experience but are not at all times able to reproduce it and may still fall back into greed, anger and delusion are not designated as arahants (though eventually they will become such). They are known as

sotāpanna or "stream winners," ones who have entered the stream that eventually leads to Nirvāna.

Rather than the end of craving per se, Nirvāna *is that which is realized when craving is ended.* Nirvāna is nothing only in that it is no thing". It is neither matter nor energy, and it has no location in space and time. It is not perceived by the senses, nor is it a thought, concept, mood, or emotion. Though an arahant is conscious of Nirvāna, it is not consciousness in any sense by which we normally understand that word. It is indivisible, timeless, changeless, unborn, and not compounded; in other words the very antithesis of saṃsāra. It is thoroughly apart from saṃsāra and thus neither influences nor is influenced by karma. In no way does it interact with saṃsāra or intervene in saṃsāra in the way Brahma or Jehovah is said to answer prayers or manifest divine intervention.

Much of the above is reiterated in the Buddha's famous "Discourse on the Snake Simile":

> A Noble One who has abandoned the conceit of self, has cut it off at the root, removed it from its soil like a Palmyra tree, brought it to utter extinction, incapable of arising again. Thus is the monk a Noble One who has taken down the flag, put down the burden, become unfettered. When a monk's mind is thus freed, O monks, neither the *devas* with Indra, nor those with Brahma nor those with Pajāpati, when searching will find on what the consciousness of one

thus gone [Tathāgata] is based. Why is that? One who has thus gone is no longer traceable here and now, so I say.

So teaching, so proclaiming, O monks, there are some recluses and *brahmans* who misrepresent me untruly, vainly, falsely, not in accordance with fact, saying, "A nihilist is the ascetic Gotama; he teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the non-being of an existing individual." As I am not and as I do not teach, therefore these worthy recluses and *brahmans* misrepresent me untruly, vainly, falsely, and not in accordance with fact when they say, "A nihilist is the ascetic Gotama; he teaches the annihilation, the destruction, the non-being of an existing individual." What I teach now as before, O monks, is suffering and the cessation of suffering.

If for that others revile, abuse, scold, and insult the Tathāgata [the Buddha], on that account, O monks, the Tathāgata will not feel annoyance, nor dejection, nor displeasure in his heart. And if for that others respect, revere, honour, and venerate the Tathāgata, on that account the Tathāgata will not feel delight, nor joy, nor elation in his heart. If for that others respect, revere, honour, and venerate the Tathāgata, he will think, "It is towards this [mind-body aggregate] which was formerly fully comprehended, that they perform such acts."

> The Buddha then repeats the above paragraph advising the monks to do the same when they too receive blame or praise. He then continues:
>
> Therefore, monks, relinquish whatever is not yours. Your relinquishment of it will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. What is it that is not yours? Material shape is not yours. Relinquish it. Your relinquishment of it will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. Feeling is not yours. Relinquish it. Your relinquishment of it will for a long time bring you welfare and happiness. Feeling is not yours. Relinquish it. Your relinquishment of it will for a long time bring you welfare and happines … . [And likewise for perception, mental formations and consciousness.]" (Alagaddūpama Sutta, M I 139-141)

A common source of misunderstanding about the Buddha's use of the word Nirvāna originates from the Hindu usage of the same word. The Hindus give it a positive metaphysical and mystical meaning stating that Nirvāna is Union with *Brahma* or God, a condition of Oneness with the Cosmic Absolute in which the soul of man merges with the Infinite Soul of the Universe. Such a misconception is furthered by the fact that some centuries after the Buddha, various schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism began to develop along mystical and metaphysical paths unknown to, or even refuted by, the Buddha. Consequently Mahāyāna Buddhist

writings often abound with such terms as Buddha Nature, Universal Mind, the *Tri-kāya* and Primordial Buddha. Thus the concept of Nirvāna now has a host of mystical, religious and psychological usages quite different from its original Buddhist meaning.

The Buddha spoke relatively little about nirvāna, one reason being that there is little which is meaningful that one can say about Nirvāna. Within the Pali Canon the most detailed dissertation on Nirvāna given by the Buddha is this:

> There is, monks, a realm where there is neither earth, water, fire, nor air, nor the sphere of infinite space, nor the sphere of infinite consciousness, nor the sphere of nothingness, nor the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, neither this world nor a world beyond, nor sun and moon.
>
> There, monks, I say, there is neither coming to birth nor going nor staying nor passing away nor arising. It is without support or mobility or basis. It is the end of dukkha [suffering].
>
> > That which is selfless, hard it is to see;
> > Not easy is it to perceive the truth.
> > But who has ended craving utterly
> > Has naught to cling to, he alone can see.
>
> There is, monks, an unborn, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. If, monks, there were not this unborn, not-become, not-made, not-

> compounded, there would not be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded. But because there is an unborn … , therefore there is an escape … .(*Pātaligāma, Udāna 8.2–3, p. 80–81)

The outstanding feature of this quotation is that it is a series of negatives. Other than the simple affirmation "there is," not one positive description is used. Why not?

The answer is not hard to find. Since Nirvāna is in no way related to anything within normal human experience, we have no words adequate to describe it. Even if we should adopt some word or phrase such as "Ultimate Reality" or "Pure Being" such would more likely than not create an illusion of understanding rather than give any true insight. Such terms would tell us no more about Nirvāna than the word "music" tells to a man born deaf, the word "passion" tells to a young child or the word "beatnik" tells to an Eskimo. Thus the value of negative terms is that they discourage one from holding to verbal symbols which quickly become illusions of reality. Or in the language of Zen, "The finger pointing at the moon must not be confused with the moon itself."

As was explained (cf. page 7), the only true certainty man can have is direct experience. Consequently, the Buddha did not attempt to describe the indescribable. Rather than talk about Nirvāna, the great majority of his teachings were concerned with the techniques of psychological development, which proceed from the empirical data of

one's own states of consciousness in the immediate present. If such practices are done properly, the dimensions of one's awareness progressively expand until Nirvāna becomes a reality on the basis of direct experience. When that happens explanations become unnecessary. Attempts at verbal descriptions only lead to useless metaphysical conjectures which may divert one's attention and energies from the practices necessary for true realization. Consequently, when questioned on transcendental matters the Buddha would either show the futility of such inquiries or remain silent. We have for example his encounter with the young Brahman, Udāyi:

> Well then, Udāyi, what is your own teacher's doctrine?
>
> Our own teacher's doctrine, venerable sir, says thus: "This is the highest splendour! This is the highest splendour!"
>
> But what is that highest splendour, Udāyi, of which your teacher's doctrine speaks?
>
> It is, venerable sir, a splendour greater and loftier than which there is none. That is the Highest Splendour.
>
> But, Udāyi, what is that splendour greater and loftier than which there is none?
>
> It is, venerable sir, the Highest Splendour greater and loftier than which there is none.

For a long time, Udāyi, you can continue in this way, saying, "A splendour greater and loftier than which there is none, that is the Highest Splendour." But still you will not have explained that splendour. Suppose a man were to say, "I love and desire the most beautiful woman in this land," and then he is asked, "Good man, that most beautiful woman whom you love and desire, do you know whether she is a lady from nobility or from a Brahman family or from the trader class or Sūdra?" and he replied "No," "Then, good man, do you know her name and that of her clan? Or whether she is tall, short or of middle height, whether she is dark, brunette or golden-skinned, or in what village or town or city she dwells?" and he replied "No," and then he is asked, "Hence, good man, you love and desire what you neither know nor see?" and he answers "Yes," what do you think, Udāyi, that being so, would not that man's talk amount to nonsense?

Certainly, venerable Sir, that being so, that man's talk would amount to nonsense.

But in the same way, you, Udāyi, say, "A splendour greater and loftier than which there is none, that is the Highest Splendour," and yet you have not explained that splendour. (Cūla-Sakuludāyi Sutta, M II 32–33)

The Buddha had acquired an insight totally unrelated to

that of a normal person and which in no way could be equated with any experiences in saṃsāra, yet he wished to reveal his discovery. The problem can be described in terms of an analogy. Let us imagine there is a man who has been blindfolded from the moment of birth and thus has never had an experience of light, vision or colour. But from the words of others he comes to know that there is something which he has never realized. He may then attempt to discover this unknown quality by meditating upon it, which is analogous to the mystical approach of meditating upon God or thinking of Ultimate Being. But at best he can only echo in his mind the words "vision," "color" and "light," or intensify some subjective impression of what he thinks these things may be. On the other hand our blindfolded man may reason as follows: "There is something which I don't realize and which is beyond me. Since it is beyond me it must be greater than I, and if it is a greater than I, it must be able to help me. 'Oh Vision! Oh Light! Please come to me. Make Yourself known unto me, Thy humble servant.'" This, of course, is the devotional approach. The metaphysical approach, the approach of philosophy, is to attempt to verbally describe vision with positive phrases, skilful similes and inventive metaphors. But what words can enable a blind man to realize the difference between red and green or to comprehend any other features of visual experience? Words cannot, and to avoid creating misconceptions and illusions it is best to either say nothing at all or give only negative descriptions. Consequently, the

Buddha talked about one thing and one thing only, that is, how to take off the blindfold.

In line with the above it should be noted that the Suttas of Theravāda Buddhism make little mention of meditating upon Nirvāna. This strongly contrasts with the Hindu practice of meditating upon Brahma and similar meditations in other schools of mysticism. Buddhist meditation is of two major sorts. One is tranquillity, or *samatha*, in which the practitioner concentrates upon a clay or colour disk, a flame, the thought of equanimity, one's own quiet breathing, or any one of several similar things, all for the sake of stilling the mind. [18] More important than samatha is insight meditation or *vipassanā*, which are based on the development of full awareness of one's actions, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. [19]

The one exception to the preceding paragraph concerns the peace meditation. In the early Pali writings Nirvāna is often termed "the peaceful," and peace is considered to be one feature of Nirvāna. Peace is also listed among the forty prescribed meditation subjects, and it is thus inferred that meditating upon peace is meditating upon an attribute of Nirvāna. This meditation, however, is but one of forty, and meditation instructors would assign it only to selected students. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, it can be of full benefit only to persons who have already glimpsed Nirvāna. [20]

III. Theories Regarding Nirvāna

Can Nirvāna be explained as a trance state such as occurs in deep hypnosis? Or is it a state of ecstasy as seen in mystical practices or under the effect of psychedelic drugs? Or is it regression of the personality back to prenatal existence? All three of these hypotheses have been used to explain Nirvāna. And while such contentions are distasteful to devout Buddhists, it must be admitted that one cannot flatly and dogmatically reject any one of them unless one has experienced Nirvāna for onself. For how can we prove that one man's subjective experiences are either identical with, or different from, another's? We cannot. As stated before, the only reality and certainty that one has is one's own immediate states of consciousness, be they of subjective or objective origins. However, on the basis of the available evidence it is possible to throw serious doubt on all three of the above.

Trance

The concept of trance includes a variety and spectrum of

different but overlapping states which can be classified into somewhat arbitrary groupings and which sometimes merge imperceptibly into states of ecstasy. The most common and readily observed condition of trance is hypnosis. However, as yet, psychology has no satisfactory explanation for hypnosis. The best that can be done is merely to describe what happens, that is, the subject becomes extremely suggestible to the instructions of others even to the extent of having hallucinations and some degree of control of the autonomic nervous system (which is normally beyond conscious control). Usually there is either partial or complete amnesia for the period of hypnosis, but paradoxically one can often recall detailed events of the past not normally accessible to one's memory. As far as the subject's subjective experience is concerned, there is no characteristic feature of the trance per se. Some subjects find it mildly pleasant, others discomforting and others neutral, and the experience can be different for the same subject on different occasions. Strong emotional reactions and states of euphoria may occur but usually not unless induced by the hypnotist. Hypnosis is an alteration in one's normal state of consciousness, but since we do not know what consciousness is in the first place, it is impossible to explain its deviations and alterations.

Hypnotic trance differs from Nirvāna in several important ways. Hypnosis can be rapidly produced, and produced in a wide variety of different kinds of personalities. It rarely lasts more than a few hours at most, and usually produces no

enduring alteration in one's psyche. Nirvāna, on the other hand, can only be achieved by a long period of restructuring the total personality with certain very definite character traits as prerequisites (absence of lust, and so forth). It is an irreversible state of which one is fully conscious and is very much a unique experience. In the deepest stages of hypnosis one is unconscious and has total amnesia for the event. Subjectively the hypnotic experience has no unique features of its own.

Another category of trance states, and one quite well known in Buddhism, are the eight absorptions or *jhānas*. In the lower four jhānas one is said to be fully conscious but to have shut off awareness of all sensory impressions, stilled discursive and verbal thinking, and temporarily abandoned lust, anger, agitation, torpor and doubt. Thus, upon reaching the fourth jhāna one dwells in a state of pure equanimity and concentration. Having achieved the fourth jhāna, one may then progress to the four *arūpajhānas*. These are states of deep *samatha* meditation (cf. page **16**), and in their successive orders of attainment they are termed "the sphere of infinite space," "the sphere of infinite consciousness," "the sphere of nothingness" and "the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception." **[21]** Though years of practice may be required to attain these states, they do not represent the complete abolition of craving nor true insight into one's own nature. They are actually pre-Buddhist practices known to the Hindu faith as well as to Buddhism, and the Buddha himself achieved

them before realizing Nirvāna. [22] Though the jhānas are taught in Buddhism, and though the lower four are even included in the eighth step of the Eightfold Path, they are, though often helpful, not strictly necessary to the attainment of Liberation. (Highly developed mental concentration, however, is indispensable.)

