

What the Buddha Taught

By Dr. Walpola Rahula

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Foreword

By Paul Demieville

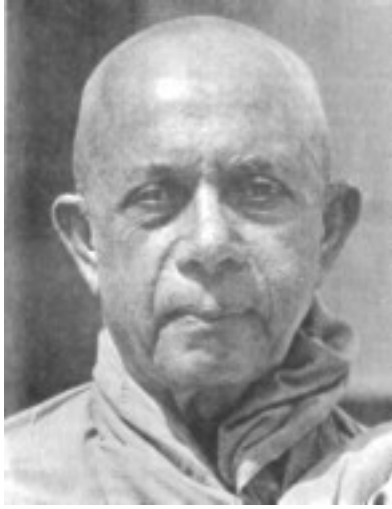
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Here is an exposition of Buddhism conceived in a resolutely modern spirit by one of the most qualified and enlightened representatives of that religion. The Rev. Dr. W. Rahula received the traditional training and education of a Buddhist monk in Ceylon, and held eminent positions in one of the leading monastic institutes (Pirivena) in that island, where the Law of the Buddha flourishes from the time of Asoka and has preserved all its vitality up to this day. Thus brought up in ancient tradition, he decided, at this time when all traditions are called in question, to face the spirit and the methods of international scientific learning. He entered the Ceylon University, obtained the B.A. Honours degree (London), and then won the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Ceylon University on a highly learned thesis on the History of Buddhism in Ceylon. Having worked with distinguished professors at the University of Calcutta and come in contact with adepts of Mahāyāna (the Great Vehicle), that form of Buddhism which reigns from Tibet to the Far East, he decided to go into the Tibetan and Chinese texts in order to widen his ecumenism, and he has honoured us by coming to the University of Paris (Sorbonne) to prepare a study of Asanga, the illustrious philosopher of Mahāyāna, whose principal works in the original Sanskrit are lost, and can only be read in their Tibetan and Chinese translations. It is now eight years since Dr. Rahula is among us, wearing yellow robe, breathing the air of the

Occident, searching perhaps in our old troubled mirror a universalized reflection of the religion which is his.

The book, which he has kindly asked me to present to the public of the West, is a luminous account, within reach of everybody, of the fundamental principles of the Buddhist doctrine, as they are found in the most ancient texts, which are called "The Tradition' (*Āgama*) in Sanskrit and 'The Canonic Corpus' (*Nikāya*) in Pali. Dr. Rahula, who possesses an incomparable knowledge of these texts, refers to them constantly and almost exclusively. Their authority is recognized unanimously by all the Buddhist schools, which were and are numerous, but none of which ever deviates from these texts, except with the intention of better interpreting the spirit beyond the letter. The interpretation has indeed been varied in the course of the expansion of Buddhism through many centuries and vast regions, and the Law has taken more than one aspect. But the aspect of Buddhism here presented by Dr. Rahula-humanist, rational, Socratic in some respects, Evangelic in others, or again almost scientific-has for its support a great deal of authentic scriptural evidence which he only had to let speak for themselves.

The explanations which he adds to his quotations, always translated with scrupulous accuracy, are clear, simple, direct and free from all pedantry. Some among them might lead to discussion, as when he wishes to rediscover in the Pali sources all the doctrines of Mahāyāna; but his familiarity with those sources permits him to throw new light on them. He addresses himself to the modern man, but the refrains from insisting on comparisons just suggested here and there, which could be made with certain currents and thought of the contemporary world: socialism, atheism, existentialism, psycho-analysis. It is for the reader to appreciate the modernity, the possibilities of adaptation of a doctrine which, in this work of genuine scholarship, is presented to him in its primal richness.



Most Ven. Walpola Rahula

Preface

All over the world today there is growing interest in Buddhism. Numerous societies and study-groups have come into being, and scores of books have appeared on the teaching of the Buddha. It is to be regretted, however, that most of them have been written by those who are not really competent, or who bring to their task misleading assumptions derived from other religions, which must misinterpret and misrepresent their subject. A professor of comparative religion who recently wrote a book on Buddhism did not even know that Ānanda, the devoted attendant of the Buddha, was a *bbikkhu* (a monk), but though he was a layman! The knowledge of Buddhism propagated by books like these can be left to the reader's imagination.

I have tried in this little book to address myself first of all to the educated and intelligent general reader, uninstructed in the subject, who would like to know what the Buddha actually taught. For his benefit I have aimed at giving briefly, and as directly and simply as possible, a faithful and accurate account of the actual words used by the Buddha as they are to be found in the original Pali texts of the Tipitaka, universally accepted by scholars as the earliest extant records of the teachings of the Buddha. The material used and the passages here are taken directly from these originals. In a few places I have preferred to some later works too.

I have borne in mind, too, the reader who has already some knowledge of what the Buddha taught and would like to go further with his studies. I have therefore provided not only the Pali equivalents of most of the key-words, but also references to the original texts in footnotes, and a select bibliography.

The difficulties of my task have been manifold: throughout I have tried to steer a course between the unfamiliar and the popular, to give the English reader of the

present day something which he could understand and appreciate, without sacrificing anything of the matter and the form of the discourses of the Buddha. Writing the book I have had the ancient texts running in my mind, so I have deliberately kept the synonyms and repetitions which were a part of the Buddha's speech as it has come down to us through oral tradition, in order that the reader should have some notion of the form used by the Teacher. I have kept as close as I could to the originals, and have tried to make my translations easy and readable.

But there is a point beyond which it is difficult to take an idea without losing in the interests of simplicity the particular meaning the Buddha was interested in developing. As the title 'What the Buddha Taught' was selected for this book, I felt that it would be wrong not to set down the words of the Buddha, even the figures he used, in preference to a rendering which might provide the easy gratification of comprehensibility at the risk of distortion of meaning.

I have discussed in this book almost everything which is commonly accepted as the essential and fundamental teaching of Buddha. These are the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Five Aggregates, Karma, Rebirth, Conditioned Genesis (Patīccasamuppāda), the doctrine of No-Soul (Anatta), Satipatthāna (the Setting-up of Mindfulness). Naturally there will be in the discussion expressions which must be unfamiliar to the Western reader. I would ask him, if he is interested, to take up on his first reading the opening chapter, and then go on to Chapters V, VII and VIII, returning to Chapters II, III, IV and VI when the general sense is clearer and more vivid. It would not be possible to write a book on the teaching of the Buddha without dealing with the subjects which Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism have accepted as fundamental in his system of thought.

The term Theravāda-Hīnayāna or 'Small Vehicle' is no longer used in informed circles- could be translated as 'the School of the Elders' (theras), and Mahāyāna as 'Great Vehicle'. They are used of the two main forms of Buddhism known in

the world today. Theravāda, which is regarded as the original orthodox Buddhism, is followed in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Chittagong in East Pakistan. Mahāyāna, which developed relatively later, is followed in other Buddhist countries like China, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, etc. There are certain differences, mainly with regard to some beliefs, practices and observances between these two schools, but on the most important teachings of the Buddha, such as those discussed here, Theravāda and Mahāyāna are unanimously agreed.

It only remains for me now to express my sense of gratitude to Professor E.F.C. Ludowyk, who in fact invited me to write this book, for all the help given me, the interest taken in it, the suggestions he offered, and for reading through the manuscript. To Miss Marianne Möhn too, who went through the manuscript and made valuable suggestions, I am deeply greatly. Finally I am greatly beholden to Professor Paul Demiéville, my teacher in Paris, for his kindness in writing the Foreword.

W.RAHULA.

Paris

July 1958 start

The Buddha

The Buddha, whose personal name was Siddhattha (Siddhārtha in Sanskrit), and family name Gotama (Skt. Gautama), lived in North India in the 6th century B.C. His father, Suddhodana, was the ruler of the kingdom, of the Sākya (in modern Nepal). His mother was queen Māyā. According to the custom of the time, he was married quite young, at the age sixteen, to a beautiful and devoted young princess named Yasodharā. The young prince lived in his palace with every luxury at his command. But all of a sudden, confronted with the reality of life and the suffering of mankind, he decided to find the solution - the way out of this universal suffering. At the age of 29, soon after birth of his only child, Rāhula, he left his kingdom and became an ascetic in search of this solution.

For six years the ascetic Gotama wandered about the valley of the Ganges, meeting famous religious teachers, studying and following their systems and methods, and submitting himself to rigorous ascetic practices. They did not satisfy him. So he abandoned all traditional religions and their methods and went his own way. It was thus that one evening, seated under a tree (since then known as the Bodhi-or-Bo-tree, 'the Tree of Wisdom'). On the bank of the river Neranjarā at Buddha-Gaya (near Gaya in modern Bihar), at the age of 35, Gotama attained Enlightenment, after which he was known as the Buddha, 'The Enlightened One'.

After his Enlightenment, Gotama the Buddha delivered his first sermon to a group of five ascetics, his old colleagues, in the Deer Park at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Benares. From that day, for 45 years, he taught all classes of men and women-kings and peasants, Brahmins and outcasts, bankers and beggars, holy men and robbers – without making slightest distinction between them. He recognized no differences of caste or social groupings, and the Way he

preached was open to all men and women who were ready to understand and to follow it.

At the age of 80, the Buddha passed away at Kusinārā (in modern Uttar Pradesh in India).

Today Buddhism is found in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Tibet, China, Japan, Mongolia, Korea, Formosa, in some parts of India, Pakistan and Nepal, and also in the Soviet Union. The Buddhist population of the world is over 500 million.

Chapter I. THE BUDDHIST ATTITUDE OF MIND

Among the founders of religions the Buddha (if we are permitted to call him the founder of a religion in the popular sense of the term) was the only teacher who did not claim to be other than a human being, pure and simple. Other teachers were either God, or his incarnations in different forms, or inspired by him. The Buddha was not only a human being; he claimed no inspiration from any god or external power either. He attributed all his realization, attainments and achievements to human endeavour and human intelligence. A man and only a man can become a Buddha. Every man has within himself the potentiality of becoming a Buddha, if he so wills it and endeavours. We can call the Buddha a man *par excellence*. He was so perfect in his 'human-ness' that he came to be regarded later in popular religion almost as 'super-human'.

Man's position, according to Buddhism, is supreme. Man is his own master, and there is higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny.

'One is one's own refuge, who else could be the refuge?'[1] said the Buddha. He admonished his disciples to 'be a refuge to themselves', and never to seek refuge in or help from anybody else.[2] He taught, encouraged and stimulated each person to develop himself and to work out his own emancipation, for man has the power to liberate himself from all bondage through his own personal effort and intelligence. The Buddha says: 'You should do your work, for the Tathāgatas[3] only teach the way.'[4] If the Buddha is to be called a 'saviour' at all, it is only in the sense that he discovered and showed the Path to Liberation, Nirvāna. But we must tread the Path ourselves.

It is on this principle of individual responsibility that the Buddha allows freedom to his disciples. In the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* the Buddha says that he never

thought of controlling the *Sangha* (Order of Monks)^[5], nor he did want the *Sangha* to depend on him. He said that there was no esoteric doctrine in his teaching, nothing hidden in the 'closed-fist of the teacher' (*ācariya-muttbi*), or to put it in the other words, there never was anything 'up his sleeve'.^[6]

The freedom of thought allowed by the Buddha is unheard of elsewhere in the history of religions. This freedom is necessary because, according to the Buddha, man's emancipation depends on his own realization of Truth, and not on the benevolent grace of a god or any external power as a reward for his obedient good behaviour.

The Buddha once visited a small town called Kesaputta in the kingdom of Kosala. The inhabitants of his town were known by the common name Kālāma. When they heard that the Buddha was in their town, the Kālāmas paid him a visit, and told him:

'Sir, there are some recluses and brāhmanas who visit Kesaputta. They explain and illumine only their own doctrines, and despise, condemn and spurn others' doctrines. Then come other recluses and brāhmanas, and they, too, in their turn, explain and illumine only their own doctrines, and despise, condemn and spurn others' doctrines. But, for us, Sir, we have always doubt and perplexity as to who among these venerable recluses and brāhmanas spoke the truth, and who spoke falsehood.'