Ecstasy

Like trance, the states of ecstasy also embrace a wide variety of experiences and occur in such diverse situations as the rites and rituals of cults and primitive societies; acute psychotic reactions; epilepsy; moments of solitude in forests and mountains; artistic absorption; deep contemplation; romance; religious fervour; and the intoxications of various drugs such as LSD-25, mescaline and hashish. [23] Spontaneous cases are not uncommon, but here the word "spontaneous" must be taken to mean that the precipitating factors are not immediately discernible. All of these experiences do not belong to the same order of mental phenomena, but our very limited understanding of such states, the inadequacy of language to fully relate them, the great spectrum of human feelings which seems to lack clearly defined boundaries, and the ability of the mind to mix various levels of feelings into one experience, all warrant grouping such phenomena under one heading.

What these states have in common is an intense or unusual feeling of bliss, well-being or euphoria (though fear or other negative emotions may also be present.) All of one's usual preoccupations and emotions are swept aside, and for the moment only the ecstasy itself seems important. One may gain the impression of a new and deeper insight into existence. Atheists and agnostics, in describing the effects of LSD, often use such words as "divine," "mystical" and "religious."

Like hypnosis, these states differ from Nirvāna in their sudden onset, relatively brief duration and (with infrequent exceptions) the lack of any lasting influence upon the personality. Also, like hypnosis, they contrast with Nirvāna by appearing in numerous and diverse types of people, regardless of the extent to which one has relinquished greed, hatred and delusion, or resolved emotional conflicts. The paramount feature of ecstasy is that one is so enamoured in bliss that for the moment all else is either forgotten or seems unimportant or unreal. Consequently, at such times it is almost impossible to make sound and realistic judgments. Thus it is significant that the accounts we have of the Buddha and the other arahants reveal that they were unusually realistic and objective. Were this not the case it is unlikely that Buddhism could have won out over numerous competing systems and could have existed to the present day. The Suttas reveal that it was not only necessary for the Buddha and his chief disciples to maintain the order and discipline of the continually expanding body

of monks; they also had to be proficient in lecturing, debating, systematizing the doctrine, and managing the affairs of everyday life.

Regression

Another hypothesis about Nirvāna is the psychoanalytic belief that it is a state of regression to intrauterine existence: a psychological return to one's prenatal life; when the fetus floated effortlessly in the timeless, black silence of the amniotic fluid; a time free of frustration, anxiety, sensory impressions or awareness of time-space relationships. Perhaps the major proponent of this hypothesis was the well-known psychoanalyst, Dr. Franz Alexander. Two paragraphs from his manuscript, "Buddhistic Training as an Artificial Catatonia," are quoted here:

> From our present psychoanalytical knowledge it is clear that Buddhistic self-absorption is a libidinal, narcissistic turning of the urge for knowing inward, a sort of artificial schizophrenia with complete withdrawal of libidinal interest from the outside world. The catatonic conditions of the Hindu ascetics in self-absorption prove quite clearly the correctness of this contention. The mastery of the world is given up and there remains as an exclusive goal of the

> libido the mastery of the self. In the older pre-Buddha Yogi practice the aim is clearly a mastery of the body, while the absorption of Buddha is directed toward the psychic personality, i.e. the ego.
>
> The Yoga self-absorption, however, has no therapeutic goal; the mastery of the body is an end in itself. Likewise, in Buddhistic self-absorption the turning of the perceptive consciousness inward is an end in itself, a narcissistic-masochistic affair shown by the fact that the way to it leads through asceticism. Psychoanalysis turns inward in order to help the instincts to accommodate themselves to reality; it wishes to effect an alliance between consciousness and instinct, in order to make experience with the outer world useful to the instincts. The Buddhistic theory sets itself an easier task: it eliminates reality,and attempts to turn the entire instinctual life away from the world, inwards, towards itself. [24]

Dr. Alexander's thesis, written with a limited knowledge of Buddhism, was published in 1931. Consequently from the Buddhist position it is easy to refute several of the arguments on which he built his case. For example, he equated the lotus position of Buddhist meditation with the fetal position (in which the entire neck and trunk are curled and the wrists and knees brought up over the face). He believed the sole purpose of yogi meditation to be mastery of the body. He mistakenly believed it is only biological

forms of suffering (such as old age, sickness and death) which motivate Buddhist training and not any social or emotional forms. He spoke of the end of the Buddha's doctrine "which came with a tragic crash," but since Buddhism is still very much alive in the world today, it is difficult to know just what historical event Dr. Alexander was referring to. On extremely limited data he analyzed the Buddha's disciple, Ānanda, as acting under the influence of an unresolved Oedipus complex. But perhaps most important is that his case rests heavily upon explaining Nirvāna as attained via the jhānas, and he inferred that Nirvāna is but an intensification of the fourth jhāna. As already mentioned, Buddhist doctrine teaches that attaining the jhānas is not necessary for the realization of Nirvāna, [25] and the Buddha clearly stated that Nirvāna is of a totally different order of being even up to the eighth, or highest, jhāna.

But regardless of the errors in Dr. Alexander's thesis, we are still confronted with his basic hypothesis that Nirvāna is regression to intrauterine life. Several considerations make this assumption appear doubtful.

First, Alexander believed that regression can go back to the very moment of conception. Yet it is questionable whether or not such a degree of regression is possible in terms of present-day biological theory. The concept of regression presupposes memory, and on good evidence it is generally assumed that human memory is the product of a matured and highly developed nervous system. Yet even at the time

of birth the infant human brain is still undeveloped and largely non-functional. If early prenatal memory is possible, we then have evidence to support the Buddhist belief in a non-physical component of the psyche which is present from the time of conception.

Second, if we assume that Nirvāna is the complete withdrawl of libido from the outside world (that is, a total lack of feeling for persons and things outside oneself), then we are at a loss to explain the great emphasis which the Buddha gave to love, ethics and social improvements. Dr. Alexander himself was aware of this:

> Nowhere in the Buddhistic literature has sufficient account been taken of the deep contradiction between the absorption doctrine and Buddha's practical ethics, so far as I am able to follow. The goal of absorption, Nirvāna, is a completely a-social condition and is difficult to combine with ethical precepts.

However, no contradiction exists if one assumes the Buddhist interpretation of Nirvāna (see Ch. VII). Only if one takes Dr. Alexander's position does a problem arise. Thus it was up to Dr. Alexander and not Buddhism to explain the discrepancy. This he did not do.

While the Buddha advocated a state of non-craving and non-attachment, this did not mean a condition devoid of feeling, sensory perception or other forms of experience. We

have, for example, the record of his encounter with Uttara, a disciple of a Brahmin teacher named Parasariya. The Buddha inquires of Uttara as to his teacher's doctrine to which the latter replies:

> As to this, good Gotama, one should not see material shapes with the eye; one should not hear sounds with the ear. It is thus, good Gotama, that the brahman Parasariya teaches the development of the sense-organs to his disciples.

To this the Buddha replied:

> This being so, Uttara, then according to what Parasariya, the brahman, says, a blind man must have his sense-organ developed; a deaf man must have his sense-organ developed. For a blind man, Uttara, does not see material shape with this eye, nor does a deaf man hear sound with his ear … .

He then explains his own position on this matter:

> When a monk has seen a material shape with the eye, there arises what is liked; there arises what is disliked; there arises what is both liked and disliked. He comprehends thus: "This that is liked is arising in me; this that is disliked is arising, and this that arises is because it is constructed, is gross. [But] this is the real, this the excellent, that is to say equanimity." So whether what is arising in him is liked, disliked or

> both liked and disliked, it is [all the same] stopped in him and equanimity remains. (Indriyabhāvana Sutta, M III 298–299)

An arahant is said to be wise, oriented to his environment and compassionate towards others. We need only consider the life and personality of the Buddha himself. Had he vegetated by retreating into purely subjective existence, it would have been impossible for him to produce the very strong and lasting effect which he has made upon world history. Alexander explains this by saying that his withdrawal was not complete: one bond remained unsevered, his spiritual attachment to his disciples. Yet we must remember that at the time of his enlightenment, Buddha was living completely alone and had no disciples or companions of any sort. Also, from both the Suttas and the *Vinaya* it is apparent that he made great efforts to assure his doctrine would reach all levels of humanity and last for many generations. After his enlightenment, and the enlightenment of sixty of his followers, he gave his well-known missionary address:

> I am freed, monks, from all fetters both divine and human. You also, monks, are freed from all fetters both divine and human. Wander, monks, for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the gain, for the welfare and happiness of gods and men. Let not two take the same course. Proclaim the Dhamma excellent in the

> beginning, excellent in the middle and excellent in the end, in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the life of consummate purity. (S I 105/SN 4:5)

If we equate the psychoanalytic concept of libido with the Buddhist concept of *taṇhā* or craving, then it may not be far from wrong to say that withdrawing libido from the world is either the same as Nirvāna or a forerunner of Nirvāna. And if we assume that because the embryo or fetus has not yet experienced the outside world, it thus has not yet invested libido into this world, then we can understand the rationale behind Dr. Alexander's reasoning: Libido remains invested in the self; hence narcissism. We must remember, however, that Buddhist training requires the withdrawal of libido from oneself as well as from the world of sensory experience, and all states of one's thoughts and feelings must be regarded with the same detached objectivity as is the world at large. At this point, the concept of "withdrawing libido" comes under question, for, into what is it withdrawn? Thus Buddhism does not use such a concept, but rather deals with individual states of mind and the causative factors which produce those states.

Even though the concept of embryonic libido is somewhat problematic, Dr. Alexander's hypothesis does warrant consideration. However, in presenting his case his repeated use of the words ṅarcissistic," "masochistic" and "schizophrenic" gives a rather distorted and unpleasant flavour to the whole idea. Apparently his use of the word

"masochistic" comes from the mistaken notion that Buddhism is a type of asceticism. Actually, the Buddha rejected self-inflicted pain as being spiritually futile, and as unwholesome as sensual indulgence.

The word "schizophrenia" covers a variety of mental disorders and certainly its most common forms do not in any way apply to an arahant. Among the prime features of most schizophrenias is a distorted perception of external reality (often with delusions and hallucinations) and a marked confusion and deterioration of logical thinking. Speech is often irrelevant, fragmented and inconsistent. This contrasts sharply with the eloquence, clarity and consistency of the Buddha's logic and oratory. Perhaps most significant was his unusual ability to see through semantic problems and thus resolve matters which were purely linguistic in origin, a feature quite opposite to that of schizophrenic thinking. On a feeling level, schizophrenics are often characterized by great emotional lability, inappropriate responses and difficulty in accepting and handling emotional impulses. Again this stands in sharp contrast to the personality of the arahants. It is almost inconceivable that a schizophrenic, at least of the usual sort, could successfully institute, manage and perpetuate a complex and highly organized religious order.

It is the catatonic form of schizophrenia (a condition of prolonged trance-like stupor, immobility and seeming unresponsiveness to the outside world) which Alexander specifically equates with Nirvāna. One may remain in such

a state for weeks at a time without changing position, not feeding oneself and not even tending to toilet needs. At such times one is usually indifferent to pin-pricks and other forms of pain. But even catatonia manifests in a variety of ways and quite commonly is interspersed with episodes of excitement, rambling speech and hyperactivity. Persons who have recovered from catatonic stupor do not describe any particular mental state as being characteristic of this condition, nor is it necessarily pleasant. Usually thought disorders characteristic of other forms of schizophrenia are also present. Perhaps most important is that descriptions given of the catatonic experience bear little in common with the arahants' accounts of Nirvāna. Catatonia is not a condition which one enters voluntarily; rather it is the result of social, psychological and environmental forces which overpower and are beyond one's control. Such a person is a victim of saṃsāra, and his stupor is a prison which he cannot leave at will. If the depth and tranquillity of Buddhist meditation is a state of catatonia, then it is a condition of catatonia which one enters and leaves mindfully and willfully at one's own discretion (something unknown in the history of psychiatry). Thus Nirvāna is so different from the usual forms of catatonia that it is doubtful that the word "catatonia" can be applied.

The Practical Solution

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, logically and scientifically one can neither prove nor disprove with complete certainty that Nirvāna either is or is not a condition akin to trance, ecstasy or regression. But putting aside all such speculations, the best information we have about Nirvāna is the Pali Canon of Theravāda Buddhism. If Nirvāna is real and if any person in history has actually realized Nirvāna then in all probability that person was the Buddha himself. On the basis of the historical record we find the Buddha to be a man who dedicated over forty years of his life to the untiring service of his fellow beings; who was widely respected for his wisdom, compassion and moral character; and who apparently did not display anger, greed or prejudice. He was a man noted for his calm and equanimity, and for his strong influence in the lives of many hundreds of millions of people during the past 2,500 years. Thus on the historical record alone, one can reasonably conclude that whatever Nirvāna may be, most likely it is not undesirable.