Then the Buddha gave them this advice unique in the history of religions:

'Yes, Kālāmas, it is proper that you have doubt, that you have perplexity, for a doubt has arisen in a matter which is doubtful. Now, look you Kālāmas, do not be led by reports, or tradition or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances, nor by

the delight in speculative opinions, nor by seeming possibilities, nor by the idea: 'this is our teacher'. But, O Kālāmas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (*akusala*), and wrong, and bad, the give them up... And when you know yourselves that certain things are wholesome (*kusala*) and good, then accept them and follow them'[7]

The Buddha went even further. He told the bhikkus that a disciple should examine even the Tathāgata (Buddha) himself, so that he (the disciple) might be fully convinced of the true value of the teacher whom he followed.[8]

According to the Buddha's teaching, doubt (*vicikkicchā*) is one of the five Hindrances (*nīvarana*)[9] to the clear understanding of Truth and to spiritual progress (or for that matter to any progress). Doubt, however, is not a 'sin', because there are no articles of faith in Buddhism. In fact there is no 'sin' in Buddhism, as sin is understood in some religions. The root of all evil is ignorance (*avijjā*) and false views (*micchā ditthi*). It is an undeniable fact that as long as there is doubt, perplexity, wavering, no progress is possible. It is also equally undeniable that there must be doubt as long as one does not understand or see clearly. But in order to progress further it is absolutely necessary to get rid of doubt. To get rid of doubt one has to see clearly.

There is no point in saying that one should not doubt or one should believe. Just to say 'I believe' does not mean that you understand and see, When a student works on mathematical problem, he comes to a stage beyond which he does not know how to proceed, and where he is in doubt and perplexity. As long as he has this doubt, he cannot proceed. If he wants to proceed, he must resolve this doubt. And there are ways of resolving that doubt. Just to say 'I believe', or, 'I do not doubt' will certainly not solve the problem. To force oneself to believe and to accept a thing without understanding is political, and not spiritual or intellectual.

The Buddha was always eager to dispel doubt. Even just a few minutes before his death, he requested his disciples several times to ask him if they had any doubts about his teaching, and not to feel sorry later that they could not clear those doubts. But the disciples were silent. What he said then was touching: 'If it is through respect for the Teacher that you do not ask anything, let even one of you inform his friend' (i.e., let one tell his friend so that the latter may ask the question on the other's behalf).[\[10\]](#)

Not only the freedom of thought, but also the tolerance allowed by the Buddha is astonishing to the student of the history of religions. Once in Nālandā a prominent and wealthy householder named Upāli, a well-known lay disciple of Nigantha Nātaputta (Jaina Mahāvira), was expressly sent by Mahāvira himself to meet the Buddha and defeat him in argument on certain points in the theory of Karma, because the Buddha's views on the subject were different from those of Mahāvira.[\[11\]](#) Quite contrary to expectations, Upāli, at the end of the discussion, was convinced that the views of the Buddha were right and those of his master were wrong. So he begged the Buddha to accept him as one of his lay disciples (*Upāsaka*). But the Buddha asked him to reconsider it, and not to be in a hurry, for 'considering carefully is good for well-known men like you'. When Upāli expressed his desire again, the Buddha requested him to continue to respect and support his old religious teachers as he used to.[\[12\]](#)

In the third century B.C., the great Buddhist Emperor Asoka of India, following this noble example of tolerance and understanding, honoured and supported all other religions in his vast empire. In one of his Edicts carved on rock, the original of which one may read even today, the Emperor declared:

'One should not honour only one's own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honour others' religions for this or that person. So doing, one helps one's own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of

others too. In acting otherwise one digs the grave of one's own religion and also does harm to other religions. Whosoever honours his own religion and condemns other religions, does so indeed through devotion to his own religion, thinking "I will glorify my own religion". But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his own religion more gravely.

So concord is good: Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others'.[\[13\]](#)

We should add here that this spirit of sympathetic understanding should be applied today not only in the matter of religious doctrine, but elsewhere as well.

This spirit of tolerance and understanding has been from the beginning one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization. That is why there is not a single example of persecution or the shedding of a drop of blood in converting people to Buddhism, or in its propagation during its long history of 2500 years. It spread peacefully all over the continent of Asia, having more than 500 million adherents today. Violence in any form, under any pretext whatsoever, is absolutely against the teaching of the Buddha.

The question has often been asked: Is Buddhism a religion or a philosophy? It does not matter what you call it. Buddhism remains what it is whatever label you may put on it. The label is immaterial. Even the label 'Buddhism' which we give to the teaching of the Buddha is of little importance. The name one gives it is inessential.

What's in a name? That which we call a rose,

By any other name would smell as sweet.

In the same way Truth needs no label" it is neither Buddhist, Christian, Hindu nor Moslem. It is not the monopoly of anybody. Sectarian labels are a hindrance to the independent understanding of Truth, and they produce harmful prejudices in men's minds.

This is true not only in intellectual and spiritual matters, but also in human relations. When, for instance, we meet a man, we do not look on him as a human being, but we put a label on him, such as English, French, German, American, or Jew, and regard him with all the prejudices associated with that label in our mind. Yet he may be completely free from those attributes which we have put on him.

People are so fond of discriminative labels that they even go to the length of putting them on human qualities and emotions common to all. So they talk of different 'brands' of charity, as for example, of Buddhist charity or Christian charity, and look down upon other 'brands' of charity. But charity cannot be sectarian; it is neither Christian, Buddhist, Hindu nor Moslem. The love of a mother for her child is neither Buddhist nor Christian: it is mother love. Human qualities and emotions like love, charity, compassion, tolerance, patience, friendship, desire, hatred, ill-will, ignorance, conceit, etc., need no sectarian labels; they belong to no particular religions.

To the seeker after Truth it is immaterial from where an idea comes. The source and development of an idea is a matter for the academic. In fact, in order to understand Truth, it is not necessary even to know whether the teaching comes from the Buddha, or from anyone else. What is essential is seeing the thing, understanding it. There is an important story in the *Majjhima-nikāya* (*sutta* no.140) which illustrates this.

The Buddha once spent a night in a potter's shed. In the same shed there was a young recluse who had arrived there earlier.[\[14\]](#) They did not know each other. The Buddha observed the recluse and thought to himself: 'Pleasant are the ways of this young man. It would be good if I should ask about him'. So the Buddha asked him 'O bhikkhu,[\[15\]](#) in whose name have you left home? Or who is your master? Or whose doctrine do you like?'

'O friend,' answered the young man, 'there is the recluse Gotama, a Sakyan scion, who left the Sakya-family to become a recluse. There is high repute abroad of him that he is an Arahant, a Fully-Enlightened One. In the name of that Blessed One I have become a recluse. He is my Master, and I like his doctrine.'

'Where does that Blessed One, the Arahant, the Fully-Enlightened One live at the present time?'

'In the countries to the north, friend, there is a city called Sāvatti. It is there that Blessed One, the Arahant, the Fully-Enlightened One, is now living.'

'Have you ever seen him, that Blessed One? Would you recognize him if you saw him?'

'I have never seen that Blessed One. Nor should I recognize him if I saw him.'

The Buddha realized that it was in his name that this unknown young man had left home and become a recluse. But without divulging his own identity, he said: 'O bhikkhu, I will teach you the doctrine. Listen and pay attention. I will speak.'

'Very well, friend,' said the young man in assent.

Then the Buddha delivered to this young man a most remarkable discourse explaining Truth (the gist of which is given later).[\[16\]](#)

It was only at the end of the discourse that this young recluse, whose name was Pukkusāti, realized that the person who spoke to him was the Buddha himself. So he got up, went before the Buddha, bowed down at the feet of the Master, and apologized to him for calling him 'friend' [17] unknowingly. He then begged the Buddha to ordain him and admit him into the Order of the *Sangha*.

The Buddha asked him whether he had the alms-bowl and the robes ready. (A bhikkhu must have three robes and the alms-bowl for begging food). When Pukkusāti replied in the negative, the Buddha said that the Tathāgatas would not ordain a person unless the alms-bowl and the robes were ready. So Pukkusāti went out in search of an alms-bowl and robes, but was unfortunately savaged by a cow and died. [18]

Later, when this sad news reached the Buddha, he announced that Pukkusāti was a wise man, who had already seen the Truth, and attained the penultimate stage in the realization of Nirvāna, and that he was born in a realm where he would become an Arahant [19] and finally pass away, never to return to this world again. [20]

From this story it is quite clear that when Pukkusāti listened to the Buddha and understood his teaching, he did not know who was speaking to him, or whose teaching it was. He saw Truth. If the medicine is good, the disease will be cured. It is not necessary to know who prepared it, or where it came from.

Almost all religions are built on faith—rather 'blind' faith it would seem. But in Buddhism emphasis is laid on 'seeing', knowing, understanding, and not on faith, or belief. In Buddhist texts there is a word *saddhā* (Skt. *Śraddhā* has three aspects: (1) full and firm conviction that a thing is, (2) serene joy at good qualities, and (3) aspiration or wish to achieve an object in view. [21]

However you put it, faith or belief as understood by most religions has little to do with Buddhism.[\[22\]](#)

The question of belief arises when there is no seeing- seeing in every sense of the word. The moment you see, the question of belief disappears. If I tell you that I have a gem hidden in the folded palm of my hand, the question of belief arises because you do not see it yourself. But if I unclench my fist and show you the gem, then you see it for yourself, and the question of belief does not arise. So the phrase in ancient, Buddhist texts reads: 'Realizing, as one sees a gem (or a myrobalan fruit) in the palm'.

A disciple of the Buddha named Musila tells another monk: 'Friend Savittha, without devotion, faith or belief,[\[23\]](#) without liking or inclination, without hearsay or tradition, without considering apparent reasons, without delight in the speculations of opinions, I know and see that the cessation of becoming is Nirvāna.'[\[24\]](#)

And the Buddha says: 'O bhikkus, I say that the destruction of defilement and impurities is (meant) for a person who knows and who sees, and not for a person who does not know and does not see.'[\[25\]](#)

It is always a question of knowing and seeing, and not that of believing. The teaching of the Buddha is qualified as *ehi-passika*, inviting you to 'come and see', but not to come and believe.

The expressions used everywhere in Buddhist texts referring to persons who realized Truth are: 'The dustless and stainless Eye of Truth (*Dhamma-cakkhu*) has arisen.' 'He has seen Truth, has attained Truth, has known Truth, has known Truth, has penetrated into Truth, has crossed over doubt, is without wavering.' 'Thus with right wisdom he sees it as it is (*yathā bhūtam*).'[\[26\]](#) With reference to

his own Enlightenment the Buddha said: 'The eye was born, knowledge was born, wisdom was born, science was born, and light was born.'[\[27\]](#) It is always seeing through knowledge or wisdom (*ñāna-dassana*), and not believing through faith.

This was more and more appreciated at a time when Brāhmanic orthodoxy intolerantly insisted on believing and accepting their tradition and authority as the only Truth without question. Once a group of learned and well-known Brahmins went to see the Buddha and had a long discussion with him. One of the group, a Brahmin youth of 16 years of age, named Kāpathika, considered by them all to be an exceptionally brilliant mind, put a question to the Buddha:[\[28\]](#)

'Venerable Gotama, there are the ancient holy scriptures of the Brahmins handed down along the line by unbroken oral tradition of texts. With regard to them, Brahmins come to the absolute conclusions: "This alone is Truth, and everything else is false". Now, what does the Venerable Gotama say about this?'

The Buddha inquired: 'Among Brahmins is there any one single Brahmin who claims that he personally knows and sees that "This alone is Truth, and everything else is false."?'

The young man was frank, and said: 'No'.

'Then, is there any one single teacher, or a teacher of teachers of Brahmins back to the seventh generation, or even any one of those original authors of those scriptures, who claims that he knows and he sees: "This alone is Truth, and everything else is false"?''

'No.'

'Then, it is like a line of blind men, each holding on to the preceding one; the first one does not see, the middle one also does not see, the last one also does not see. Thus, it seems to me that the state of the Brahmins is like that of line blind men.'

Then the Buddha gave advice of extreme importance to the group of Brahmins: 'It is not proper for a wise man who maintains (lit. protects) truth to come to the conclusions: "This alone is Truth, and everything else is false".'

Asked by the young Brahmin to explain the idea of maintaining or protecting truth, the Buddha said: 'A man has a faith. If he says "This is my faith", so far he maintains truth. But by that he cannot proceed to the absolute conclusions: "This alone is Truth, and everything else is false".' In other words, a man may believe what he likes, and he may say 'I believe this'. So far he respects truth. But because of his belief or faith, he should not say that what he believes is alone the Truth, and everything else is false.