IV. Zen Enlightenment

Another category of experience, which appears to belong to a class of its own is the enlightenment of Zen Buddhism, usually termed *satori*. Since Zen is a school of Buddhism and employs some of the same terminology and concepts as early Buddhism, it is often assumed that Zen enlightenment (*satori*) and Theravāda enlightenment (Nirvāna) are the same. But apparently such is not the case. It is difficult to give a satisfactory account of satori, not only because of the elusive and paradoxical features of Zen, but also because of the different versions of enlightenment and Zen in general, as presented by the various Zen sects and masters of the past 1,400 years. One can quote selected passages of Zen scriptures and other Zen writings to support just about any interpretation of Zen that one may choose to formulate. On the basis of Zen literature, however, satori seems to be very much a product of saṃsāra and to contain two essential features. One is a true insight into the nature of things and of oneself beyond intellectual knowing. The other is a total restructuring of the psyche so that even though one remains very much involved in saṃsāra, one's whole perception of life and response to life situations are so radically altered that life becomes something quite different than it ever was

before. [26] There is in Zen only scant mention of ending one's existence in saṃsāra. While Zen has given much concern to freeing oneself from the restrictions of intellectualizing and conceptual thinking, it says much less about altering one's feelings, motives and emotions. One occasionally reads of great Zen masters expressing anger and of persons who have realized satori and yet are more selfish than many who have not. [27] We are told that there are degrees of satori, and one must ripen it and grow in it. [28] The renowned Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki comments on the Zen version of *jhāna* or *dhyāna* in these words: "Dhyāna is not quietism, nor is it tranquillization; it is rather acting, moving, performing deeds, seeing, hearing, thinking, remembering." [29]

One may question whether or not satori is a real experience or merely a philosophical ideal which evolved in the history of Zen thought. Two independent sources of evidence indicate that there is such an experience. One source is the recent electroencephalographic (EEG or brain wave) studies of Zen meditators. [30] The other source is the case histories and testimonies of persons allegedly realizing satori in recent years. Both these areas of study require further investigation before any definite conclusions can be drawn, and probably the characteristic Zen EEG tracings are not akin to the subjective experiences described in the case histories. In other words, they appear to be two unrelated phenomena. Also, it may be that both of these recently-studied phenomena are quite different from the satori

experiences of the Zen masters of old or of those Zen monks residing today in secluded and highly disciplined meditation centers.

Electroencephalographic Studies

The EEG investigations have been conducted in Japan since 1953. The subjects studied included monks with many years of meditation experience as well as non-meditators. Two significant findings have been noted. First, during meditation in a well-lighted room and with eyes open, accomplished Zen practitioners produce a rhythmic slowing of the EEG pattern to cycles of seven or eight per second. [31] Usually this is seen in non-meditators only when the eyes are closed and is termed "alpha wave pattern." As a rule it occurs in meditators with open eyes only during, and for a few minutes following, meditation. However, it has occasionally been seen in non-nmeditators, and as yet no studies have been done to establish a correlation between this EEG pattern and personality structure. It is known that some meditators who produce this pattern are not free of a normal intensity of sexual impulses. The Zen EEG pattern is distincly different from those of sleep and hypnotic trance, and the meditators said that during meditation they were free from sleepiness, confusion and other mental disturbances. Normally an EEG cannot reveal a person's exact emotions, and people with

identical EEG patterns may be experiencing very different states of thought and feeling. However, it was "fairly constant" that the Zen practitioners described their subjective experiences during meditation as "calm, undisturbed and serene." It is noteworthy that no mention is made of religious, mystical, indescribable, transcendental or otherwise unusual states.

The second finding of the EEG studies revealed an alteration in the Zen practitioner's response to sensory stimuli, which suggests an alteration in the perception of one's environment. In normal persons a sudden sensory stimulus, such as a loud noise, draws attention for a brief period, but if the stimulus is repeated at regular and frequent intervals, one eventually becomes oblivious to it and takes no notice. EEG tracings taken on such occasions reveal that in normal subjects the first stimulus produces an alteration in EEG of seven seconds or more; this duration shortens with each successive distraction (in this case noises produced at 15–second intervals) until the fifth stimulus when virtually no EEG effect is seen. It is different, however, with advanced Zen practitioners. The EEG response to the first stimulus lasts only two to three seconds and then continues to last for two to three seconds for every succeeding stimulus up to the twentieth. This suggests a greater total awareness of one's environment but with fewer strong reactions to individual stimuli. This phenomenon has been observed only during meditation and only in persons experienced in Zen training. [32]

Satori is said to be present both in and out of meditation, and the reports of the EEG studies noted above make no mention of whether or not the subjects had had enlightenment. This writer knows of no EEG investigations of Theravāda meditators, or of Mahāyānists apart from Zen.

Case Studies of the Satori Experience

Perhaps the best published examples in English of alleged satori experiences are those described by Mr. Philip Kapleau in his book, *The Three Pillars of Zen*. Mr. Kapleau presents eight case histories in the form of personal testimonies, which describe in varying amounts of detail the experiences preceding and during enlightenment. His subjects, including himself and his wife, range from 25 to 60 years of age and include three women and five men. Four are Japanese, three are American and one is Canadian. All are lay people, that is, not monks or priests. In the following paragraphs I shall discuss satori as described and explained in Kapleau's writing. All eight of his cases occured to persons who were practising under the guidance of experienced Zen masters and most, if not all, were tested and affirmed by these masters to be genuine instances of satori. However, the reader should be aware that some reputable and long-experienced Zen practitioners reject the validity of these cases.

As a psychiatrist, I find it tempting to speculate on the psychological mechanisms which produced Kapleau's case histories, though such speculations can be hazardous on two counts. First, it may be presumptuous to assume that western psychology in its present form is fully capable of explaining the satori experience. Perhaps it is capable, but having no close contact with persons claiming satori, I cannot venture to say so. Second, Kapleau's case histories do not furnish enough information to enable one to speculate with certainty as to individual psycho-dynamics and personality structures. Some furnish almost no such information, and it is not the primary purpose of his writing to provide this sort of data.

But while there is insufficient data to analyze most of the individual case histories of Kapleau's series, I feel that collectively there is enough information to formulate a reasonable hypothesis for explaining his examples of satori on psychological grounds. Before presenting such a hypothesis, let us first note the nature of Zen training and its subsequent satori experiences.

All but one of Kapleau's eight cases give clear indication of significant emotional disturbances which resulted in the subjects taking up Zen training. In some cases these were relatively normal reactions to stressful situations such as the death of a loved one, serious illness and the insecurity of life in Japan following the war. Other cases indicated more basic personality disturbances such as alcoholism and psychosomatic symptoms. However, in all accounts of Zen

training known to this writer, very little concern is given to uncovering the psychological causes of one's disturbances. The Zen practitioner is repeatedly told to see his "true self," that is, to behold his Buddha Nature, his Oneness with the whole universe; and this must be done by dropping dualistic (that is, subject-object) thinking and abandoning conceptualization. For example, we read of one dialogue between a Zen trainee and a master. The trainee says she has had several insights into herself and "felt extremely elated." She is therefore puzzled that the master has told her that insights are *makyo* (that is, mental distractions such as visions and fantasies). In response to this the master makes no inquiry as to what these insights are but responds, "In themselves they [insights] are not harmful, they may even be beneficial in some measure. But if you become attached to or ensnared by them, they can hinder you." **[33]**

Perhaps the best example of this apparent indifference to motives and personality traits is displayed in the last case of Kapleau's series. The subject relates that while her childhood could be called almost "ideal," "even from the first, though, there were recurrent periods of despair and loneliness which used to seep up from no apparent source, overflowing into streams of tears and engulfing me to the exclusion of everything else." This is not the behaviour of a normal child, and though the source may not have been "apparent" it would be naive to assume there was no source at all. Then again: "Within a few months our marriage took place, and almost immediately after, I awoke to find myself

a widow. The violent, self-inflicted death of my husband was a shock more severe than anything I had ever experienced." [34] One can only wonder what more had taken place but was left unmentioned. It is extremely unusual for a normal well-adjusted man to commit violent, self-inflicted death shortly after his marriage. And it is also unusual for a normal well-adjusted woman to marry a person predisposed to such action. Later the subject enters Zen training in Japan. We are given detailed accounts of her Zen experiences but in only five words told that during this period she marries again. There is no mention of her feelings towards her fiance, her desires for companionship or the nature of the marital relationship. It is as though these aspects of oneself are a world apart from Zen practice and not directly concerned with "seeing into one's True Nature."

The essence of Zen training is *zazen* or the sitting meditation. One practises this at frequent and regular intervals often for hours at a time, over a period of months or years. On such occasions one sits in the company of others and gazes at a blank wall or other blank object. One is repeatedly subjected to great pressures and persuasions to strive with the utmost efforts to empty the mind, abandon intellectualizing and realize the Oneness of all things. Deliberate humiliations and painful brief beatings may be employed to encourage diligence and effort. One is told not to think about the Oneness or to have any ideas about one's yet unrealized Buddha Nature. Nevertheless, the

practitioner has already heard much about it and knows something of the enlightenment experiences of others before him.

The reactions to one's initial satori experience vary among different individuals, and it is questionable that all of these "enlightenments" represent the same mental phenomenon. Often persons break out in uncontrollable laughter and/or sobbing. Some do neither. Usually there is a sense of joy, calmness or euphoria and often a feeling of oneness with all things. How enduring these states may be is uncertain and probably varies considerably among different individuals. To determine the real value of such experiences it would be necessary to have long-term follow-up reports at regular intervals. A mystical or uplifting emotional experience can be worthwhile in itself, but if years of arduous training have been required to produce it, one should hope for a reward lasting more than a few days or weeks. In the first case of Kapleau's series (which is also the only case that gives no history of previous emotional stress) we are told only of a 48–hour period in which a Japanese executive breaks out with tears, crying and a loud uncontrollable laughter described as "inhuman." With this are great feelings of peace, happiness and freedom. This is most likely akin to the states of euphoria described earlier; and we are given no previous history of this person, and no report of his condition following the "enlightenment."

What then is the satori experience? Probably it is more than one thing depending on whose experience we are talking

about. Also, it may be presumptuous to assume that one not having had satori can fully account for it. Nevertheless, I feel that two types of phenomena are responsible for most of these experiences and such probably occur in varying degrees and combinations in different instances.

Satori and Conversion

The most striking feature of the recorded satori experience is the strong resemblance to stereotypical Christian conversion and/or salvation experiences. Readers of Buddhist writings are often predisposed negative impressions of Christian experiences based mostly upon the extremely emotional and fanatic conversions so often witnessed at evangelistic revivals. But Christian conversions include a much deeper and wider range of experiences than these. William James in his well-known classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, covers this topic with remarkable perspicacity, drawing his material both from numerous personal testimonies and case histories as well as the psychological studies of other researchers. While each conversion is a unique experience which reflects the convictions and emotional constitution of the person involved, one cannot avoid being impressed by the number of recurrent features in Christian conversions which are equally common in alleged satoris. Usually the moment of conversion is preceded by a duration (often several years) of

unhappiness, emotional conflict or a general dissatisfaction with oneself and life in general. Often there has been a great (usually frustrated) striving to find God and to be pure and good. Yet the moment of salvation often comes at the instant one lets go and stops trying: "'Lord, I have done all I can, I leave the whole matter with thee.' Immediately there came to me a great peace …" [35]

Such moments often occur when one's emotions or efforts have built up to a point that might be called a spiritual crisis. While this occurs more or less fortuitously in a Christian life, Zen induces it deliberately. In his own account of *zazen* meditation Kapleau relates the following:

> Suddenly the sun's streaming into the window in front of me! The rain's stopped! It's become warmer! At last the gods are with me! Now I can't miss *satori*! … Mu, Mu, Mu! … Again Roshi [the Zen master] leaned over but only to whisper, 'You are panting and disturbing the others, try to breathe quietly.' But I can't stop. My heart's pumping wildly. I'm trembling from head to toe, tears are streaming down uncontrollably. … Godo cracks me but I hardly feel it. He whacks my neighbour and I suddenly think, 'Why's he so mean? He's hurting him.' … More tears. … Godo returns and clouts me again and again, shouting, 'Empty your mind of every single thought; become like a baby again. Just Mu, Mu! right from your guts!' … crack, crack, crack! … . [36] [All the spacings are Kapleau's.]

And returning to Christianity we read:

> I have been through the experience which is known as conversion. My explanation of it is this: the subject works his emotions up to the breaking point, at the same time resisting their physical manifestations, such as quickened pulse, and so forth, and then suddenly lets them have their full sway over his body. The relief is something wonderful, and the pleasurable effects of the emotions are experienced to the highest degree. [37]

As in Zen, the Christian experience is direct and immediate. Theology and philosophy fade out of sight at least for the moment, and in their place one may experience what appears to be a new insight into the nature of things:

> My emotional nature was stirred to its depths, confessions of depravity and pleading with God for salvation from sin made me oblivious of all surroundings. I pleaded for mercy, and had a vivid realization of forgiveness and renewal of my nature. When rising from my knees I exclaimed, "Old things have passed away, all things have become new." It was like entering another world, a new state of existence. Natural objects were glorified, my spiritual vision was so clarified that I saw beauty in every material object in the universe, the woods were vocal with heavenly music, my soul exulted in the love of God, and I wanted everybody to share in my joy. [38]

> Not for a moment only, but all day and night, floods of light and glory seemed to pour through my soul, and oh, how I was changed, and everything became new. My horses and hogs and even everybody seemed changed. [39]

And now as described by Zen devotees:

> Never before had the road been so roadlike, the shops such perfect shops, nor the winter sky so unutterably a starry sky. Joy bubbled up like a fresh spring. The days and weeks that followed were the most deeply happy and serene of my life. [40]

And from another Zen practitioner:

> Am totally at peace, at peace, at peace.
>
> Feel numb throughout body, yet hands and feet jumped for joy for almost half an hour.
>
> Am supremely free, free, free, free, free.
>
> Should I be so happy?
>
> There is no common man.
>
> The big clock chimes—not the clock but Mind chimes. The universe itself chimes.
>
> There is neither Mind nor universe. Dong, dong, dong!

I've totally disappeared. Buddha is! [41]

Also, as in Zen, Christian experiences can be precipitated by a simple word, a passage of scripture or non-verbal sensory experience.

It is difficult at this point to assert any essential difference between the Christian and Zen experiences. Both claim a state of certainty, a direct knowing beyond logic and argument. Perhaps the basic differences are the respective vocabularies, religious convictions and cultural settings that determine the manner in which one describes and explains them.

While such religious experiences are usually brief and of little consequence, in both the Zen and Christian traditions one finds examples of profound and long-lasting (often permanent) personality changes, usually for the better. Such instances most often are preceded by an unsatisfactory life pattern of either overt or repressed unhappiness: drunkenness, sensuality, cynicism, insecurity, and so forth. Apparently one's inner conflicts build up to such a point that there occurs a radical restructuring of the personality. The old, selfish, guilt-ridden, and unrewarding tendencies are repressed and their existence denied. Simultaneously the previously denied or undeveloped feelings of companionship and love are brought into focus. Thus one indeed is reborn and is now manifesting a personality pattern which brings much greater personal rewards and

brings a previously unknown sense of purpose in life. James states:

> Another American psychologist, Prof. George A. Coe, has analyzed the cases of seventy-seven converts or ex-candidates for conversion, known to him, and the results strikingly confirm the view that sudden conversion is connected with the possession of an active subliminal (i.e. unconscious) self. Examining his subjects with reference to their hypnotic sensibility and to such automatisms as hypnagogic hallucinations, odd impulses, religious dreams about the time of their conversion, etc. he found these relatively much more frequent in the group of converts whose transformation had been 'striking', 'striking' transformation being defined as a change which, though not necessarily instantaneous, seems to the subject of it to be distinctly different from a process of growth, however rapid. [42]

In many instances the fruits of both Zen and Christian experiences are highly beneficial in terms of morality, social productivity and one's internal well-being. Yet these remarkable transformations take place with an almost total lack of insight into oneself. The old, neurotic, unwholesome tendencies are more often repressed than resolved, and thus may manifest in more covert ways such as evangelical fervor, "a hatred for sin," or religious fanaticism. This is more apt to occur in the Christian tradition where the

religious experience is made a part of a rigidly defined dogma, and the devotee is often unable to separate the experience itself from such concepts as God, salvation and Bible. One knows of examples of saintly, elderly Christians, self-sacrificing and compassionate, who for decades have won the hearts of many and epitomized Christian virtue. Yet if caught in a discussion where the fallacies of their theological convictions are laid bare, fear, anxiety and even unmasked anger break forth until again repressed in conformity with Christian ideals. This also appears to occur to some extent in Zen. We read, for example, of a dialogue between a highly respected Zen master and a pupil. The student raises a doubt about an extremely unlikely Zen teaching which claims that Zen was the Buddha's highest doctrine and was passed on by special transmission down to the present. After the student asks if this is not really a myth, the master unconditionally replies, "No, it is true. if you don't believe it, that's too bad." [43]

Other features of Zen training can also produce desirable personality changes. There is the factor of suggestion: one hears over and over again what should happen, and eventually it does. The introspective nature of Zen, and especially of meditation, can make one aware of mental changes and states of mind which might otherwise go unnoticed though be no less present in non-meditators. (This can also apply in part to the claims for success of all of the other numerous and divergent schools of psychotherapy besides Zen.) The move to a new environment (either to a

new culture for Westerners or into a monastery for Japanese laymen) can in itself change the person and make old concerns seem unimportant; transplanted to a new world, it is easier to abandon old habits, to form a new identity and to relinquish attachments. The process of growing up and maturing, regardless of religion and practice, must be taken into account, especially when we consider that Zen training often requires several years. And finally there is the fact that Zen training is a long and arduous discipline; just as one who has survived a long journey through a wilderness or scaled a difficult mountain or withstood any prolonged stress, the sheer fact of successful endurance gives one self-confidence and a feeling of worth.

Perceptual Alteration

In addition to the above mentioned causes of Zen experiences, the nature of Zen meditation probably produces an additional state of mind not normally present in Christian conversions. This state can occur either singly or in combination with any of the other Zen experiences already noted.

Recent psychological studies have shown that prolonged concentration on simple visual objects can produce striking temporary alterations of feeling and perception. Perhaps most noteworthy are the studies of Dr. Arthur J. Deikman of

Austen Riggs Center, Stockbridge, Massachusetts, U.S.A. [44]

Dr. Deikman's subjects were seated in front of a blue vase and instructed:

> Your aim is to concentrate on the blue vase. By concentration I do not mean analyzing the different parts of the vase, or thinking a series of thoughts about the vase, or associating ideas to the vase, but rather trying to see the vase as it exists in itself, without any connections to other things. Exclude all other thought or feelings or sounds or body sensations. Do not let them distract you but keep them out so that you can concentrate all your attention, all your awareness on the vase itself. Let the perception of the vase fill your entire mind.

It is significant that of the more than eight persons selected for these studies, apparently none had had any previous exposure to meditation, nor had any contact with mystical literature. Subjects were described as normal adults in their thirties and forties, well educated and intelligent." After a few introductory sessions of about 10 minutes' duration, the sessions were increased to 30 minutes each and held three times a week. Four of the subjects completed 30 to 40 sessions; one completed 78 sessions; and one was still continuing after 106. Though marked individual variations were noted, most, if not all, subjects experienced perceptual changes relating to the vase, modification of the state of

consciousness and a general feeling that the sessions were pleasurable and valuable. Quite commonly the vase became more vivid or luminous; a loss of the third dimension was often noted. Some subjects felt a loss of ego boundaries, a confusion of the subject-object relationship as though they and the vase were merging. Such experiences occurred spontaneously and unexpectedly and were sometimes frightening. The degree of success in achieving such states appeared to correlate with one's ability to relinquish control and accept whatever happens. In general the subjects found it difficult to describe their feelings and perceptions. "It's very hard to put into words," was a frequent comment. This difficulty was due in part to the difficulty of describing their experiences without contradictions.

Immediately following the meditation sessions, the subjects were asked to describe the experience and also to look out of the window and describe the way things now appeared to them. A few of their comments are quoted below:

> One of the points that I remember most vividly is when I really began to feel, you know, almost as though the blue and I were perhaps merging, or that the vase and I were. I almost got scared to the point where I found myself bringing myself back in some way from it … .
>
> The building is a kind of very white … a kind of luminescence that the fields have and the trees are really swaying, it's very nice … lean way over and

bounce back with a nice spring-like movement …

The movements are nice, the brightness is. I would have thought it was a terribly overcast day but it isn't. It's a perception filled with light and movement both of which are very pleasurable. Nobody knows what a nice day it is except me.

I am looking differently than I have ever looked before. I mean it's almost as though I have a different way of seeing. It's like something to do with dimensions. It's as though I am feeling what I am looking at. It's as though I have an extension of myself reaching out and seeing something by feeling it. It's as though somebody added something, another factor, to my seeing.

I've experienced … new experiences and I have no vehicle to communicate them to you. I expect that this is probably the way a baby feels when he is full of something to say about an experience or an awareneess and he has not learned to use the words yet.

It's so completely and totally outside of anything else I've experienced.

It was like a parallel world or parallel time … .

The similarities between these descriptions and the descriptions of Zen experiences are so striking that little

comment is needed.

Dr. Deikman lists several factors which he believes account for these experiences, three of which warrant discussion here. They are de-automatization, perceptual expansion and reality transfer.

In order to explain de-automatization and perceptual expansion it is first necessary to explain the word "perception" as used in modern psychology. For simplicity, our discussion will be confined to visual perception, but the same principles also apply to auditory, tactile and olfactory perception.

Visual perception is dependent upon, but must be distinguished from, simple visual sensation. Sensation is the patterns of colors which we behold upon opening our eyes. Perception is the way in which we understand or interpret these patterns. Contrary to popular assumption, human visual perception is not innate in visual experience but rather is gradually acquired by learning as the result of repeatedly seeing visual patterns. The best and most convincing illustration of this is noted in the case of persons born blind but who in later life receive eye surgery. For all practical purposes these people obtain instant and near-perfect vision for the first time in what has been a lifetime of total blindness. They are overwhelmed by a mass of confusing colors and shapes, which they are totally at a loss to understand. They are unable to determine the difference in distance, size and quality; between a full moon in the sky,

a light bulb on the ceiling or a white ball placed two feet in front of them. They are just as likely to try and reach for a cloud as to reach for a piece of paper near at hand. A pencil seen from its end will not be recognized as the same object seen from its side. But only when the pencil has been examined over and over in one's hands (in the same manner and for the same reason as a very young child) will one come to know that these very different visual patterns actually are the same object, that is, a pencil. [45]

Any person raised in a Western culture who in later life learns to read a non-Romanized language, such as Chinese, Thai, Sanskrit or Arabic, will recall that in the beginning great attention had to be given to the details of shape and form of each letter or character. But once fluency is achieved, one scarcely is aware of individual letters, let alone their details of shape. One can now glance at whole patterns of words and immediately comprehend the meanings; just as one competent in English reads these pages. [46]

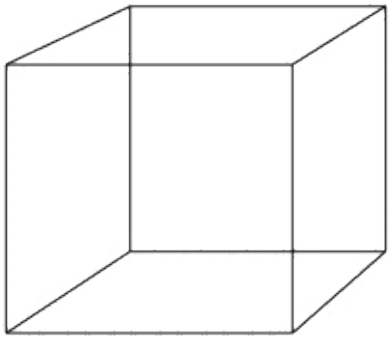
Psychology uses the word "automatization" to refer to the natural loss of awareness of the intermediate steps in perception. For example, one does not consciously give attention to the shape of each letter in the words one is reading. Automatization thus increases our mental efficiency by freeing the mind from concern for repetitious details. De-automatization is the undoing of automatization, that is, attention is again focused on minor sensory details. Perceptually, de-automatization puts one's mind

momentarily on the same level as a young child. Colours become more vivid; previously unnoticed details hold the attention. Commonplace objects such as boxes, brooms and key chains may seem fascinating and beautiful. [47] Concentrative meditation is not the only way of inducing this phenomenon; sensory deprivation and drugs such as marijuana, peyote and LSD-25 are equally, if not more, effective de-automatizers.

The response of Zen practitioners in meditation to repeated stimuli as shown by an EEG [48] may well be the result of de-automatization. However, it cannot at this time be concluded that the phenomena of Deikman's relatively inexperienced meditation subjects are either qualitatively or quantitatively the same as the EEG phenomena observed in Zen monks. Control studies on 22 non-meditators failed to produce these same EEG findings. Also, the degree of EEG change correlated directly with the number of years in practice, and the most striking change (that is, 6–7/second theta waves) was rarely if ever seen in monks with less than 20 years of experience.

Following and dependent upon de-automatization is perceptual expansion. So strong is the process of automatization that it is virtually impossible for one to see visual patterns in their true form, independently of perceptual conditioning. ท, for example, will be seen as the written form of *n* by an American, but to a Thai it is the Siamese equivalent of a *t*. And what does the English-trained mind make of บ, ด or ญ?

The figure below will immediately be recognized as a cube. If one stares at the extreme upper right-hand corner of this cube, some people will perceive this corner as belonging to the front (near) side of the cube; others will see it as belonging to the back (far) side. Most people who stare at the cube for a minute or two will perceive the position of the upper right-hand corner as constantly changing; that is, first it is forward, and then back, and then forward again, and so on. In reality there is no front or back side; in fact there is no third dimension at all. Perception compels us to see a third dimension that is not really there. Under de-automatizing drugs such as hashish and LSD the figure above may appear flat, that is, have no third dimension, and yet a moment later one may see all three possibilities (forward, backward and flat) simultaneously. This is but one example of perceptual expansion.