The Buddha says: 'To be attached to one thing (to a certain view) and to look down upon other things (views) as inferior – this the wise men call a fetter.'[\[29\]](#)

Once the Buddha explained[\[30\]](#) the doctrine of cause and effect to his disciples, and they said that they saw it and understood it clearly. Then the Buddha said:

'O bhikkhus, even this view, which is so pure and so clear, if you cling to it, if you fondle it, if you treasure it, if you are attached to it, then you do not understand that the teacher is similar to a raft, which is for crossing over, and not for getting hold of.'[\[31\]](#)

Elsewhere the Buddha explains this famous simile in which his teaching is compared to a raft for crossing over, and not for getting hold of and carrying on one's back:

'O bhikkhus, a man is on a journey. He comes to a vast stretch of water. On this side the shore is dangerous, but on the other it is safe without danger. No boat goes to the other shore which is safe and without danger, nor is there any bridge for crossing over. He says to himself: "This sea of water is vast, and the shore on this side is full of danger; but on the other shore it is safe and without danger. No boat goes to the other side, nor is there a bridge for crossing over. It would be good therefore if I would gather grass, wood, branches and leaves to make a raft, and with the help of the raft cross over safely to the other side, exerting myself with my hands and feet". Then that man, O bhikkhus, gather grass, wood, branches and leaves and makes a raft, and with the help of that raft crosses over safely to the other side, exerting himself with his hands and feet. Having crossed over and got to the other side, he thinks: "This raft was of great help to me. With its aid I have crossed safely over to this side, exerting myself with my hands and feet. It would be good if I carry this raft on my head or on my back wherever I go".

'What do you think, O bhikkhus, if he acted in this way would that man be acting properly with regard to the raft? "No, Sir". In which way then would he be acting properly with regard to the raft? Having crossed and gone over to the other side, suppose that man should think: "This raft was a great help to me. With its aid I have crossed safely over to this side, exerting myself with my hands and feet. It would be good if I beached this raft on the shore, or moored it and left it afloat, and then went on my way wherever it may be". Acting in this way would that man act properly with regard to that raft.

'In the same manner, O bhikkhus, I have taught a doctrine similar to a raft – it is for crossing over, and not for carrying (lit. getting hold of). You, O bhikkhus, who understand that the teaching similar to a raft, should give up even good things (*dhamma*); how much more then should you give up evil things (*adhamma*).'[\[32\]](#)

From this parable it is quite clear that the Buddha's teaching is meant to carry man to safety, peace, happiness, tranquillity, the attainment of *Nirvāna*. The whole doctrine taught by the Buddha leads to this end. He did not say things just to satisfy intellectual curiosity. He was a practical teacher and taught only those things which would bring peace and happiness to man.

The Buddha was once staying in a Simsapā forest in Kosambi (near Allahabad). He took a few leaves into his hand, and asked his disciples: 'What do you think, O bhikkhus? Which is more? These few leaves in my hand or the leaves in the forest over here?

'Sir, very few are the leaves in the hand of the Blessed One , but indeed the leaves in the Simsapā forest over here are very much more abundant.'

'Even so, bhikkhus, of what I have known I have told you only a little, what I have not told you is very much more. And why have I not told you (those things)? Because that is not useful... not leading to *Nirvāna*. That is why I have not told you those things.'[\[33\]](#)

It is futile, as some scholars vainly try to do, for us to speculate on what the Buddha knew but did not tell us.

The Buddha was not interested in discussing unnecessary metaphysical questions which are purely speculative and which create imaginary problems.

He considered them as a 'wilderness of opinions.' It seems that there were some among his own disciples who did not appreciate this attribute of his. For, we have the example of one of them, Mālunkyaputta by name, who put to the Buddha ten well-known classical questions on metaphysical problems and demanded answers.[\[34\]](#)

One day Mālunkyaputta got up from his afternoon meditation, went to the Buddha, saluted him, sat on one side and said:

'Sir, when I was all alone meditating, this thought occurred to me: There are these problems unexplained, put aside and rejected by the Blessed One, Namely, (1) is the universe eternal or (2) is it not eternal, (3) is the universe finite or (4) is it infinite, (5) is soul the same as body or (6) is soul one thing and body another thing, (7) does the Tathāgata exist after death, or (8) does he not exist after death, or (9) does he both (at the same time) exist and not exist after death, or (10) does he both (at the same time) not exist and not not-exist. These problems the Blessed One does not explain to me. This (attitude) does not please me, I do not appreciate it. I will go to the Blessed One and ask him about this matter. If the Blessed One explains them to me, then I will continue to follow the holy life under him. If he does not explain them, I will leave the Order and go away. If the Blessed One knows that the universe is eternal, let him explain it to me so. If the Blessed One knows that the universe is not eternal, let him say so. If the Blessed One does not know whether the universe is eternal or not, etc., then for a person who does not know, it is straight forward to say "I do not know. I do not see".'

The Buddha's reply to Mālunkyaputta should do good to many millions in the world today who are wasting valuable time on such metaphysical questions and unnecessarily disturbing their peace of mind:

'Did I ever tell you, Mālunkyaputta, "Come, Mālunkyaputta, lead the holy life under me. I will explain these questions to you?"

'No, Sir.'

'Then, Mālunkyaputta, even you, did you tell me: "Sir, I will lead the holy life under the Blessed One, and the Blessed One will explain these questions to me"?'

'No, Sir.'

'Even now, Mālunkyaputta, I do not tell you: "Come and lead the holy life under me, I will explain these questions to you". And you do not tell me either: "Sir, I will lead the holy life under the Blessed One, and he will explain these questions to me". Under these circumstances, you foolish one, who refuses whom?[\[35\]](#)

Mālunkyaputta, if anyone says: "I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until he explains these questions," he may die with these questions unanswered by the Tathāgata. Suppose Mālunkyaputta, a man is wounded by a poisoned arrow, and his friends and relatives bring him to a surgeon. Suppose the man should then say: "I will not let this arrow be taken out until I know who shot me; whether he is a Ksattiya (of the warrior caste) or a Brāhmana (of the priestly caste) or a Vaiśya (of the trading and agricultural caste) or a Sūdra (of the low caste); what his name and family may be; whether he is tall, short, or of medium stature; whether his complexion is black, brown, or golden: from which village, town or city he comes. I will not let this arrow be taken out until I know the kind of bow with which I was shot; the kind of bowstring used; the type of arrow; what sort of feather was used on the arrow and with what kind of material the point of the arrow was made." Mālunkyaputta, that man would die without knowing any of these things. Even so, Mālunkyaputta, if anyone says: "I

will not follow the holy life under the Blessed One until he answers these questions such as whether the universe is eternal or not, etc.," he would die with these questions unanswered by the Tathāgata.'

Then the Buddha explains to Mālunkyaputta that the holy life does not depend on these views. Whatever opinion one may have about these problems, there is birth, old age, decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, distress, "the Cessation of which (i.e. *Nirvāna*) I declare in this very life."

'Therefore, Mālunkyaputta, bear in mind what I have explained as explained and what I have not explained as unexplained. What are the things that I have not explained? Whether the universe is eternal or not etc., (those 10 opinions) I have not explained. Why, Mālunkyaputta, have I not explained them? Because it is not useful, it is not fundamentally connected with the spiritual holy life, is not conducive to aversion, detachment, cessation, tranquility, deep penetration, full realization, *Nirvāna*. That is why I have not told you about them.

'Then, what, Mālunkyaputta, have I explained? I have explained *dukkha*, the arising of *dukkha*, the cessation of *dukkha*, and the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.[\[36\]](#) Why, Mālunkyaputta, have I explained them? Because it is useful, is fundamentally connected with the spiritual holy life, is conducive to aversion, detachment, cessation, tranquility, deep penetration, full realization, *Nirvāna*. Therefore I have explained them.'[\[37\]](#)

Let us now examine the Four Noble Truths which the Buddha told Mālunkyaputta he had explained.

CHAPTER II. The Four Noble Truths

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH: *DUKKHA*

The heart of the Buddha's teaching lies in the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*) which he expounded in his very first sermon^[1] to his old colleagues, the five ascetics, at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Benares. In the sermon, as well have it in the original texts, these four Truths are given briefly. But there are innumerable places in the early Buddhist scriptures where they are explained again and again, with greater detail and in different ways. If we study the Four Noble Truths with the help of these references and explanations, we get fairly good and accurate account of the essential teachings of the Buddha according to the original texts.

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. *Dukkha*²
2. *Samudaya*, the arising or origin of *dukkha*,
3. *Nirodha*, the cessation of *dukkha*
4. *Magga*, the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH: *DUKKHA*

The First Noble Truth (*Dukkha-ariyasacca*) is generally translated by almost all scholars as 'The Noble Truth of Suffering', and it is interpreted to mean that life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain. Both translation and interpretation are highly unsatisfactory and misleading. It is because of this limited, free and easy translation, and its superficial interpretation, that many people have been misled into regarding Buddhism as pessimistic.

First of all, Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. If anything at all, it is realistic, for it takes a realistic view of life and of the world. It looks at things objectively (*yathābūtam*). It does not falsely lull you into living in a fool's paradise, nor does it frighten and agonize you with all kinds of imaginary fears and sins. It tells you exactly and objectively what you are and what the world around you is, and shows you the way to perfect freedom, peace, tranquillity and happiness.

One physician may gravely exaggerate an illness and give up hope altogether. Another may ignorantly declare that there is no illness and that no treatment is necessary, thus deceiving the patient with a false consolation. You may call the first one pessimistic and the second optimistic. Both are equally dangerous. But a third physician diagnoses the symptoms correctly, understands the cause and the nature of the illness, sees clearly that it can be cured, and courageously administers a course of treatment, thus saving his patient. The Buddha is like the last physician. He is the wise and scientific doctor for the ills of the world (*Bhisakka*) or *Bhaisajya-guru*).

It is true that the Pali word *dukkha* (or Sanskrit *dukka*) in ordinary usage means 'suffering', 'pain', 'sorrow' or 'misery', as opposed to the word *sukha* meaning 'happiness', 'comfort' or 'ease'. But the term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, which represents the Buddha's view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses. It is admitted that the term *dukkha* in the First noble Truth contains, quite obviously, the ordinary meaning of 'suffering', but in addition it also includes deeper ideas such as 'imperfection', 'impermanence', 'emptiness', 'insubstantiality'. It is difficult therefore to find one word to embrace the whole conception of the term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, and so it is better to leave it untranslated, than to give an inadequate and wrong idea of it by conveniently translating it as 'suffering' or 'pain'.

The Buddha does not deny happiness in life when he says there is suffering. On the contrary he admits different forms of happiness, both material and spiritual, for laymen as well as for monks. In the *anguttara-nikāya*, one of the five original Collections in Pāli containing the Buddha's discourses, there is a list of happinesses (*sukhāni*), such as the happiness of family life and the happiness of the life of a recluse, the happiness of sense pleasures and the happiness of attachment and the happiness of detachment, physical happiness and mental happiness etc.[2] But all these are included in *dukkha*. Even the very pure spiritual states of *dhyāna* (*recueillement* or *trance*) attained by the practice of higher meditation, free from even a shadow of suffering in the accepted sense of the word, states which may be described as unmixed happiness, as well as the state of *dhyāna* which is free from sensations both pleasant (*sukha*) and unpleasant (*dukkha*) and is only pure equanimity and awareness- even these very high spiritual states are included in *dukkha*. In one of the *suttas* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, (again one of the five original Collections), after praising the spiritual happiness of these *dhyānas*, the Buddha says that they are 'impermanent, *dukkha*, and subject to change' (*aniccā dukkhā viparināmadhammā*).[3] Notice that the word *dukkha* is explicitly used. It is *dukkha*, not because there is 'suffering' in the ordinary sense of the word, but because 'whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*'. (*yad aniccam tam dukkham*).

The Buddha was realistic and objective. He says, with regard to life and the enjoyment of sense-pleasures, that one should clearly understand three things: (1) attraction or enjoyment (*assāda*), (2) evil consequence or danger or unsatisfactoriness (*ādinava*), and (3) freedom or liberation (*nissarana*).[4] When you see a pleasant, charming and beautiful person, you like him (or her), you are attracted, you enjoy seeing that person again and again, you derive pleasure and satisfaction from that person. This is enjoyment (*assāda*). It is a fact of experience. But this enjoyment is not permanent, just as that person and all his (or her) attractions are not permanent either. When the situation changes, when

you cannot see that person, when you deprived of this enjoyment, you become sad, you may become unreasonable and unbalanced, you may even behave foolishly. This is the evil, unsatisfactory and dangerous side of the picture (*ādinava*). This, too, is a fact of experience. Now if you have no attachment to the person, if you are completely detached, that is freedom, liberation (*nissarana*). These three things are true with regard to all enjoyment in life.

From it is evident that it is no question of pessimism or optimism, but that we must take account of the pleasures of life as well as of its pain and sorrows, and also freedom from them, in order to understand life completely and objectively. Only then is true liberation possible. Regarding this question the Buddha says:

'O bhikkhus, if ant recluses or brāhmanas do not understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense-pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation, then it is not possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire of sense-pleasures completely, or that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, or that the person following their instruction will completely understand the desire for sense-pleasures. But O bhikkhus, if any recluses or brāhmanas understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense-pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation, then it is possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire for sense-pleasures completely, and that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, and that that person following their instruction will completely understand the desire for sense-pleasure.'[\[5\]](#)

The conception of *dukkha* may be viewed from three aspects (1) *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*), (2) *dukkha* as produced by change

(*viparināma-dukkha*) and (3) *dukkha* as conditioned states (*samkhāra-dukkha*).
[\[6\]](#)

All kinds of suffering in life like birth, old age, sickness, death, association with unpleasant persons and conditions, separation from loved ones and pleasant conditions, not getting what one desires, grief, lamentation, distress—all such forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as suffering or pain, are included in *dukkha* as ordinary suffering (*dukkha-dukkha*).

A happy feeling, a happy condition in life, is not permanent, not everlasting. It changes sooner or later. When it changes, it produces pain, suffering, unhappiness. This vicissitude is included in *dukkha* as suffering produced by change (*viparināma-dukkha*).

It is easy to understand the two forms of suffering (*dukkha*) mentioned above. No one will dispute them. This aspect of the First Noble Truth is more popular known because it is easy to understand. It is common experience in our daily life.

But the third form of *dukkha* as conditioned states (*samkhāra-dukkha*) is the most important philosophical aspect of the First Noble Truth, and it requires some analytical explanation of what we consider as a 'being', as an 'individual', or as 'I'.

What we call a 'being' or an 'individual', or 'I', according to Buddhist philosophy, is only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies, which may be divided into five groups or aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). The Buddha says: 'In short these five aggregates of attachment are *dukkha*'.[\[7\]](#) Elsewhere he distinctly defines *dukkha* as the five aggregates: 'O bhikkhus, what is *dukkha*? It should be said that it is the five aggregates of attachment'.[\[8\]](#) Here

it should be clearly understood that *duhhka* and five aggregates are not two different things: the five aggregates themselves are *dukkha*. We will understand this point better when we have some notion of the five aggregates which constitute the so-called 'being'. Now, what are these five?

The Five Aggregates

The first is the Aggregates of Matter (*Rūpakkhandha*). In this term 'Aggregates of Matter' are included the traditional Four Great Elements (*cattāri mahābbūtāni*), namely, solidity, fluidity, heat and motion, and also the Derivatives (*upādāya-rūpa*) of the Four Great Elements.[\[9\]](#) In the term 'Derivatives of Four Great Elements' are included our five material sense-organs, i.e., the faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body, and their corresponding objects in the external world, i.e., visible form, sound, odour, taste, and tangible things, and also some thoughts or ideas or conceptions which are in the sphere of mind-objects (*dharmāyatana*).[\[10\]](#) Thus the whole realm of matter, both internal and external, is included in the Aggregate of Matter.

The second is the Aggregate of Sensations (*Vedanākkhandha*). In this group are included all our sensations, pleasant or unpleasant or neutral, experienced through the contact of physical and mental organs with the external world. They are of six kinds: the sensations experienced through the contact of the eye with visible forms, ear with sounds, nose with odour, tongue with taste, body with tangible objects, and mind (which is the sixth faculty in Buddhist Philosophy) with mind-objects or thoughts or idea.[\[11\]](#) All our physical and mental sensations are included in this group.

A word about what is meant by the term "Mind' (*manas*) in Buddhist philosophy may be useful here. It should clearly be understood that mind is not spirit as opposed to matter. It should always be remembered that Buddhism does not

recognize a spirit opposed to matter, as is accepted by most other systems of philosophies and religions. Mind is only a faculty or organ (*indriya*) like the eye or the ear. It can be controlled and developed like any other faculty, and the Buddha speaks quite often of the value of controlling and disciplining these six faculties. The difference between the eye and the mind as faculties is that the former senses the world of colours and visible forms, while the latter senses the world of ideas and thoughts and mental objects. We experience different fields of the world with different senses. We cannot hear colours, but we can see them. Nor can we see sounds, but we can hear them. Thus with our five physical sense-organs-eye, ear, nose, tongue, body-we experience only the world of visible forms, sound, odours, tastes and tangible objects. But these represent only a part of the world, not the whole. What of ideas and thoughts? They are also a part of the world. But they cannot be sensed, they cannot be conceived by the faculty of the eye, ear, nose, tongue or body. Yet they can be conceived by another faculty, which is mind. Now ideas and thoughts are not independent of the world experienced by these five physical sense faculties. In fact they depend on, and are conditioned by, physical experiences. Hence a person born blind cannot have ideas of colour, except through the analogy of sounds or some other things experienced through his other faculties. Ideas and thoughts which form a part of the world are thus produced and conditioned by physical experiences and are conceived by the mind. Hence mind (*manas*) is considered a sense faculty or organ (*indriya*), like the eye or the ear.

The third is the Aggregate of Perceptions (*Saññākkhandha*). Like sensations, perceptions also are of six kinds, in relation to six internal faculties and the corresponding six external objects. Like sensations, they are produced through the contact of our six faculties with the external world. It is the perceptions that recognize objects whether physical or mental.[\[12\]](#)

The fourth is the Aggregate of Mental Formations [\[13\]](#)(*Samkhāra*). In this group are included all volitional activities both good and bad. What is generally known as *karma* (or *kamma*) comes under this group. The Buddha's own definition of *karma* should be remembered here: 'O bhikkhus, it is volition (*cetanā*) that I call *karma*. Having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind.'[\[14\]](#) Volition is 'mental construction, mental activity. Its function is to direct the mind in the sphere of good, bad or neutral activities.'[\[15\]](#) Just like sensations and perceptions, volition is of six kinds, connected with the six internal faculties and the corresponding six objects (both physical and mental) in the external world.[\[16\]](#) Sensations and perceptions are not volitional actions. They do not produce karmic effects. It is only volitional actions- such as attention (*manasikāra*), will (*chanda*), determination (*adhimokkha*), confidence (*saddhā*), concentrate (*samādhi*), wisdom (*paññā*), energy (*virīya*), desire (*rāga*), repugnance or hate (*patigha*), Ignorance (*avijjā*), conceit (*māna*), idea of self (*sakkāya-ditthi*) etc. – that can produce karmic effects. There are 52 such mental activities which constitute the Aggregate of Mental Formations.

The fifth is the Aggregate of Consciousness (*Viññāna*).[\[17\]](#) Consciousness is a reaction or response which has one of the six faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) as its basis, and one of the six corresponding external phenomena (visible form, sound, odour, taste, tangible things and mind-objects, i.e., an idea or thought) as its objects. For instance, visual consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāna*) has the eye as its basis and a visible form as its object. Mental consciousness (*mano-viññāna*) has the mind (*manas*) as its basis and a mental object, i.e., an idea or thought (*dhamma*) as its objects. So consciousness is connected with other faculties. Thus, like sensation, perception and volition, consciousness also is of six kinds, in relation to six internal faculties and corresponding six external objects.[\[18\]](#)

It should be clearly understood that consciousness does not recognize an object. It is only a sort of awareness-awareness of the presence of an object. When the eye comes in contact with a colour, for instance blue, visual consciousness arises which simply is a awareness of the presence of a colour; but it does not recognize that it is blue. There is no recognition at this stage. It is perception (the third Aggregate discussed above) that recognizes that it is blue. The term "visual consciousness" is a philosophical expression denoting the same idea as is conveyed by the ordinary word 'seeing'. Seeing does not mean recognizing. So are the other forms of consciousness.

It must be repeated here that according to Buddhist philosophy there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered 'Self', or 'Soul', or 'Ego', as apposed to matter, and that consciousness (*viññāna*) should not be taken as 'spirit' in opposition to matter. This point has to be particularly emphasized, because a wrong notion consciousness is a sort of Self or Soul that continues as a permanent substance through life, has persisted from the earliest time to the present day.

One of the Buddha's own disciples, Sāti by name, held that the Master taught: 'It is the same consciousness that transmigrates and wanders about.' The Buddha asked him what he meant by 'consciousness'. Sāti reply is classical: 'It is that which expresses, which feels, which experiences the results of good and bad deeds here and there'.

'To whomever, you stupid one', remonstrated the Master, 'have you heard me expounding the doctrines in this manner? Haven't I in many ways explained consciousness as arising out of conditions: that there is n arising of consciousness without conditions'. Then the Buddha went on to explain consciousness in detail: 'Consciousness is named according to whatever condition through which it arises: on account of the eye and visible forms arises

a consciousness, and it is called visual consciousness; on account of the ear and sounds arises a consciousness, and it is called auditory consciousness; on account of the nose and odours arises consciousness, and it is called olfactory consciousness; on account of the tongue and tastes arises a consciousness, and it is called gustatory consciousness; on account of the body and tangible objects arises a consciousness, and it is called tactile consciousness; on account of the mind and mind-objects (ideas and thoughts) arises a consciousness, and it is called mental consciousness.'

Then the Buddha explained it further by an illustration: A fire is named according to the material on account of which it burns. A fire may burn on account of wood, and it is called wood-fire. It may burn on account of straw, and then it is called straw-fire. So consciousness is named according to the condition through which it arises.[\[19\]](#)

Dwelling on this point, Buddhaghosa, the great commentator, explains: '... a fire burns on account of wood burns only when there is a supply, but dies down in that very place when it (the supply) is no longer there, because then the condition has changed, but (the fire) does not cross over to splinters, etc., and become a splinter-fire and so on; even so the consciousness that arises on account of the eye and visible forms arises in that gate of sense organ (i.e., in the eye), only where there is the condition of the eye, visible forms, light and attentions, but ceases then and there when it (the condition) is no more there, because then the condition has changed, but (the consciousness) does not cross over to the ear, etc, and become auditory consciousness and so on ...'[\[20\]](#)

The Buddha declared in unequivocal terms that consciousness depends on matter, sensation, perception and mental formations and that it cannot exist independently of them. He says:

'Consciousness may exist having matter as its means (*rūpupāyam*), matter as its object (*rūpārammanani*), matter as its support (*rūpa-patittham*), and seeking delight it may grow, increase and develop; or consciousness may exist having sensation as its means... or perception as its means... or mental as its means, mental formations as its objects, mental formations as its support, and seeking delight it may grow, increase and develop.

'Were a man to say: I shall show the coming, the going, the passing away, the arising, the growth, the increase or the development of consciousness apart from matter, sensation, perception and mental formations, he would be speaking of something that does not exist.'[\[21\]](#)

Very brief these are the five Aggregates. What we call a 'being', or an 'individual', or, 'I', is only a convenient name or a label given to the combination of these five groups. They are all impermanent, all constantly changing. 'Whatever is impermanent is *dukkha*' (*Yad aniccam tam dukkham*). This is true meaning of the Buddha's words: 'In brief the five Aggregates of Attachment are *dukkha*'. They are not the same for two consecutive moments. Here A is not equal to A. They are in a flux of momentary arising and disappearing.

'O Brāhmana, it is just like a mountain river, flowing far and swift, taking everything along with it; there is no matter, no instant no second when it stops flowing, but it goes on flowing and continuing. So Brāhmana, is human life, like a mountain river.'[\[22\]](#) As the Buddha told Ratthapāla: 'The world is in continuous flux and is impermanent.'

One thing disappears, conditioning the appearance of the next in a series of cause and effect. There is no unchanging substance in them. There is nothing behind them that can be called a permanent Self (*Ātman*), individuality, or anything that can in reality be called 'I'. Every one will agree that neither matter,

nor sensation, nor perception, nor any one of those mental activities, nor consciousness can really be called 'I'.[\[23\]](#) But when these five physical and mental aggregates which are interdependent are working together in combination as a physio-psychological machine,[\[24\]](#) we get the idea of 'I'. But this is only a false idea, a mental formation, which is nothing but one of those 52 mental formations of the fourth Aggregate which we have just discussed, namely, it is the idea of self (*sakkāya-ditthi*).

These five Aggregate together, which we popularly call a 'being' are *dukkha* itself (*samkhāra-dukkha*). There is no other 'being' or 'I', standing behind these five aggregates, who experiences *dukkha*. As Buddhaghosa says:

'Mere suffering exists, but no suffering is found;
The deeds are, but no doer is found.'[\[25\]](#)

There is no unmoving mover behind the movement. It is only movement. It is not correct to say that life is moving, but life is movement itself. Life and movement are not two different things. In other words, there is no thinker behind the thought. Thought itself is the thinker. If you move the thought, there is no thinker to be found. Here we cannot fail to notice how this Buddhist view is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*: 'I think, therefore I am.'