The artistic value of perceptual expansion, whether obtained through drugs or through concentrative meditation, is not to be denied. No doubt it enables an artist to see previously unnoticed patterns and thus can enhance creativity. Also the experience is often accompanied by pleasant and uplifting emotions. However, it is questionable whether or not such experiences have any lasting value in terms of emotional well-being, long-term happiness or adjustment to life problems. The failures of numerous

persons who have long tried Zen and/or LSD to resolve emotional and neurotic problems testifies to this fact. [49] Of the two subjects in Deikman's meditation experiments who both practised the longest and got the most striking results, both showed evidence of neurotic conflicts on the basis of personal history and psychological testing, though they were functioning relatively well in their environments. De-automatization experiences, whether induced through chemistry or *zazen*, are quite brief, a few hours at most in the case of drugs ond only a few minutes following meditation. Also, we must not forget that normal perception (that is, automatization) has a definite biological value or it would not have evolved. Its presence allows us greater efficiency in dealing with the problems of daily living. The man who quickly reads through a menu will be farther along the road to survival than one who becomes enamoured with the shape and form of the ABCs.

The reader should keep in mind that the above statements regarding meditation are concerned with only one type of meditation, and do not apply to insight meditation (vipassanā) as practised in Pali Buddhism. Nor do these statements apply to the deeper tranquillity practices (jhāna), nor to the various discursive meditations.

Dr. Deikman's third factor used to explain the above meditation experiences he terms "reality transfer." This phrase refers to the fact that actual physical reality and the *sensation* or *feeling* of reality are not the same. In the interests of biological survival, the normal state of the mind is to

invest a feeling of reality into the objects of everyday experience. However, factors which alter the mind (such as hypnosis, LSD, psychotic states, and prolonged concentration) can displace this reality sensation. At such times the real world may seem unreal, while subjective states and minor sensory perceptions may appear more real than normal reality.

V. The Occurrence of Arahants

If Nirvāna is real, why are arahants so hard to find? Has even one lived within the past century? We are told that at the time of the Buddha over 1,000 of the monks realized Nirvāna. But despite this impressive figure we are also told that the occurrence of arahants is rare in the world, and even more rare is the occurrence of an enlightened teacher who warrants the title of "Buddha." [50]

> Few among men are there indeed
> Who cross to the Further Shore.
> The remaining men, most of mankind
> Run up and down this hither shore.
> But they who Dhamma practise
> In this Dhamma well-expounded,
> It is such among mankind
> Who will reach the Further Shore,
> Who will cross old Death's dominions
> So difficult to cross. (Dhammapada 85–86)

It goes without saying that the realization of Nirvāna is no easy achievement, for it requires the complete and final abolition of all attachment and craving. What is not fully appreciated, however, is that the desire to remove

attachments will not in and of itself effect their removal. Wanting to abandon passion only means that one is in a state of ambivalence, that is, two contradictory or opposing feelings co-exist. We have for example the well-known prayer of St. Augustine:

> I had begged chastity of Thee, and said, "Give me chastity and continency, only not yet!" For I feared lest Thou shouldest hear me soon, and soon cure me of the disease of concupiscence, which I wished to have satisfied, rather than extinguished. [51]

The problem is compounded by the fact that if the desire to be free of hatred or passion is significantly stronger than the hatred or passion itself, one may unwittingly repress these unwanted feelings so as to hide them from awareness, and thus not realize that they still exist. This brings us to the second major barrier to Nirvāna, which is delusion (*moha*). Delusion and desire are interdependent. It is because of desires of one sort or another that we structure delusions and unconsciously resist their relinquishment. As an example, the desire to be rid of passion is as often as not motivated by a more subtle form of pleasure seeking, which is the egotistical wish to be pure, virtuous and holy. This in turn originates in part from the delusion that one has an Ego, a true unchanging self, something special and unique which is the essence of one's true being. But the level of self-deception goes even deeper than this. In the light of modern science and psychology many persons have come to accept

that there is no immortal soul; instead, man is a compounded and highly complex psycho-physical phenomenon. However, an intellectual acceptance is something quite different from a thorough emotional acceptance. Quite likely many of the most ardent materialists retain some lingering notion of a soul or even of personal immortality no matter how strongly they may repress such feelings or find them intellectually unpalatable. The same is equally true of great scholars of Buddhist thought, if their scholastic achievements have not been accompanied by successful insight (*vipassanā*) practice. Thus the realization of Nirvāna requires the maximum possible goal of psychoanalysis: a complete laying bare of the subconscious, the total removal of repression, rationalization and all other unconscious defense mechanisms. Ardent discipline, religious dedication and deep faith (no matter how strong they may be) do not guarantee that true insight will be achieved. For quite often discipline, dedication and faith originate from the very factors that obstruct one's progress towards enlightenment. Common among such factors are bigotry, compulsiveness, ethnocentrism, egotism, and insecurity. Thus discipline, dedication and faith are double-edged swords. Though they can be assets towards realizing Nirvāna, they must be subjected to close scrutiny and questioning:

> The faults of others are easy to see,
> While hard indeed to see are one's own;
> Like chaff one winnows others' faults,

Concealing carefully those of one's own;
Just as a cheating gambler hides
The ill-thrown dice from others' eyes. (Dhammapada 252)

But even allowing for the great difficulty in realizing Nirvāna, one might think that among the many millions of Buddhists in the world today at least a few should win the ultimate goal. In this regard two facts must be kept in mind. First, many Buddhist regions are Buddhist in name only. During the past 2,500 years the Dhamma has spread to many lands and become mixed with numerous indigenous beliefs and superstitions, while at the same time its teachings have been radically modified by priests and scholars. Thus many millions of Buddhists have followed and are still following beliefs and practices that are the direct antithesis of the Buddha's teachings. Second, even in nations which have best retained the original teachings, too often these teachings have been either obscured by folklore, mythology and ecclesiasticism, or buried in a deluge of metaphysics, meticulous categorizations and philosophizing. Then again when one does encounter the apparently valid teachings of the Buddha, one occasionally finds that the major emphasis is either upon the correct intonations for chanting these teachings in Pali (which has been a dead language for two millenniums), or upon scriptural hair splitting, rote memorizing or argumentation.

All of this is not meant to imply that there are very few

persons with an extensive and profound grasp of the Dhamma; for such is not the case. The point to be made, however, is that the quoted number of world Buddhists is a figure many times greater than the number of those who truly understand what the Buddha taught. And smaller still is the number of those who both understand and practise.

Persons not usually credulous, and who are in close contact with advanced centers of Buddhist training, have stated that there are indeed arahants alive in the world today. This writer can neither deny nor affirm such claims, but two facts must be mentioned. First, the *Vinaya* rules, by which all *Theravādin* monks are bound, state that a monk must not tell a lay person of his attainment of either *jhāna* or Nirvāna, even though such be true. [52] Second, there are very good reasons for establishing such a rule. One familiar with Asian society need only reflect a moment on what would happen were an arahant to make his attainment known. The results would be little short of disastrous. In the minds of uneducated lay Buddhists he would be regarded as a god and in possession of almost limitless supernatural powers. There would be pleas for cures of ailments, requests for prophecies and demands for blessings to protect one from ghosts, ill fortune and injury. Should the announced arahant utter any statement contrary to either popular tradition or the letter of Buddhist scriptures, there would be a wail of protests rejecting his claims to enlightenment and accusing him of fraud. Undoubtedly he would be repeatedly approached by fanatics and by persons intent on

challenging and testing his claim.

How then can one who has not achieved Nirvāna be assured of the attainment of one who has? This same question was once put to the Buddha:

> The king, the Kosalan Pasenadī, came to visit the Exalted One, and having saluted him, took a seat at one side. Now just then there passed by, not far from the Exalted One, seven ascetics out of those who wore the hair matted, seven of the *Niganthas* [Jains], seven naked ascetics, seven of the Single Vestment class, and seven Wanderers, all with hairy bodies and long nails, carrying friars' kit. Then the king, rising from his seat, and draping his robe over one shoulder, knelt down on his right knee, and holding forth clasped hands, thrice called out his name to those ascetics: 'I am the king, Your Reverences, the Kosalan Pasenadī.' And when they were gone by, he came back to the Exalted One, and saluting him, sat down as before. So seated, he asked the Exalted One: 'Are those persons, Lord, either among the world's arahants, or among those who are in the Path of arahantship?'

To this the Buddha replied:

> Hard is it, sir, for you who are a layman holding worldly possessions, dwelling amidst the encumbrances of children, accustomed to Benares

sandalwood, arrayed in garlands and perfumed unguents, using gold and silver, to know whether those are arahants, or are in the Path of arahantship.

It is by life in common with a person, sir, that we learn his moral character; and then only after a long interval if we pay good heed and are not heedless, if we have insight and are not unintelligent. It is by converse with another, sir, that we learn whether he is pure-minded; and then only after a long interval if we pay good heed and are not heedless, if we have insight and are not unintelligent. It is in time of trouble, sir, that we learn to know a man's fortitude and then only after a long interval, if we pay good heed and are not heedless, if we have insight and are not unintelligent. (S I 77–78/ SN 3:11)

Among the commentaries to the Pali Cannon is the following story:

At the monastery on the Cittala Hill, there lived an Elder who was a canker-freed Saint [an arahant]. As his personal attendant he had a novice who got ordained in his old age. One day that old novice went on alms-round together with the Elder, and carrying the Elder's alms bowl and outer robe, he walked behind him. While they so went, the old novice asked the Elder, 'Those who are Saints, how do they look? How can we recognize them?' The elder said, 'There is an old person who carries a Saint's bowl and robe,

> fulfils all duties towards him, and even goes along with him; yet he cannot recognize Saints. So hard to know, friend, are the Saints!' And not even then did the old novice understand. (Commentary to the Saṃyutta Nikāya)

At this point one may ask whether or not Buddhism is a satisfactory religion, for it offers salvation to so few. But the problem is not one of "offering" salvation but rather of pointing the way for those who are able and willing to tread the path. What then of persons apparently unable to reach the goal? In this regard we must first remember that Buddhism is empirical; it is dealing with things as they are, not as we would like them to be. A religion which promises universal or easy salvation may be more emotionally satisfying, but in the long run it will tend to be an opiate which diverts our efforts from truly constructive endeavours. But the Buddha was fully aware of the needs and capabilities of the common people. Repeatedly, he gave them instructions for finding comfort and happiness in everyday life. [53] Even those who strive for Nirvāna without fully attaining the goal have not wasted their efforts; for the extent to which one has freed one's mind from greed, hatred and delusion, and developed compassion and equanimity, is the extent to which one finds emotional well-being and peace of mind in the present. Furthermore, such achievements are said to result in good karma, which in turn brings happiness in the future. And in

the next birth which allegedly arises as the result of the present one, one would be that much closer to Nirvāna should one choose to continue the journey. If we consider the great infinity of time as taught in Buddhism and also the fact that Nirvāna is said to be obtainable after several lifetimes of patient endeavour, then perhaps the percentage of beings reaching Nirvāna is much greater than realized. Also, the Buddha is quoted as saying that some persons who make sufficient progress towards Nirvāna will not be reborn in this world. Rather they will continue their existence on some other dimension within saṃsāra and in that realm attain the final goal.

VI. Aesthetic and Moral Criticisms

Apathy and Negation

As Nirvāna can be realized only by the abolition of desire and craving, it is often viewed as a condition of emotional death, a state of emptiness and apathy. Even in the minds of many Theravādin Buddhists it seems depressing, as if to say one never wins in saṃsāra, so the only solution is suicide. Yet suicide of the usual sort is almost invariably preceded by severe and inescapable depression. Before concluding that the quest for Nirvāna is motivated by a death-wish, we should note that the Buddha divided the types of craving one should overcome into three categories. The first two are cravings for sense pleasures and for continued existence. The third craving to be relinquished is craving for annihilation after death. [54]

An arahant is not in a state of chronic apathy. In the Suttas the Buddha is often referred to as "the Happy One," [55] and of the seven states of mind listed as conducive to Nirvāna, the factors of enlightenment, one is happiness and two of the others are tranquillity and equanimity. (The remaining four are mindfulness, investigation of reality, energy, and

concentration.) [56] The Buddha said:

> Happy is he contented in solitude,
> Seeing the truth he has learned.
> Happy is he who abstains from harming,
> Living restrained towards all that lives.
> Happiness true is freedom from passion
> If senses' cravings are left behind.
> But highest happiness is his
> Who has removed the self-conceit. (Mucalinda, Udāna 2.1)

The Buddha's statement "happiness is won by happiness" stands in sharp contrast to the Jain teaching that happiness is won by suffering. [57] Too often Buddhism is misunderstood as a practice of rigid asceticism intended to induce a state of euphoria. In his first sermon the Buddha contradicted this notion by advocating the famed Middle Way, the avoidance of the two extremes: one being sensual indulgence and the other self-torture. [58] And in the Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta the Buddha asks:

> If a man, O Kassapa, should go naked, and be of loose habits, and lick his hands clean with his tongue, and do and be all those other things you gave in detail, down to his being addicted to the practice of taking food, according to rule, at regular intervals up to even half a month—if he does all this, and the state of blissful attainment in conduct, in heart, in intellect,

have not been practised by him, realized by him, then is he far from samaṇaship, far from brahmanship. But from the time, O Kassapa, when a Bhikkhu has cultivated the heart of love that knows no anger, that knows no ill-will—from the time when by the destruction of the deadly intoxications [the lusts of the flesh, the lust after future life, and the defilements of delusion and ignorance], he dwells in that emancipation of heart, that emancipation of mind, that is free from those intoxications, and that he, while yet in this visible world, has come to realize and know—from that time, O Kassapa, is it that the *bhikkhu* is called a *saṃana*, is called a *brāhmana*." (Kassapa-Sīhanāda Sutta, D I 167)

And again he is quoted:

Now it may well be, Poṭṭhapāda, that you think: 'Evil dispositions may be put away, the dispositions that tend to purification may increase, one may continue to see face to face, and by himself come to realise, the full perfection and grandeur of wisdom, but one may continue sad.' Now that, Poṭṭhapāda, would not be accurate judgment. When such conditions are fulfilled, then there will be joy, and happiness, and peace, and in continual mindfulness and self-mastery, one will dwell at ease.