Now a question may be raised whether life has a beginning. According to the Buddha's teaching the beginning of the life-stream of living beings is unthinkable. The believer in the creation of life by God may be astonished at this reply. But if you were to ask him 'What is the beginning of God?' he would answer without hesitation 'God has no beginning', and he is not astonished at his own reply. The Buddha says: 'O bhikkhus, this cycle of continuity (*samsāra*) is without a visible end, and the first beginning of beings wandering and running

round, enveloped in ignorance (*avijjā*) and bound down by the fetters of thirst (desire, *tamhā*) is not to be perceived.'[\[26\]](#) And further, referring to ignorance which is the main cause of the continuity of life the Buddha states: 'The first beginning of ignorance (*avijjā*) is not to be perceived in such a way as to postulate that there was no ignorance beyond a certain point.'[\[27\]](#) Thus it is not possible to say that there was no life beyond a certain definite point.

This in short is the meaning of the Noble Truth of *Dukkha*. It is extremely important to understand this First Noble Truth clearly because, as the Buddha says, 'he who sees *dukkha* sees also the arising of *dukkha*, sees also the cessation of *dukkha*, and sees also the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.'[\[28\]](#)

This does not at all make the life of a Buddhist melancholy or sorrowful, as some people wrongly imagine. On the contrary, a true Buddhist is the happiest of beings. He has no fears or anxieties. He is always calm and serene, and cannot be upset or dismayed by changes or calamities, because he sees things as they are. The Buddha was never melancholy or gloomy. He was described by his contemporaries as 'ever-smiling' (*mihitapubbamgama*). In Buddhist painting and sculpture the Buddha is always represented with a countenance happy, serene, contented and compassionate. Never a trace of suffering or agony or pain is to be seen.[\[29\]](#) Buddhist art and architecture, Buddhist temples never give the impression of gloom or sorrow, but produce an atmosphere of calm and serene joy.

Although there is suffering in life, a Buddhist should not be gloomy over it, should not be angry or impatient at it. One of the principal evils in life, according to Buddhism, is 'repugnance' or hatred. Repugnance (*pratigha*) is explained as 'ill-will with regard to living beings, with regard to suffering and with regard to things pertaining to suffering. Its function is to produce a basis

for unhappy states and bad conduct.’[30] Thus it is wrong to be impatient at suffering. Being impatient or angry at suffering does not remove it. On the contrary, it adds a little more to one’s trouble, and aggravates and exacerbates a situation already disagreeable. What is necessary is not anger or impatience, but the understanding of the question of suffering, how it comes about, and how to get rid of it, and then to work accordingly with patience, intelligence, determination and energy.

There are two ancient Buddhist texts called the *Therigāthā* which are full of the joyful utterances of the Buddha’s disciples, both male and female, who found peace and happiness in life through his teaching. The king of Kosala once told the Buddha that unlike many a disciple of other religious systems who looked haggard, coarse, pale, emaciated and unprepossessing, his disciples were ‘joyful and elated (*hattha-pahattha*), jubilant and exultant (*udaggudagga*), enjoying the spiritual life (*abhiratarūpa*), with faculties pleased (*pinitindriya*), free from anxiety (*appossukka*) serene (*pannaloma*), peaceful (*paradavutta*) and living with a gazelle’s mind (*migabhūtena cetasā*), i.e., light-hearted.’ The king added that he believed that this healthy disposition was due to the fact that ‘these venerable ones had certainly realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One’s teaching.’[31]

Buddhism is quite opposed to be melancholic, sorrowful, penitent and gloomy attitude of mind which is considered a hindrance to the realization of Truth. On the other hand, it is interesting to remember here that joy (*pīti*) is one of the seven to be cultivated for the realization of Nirvāṇā.[32]

CHAPTER III. THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH: *SAMUDAYA*: 'The Arising of *Dukkha*'

The Second Noble Truth is that of the arising or origin of *dukkha* (*Dukkhasamudaya-ariyasacca*). The most popular and well-known definition of the Second Truth as found in innumerable places in the original texts runs as follows:

'It is this "thirst" (craving, *tanhā*) which produces re-existence and re-becoming (*ponobhavikā*), and which is bound up with passionate greed (*nandirāgasahagatā*), and which finds fresh delight now here and now there (*tatratatrābhinandini*), namely, (1) thirst for sense- pleasures (*kāma-tanhā*), (2) thirst for existence and becoming (*bhava-tanhā*) and (3) thirst for non-existence (self-annihilation, *vibhava-tanhā*).[1]

In this 'thirst', desire, greed, craving, manifesting itself in various ways, that gives rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings. But it should not be taken as the first cause, for there is no first cause possible as, according to Buddhism, everything is relative and inter-dependent. Even this 'thirst', *tanhā*, which is considered as the cause or origin of *dukkha*, depends for its arising (*samudaya*) on something else, which is sensation (*vedanā*)[2], and sensation arises depending on contact (*phassa*), and so on and so forth on the circle which is known as Conditioned Genesis (*Paticca-samuppāda*), which we will discuss later.[3]

So *tanhā*, 'thirst', is not the first or the only cause of the arising of *dukkha*. But it is the most palpable and the 'all-pervading thing'.[4] Hence in certain places of the original Pali texts themselves the definition of *samudaya* or the origin of *dukkha* includes other defilements and impurities (*kilesā, sāsavā dhammā*), in

addition to *tanhā* 'thirst' which is always given the first place.[5] Within the necessarily limited space of our discussion, it will be sufficient if we remember that this 'thirst' has as its centre the false idea of self arising out of ignorance.

Here the term 'thirst' includes not only desire for, and attachment to, sense-pleasures, wealth and power, but also desire for, and attachment to, idea and ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions and beliefs (*dhamma-tanhā*).[6] According to the Buddha's analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world, from little personal quarrels in families to great wars between nations and countries, arise out of this selfish 'thirst'. From this point of view, all economic, political and social problems are rooted in this selfish 'thirst'.[7] Great statesmen who try to settle international disputes and talk of war and peace only in economic and political terms touch the superficialities, and never go deep into the real root of the problem. As the Buddha told Rattapāla: 'The world lacks and hankers, and is enslaved to "thirst" (*tanhādāso*).'

Every one will admit that all the evils in the world are produced by selfish desire. This is not difficult to understand. But now this desire, 'thirst', can produce re-existence and re-becoming (*ponobhavikā*) is a problem not so easy to grasp. It is here that we have to discuss the deeper philosophical side of the Second Noble Truth corresponding to the philosophical side of the First Noble Truth. Here we must have some idea about the theory of *karma* and rebirth.

There are four Nutriments (*āhāra*) in the sense of 'cause' or 'condition' necessary for the existence and continuity of beings" (1) ordinary material food (*kabalinkārāhāra*), (2) contact of our sense-organs (including mind) with the external world (*phassāhāra*), (3) consciousness (*viññānāhāra*) and (4) mental volition or will (*manosañcetanāhāra*).[8]

One these four, the last mentioned 'mental volition' is the will to live, to re-exist, to continue, to become more and more.[9] It creates the root of existence and continuity, striving forward by the way of good and bad actions (*kusalākusalakamma*).[10] It is the same as 'Volition' (*cetanā*).[11] We have seen earlier[12] that volition is karma, as the Buddha himself has defined it. Referring to 'Mental volition' just mentioned above the Buddha says: 'When one understands the nutriment of mental volition one understands the three forms of 'thirst' (*tamhā*).'[13] Thus the terms 'thirst', 'volition', 'mental volition' and 'karma' all denote the same thing: they denote the desire, the will to be, to exist, to re-exist, to become more and more, to grow more and more, to accumulate more and more. This is the cause of the arising of *dukkha*, and this is found within the Aggregate of Mental Formations, one of the Five Aggregates which constitute a being. [14]

Here is one of the most important and essential points in the Buddha's teaching. We must therefore clearly and carefully mark and remember that the cause, the germ, of the arising of *dukkha* itself, and not outside; and we must equally well remember that the cause, the germ, of the cessation of *dukkha*, of the destruction of *dukkha*, is also within *dukkha* itself, and not outside. This is what is meant by the well-known formula often found in original Pali texts: *Yam kiñci samudayadhammam sabbam tam nirodhadhammam* 'Whatever is of the nature of arising, all that is of the nature of cessation.'[15] A being, a thing, or a system, if it has within itself the nature of arising, the nature of coming into being, has also within itself the nature, the germ, of its own cessation and destruction. Thus *dukkha* (Five Aggregates) has within itself the nature of its own arising, and has also within itself the nature of its own cessation. This point will be taken up again in the discussion of the Third Noble Truth, *Nirodha*.

Now, the Pali word *kamma* or the Sankrit word *karma* (from the root *kr* to do) literally means 'action', 'doing'. But in the Buddhist theory of karma it has a

specific meaning: it means only 'volitional action', not all action. Nor does it mean the result of karma as many people wrongly and loosely use it. In Buddhist terminology karma never means its effect; its effect is known as the 'fruit' or the 'result' or karma (*kamma-phala* or *kamma-vipāka*).

Volition may relatively be good or bad, just as a desire may relatively be good or bad. So karma may be good or bad relatively. Good karma (*kusala*) produces good effects, and bad karma (*akusala*) produces bad effects. 'Thirst', volition, karma, whether good or bad, has one force as its effect: force to continue-to continue in a good or bad direction. Whether good or bad it is relative, and is within the cycle of continuity (*samsāra*). An Arahant, though he acts, does not accumulate karma, because he is free from the false idea of self, free from the 'thirst' for continuity and becoming, free from all other defilements and impurities (*kilesā, sāsavā dhammā*). For him there is no rebirth.

The theory of karma should not be confused with so-called 'moral justice' or 'reward and punishment'. The idea of moral justice, or reward and punishment, arises out of the conception of a supreme being, a God, who sits in judgment, who is a law-giver and who decides what is right and wrong. The term 'justice' is ambiguous and dangerous, and in its name more harm than good is done to humanity. The theory of karma is the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction; it is a natural law, which has nothing to do with the idea of justice or reward and punishment. Every volitional action produces its effects or results. If a good action produces good effects and a bad action bad effects, it is not justice, or reward, or punishment meted out by anybody or any power sitting in judgment on your action, but this is in virtue of its own nature, its own law. This is not difficult to understand. But what is difficult is that, according to the karma theory, the effects of a volitional action may continue to manifest themselves even in a life after death. Here we have to explain what death is according to Buddhism.

We have seen earlier that a being is nothing but a combination physical and mental forces or energies. What we call death is the total non-functioning of the physical body. Do all these forces and energies stop altogether with the non-functioning of the body? Buddhism says 'No'. Will, volition, desire, thirst to exist, to continue, to become more and more, is a tremendous force that moves whole lives, whole existences, that even moves the whole world. This is the greatest force, the greatest energy in the world. According to Buddhism, this force does not stop with the non-functioning of the body, which is death; but it continues manifesting itself in another form, producing re-existence which is called rebirth.

Now, another question arises: If there is no permanent, unchanging entity or substance like Self or Soul (*ātman*), what is it that can re-exist or be reborn after death? Before we can go on to life after death, let us consider what this life is, and how it continues now. What we call life, as we have so often repeated, is the combination of the Five Aggregates, a combination of physical and mental energies. These are constantly changing: they do not remain the same for two consecutive moments. Every moment they are born and they die. 'When the Aggregates arise, decay and die, O bhikkhu, every moment you are born, decay and die^[16].' Thus, even now during this life time, every moment we are born and die, but we continue. If we can understand that in this life we can continue without a permanent, unchanging substance like Self or Soul, why can't we understand that those forces themselves can continue without a Self or a Soul behind them after then non-functioning of the body?

When this physical body is no more capable of functioning, energies do not die with it, but continue to take some other shape or form, which we call another life. In a child all the physical, mental and intellectual faculties are tender and weak, but they have within them the potentiality of producing a full grown man. Physical and mental energies which constitute the so-called being have

within themselves the power to take a new form, and grow gradually and gather force to the full.

As there is no permanent, unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next. So quite obviously, nothing permanent or unchanging can pass or transmigrate from one life to the next. It is a series that continues unbroken, but changes every moment. The series is, really speaking, nothing but movement. It is like a flame that burns through the night: it is not the same flame nor it is another. A child grows up to be a man of sixty. Certainly the man of sixty is not the same as the child of sixty years ago, nor is he another person. Similarly, a person who dies here and is reborn elsewhere is neither the same person, nor another (*na ca so na ca añño*). It is the continuity of the same series. The difference between death and birth is only a thought-moment: the last thought-moment in this life conditions the first thought-moment in the so-called next life, which, in fact, is the continuity of the same series. During this life itself, too, one thought-moment conditions the next thought-moment. So from the Buddhist point of view, the question of life after death is not a great mystery, and a Buddhist is never worried about this problem.

As long as there is this 'thirst' to be and to become, the cycle of continuity (*samsāra*) goes on. It can stop only when its driving force, this 'thirst', is cut off through wisdom which sees Reality, Truth, Nirvāna.

CHAPTER IV. THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH: *NIRODHA*: 'The Cessation of *Dukkha*'

The third Noble Truth is that there is emancipation, liberation, freedom from suffering, from the continuity of *dukkha*. This is called the Noble Truth of the Cessation of *dukkha* (*Dukkhanirodha-ariyasacca*), which is *Nibbāna*, more popularly known in its Sanskrit form of *Nirvāna*.

To eliminate *dukkha* completely one has to eliminate the main root of *dukkha*, which is 'thirst' (*tanhā*), as we saw earlier. Therefore *Nirvāna* is known also by then term *Tanhakkhaya* 'Extinction of Thirst'.

Now you will ask: But what is *Nirvāna*? Volumes have been written in reply to this quite natural and simple question; they have, more and more, only confused the issue rather than clarified it. The only reasonable reply to give to the question is that it can never be answered completely and satisfactorily in words, because human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality which is *Nirvāna*. Language is created and used by masses of human beings to express things and ideas experienced by their sense organs and their mind. A supramundane experience like that of the Absolute Truth is not of such a category. Therefore there cannot be words to express that experience, just as the fish had no words in his vocabulary to express the nature of the solid land. The tortoise told his friend the fish that he (the tortoise) just returned to the lake after a walk on the land. 'Of course' the fish said, 'You mean swimming.' The tortoise tried to explain that one couldn't swim on the land, that it was solid, and that one walked on it. But the fish insisted that there could be nothing like it, that is must be liquid like his lake, with waves, and that one must be able to dive and dive and swim there.

Words are symbols representing things and ideas known to us; and these symbols do not and cannot convey the true nature of even ordinary things. Language is considered deceptive and misleading in the matter of understand of the Truth. So the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra* says that ignorant people get stuck in words like an elephant in the mud.[\[1\]](#)

Nevertheless we cannot do without language. But if Nirvāna is to be expressed and explained in positive terms, we are likely immediately to grasp an idea associated with those terms, which may be quite the contrary. Therefore it is generally expressed in negative term[\[2\]](#)-a less dangerous mode perhaps. So it is often referred to by such negative terms as *Tanhakkhaya* 'Extinction of Thirst', *Asamkhata* 'Unconditioned', *Virāga* 'Absence of desire', *Nirodha* 'Cessation', *Nibbāna* 'Blowing out' or 'Extinction'.

Let us consider a few definitions and descriptions of Nirvāna as found in the original Pali texts:

'It is the complete cessation of that very 'thirst' (*tanhā*), giving it up, renouncing it, emancipation from it, detachment from it.'[\[3\]](#)

'Calming of all conditioned things, giving up of all defilements, extinction of "thirst", detachment, cessation, Nibbāna.'[\[4\]](#)

'O bhikkhus, what is the Absolute (*Asamkhata*, Unconditioned)? It is, O bhikkhus, the extinction of desire (*rāgakkhaya*) the extinction of hatred (*dosakkhaya*), the extinction of illusion (*mohakkhaya*). This O bhikkhus, is called the Absolute.'[\[5\]](#)

'O Rādha, the extinction of "thirst" (*Tanhakkhaya*) is Nibbāna.'[\[6\]](#)

'O bhikkhus, whatever there may be things conditioned or unconditioned, among them detachment (*virāga*) is the highest. That is to say, freedom from conceit, destruction of thirst, [7]the uprooting of attachment, the cutting off of continuity, the extinction of "thirst", detachment, cessation, Nibbāna.'[8]

The reply Sāriputta, the chief disciple of the Buddha, to a direct question 'What is Nibbāna?' posed by a Parivrājaka, is identical with the definition of *Asamkhata* given by the Buddha (above): 'The extinction of desire, the extinction of hatred, the extinction of illusion.'[9]

'The abandoning and destruction of desire and craving for these Five Aggregates of Attachment" that is the cessation of *dukkha*.'[10]

'The cessation of Continuity and becoming (*Bhavanirodha*) is Nirvāna.'[11]

And further, referring to Nirvāna the Buddha says:

'O bhikkhus, there is the unborn, ungrown, and unconditioned. Were there not the unborn, ungrown, and unconditioned, there would be no escape for the born, grown, and conditioned. Since there is the unborn, ungrown, and unconditioned, so there is escape for the born, grown, and conditioned.'[12]

'Here the four elements of solidity, fluidity, heat and motion have no place; the notions of length and breadth, the subtle and the gross, good and evil, name and form are altogether destroyed; neither this world nor the other, nor coming, going or standing, neither death nor birth, nor sense-objects are to be found.'[13]

Because Nirvana is this expressed in negative terms, there are many who have got a wrong notion that it is negative, and expresses self-annihilation. Nirvāna is

definitely no annihilation of self, because there is no self no annihilate. If at all, it is the annihilation of the illusion, of the false idea of self.

It is incorrect to say that Nirvāna is negative or positive. The ideas of 'negative' and 'positive' are relative, and are within the realm of duality. These terms cannot be applied to Nirvāna, Absolute Truth, which is beyond duality and relativity.

A negative word need not necessarily indicate a negative state. The Pali of Sanskrit word for health is *ārogya*, a negative term, which literally means 'absence or illness'. But *ārogya* (health) does not represent a negative state. The word 'Immortal' (or its Sanskrit equivalent *Amṛta* or Pali *Amata*), which also is a synonym for Nirvāna, is negative, but it does not denote a negative state. The negation of negative values is not negative. One of the well-known synonyms for Nirvāna is 'Freedom' (Pali *Mutti*, Skt. *Mukti*). Nobody would say that freedom is negative. But even freedom has a negative side: freedom is always a liberation from something which is obstructive, which is evil, which is negative. But freedom is not negative. So Nirvāna, *Mutti* or *Vimutti*, the Absolute Freedom, is freedom from all evil, freedom from craving, hatred and ignorance, freedom from all terms of duality, relativity, time and space.

We may get some idea of Nirvāna as Absolute Truth from the *Dhātuvibhanga-sutta* (No. 140) of the *Majjhima-nikāya*. This extremely important discourse was delivered by the Buddha to Pukkusāti (already mentioned), whom the Master found to be intelligent and earnest, in the quiet of the night in a potter's shed. The essence of the relevant portions of the sutta is as follows:

A man is composed of six elements: solidity, fluidity, heat, motion, space and consciousness. He analyses them and finds that none of them is 'mine', or 'my self'. He understands how consciousness appears and disappears, how pleasant,

unpleasant and neutral sensations appear and disappear. Through this knowledge his mind becomes detached. Then he finds within him a pure equanimity (*upekhā*), which he can direct towards the attainment of any high spiritual state, and he knows that thus this pure equanimity will last for a long period. But then he thinks:

'If I focus this purified and cleansed equanimity on the Sphere of Infinite Space and develop a mind conforming thereto, that is a mental creation (*samkhatam*). [14] If I focus this purified and cleansed equanimity on the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness... on the Sphere of Nothingness ... or on the Sphere of Neither-perception nor Non-perception and develop a mind conforming thereto, that is a mental creation.' Then he neither mentally creates nor wills continuity and becoming (*bhava*) or annihilation (*vibbava*). [15] As he does not construct or does not will continuity and becoming or annihilation, he does not cling to anything in the world; as he does not cling, he is not anxious; as he is not anxious, he is completely calmed within (fully blown out within *paccattam yeva parinibbāyati*). And he knows: 'Finished is birth, lived is pure life, what should be done is done, nothing more is left to be done.' [16]

Now, when he experiences a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensation, he knows that it is impermanent, that it does not bind him, that it is not experienced with passion. Whatever may be the sensation, he experiences it would being bound to it (*visamyutto*). He knows that all those sensations will be pacified with the dissolution of the body, just as the flame of a lamp goes out when oil and wick give out.

'Therefore, O bhikkhus, a person so endowed is endowed with the absolute wisdom, for the knowledge of the extinction of all *dukkha* is the absolute noble wisdom.

'This his deliverance, founded on Truth, is unshakable. O bhikkhus, that which is unreality (*mosadhamma*) is false; that which is reality (*amosadhamma*), Nibbāna, is Truth (*Sacca*). Therefore, O bhikkhu, a person so endowed is endowed with this Absolute Truth. For, the Absolute Noble Truth (*paramam ariyasaccam*) is Nibbāna, which is Reality.'

Elsewhere the Buddha unequivocally uses the word Truth in place of Nibbāna: 'I will teach you the Truth and the Path leading to the Truth.'[\[17\]](#) Here Truth definitely means Nirvāna.

Now, what is Absolute Truth? According to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, conditioned and impermanent, and that there is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance like Self, Soul, or *Ātman* within or without. This is the Absolute Truth. Truth is never negative, though there is a popular expression as negative truth. The realization of this Truth, i.e., to see things as they are (*yathābhūtam*) without illusion or ignorance (*avijjā*),[\[18\]](#) is the extinction of craving 'thirst' (*Nirodha*) of *dukkha*, which is Nirvāna. It is interesting and useful to remember here Mahāyāna view of Nirvāna as not being different from *Samsāra*.[\[19\]](#) The same thing is *Samsāra* or Nirvāna according to the way you look at it – subjectively or objectively. This Mahāyāna view was probably developed out of the ideas found in the original Theravāda Pali texts, to which we have just referred in our brief discussion.

It is incorrect to think that Nirvāna is the natural result of the extinction of craving. Nirvāna is not the result of anything. If it would be a result, then it would be an effect produced by a cause. It would be *samkhata* 'produced' and 'conditioned'. Nirvāna is neither cause nor effect. It is beyond cause and effect. Truth is not a result nor an effect. It is not produced like a mystic, spiritual, mental state, such as *dhyāna* or *samādhi*. TRUTH IS. NIRVĀNA IS. The only thing

you can do is to see it, to realize it. There is a path leading to the realization of Nirvāna. But Nirvāna is not the result of this path.^[20] You may get to the mountain along a path, but the mountain is not the result, not an effect of the path. You may see a light, but the light not the result of your eyesight.

People often ask: What is there after Nirvāna? This question cannot arise, because Nirvāna is the Ultimate Truth. If it is Ultimate, there can be nothing effect it. If there is anything after Nirvāna, then that will be the Ultimate Truth and not Nirvāna. A monk named Rādha put this question to the Buddha in a different form: 'For what purpose (or end) is Nirvāna?' This question presupposes something after Nirvāna, when it postulates some purpose or end for it. So the Buddha answered: 'O Rādha, this question could not catch its limit (i.e., it is beside the point). One lives the holy life with Nirvāna as its final plunge (into the Absolute Truth), as its goal, as its ultimate end.'^[21]

Some popular inaccurately phrased expressions like 'The Buddha entered into Nirvāna or Parinirvāna after his death' have given rise to many imaginary speculations about Nirvāna. ^[22]The moment you hear the phrase that 'the Buddha entered into Nirvāna or Parinirvāna', you take Nirvāna to be a state, or a realm, or a position in which there is some sort of existence, and try to imagine it in terms of the senses of the word 'existence' as it is known to you. This popular expression 'entered into Nirvāna' has no equivalent in the original texts. There is no such thing as 'entering into Nirvāna after death'. There is a word *parinibbuto* used to denote the death of the Buddha or an Arahant who has realized Nirvāna, but it does not mean 'entering into Nirvāna'. *Parinibbuto* simply mean 'fully blown out' or 'fully extinct', because the Buddha or an Arahant has no re-existence after his death.