And outsiders, Poṭṭhapāda, might question us thus: 'What then, sir, is that material (or that mental, or

> that formless) mode of personality for the putting away of which you preach such a doctrine?' And to that I should reply: 'Why this very personality, that you see before you is what I mean.' (Poṭṭhapāda Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya I 196–197)

The Buddha never taught that the abolition of all feelings is a prerequisite to Nirvāna. Only those states of mind which are unwholesome (that is, conducive to dukkha and undesirable karma) need be abandoned. Usually he classified such states into greed, hatred and delusion. On other occasions they were termed the "five mental hindrances," and enumerated as sensual lust, anger, sloth and torpor, agitation and worry, and sceptical doubt. Sometimes the list was expanded to ten: belief that oneself is an unchanging soul, scepticism, belief in salvation through rules and ceremonies, sensual lust, hatred, craving for existence in a heaven world, craving for the bliss of deep meditation (that is, *arūpajjhāna*, cf. page 17), conceit, restlessness and ignorance. [59]

In place of the unwholesome levels of feeling the Buddha advocated the cultivation and development of the four *brahma-vihāras*: Love (*mettā*), compassion, sympathetic joy (that is, the happiness one experiences in perceiving the happiness of others) and equanimity. [60] The first of these four, *mettā*, is usually translated into English as "love" or "loving-kindness," but there is no precise English equivalent. By simultaneously thinking of love, kindness

and friendship, we can best understand its meaning.

In Buddhist teaching there is no moral or psychological wrong in encountering and acknowledging an enjoyable experience per se. The pleasures which accompany the sweet taste of sugar, and the beauty of a mountain scene, are not in themselves barriers to Nirvāna. But danger arises from the craving or attachment that such experiences may produce. That is, the notion "I must have this. I must re-experience it." Thus the Buddha said:

> If he [an arahant] feels a pleasant feeling he knows it is transient, he knows it is not clung to, he knows it has no lure for him … . [The same is then repeated for painful and neutral feelings.] If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels that feeling with detachment. If he feels a painful feeling, he feels that feeling with detachment. (S II 82/SN 12:51)

Referring to the place at which he first realized Nirvāna, the Buddha spoke:

> Pleasant indeed and delightful is the forest grove with a flowing river of clear water, a pleasant and delightful ford and a village near by for procuring food. Indeed it is a most suitable place for a noble youth intent on spiritual exertion. (Ariyapariyesana Sutta, M I 167)

And on an occasion shortly before the Buddha's demise:

> So the Exalted One proceeded to the Cāpala Shrine, and when he had come there he sat on the mat spread out for him, and the Venerable Ānanda took his seat respectfully beside him. Then the Exalted One addressed the Venerable Ānanda, and said: 'How delightful a spot, Ānanda, is Vesāli, and how charming the Udena Shrine, and the Gotamaka Shrine, and the Shrine of the Seven Mangoes, and the Shrine of Many Sons, and the Sarandada Shrine, and the Cāpāla Shrine!' (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Ch. III , D II 102)

And at another time he is quoted:

> Now I, Bhaggava, being of such an opinion, certain recluses and *brahmins* have falsely, emptily, mendaciously and unfairly accused me, saying, "Gotama, the recluse, is all wrong, and so are his monks." He has said, "Whenever one has attained the stage of deliverance entitled the Beautiful [*subha*, a condition below both Nirvāna and *arūpajjhāna*], one then considers all things as repulsive." But this, Bhaggava, I have not said. What I do say is this: "Whenever one attains the stage of deliverance, entitled the Beautiful, one is then aware, 'Tis lovely!'" (Pātika Sutta, D III 34)

This same appreciation of beauty was also expressed by others among the arahants. There is, for example, a poem

attributed to Sabbaka after his enlightenment:

> Whene'er I see the crane, her clear bright wings
> Outstretched in fear to flee the black storm cloud,
> A shelter seeking, to safe shelter borne,
> Then doth the river Ajakaraṇī give joy to me.
> Who doth not love to see on either bank
> Clustered rose-apple trees in fair array
> Behind the great cave (of my hermitage)
> Or hear the soft croak of the frogs, well rid
> Of their undying mortal foes, proclaim:
> "Not from the mountain streams is't time today
> To flit. Safe is the Ajakaraṇī.
> She brings us luck. Here is it good to be." (Theragāthā, *Psalms of the Brethren* IV 196)

And Kassapa, another of the arahants, is allegedly the author of the following:

> Those upland glades delightful to the soul,
> Where the *kareri* spreads its wildering wreaths,
> Where sound the trumpet-calls of elephants,
> Those rocky heights with hue of dark blue clouds,
> Where lies embosomed many a shining tarn
> Of crystal-clear, cool waters, and whose slopes
> The "herds of Indra" cover and bedeck …
> Here is enough for me who fain would dwell
> In meditation rapt, mindful and tense. (Theragāthā, *Psalms of the Brethren* XVIII 261,4)

However, it is only the hand that has no wound that can safely handle poison. Not uncommonly, we mistakenly consider ourselves free of addictions simply because we have not been sufficiently separated from the objects of gratification to experience the full intensity of our desires. Cigarette smoking is one obvious example. Thus for one treading the path to Nirvāna, a considerable amount of renunciation and discipline is imperative.

This brings us to another feature of the Dhamma which has given many the impression that it is life-negating, depressing and morbid. There are those passages of scripture which refer to the body or the world in general as "disgusting" or "impure," or else advocate the development of "disgust." This is especially characteristic of the cemetery meditations that occur in *satipaṭṭhāna* practice. Here a monk is advised to meditate upon a human corpse in various stages of decay and putrification, "swollen, blue and festering"; or "being eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals or by different kinds of worms." And with each of these mental pictures the monk "then applies this perception to his own body thus: 'Verily, also my own body is of the same nature: such it will become and will not escape it.'" [61] Likewise one finds meditations on food in which the meditator visualizes the digestion and decomposition of food as it proceeds through the intestines. [62]

The point to remember is that Buddhism is first and foremost a series of techniques for psychological maturation

rather than a philosophy about the nature of the world. Furthermore, these techniques must be varied from person to person and also varied from time to time for any one person, depending upon one's particular state of mind. [63] Thus the above meditations are specific techniques intended as antidotes for specific types of craving (in the above instances the cravings of narcissism, immortality, passion, and gluttony). Their function is one of negative conditioning. It is like a man who is repeatedly told while under hypnosis that cigarette smoke tastes like ammonia. This produces the post-hypnotic hallucination that cigarettes do taste like ammonia, and he eventually loses his desire for cigarettes. Or again, it is like Pavlov's dog which is given a painful electric shock every time it sees a certain food. In time all desire for that food is lost. When reading of these meditations one often gets a very depressing view of them. But if they induce depression, one has either misperceived them or one's present mental condition is not one for which these meditations are intended. In this regard the Buddha has said:

> If in the contemplation of the body, bodily agitation, or mental lassitude or distraction should arise in the meditator, then, Ānanda, he should turn his mind to a gladdening subject. Having done so, joy will arise in him. (S V 156/SN 47:10)

A Selfish Goal

Is the goal of Nirvāna a selfish one? Perhaps the most common criticism directed against Buddhism, and Theravāda Buddhism in particular, is that one's primary concern is one's own salvation. The whole effort and purpose of the Eightfold Path is self-development and self-purification, that is, one's personal liberation.

In reply to the question "Is Buddhism selfish?" the answer must be "yes" in the sense that every willful action is selfish. Referring to our previous discussion of the pleasure-pain principle (cf. page 8), all human endeavours (unless purely habitual) are motivated by some attempt at achieving happiness, pleasure, love, self-respect, social approval, beauty, and other enjoyable experiences; or else actions are motivated by an endeavour to escape sorrow, pain, fear, guilt, humiliation, and other forms of dukkha. Even great acts of self-sacrifice are but instances of ambivalence in which one level of feeling (for example, love, religious dedication or a wish for self-esteem) wins out over antagonistic and less respected levels. Christianity and Islam, with their great emphases upon Heaven and Hell (regardless of the ways in which Heaven and Hell may be interpreted), provide clear examples of the pleasure-pain principle occurring in high reaches of religious thought.

Compassion originates not as a philosophical or religious ideal but rather as a feeling which motivates us to help others, and is experienced as a very wholesome and rewarding state of mind. In fact loud advocacies of love and compassion as ideals often indicate that they are wanting as

realities; the militancy of most Bohemian peace marchers, fundamentalist clergyman, and communist and socialist zealots provide clear examples. [64]

If however, we take the more conventional usage of the word "selfish," which encompasses greed and egotism, but excludes love (*mettā*) and compassion, then the term does not apply to the Buddha's teachings. As several quotations will demonstrate:

> Then, Lohicca, he who would say, "Suppose a *samaṇa* or a brāhmaṇa has reached some good state [of mind], then he should tell no one else about it. For what can one man do for another? To tell others would be like the man who, having broken through an old bond, should entangle himself in a new one. Like that, I say, is this desire to declare to others; it is a form of lust." He who should say thus would be putting obstacles in the way of those clansmen who have taken upon themselves the Doctrine and Discipline … . But putting obstacles in their way he would be out of sympathy for their welfare. Being out of sympathy for their welfare, his heart would become established in enmity, and when one's heart is established in enmity, that is unsound doctrine. (Lohicca Sutta, D I 228–229)

When told that it is unbefitting for one who has renounced the world to spend his life exhorting other men, the Buddha replied:

> Whatever the apparent cause, Sakka, whereby
> Men come to dwell together, none doth fit
> The Wise Man's case.
> Compassion moves his mind.
> And if, with mind thus satisfied, he spends
> His life instructing other men, yet he
> Thereby is nowise bound as by a yoke.
> Compassion moves him and sympathy. (S I 206/SN 10:2)

And again he said:

> Monks, it is because I observe these two results therein that I am given to dwelling in lonely spots, in solitary lodging in the forest. What two? Observing my own pleasant way of living in this very life, and feeling compassion for future generations. These are the two results. (A I 60/AN 2:9)

Once one of the monks lay ill but was ignored by the others, so intent were they on spiritual training. At this time the Buddha admonished them:

> Whosoever, bhikkhus, would wait upon me, whosoever, bhikkhus, would honour me, whosoever bhikkhus, would follow my advice, he should wait upon the sick. (Mahāvagga VIII .26/Vinaya I 302)

And when the Brahmin, Sangarava, said that the life of a

monk was of benefit to but one person, the monk himself, the Buddha replied that one who succeeds in his practice and attains Enlightenment will become a teacher of men and can lead many thousands to the same Liberation. [65]

The justification for the Buddha's great emphasis upon self-development and self-purification was explained in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus said:

> Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, "Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye: and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (St. Matthew 7:4–5)

It has been said, "Men can be forgiven for the things they have done in the name of evil, but who can forgive that which has been done in the name of good?" The histories of Europe, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Mexico, and numerous tribal areas provide the most tragic examples of Christian atrocities committed by men apparently sincere in the belief that they were serving God. Likewise for the Moslem faith. More recently, communists with apparently genuine convictions of the rightness of the socialist state have been equally ruthless. A more subtle but common occurrence of this same phenomenon is seen in the everyday process of child raising. Parents convinced that their particular habits, ideals, mores, and customs are the best too often attempt to mould their children into the same patterns. Sometimes the

persuasions are deliberate, direct and suppressive; other times unconscious, covert and insidious. But in either case it is an attempt by one party to force its ways upon another. Sometimes this is done with relative success and harmony, but sometimes with tragedy and heartache to all concerned. Thus the Buddha advised:

> But, Cunda, that one who himself is in the mire should pull out of the mire another sunk therein—this, verily, is an unheard-of thing. But that one himself clear of the slough should be able to lift out of the Slough another foundered therein—such a thing may well be. And that one who himself is not subdued, not disciplined, has not attained the Extinction of Delusion, should cause others to become subdued, and disciplined, to attain to the Extinction of Delusion—such a thing has never been known. But that one, himself controlled, trained, delivered from delusion, should lead others to become controlled and trained, lead them to Deliverance from Delusion,—such a thing may very well be." (Sallekha Sutta, M I 45)

Escapist

Akin to the problem of selfishness is that of escapism. The label "escapist" is one commonly used by critics of

Theravāda Buddhism, and, as with selfishness, the problem must first be dealt with in terms of semantics. Again referring to the pleasure-pain principle, half of life is escapist in that it is an attempt to avoid *dukkha* (suffering). A man who takes aspirin does so to escape the pain of his headache, and a large part of obeying customs and rules is done to avoid either reproach and punishment or to avoid one's own feelings of guilt. Thus in this sense of the word, Buddhism is very decidedly escapist, for its primary concern is to free men from dukkha. However, in addition to their literal meanings the words "escapist" and "escapism" almost always bear connotations of cowardice or of shirking one's duty. Thus when asked whether or not his religion is escapist, a Buddhist is placed in a position where an answer to the affirmative will admit to an unseated and unwarranted value judgment.