Now another question arises: What happens to the Buddha or an Arahant after his death, *parinirvāna*? This comes under the category of unanswered questions

(*avyākata*).[\[23\]](#) Even when the Buddha spoke about this, he indicated that no words in our vocabulary could express what happens to an Arahant after his death. In reply to a Parivrājaka named Vaccha, the Buddha said that terms like 'born' or 'not born' do not apply in the case of an Arahant, because those things-matter, sensation, perception, mental activities, consciousness- with which the terms like 'born' and 'not born' are associated, are completely destroyed and up-rooted, never to rise again after his death.[\[24\]](#)

An Arahant after his death is often compared to a fire gone out when the supply of wood is over, or to the flame of a lamp gone out when the wick and oil are finished.[\[25\]](#) Here it should be clearly and distinctly understood, without any confusion, that what is compared to a flame or a fire gone out is *not* Nirvāna, but the 'being' composed of the Five Aggregates who realized Nirvāna. This point has to be emphasized because many people, even some great scholars, have misunderstood and misinterpreted this simile as referring to Nirvāna. Nirvāna is never compared to a fire or a lamp gone out.

There is another popular question: If there is no Self, no *Ātman*, who realizes Nirvāna? Before we go on to Nirvāna, let us ask the question: Who thinks now, if there is no Self? We have seen earlier that it is the thought that thinks, that there is no thinker behind the thought. In the same way, it is wisdom (*pañña*), realization, that realizes. There is no other self behind the realization. In the discussion of the origin of *dukkha* we saw that whatever it may be- whether being, or thing, or system- if it is of the nature of arising, it has within itself the nature, the germ, of its cessation, its destruction. Now *dukkha*, *samsāra*, the cycle of continuity, is of the nature of arising; it must also be of the nature of cessation. *Dukkha* arises because of 'thirst' (*tanhā*), and it ceases because of wisdom (*pañña*). 'Thirst' and wisdom are both within the Five Aggregates, as we saw earlier.[\[26\]](#)

Thus, the germ of their arising as well as that of their cessation are both within the Five Aggregates. This is real meaning of the Buddha's well-known statement: 'Within this fathom-long sentient body itself, I postulate the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world.'[\[27\]](#) This means that all the Four Noble Truths are found within the Five Aggregates, i.e., within ourselves. (Here he word 'world' (*loka*) is used in place of *dukkha*). This also means that there is no external power that produces the arising and the cessation of *dukkha*.

When wisdom is developed and cultivated according to the Fourth Noble Truth (the next to be taken up), it sees the secret is discovered, when the Truth is seen, all the forces which feverishly produce the continuity of *samsāra* in illusion become calm and incapable of producing any more karma-formations, because there is no more illusion, no more 'thirst' for continuity. It is like a mental disease which is cured when the cause or the secret of the malady is discovered and seen by the patient.

In almost all religions the *summum bonum* can be attained only after death. But Nirvāna can be realized in this very life; it is not necessary to wait till you die to 'attain' it.

He who has realizes the Truth, Nirvana, is the happiest being in the world. He is free from all 'complexes' and obsessions, the worries and troubles that torment others. His mental health is perfect. He does not repent the past, nor does he brood over the future. He lives fully in the present.[\[28\]](#) Therefore he appreciated and enjoys things in the purest sense without self-projections. He is joyful, exultant, enjoying the pure life, his faculties pleased, free from anxiety, serene and peaceful.[\[29\]](#) As he is free from selfish, desire, hatred, ignorance, conceit, and all such 'defilements', he is pure and gentle, full of universal love, compassion, kindness, sympathy, understanding and tolerance. His service to

others is of the purest, for he has no thought of self. He gains nothing, accumulates, nothing, not even anything spiritual, because he is free from the illusion of Self, and the 'thirst' for becoming.

Nirvāna is beyond all terms of duality and relativity. It is therefore beyond our conceptions of good and evil, right and wrong, existence and non-existence. Even the word 'happiness' (*sukha*) which is used to describe Nirvana has an entirely different sense here. Sāriputta once said: 'O friend, Nirvāna is happiness! Nirvāna is happiness!' Then Udāvi asked: 'But, friend Sāriputta, what happiness can it be if there is no sensation?' Sāriputta's reply was highly philosophical and beyond ordinary comprehension: 'That there is no sensation itself is happiness.'

Nirvāna is beyond logic and reasoning (*atakkāvacara*). However much we may engage, often as a vain intellectual pastime, in highly speculative discussions regarding Nirvāna or Ultimate Truth or Reality, we shall never understand it that way. A child in the kindergarten should not quarrel about the theory of relativity. Instead, if he allows his studies patiently and diligently, one day he may understand it. Nirvāna is 'to be realized by the wise within themselves' (*paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*). If we follow the Path patiently and with diligence, train and purify ourselves earnestly, and attain the necessary spiritual development, we may one day realize it within ourselves- without taxing ourselves with puzzling and high- sounding words.

Let us therefore now turn to the Path which leads to the realization of Nirvāna.

CHAPTER V: THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH – MAGGA: ‘The Path’

The Fourth Noble Truth is that of the Way leading to the Cessation of *Dukkha* (*Dukkhanirodhagāminipatipadā-ariyasacca*). This is known as the ‘Middle Path’ (*Majjhimā Patipapā*), because it avoids two extremes: one extreme being the search for happiness through the pleasures of the senses, which is ‘low, common, unprofitable and the way of the ordinary people’; the other being the search for happiness through self-mortification in different forms of asceticism, which is ‘painful, unworthy and unprofitable’. Having himself first tried these two extremes, and having found them to be useless, the Buddha discovered through personal experience the Middle Path ‘which gives vision and knowledge, which leads to Calm, Insight, Enlightenment, Nirvāna’. This Middle Path is generally referred to as the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya-Atthangika-Magga*), because it is composed of eight categories or divisions: namely,

1. Right Understanding (*Sammā ditthi*),
2. Right Thought (*Sammā sankappa*),
3. Right Speech (*Sammā vācā*),
4. Right Action (*Sammā kammanta*),
5. Right Livelihood (*Sammā ājīva*),
6. Right Effort (*Sammā vāyāma*),
7. Right Mindfulness (*Sammā sati*),
8. Right Concentration (*Sammā samādhi*),

Practically the whole teaching of the Buddha, to which he devoted himself during 45 years, deals in some way or other with this Path. He explained it in different ways in different words to different people, according to the stage of their development and their capacity to understand and follow him. But the

essence of those many thousand discourses scattered in the Buddhist Scriptures is found in the Noble Eightfold Path.

It should not be thought that the eight categories or divisions of the Path should be followed and practised one after the other in the numerical order as given in the usual list above. But they are to be developed more or less simultaneously, as far as possible according to the capacity of each individual. They are all linked together and each helps the cultivation of the others.

These eight factors aim at promoting and perfecting the three essentials of Buddhist training and discipline: namely: (a) Ethical Conduct (*Sila*), (b) Mental Discipline (*Samādhi*) and (c) Wisdom (*Pañña*).^[1] It will therefore be more helpful for a coherent and better understanding of the eight divisions of the Path, if we group them and explain them according to these three heads.

Ethical Conduct (*Sila*) is built on the vast conception of universal love and compassion for all living beings, on which the Buddha's teaching is based. It is regrettable that many scholars forget this great ideal of the Buddha's teaching, and indulge in only dry philosophical and metaphysical divagations when they talk and write about Buddhism. The Buddha gave his teaching 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world' (*bhujjanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya*).

According to Buddhism for a man to be perfect there are two qualities that he should develop equally: compassion (*karunā*) on one side, and wisdom (*pañña*) on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom would stand for the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only the emotional neglecting the intellectual, one may become a good-hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the

emotional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellect without feeling for others. Therefore, to be perfect one has to develop both equally. That is the aim of the Buddhist way of life: in it wisdom and compassion are inseparably linked together, as we shall see later.

Now, in Ethical Conduct (*Sila*), based on love and compassions, are included three factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: namely, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood. (Nos. 3, 4 and 5 in the list).

Right speech means abstention (1) from telling lies, (2) from backbiting and slander and talk that may bring about hatred, enmity, disunity, and disharmony among individuals or groups of people, (3) from harsh, rude, impolite, malicious and abusive language, and (4) from idle, useless and foolish babble and gossip. When one abstains from these forms of wrong and harmful speech one naturally has to speak the truth, has to use words that are friendly and benevolent, pleasant and gentle, meaningful and useful. One should not speak carelessly: speech should be at the right time and place. If one cannot say something useful, one should keep 'noble silence'.

Right Action aims at promoting moral, honourable and peaceful conduct. It admonishes us that we should abstain from destroying life, from stealing, from dishonest dealings, from illegitimate sexual intercourse, and that we should also help others to lead a peaceful and honourable life in the right way.

Right Livelihood means that one should abstain from making one's living through a profession that brings harm to others, such as trading in arms and lethal weapons, intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing animals, cheating, etc., and should live by a profession which is honourable, blameless and innocent of harm to others. One can clearly see here that Buddhism is strongly opposed to

any kind of war, when it lays down that trade in arms and lethal weapons is an evil and unjust means of livelihood.

These three factors (Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood) of the Eightfold Path constitute Ethical Conduct. It should be realized that the Buddhist ethical and moral conduct aims at promoting a happy and harmonious life both for the individual and for society. This moral conduct is considered as the indispensable foundation for all higher spiritual attainments. No spiritual development is possible without this moral basis.

Next comes Mental Discipline, in which are included three other factors of the Eightfold Path: namely, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness (or Attentiveness) and Right Concentration. (Nos. 6, 7 and 8 in the list).

Right Effort is the energetic will (1) to prevent evil and unwholesome states of mind from arising, and (2) to get rid of such evil and unwholesome states that have already arisen within a man, and also (3) to produce, to cause to arise, good and wholesome states of mind not yet arisen, and (4) to develop and bring to perfection the good and wholesome states of mind already present in a man.

Right Mindfulness (or Attentiveness) is to be diligently aware, mindful and attentive with regard to (1) the activities of the body (*kāya*), (2) sensations or feelings (*vedanā*), (3) the activities of the mind (*citta*) and (4) ideas, thoughts, conceptions and things (*dhamma*).

The practice of concentration on breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is one of the well-known exercises, connected with the body, for mental development. There are several other ways of developing attentiveness in relation to the body-as modes of meditation.

With regard to sensations and feelings, one should be clearly aware of all forms of feelings and sensations, pleasant, unpleasant and neutral, of how they appear and disappear within oneself.

Concerning the activities of mind, one should be aware whether one's mind is lustful or not, given to hatred or not, deluded or not, distracted or concentrated, etc. In this way one should be aware of all movements of mind, how they arise and disappear.

As regards ideas, thoughts, conceptions and things, one should know their nature, how they appear and disappear, how they are developed, how they are suppressed, and destroyed, and so on.

These four forms of mental culture or meditation are treated in detail in the *Satipatthāna-sutta* (Setting-up of Mindfulness).[\[2\]](#)

The third and last factor of Mental Discipline is Right Concentration leading to the four stages of *Dhyāna*, generally called trance or *recueillement*. In the first stage of *Dhyāna*, passionate desires and certain unwholesome thoughts like sensuous lust, ill-will, languor, worry, restlessness, and skeptical doubt are discarded, and feelings of joy and happiness are maintained, along with certain mental activities. In the second stage, all intellectual activities are suppressed, tranquillity and 'one-pointedness' of mind developed, and the feelings of joy and happiness are still retained. In the third stage, the feeling of joy, which is an active sensation, also disappears, while the disposition of happiness still remains in addition to mindful equanimity. In the fourth stage of *Dhyāna*, all sensations, even of happiness and unhappiness, of joy and sorrow, disappear, only pure equanimity and awareness remaining.

Thus the mind is trained and disciplined and developed through Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The remaining two factors, namely Right Thought and Right Understanding go to constitute Wisdom.

Right Thought denotes the thoughts of selfless renunciation or detachment, thoughts of love and thoughts of non-violence, which are extended to all beings. It is very interesting and important to note here that thoughts of selfless detachment, love and non-violence are grouped on the side of wisdom. This clearly shows that true wisdom is endowed with these noble qualities, and that all thoughts of selfish desire, ill-will, hatred and violence are the result of a lack of wisdom-in all spheres of life whether individual, social, or political.

Right Understanding is the understanding of things as they are, and it is the Four Noble Truths that explain things as they really are. Right Understanding therefore is ultimately reduced to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This understanding is the highest wisdom which sees the Ultimate Reality. According to Buddhism there are two sorts of understanding: What we generally call understanding is knowledge, an accumulated memory, an intellectual grasping of a subject according to certain given data. This is called 'knowing accordingly' (*anubodha*). It is not very deep. Real deep understanding is called 'penetration' (*pativedha*), seeing a thing in its true nature, without name and label. This penetration is possible only when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation.[\[3\]](#)

From this brief account of the Path, one may see that it is a way of life to be followed, practised and developed by each individual. It is self-discipline in body, word and mind, self-development and self-purification. It has nothing to do with belief, prayer, worship or ceremony. In that sense, it has nothing which

may popularly be called 'religious'. It is a Path leading to the realization of Ultimate Reality, to complete freedom, happiness and peace through moral, spiritual and intellectual perfection.