If escapist means shirking one's duty, then let us examine the concept of duty. Duty and obedience receive little mention in the Pali Canon and are not proclaimed as virtues. [66] In Buddhist teaching each being is free to act as each such being sees fit but should first be aware of the nature and consequences of its actions. Duty is not something which exists in nature but rather is a social construct more or less necessary for the preservation of family, tribe and nation. While in an absolute sense, duty itself may not be real, from an experiential position what is real is the feeling or sense of duty which men acquire through social conditioning. Thus in World War I, the

German soldier was compelled by duty to kill Frenchmen, while the Frenchman was equally duty-bound to kill Germans. Likewise in the 1960s when an East German escaped to the West, in the eyes of the West he was a hero who underwent dangers and hardships to realize a better way of life. But from the East German position the same man was an escapist, who for selfish motives fled his duties to the people and the socialist state.

If a man should hold dual citizenship in two countries and finds that he must relinquish one of the two, it is easy to imagine that citizens of the rejected nation might find it difficult to be sympathetic and understanding of his choice. Such a reaction would result from ethno-centrism, provincialism and a lack of familiarity with the world beyond their own. Likewise, when a man experiences Nirvāna and chooses it in preference to saṃsāra, how are we, who know only the one world and not the other, able to criticize his decision?

For all that is said about one's duty to society, it is unusual to find a man whose primary concern is not his own prosperity and happiness. And when a man does loudly proclaim the virtues of duty, we may question to what extent he is only parroting contemporary mores, attempting to win social approval or reacting to guilt feelings which have resulted from the exploitation of one's fellow men. Psychiatrically it is known that those who most strongly adhere to the concept of duty suffer from compulsive personality structures. Such persons fear their own feelings

and spontaneity; thus their compulsiveness, excessive morality and preoccupation with duty are but defences used to control their own mistrusted feelings. [67] It is man's socially acquired sense of shame or guilt followed by his desire to avoid (that is, to escape) this feeling that gives the sense of duty such powerful control over human behaviour.

If there is a higher duty than social mores, it is not duty per se, but compassion. For it is compassion that inspires us to help others regardless of the boundaries of culture, race, nation, or species. The virtue performed by compassion is thus spontaneous and genuine, rather than forced, premeditated or dutiful. Again if we consider the decades of tireless service to humanity as lived by the Buddha and the other arahants, how can we say they did not perform their "duty" to the world.

VII. The Motive and the Means

Throughout this essay three important matters have come into focus. First is the emphasis which Buddhism gives to experience as the basis of both knowledge and spiritual progress. Second, from this experiential background emerges the pleasure-pain principle as the primary concern of life. Third, Nirvāna can be known and understood only by direct experience, and since it can only be known in this way, neither I nor any of the readers of this essay (unless there be arahants among you) have any certainty that it is real.

With these facts in mind let us turn our attention to two remaining problems that need consideration concerning Nirvāna. First, why should one deny oneself many of life's comforts and joys and endure years of effort and discipline to attain something which may not exist? Second, if Nirvāna is realized only by the abolition of all cravings and desires, what about the desire for Nirvāna itself, the very thing which makes us seek Nirvāna: is not this also a selfish desire?

The problem is not one of attachment to Nirvāna per se, but rather it is a problem of being attached to the thought or

idea of Nirvāna. Thus the Buddha comments on the mind of one who is spiritually untrained and undeveloped:

> He recognizes Nirvāna as Nirvāna. Having recognized Nirvāna as Nirvāna he thinks of Nirvāna; he thinks in [the idea of] Nirvāna; he thinks [of self as] Nirvāna; he thinks, "Nirvāna is mine"; he is satisfied with Nirvāna. What is the reason for this? I say that it is not thoroughly understood by him.

Then in contrast he speaks of an arahant, one for whom Nirvāna is a reality:

> He directly knows Nirvāna as Nirvāna. From directly knowing Nirvāna as Nirvāna he does not think of Nirvāna, he does not think in [the idea of] Nirvāna; he does not think [of self as] Nirvāna; he does not think "Nirvāna is mine". He does not delight in Nirvāna. What is the reason for this? I say it is because it is thoroughly understood by him. (Mūlapariyāya Sutta, M I 4)

Perhaps the two questions above are best answered by letting the Pali Canon speak for itself. In the Majjhima Nikāya we find the following dialogue between the Buddha and the wanderer, Māgandiya. The latter has made the accusation that the Buddha "is a destroyer of life" to which the Buddha replies:

> Māgandiya, the eye delights in material shapes, is

delighted by material shapes, rejoices in material shapes; it is tamed, watched, guarded and controlled by a Tathāgata, and he teaches a Doctrine for its control. Was it on account of this, Māgandiya, that you said, "The recluse, Gotama, is a destroyer of life?"

Just on account of this did I say, good Gotama, "The recluse Gotama is a destroyer of life."

As for eye and material shapes, the same is then repeated for sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental states. The Buddha then continues:

What do you think about this, Māgandiya? Suppose someone formerly revelled in material shapes cognizable by the eye, agreeable, pleasant, desired, enticing, connected with sensual pleasure, alluring. After a time, having known the coming to be and passing away of material shapes and the satisfaction in them, and the peril of them and the way of escape from them as it really is, getting rid of craving for material shapes, suppressing the fever for material shapes, he should live devoid of lust, his mind inwardly calmed. What have you, Māgandiya, to say of him?

Nothing, good Gotama.

And again the same is repeated for sounds, smells, and so

forth:

> Now I, Māgandiya, when I was formerly a householder, endowed and provided with five strands of sense-pleasures, revelled in them: in material shapes cognizable by the eye, agreeable, pleasant … in sounds cognizable by the ear … in smells cognizable by the nose … in tastes cognizable by the tongue … in touches cognizable by the body, agreeable, pleasant, desired, enticing, connected with sensual pleasures, alluring. I had three palaces, Māgandiya, one for the rains, one for the cold season, one for the hot weather, During the four months of the rains, being delighted in the palace for the rains by women musicians, I did not come down from that palace. But after a time, knowing the coming to be and passing away of sense-pleasures, and the satisfaction in them and the peril of them and the way of escape from them as it really is, getting rid of the craving for sense-pleasures, suppressing the fever of sense-pleasures, I lived devoid of lust, my mind inwardly calmed. I saw other beings not yet devoid of attachment to sense-pleasures, who were pursuing sense-pleasures: they were being consumed by craving for sense-pleasures, burning with the fever of sense-pleasures. I did not envy them. I had no delight in those things. What was the reason for this? It was, Māgandiya, that there is this delight which, apart from pleasures of the senses, apart from unskilled

states of mind, attains and remains in a god-like happiness. Delighting in this delight, I do not envy what is low. I have no delight in that. (Māgandiya Sutta, M II 503–505)

And to the monks he spoke:

The eye is burning, visible objects are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, also whatever is felt as pleasant or painful, or neither painful nor pleasant, that arises with eye-contact as its essential support, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of craving, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion. I say it is burning with birth, ageing and death, with sorrow, with lamentation, with pain, grief and despair.

And likewise for sounds, mental states, and so forth:

Monks, when a noble follower who has heard, sees thus, he finds aversion in the eye, finds aversion in forms, finds aversion in eye-consciousness, finds aversion in eye-contact, and whatever is felt as painful or pleasant, or neither painful nor pleasant, that arises with eye-contact for its essential support, in that too he finds aversion.

And again for sounds, and so forth:

When he finds aversion, passion fades out. With the

> fading out of passion he is liberated. When liberated there is knowledge that he is liberated: he understands: "Birth is exhausted, the holy life has been lived, what was to be done has been done, of this there is no more beyond." (Mahāvagga I .21/Vinaya I 34)

Another version of the same theme occurs in the Saṃyutta Nikāya. Here the Buddha explains how the causal law of dependent origination leads to birth and suffering. Suffering inspires one to trust in the Dhamma, and this in turn gives rise to joy. Joy results in rapture; rapture produces serenity; and serenity results in happiness, which in turn makes for concentration. From concentration arises the knowledge and vision of things as they really are, and this makes for repulsion. Repulsion creates passionlessness, and passionlessness results in liberation. [68]

Thus the scriptures quite clearly provide the solution to the two questions stated above. One does not realize Nirvāna by becoming obsessed with the quest for a transcendental ideal. The Buddhist approach differs from that of some of the bhakti schools of Hinduism, for in bhakti writings we are told that man finds divinity only when his whole being cries out in fervent emotion for the divine, as one whose head is held under water, craves in desperation for air. In contrast, the Buddhist approach is one of confronting each state of consciousness with the close scrutiny of insight and mindfulness, and in so doing perceiving the unsatisfactory

nature of such states and then relinquishing them for this reason alone. Unwholesome mental conditions are abandoned because of their own inherent defects and dangers, not at the bidding of supernatural revelation nor because a reward is promised in a hypothetical life to come. Nor is there a problem of denying oneself present happiness without any compensation. The rewards are immediate. Each forward step is a goal warranted by its own intrinsic merits; this is so, even though all we can say of Nirvāna is that those who have walked the path before us have said that if we follow the course to its maximum possible realization, then something occurs which is beyond all description, a "something" well worth knowing. Nirvāna is found by fully understanding the pleasure-pain principle, stripping it of the delusions it gives rise to, and thus putting oneself beyond its influence.

Thus we have resolved St. Augustine's dilemma (cf. page 33). Desire is not conquered by repression, nor by prayer, nor by ideology; for such techniques do not circumvent our lingering thirst for satisfaction. They cannot resolve the ambivalence which they themselves have created. Rather the solution is given by the Buddha when he says that desire is overcome by foreseeing its result, "penetrating it by insight and seeing it plain." [69] Seeing it plain is seeing its pain, and desire is thus willfully abandoned because of what it is in and of itself.

The essence of Buddhist practice rests upon the empirical facts of saṃsāra, one's own experience. Faith in something

which nobody has been able to experience and testify to is unnecessary; rather there must be faith in one's ability to master one's cravings and faith in the worth of the effort. An essential aspect of the Dhamma is mindfulness, the first of the seven factors of enlightenment (cf. page 37). In simplified language it is repeatedly and persistently taking a good hard look at things, especially at oneself and one's own feelings in particular. It is the maximum possible degree of self-honesty and consequently one of the most difficult of all things to achieve.

While mindfulness which results in insight is the keynote of liberation, the problem is really more complicated than that. It is complicated because each human being is complicated. Each of us has many distinct and diverse levels to each one's psyche, and each of these levels must be dealt with in a manner appropriate to it alone. Our states of consciousness are continually changing from hour to hour, minute to minute, second to second. There is no single rule of practice to apply to all persons at all times. Thus the Buddha repeatedly emphasized that training can only be done now, in the immediate present:

> How is the solitary life perfected in detail? It is when that which is past is put away; when that which is future is given up, and when, with regard to present self-states that we have got, will and passion have been thoroughly mastered. It is thus that the solitary life is perfected in detail. (S II 283/SN 36:10)

And again:

> Do not hark back to things that passed,
> And for the future cherish not fond hopes:
> The past was left behind by thee,
> The future state has yet to come.
> But who with vision clear can see
> The present which is here and now,
> Such a wise one should aspire to win
> What never can be lost nor shaken. (Bhaddekaratta Sutta, M III 187)

With this we are now prepared to discuss one final problem regarding the Dhamma, and that is the apparent contradiction between the ideals of love and compassion, and the ideal of non-attachment. The words "love" and "compassion" do not represent two single entities but rather a whole spectrum of feelings which differ from one another in ways so subtle as to often defy description. Love and compassion can be extremely pleasant and meaningful, and they can be effective antidotes to greed and hatred. Yet at other times they can carry us to unrealistic extremes, or lead to frustration if situations prevent their expression. Thus the correct application of love and compassion (and also of detachment and equanimity) is a matter of judgment and timing, as determined by one's particular state of mind at a given moment. While logically and philosophically compassion and non-attachment may be contradictory ideals, when one comes to actually living and practising the

Dhamma, no conflict arises.

Despite the existence of dukkha (sorrow and discomfort), which is both inherent in, and generated by, passion and craving, there still remains the obvious fact that there is a level of pleasure in these states (or at least an expectation of pleasure). And it is primarily for this reason that we find it so very difficult to relinquish them. The solution is not one that can be proven by argument, logic or science. It can only be proven only by oneself and to oneself, that is, to fully and mindfully note the nature and quality of those pleasures which are associated with lust and greed. One must behold them in their true form, free of any social, religious or personal assumptions as to their merits and demerits. In the same manner one makes the same impartial and penetrative observations of equanimity, happiness and mettā. On the basis of their own inherent features these latter pleasures (equanimity, and so forth) are seen to be more wholesome, more meaningful and more truly satisfying than the pleasures of passion and greed. Furthermore, the very presence of greed, hatred, jealousy or lust excludes the possibility of the higher feelings existing at that same moment. Thus again one finds a true incentive to abandon desires. There is no savior but oneself; the Dhamma simply invites us to come and see. It points the way, but we must follow.

To a six-year-old child, adult existence often appears dull, spiritless and uninteresting. He is incapable of appreciating most adult interests, and if deprived of playthings,

playmates and stories, he will most likely lapse into apathy or depression. But ten years later he is an adolescent with an entirely different set of values and interests. He no longer cares for the childish things of the six-year-old; yet adult life still looks rather blank and pointless when compared with dancing, dating and drag races. Adult values will come in time and with them a natural loss of interest in adolescent pleasures. Thus the layman who finds it difficult to sympathize with the quietude and solitude of a Buddhist monk may reflect upon how his own life appears in the eyes of younger generations. Buddhism is pointing the way for maturation beyond that of the usual social norms. We advance to progressively higher and higher pleasure levels until we reach a state where even pleasure and happiness are transcended. In the Cūḷasuññata Sutta, the Buddha furnishes an explicit example beginning with the village life of a lay person, proceeding through a monk's life of solitude in the forest, and then continuing on up through the highest states of jhāna, each level being successively relinquished for a more rewarding one, with Nirvāna as the end. [70] And in the Aṅguttara Nikāya the Buddha states:

> There are two kinds of happiness, O monks: the happiness of the householder and the happiness of the ascetic. But the greater of the two is the happiness of the ascetic.
>
> There are two kinds of happiness, O monks: the happiness of the senses and the happiness of renunciation. But the greater of the two is the

happiness of renunciation. (A I 80/AN 2:1–2)

And from the Dhammapada:

> If by forsaking a lesser happiness,
> One may behold a greater happiness,
> Let the wise man renounce the lesser
> Considering the greater. (Dhammapada 290)

The journey to Nirvāna is not a sudden one. A thorough and harmonious restructuring of one's being can only come with time and patient endeavour. Thus we read the Buddha's words:

> Just as, bhikkhus, the mighty ocean deepens and slopes gradually down, hollow after hollow, not plunging by a sudden precipice, even so, bhikkhus, in this Dhamma-discipline the training is gradual, it goes step by step; there is no sudden penetration of insight. (Sona, Udāna 5.5, p. 54)

And again:

> By degrees, little by little, from time to time,
> a wise man should remove his own impurities,
> as a smith removes the dross from silver.
> (Dhammapada 239)

VIII. The Buddhist Institution

In the preceding chapters, our discussion of Nirvāna has led us to touch upon nearly all other features of the Dhamma: karma, rebirth, ethics, insight practice, aesthetics and epistemology. To complete the picture let us say a few words about Buddhism as a social institution. From the time of the Buddha until the present day, Buddhists have fallen into two major groups. By far the larger group is lay people, who for all practical purposes are much like lay people of any other religion, except for their belief in Buddhist tenets. Among the laity, one finds a wide range of individual variations in the extent to which they understand and practise the Dhamma. It is not unusual to meet both male and female lay Buddhists whose knowledge, discipline and meditation excel those of most monks and nuns.

The monks at the time of the Buddha were not priests. That is, they had no ecclesiastical functions, took no part in rites, ceremonies or ritual, and were discouraged from practising astrology, fortune-telling and magic. The purpose of instituting the monastic order was twofold. First it was intended to provide an environment and a way of life most conducive to progress towards Nirvāna. It freed one of the usual cares and obligations of lay people and provided

maximum opportunity for training, study and meditation. Second, it was a means of preserving and propagating the teaching. A study of the Vinaya Rules, by which all Theravādin Buddhist monks are bound, reveals that these rules are not primarily moral precepts. Rather they are standards of discipline conducive to one's psychological development or else regulations necessary for maintaining the harmony, preservation and integrity of a large and growing social body.

Thus, from its very conception the monastic order had two missions: one was to learn and practise the Dhamma; the other was to preserve this knowledge and give it to all who wished to hear. Though magic and ritual have since become a part of nearly every Buddhist sect, we still find nations, such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, where the original purposes of the order are still recognized as the primary ones. One need not be a monk or nun to realize Nirvāna. The Suttas list at least twenty one persons who reached the goal while still laymen. [71] But if one seriously intent on spiritual progress can free himself of social obligations, gain family permission (from his parents if young or from his wife if married), and can meet the other standards necessary for admission to the Order (freedom from debt, insanity and contagious diseases) [72] then the life of a monk or nun is the one which provides the best chances for realizing the goal.

Notes

1. Douglas M. Burns, *Buddhism, Science and Atheism* (Bangkok: The World Fellowship of Buddhists, 1965), 47–56.
2. S II 113–114 (12:67).
3. In proper Pali usage, *kamma* refers only to volitional actions, that is, causes, while the effects of such actions are termed *vipāka.* However, in Hindu and recent popular Buddhist writings, karma has widely come to mean the whole universal law of cause and effect. Thus I have used the word "karma" in instances where *vipāka* or *karma-vipāka* would technically be correct.
4. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera, "Karma and Rebirth" in *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, Wheel Publication 394/396 (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society).
5. A I 173 (3:61).
6. Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta, M I 259.
7. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera, *Fundamentals of Buddhism*, Wheel Publication 394/396 (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society).

8. Dhammapada 276.

9. S II 117 (12: 68).

10. *Visuddhimagga* XVI 67–74.

11. Ibid.

12. An arahant is one who has fully realized Nirvāna.

13. Nyanaponika Thera, *Anattā and Nibbāna* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1959).

14. S II 121–123 (12:70, Susīmāparibbājaka Sutta).

15. A IV 358–359 (9:4).

16. S I 174 (7:3).

17. S I 27 (1:8).

18. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera, *The Path to Deliverance* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Bauddha Sāhitya Sabhā, 1959), 73–118.

19. Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (London: Rider & Co., 1962).

20. *Visuddhimagga* VIII 245–251.

21. Ariyapariyesana Sutta, M I 174–175.

22. Ibid. 1 164–168.

23. Arthur P. Noyes and Lawrence C. Kolb, *Modern Clinical Psychiatry* (Philadephia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1963) p. 80.

24. Fransz Alexander, "Buddhistic Training as an Artificial

Catatonia," in *The Scope of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Co. Inc., 1961) 75–76.

25. Nyanatiloka Mahāthera, *The Word of the Buddha* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: The Buddhist Publication Society, 1959) p. 79.

26. *Zen Buddhism* by D. T. Suzuki. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956, p. 84.

27. *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau. Tokyo, John Weatherhill, Inc., 1965, pp. 103–104.

28. Ibid., p. 228.

29. *Zen Buddhism*, op, cit., p. 181–182.

30. Akira Kasamatsu and Tomio Hirai, *Folia Psychiatrica et Neurologica Japonica*, Vol. 20, No. 4, "*An Electroencephalographic Study of the Zen Meditation* (*Zazen)*" by December, 1966, pp. 315–336. (Supplementary data obtained by correspondence with the authors.)

31. This occurs in all areas but is most pronounced in the frontal and central regions of the scalp

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. *The Three Pillars of Zen*, op. cit., p. 99.

35. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James. London., Longmans, Green & Co., 1952, p. 249.

36. *The Three Pillars of Zen* op. cit. pp. 266–267.

37. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* op. cit., p. 246.

38. Ibid. p. 244.

39. Ibid. p. 245.

40. *The Three Pillars of Zen* op. cit. pp. 266–267.

41. Ibid. p. 207.

42. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, op. cit. p. 235.

43. *The Three Pillars of Zen* op. cit. p. 133.

44. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* Vol. 136, No. 4, "*Experimental Meditation*" by Arthur J. Deikman. UṢ.A., Williams & Walkins Co., April, 1963. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* op, cit., Vol. 142, No. 2 "*Implications of Experimentally Induced Contemplative Meditation*" by Arthur J. Deikman, 1966, pp. 101–116.

45. *Space and by Sight* M. Von Senden. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960

46. Thus perception is dependent upon memory and is inseparable from it. In Theravāda Buddhism mind (*nāma*) is divided into four groups, one of which is consciousness. Consciousness in turn is interdependent with the other three (see page 5). Of these other three the first is termed sensation or feeling (*vedanā*); the second (*saññā*) means both "memory" and "perception" and is translated into English as either one of these two words, usually the latter. The third group is mental formations (*saṅkhārā*) and includes conceptional formations

(thinking), willing, planning. (See *Buddhist Dictionary* by Nyanatiloka Mahāthera, BPS, Kandy, Sri Lanka.) The corresponding classification used in Western psychology is sensations, perceptions, and concepts arising in that order. After perceptions have become established, the mind is able to use sound (that is, spoken words) and figures (that is, written words) to serve as symbols to represent respective objects, feelings and abstract relationships; this is the formation of concepts. Thus once conceptualization has developed, it no longer is necessary to see or touch a tree, for example, to know that a tree exists at a given site; the simple sound "tree" will bring to mind the perceptions which occur in actually experiencing a tree. The word sankhāra has a range of usages, but as applied to the above aspect of Buddhist psychology it includes conceptualization as understood in Western psychology but also includes aspects of volition and motivation.

If the reader will refer back to the instructions given to the experimental meditation subjects (page **29**), it will be noted that their field of awareness is narrowed in two ways. First is by concentration on a given object to the exclusion of other concerns. Second is supression of verbal thinking and all other forms of conceptualization. Thus the mind approaches a preconceptual level, that is, a predominantly sensation-perception level presumably similar to that of an animal or one-year-old child. Psychological studies have shown that as a child matures,

the vividness of visual experience is reduced because vision becomes modified by the presence of perception and reflective thought. (The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Vol. 142, op. cit., pp. 111–113). Thus alteration or diminution of perception and conceptual thinking (as occurs in concentrative meditation and under LSD) increases the vividness of visual experience.

47. *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* by Aldous Huxley. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1959.

48. *The Drug Experience* edited by David Ebin. New York: The Orion Press, 1961, pp. 368–384.

49. This is not to imply that LSD and related drugs have no psychotherapeutic potential at all. There are instances in which they have produced valid psychological insights and thus facilitated personality growth. However, such growth will take place only if one is emotionally and intellectually prepared to confront, understand and make use of the acquired insights.

50. D II 149. (No. 16 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta Ch. V, 23).

51. *Confessions*, Book VIII, 17, by St. Augustine. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1948, p. 144.

52. Vinaya, Suttavibhanga, Pācittiya 8.

53. D III 180–193. (No. 31 Sigālovāda Sutta).

54. S V 421. (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta).

55. D II 93. (No. 16 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta Ch. II, 9).

56. *The Seven Factors of Enlightenment* by Piyadassi Thera. Kandy, Ceylon (Sri Lanka): Buddhist Publication Society, 1960.

57. *The Book of the Gradual Sayings,* Vol. II (A II), translated by F. L. Woodward, London: The Pali Text Society, 1952, pp. 2–3.

58. S V 421 (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta).

59. S V 61 (45:8, 8:9–10).

60. *The Four Sublime States* by Nyānaponika Thera. Kandy, Ceylon (Sri Lanka): Buddhist Publication Society, 1960.

61. M I 58 (No. 10 Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta).

62. *Visuddhimagga* XI, 1–26

63. S V 112–115 (46:6).

64. One may postulate that compassion and allied feelings are divinely willed but such an assumption immediately raises both the question of free will and the question of the origin of less wholesome feelings such as greed and hatred. Starting on an experiential basis, Buddhism acknowledges the reality of such feelings and proceeds from there. It is interesting to note in this regard that close observations of several species of higher animals suggest that love and compassion are not exclusively human. (*National Geographic*, Vol. 128, No. 6, Ṅew Discoveries Among Africa's Chimpanzees" by Jane Van Lawick-Goodall. Washington, D.C.: December, 1965, pp. 802–831.

Arctic Wild by Louis Chrisler, New York: Harper, 1958.)

65. A I 167–168/AN 3.60.6

66. *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* Vol. IV *Dialogues of the Buddha Part III* (D III), translated by T. W. Rhys Davids. London: The Pali Text Society, 1957, p. 181.

67. *Modern Clinical Psychiatry*, op. cit. pp. 62–63.

68. S II 30–31 (12:23).

69. A I 264 (3:110).

70. M III 104–108. (No. 121 Cūlasuññata Sutta).

71. A III 451 (6:131–151). Commentary to the Dhammapada 142.

72. Vinaya I 39–71/ Mahāvagga 72–91

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