In Buddhist countries there are simple and beautiful customs and ceremonies or religious occasions. They have little to do with the real Path. But they have their value in satisfying certain religious emotions and the needs of those who are less advanced, and helping them gradually along the Path.

With regard to the Four Noble Truths we have four functions to perform:

The First Noble Truth is *Dukkha*, the nature of life, its suffering, its sorrows and joys, its imperfection and unsatisfactoriness, its impermanence and insubstantiality. With regard to this, our function is to understand it as a fact, clearly and completely (*pariññeyya*).

The Second Noble Truth is the Origin of *Dukka*, which is desire, 'thirst', accompanied by all other passions, defilements and impurities. A mere understanding of this fact is not sufficient. Here our function is to discard it, to eliminate, to destroy and eradicate it (*pahātabba*).

The Third Noble Truth is the Cessation of *Dukkha*, Nirvāna, the Absolute Truth, the Ultimate Reality. Here our function is to realize it (*sacchikātabba*).

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Path leading to the realization of Nirvāna. A mere knowledge of the Path, however complete, will not do. In this case, our function is to follow it and keep to it (*bhāvetabba*).[\[4\]](#)

CHAPTER VI: THE DOCTRINE OF NO-SOUL: *ANATTA*

What in generally is suggested by Soul, Self, Ego, or to use the Sanskrit expression *Ātman*, is that in man there is a permanent, everlasting and absolute entity, which is the unchanging substance behind the changing phenomenal world. According to some religions, each individual has such a separate soul which is created by God, and which, finally after death, lives eternally either in hell or heaven, its destiny depending on the judgment of its creator. According to others, it goes through many lives till it is completely purified and becomes finally united with God or Brahman, Universal Soul or *Ātman*, from which it originally emanated. This soul or self in man is the thinker of thoughts, feeler of sensations, and receiver of rewards and punishments for all its actions good and bad. Such a conception is called the idea of self.

Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self, or *Ātman*. According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.

Two ideas are psychologically deep-rooted in man; self-protection and self-preservation. For self-protection man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety and security, just as a child depends on its parent. For self-preservation man has conceived the idea of an immortal Soul or *Ātman*,

which will live eternally. In his ignorance, weakness, fear, and desire, man needs these two things to console himself. Hence he clings to them deeply and fanatically.

The Buddha's teaching does not support this ignorance, weakness, fear, and desire, but aims at making man enlightened by removing and destroying them, striking at their very root. According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and Soul are false and empty. Though highly developed as theories, they are all the same extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology. These ideas are so deep-rooted in man, and so near and dear to him, that he does not wish to hear, nor does he want to understand, any teaching against them.

The Buddha knew this quite well. In fact, he said that his teaching was 'against the current' (*patisotagāmi*), against man's selfish desire. Just four weeks after his Enlightenment, seated under a banyan tree, he thought to himself; 'I have realized this Truth which is deep, difficult to understand... comprehensible only by the wise... Men who are overpowered by passions and surrounded by a mass of darkness cannot see this Truth, which is against the current, which is lofty, deep, subtle and hard to comprehend.'

With these thoughts in his mind, the Buddha hesitated for a moment, whether it would not be in vain if he tried to explain to the world the Truth he had just realized. Then he compared the world to a lotus pond: In a lotus pond there are some lotuses still under water; there are others which have risen only up to the water level; there are still others which stand above water and are untouched by it. In the same way in this world, there are men at different levels of development. Some would understand the Truth. So the Buddha decided to teach it. [\[1\]](#)

The doctrine of *Anatta* or No-Soul is the natural result of, or the corollary to, the analysis of the Five Aggregates and the teaching of Conditioned Genesis (*Paticca-samuppāda*).[\[2\]](#)

We have seen earlier, in the discussion of the First Noble Truth (*Dukkha*), that what we call a being or an individual is composed of the Five Aggregates, and that when these are analysed and examined, there is nothing behind them which can be taken as 'I', *Ātman*, or Self, or any unchanging abiding substance. That is the analytical method. The same result is arrived at through the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis which is the synthetical method, and according to this nothing in the world is absolute. Everything is conditioned, relative, and interdependent. This is the Buddhist theory of relativity.

Before we go into the question of *Anatta* proper, it is useful to have a brief idea of the Conditioned Genesis. The principle of this doctrine is given in a short formula of four lines:

When this is, that is (*Imasmim sati idam hoti*);
This arising, that arises (*Imassuppādā idam uppajjati*);
When this is not, that is not (*Imasmim asati idam na hoti*);
This ceasing, that ceases (*Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*).[\[3\]](#)

On this principle of conditionality, relativity and interdependence, the whole existence and continuity of life and its cessation are explained in a detailed formula which is called *Paticca-samuppāda* 'Conditioned Genesis', consisting of twelve factors:

1. Through ignorance are conditioned volitional actions or karma-formations (*Avijjāpaccayā samkhārā*).
2. Through volitional actions is conditioned consciousness (*Samkhārapaccayā viññānam*).
3. Through consciousness are conditioned mental and physical phenomena (*Viññānapaccayā nāmarūpam*).
4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six faculties (i.e., five physical sense-organs and mind) (*Nāmarūpapaccayā salāyatanam*).
5. Through the six faculties is conditioned (sensorial and mental) contact (*Salāyatanapaccayā phasso*).
6. Through (sensorial and mental) contact is conditioned sensation (*Phassapaccayā vedanā*).
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire, 'thirst' (*Vedanāpaccayā tanhā*).
8. Through desire ('thirst') is conditioned clinging (*Tanhāpaccayā upādānam*).
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming (*Upādānapaccayā bhavo*).
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth (*Bhavapaccayā jāti*).
11. Through birth are conditioned (12) decay, death, lamentation, pain, etc. (*Jātipaccayā jarāmaranam...*).

This is how life arises, exists and continues. If we take this formula in reverse order, we come to the cessation of the process: Through the complete cessation of ignorance, volitional activities or karma-formations cease; through the cessation of volitional activities, consciousness ceases; ... through the cessation of birth, decay, death, sorrow, etc., cease.

It should be remembered that each of these factors is conditioned (*paticcasamuppanna*) as well as conditioning (*paticcasamuppāda*).^[4] Therefore they are all relative, interdependent and interconnected, and nothing is absolute or independent; hence no first cause is accepted by Buddhism as we have seen earlier.^[5] Conditioned Genesis should be considered as a circle, and not as a chain.^[6]

The question of Free Will has occupied an important place in Western thought and philosophy. But according to Conditioned Genesis, this question does not and cannot arise in Buddhist philosophy. If the whole of existence is relative, conditioned and interdependent, how can will alone be free? Will which is included in the fourth Aggregate (*samkhāra*), like any other thought, is conditioned (*paticca-samuppanna*). So-called 'freedom' itself in this world is not absolutely free. That too is conditioned and relative. There is, of course, such a conditioned and relative 'Free Will', but not unconditioned and absolute. There can be nothing absolutely free in this world, physical or mental, as everything is conditioned and relative. If Free Will implies a will independent of conditions, independent of cause and effect, such a thing does not exist. How can a will, or anything for that matter, arise without conditions, away from cause and effect, when the whole of life, the whole of existence, is conditioned and relative? Here again, the idea of Free Will is basically connected with the ideas of God, Soul, justice, reward and punishment. Not only so-called free will is not free, but even the very idea of Free Will is not free from conditions.

According to the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis, as well as according to the analysis of being into Five Aggregates, the idea of an abiding, immortal substance in man or outside, whether it is called *Ātman*, 'I', Soul, Self, or Ego, is considered only a false belief, a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta*, No-Soul or No-Self.

In order to avoid a confusion it should be mentioned here that there are two kinds of truths: conventional truth (*sammuti-sacca*, Skt. *Samvrti-satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca*, Skt. *Paramārtha-satya*).^[7] When we use such expressions in our daily life as 'I', 'you', 'being', 'individual', etc., we do not lie because there is no self or being as such, but we speak a truth conforming to the convention of the world. But the ultimate truth is that there is no 'I' or 'being' in reality. As the *Mahāyāna-sūtrāṅkāra* says: 'A person (*puḍgala*) should be mentioned as existing only in designation (*prajñapti*) (i.e., conventionally there is a being), but not in reality (or substance *dravya*)'.^[8]

'The negation of an imperishable *Ātman* is the common characteristic of all dogmatic systems of the Lesser as well as the Great Vehicle, and, there is, therefore, no reason to assume that Buddhist tradition which is in complete agreement on this point has deviated from the Buddha's original teaching.'^[9]

It is therefore curious that recently there should have been a vain attempt by a few scholars^[10] to smuggle the idea of self into the teaching of the Buddha, quite contrary to the spirit of Buddhism. These scholars respect, admire, and venerate the Buddha and his teaching. They look up to Buddhism. But they cannot imagine that the Buddha, whom they consider the most clear and profound thinker, could have denied the existence of an *Ātman* or Self which they need so much. They unconsciously seek the support of the Buddha for this need for eternal existence—of course not in a petty individual self with small s, but in the big Self with a capital S.

It is better to say frankly that one believes in an *Ātman* or or Self. Or one may even say that the Buddha was totally wrong in denying the existence of an *Ātman*. But certainly it will not do for any one to try to introduce into Buddhism an idea which the Buddha never accepted, as far as we can see from the extant original texts.

Religions which believe in God and Soul make no secret of these two ideas; on the contrary, they proclaim them, constantly and repeatedly, in the eloquent terms. If the Buddha had accepted these two ideas, so important in all religions, he certainly would have declared them publicly, as he had spoken about other things, and would not have left them hidden to be discovered only 25 centuries after his death.

People become nervous at the idea that through the Buddha's teaching of *Anatta*, the self they imagine they have is going to be destroyed. The Buddha was not unaware of this.

A bhikkhu once asked him: 'Sir, is there a case where one is tormented when something permanent within oneself is not found?'

'Yes, bhikkhu, there is,' answered the Buddha. 'A man has the following view: "The universe is that *Ātman*, I shall be that after death, permanent, abiding, ever-lasting, unchanging, and I shall exist as such for eternity". He hears the Tathāgata or a disciple of his, preaching the doctrine aiming at the complete destruction of all speculative views... aiming at the extinction of "thirst", aiming at detachment, cessation, Nirvāna. Then that man thinks: "I will be annihilated, I will be destroyed, I will be no more." So he mourns, worries himself, laments, weeps, beating his breast, and becomes bewildered. Thus, O bhikkhu, there is a case where one is tormented when something permanent within oneself is not found.'[\[11\]](#)

Elsewhere the Buddha says: 'O bhikkhus, this idea that I may not be, I may not have, is frightening to the uninstructed world-ling.'[\[12\]](#)

Those who want to find a 'Self' in Buddhism argue as follows: It is true that the Buddha analyses being into matter, sensation, perception, mental formations,

and consciousness, and says that none of these things it self. But he does not say that there is no self at all in man or anywhere else, apart from these aggregates.

This position is untenable for two reasons:

One is that, according to the Buddha's teaching, a being is composed only of these Five Aggregates, and nothing more. Nowhere has he said that there was anything more than these Five Aggregates in a being.

The second reason is that the Buddha denied categorically, in unequivocal terms, in more than one place, the existence of *Ātman*, Soul, Self, or Ego within man or without, or anywhere else in the universe. Let us take some examples.

In the *Dhammapada* there are three verses extremely important and essential in the Buddha's teaching. They are nos. 5, 6 and 7 of chapter XX (or verses 277, 278, 279).

The first two verses say:

'All conditioned things are impermanent' (*Sabbe SAMKHĀRĀ aniccā*), and 'All conditioned things are *dukkha*' (*Sabbe SAMKHĀRĀ dukkhā*).

The third verse says:

'All *dharmas* are without self' (*Sabbe SAMKHĀRĀ anattā*).[\[13\]](#)

Here it should be carefully observed that in the first two verses the word *samkhārā* 'conditioned things' is used. But in its place in the third verse the word *dharmā* is used. Why didn't the third verse use the word *samkhārā*

'conditioned things' as the previous two verses, and why did it use the term *dhammā* instead? Here lies the crux of the whole matter.

The term *samkhāra*[\[14\]](#) denotes the Five Aggregates, all conditioned, interdependent, relative things and states, both physical and mental. If the third verse said: 'All *samkhāra* (conditioned things) are without self', then one might think that, although conditioned things are without self, yet there may be a Self outside conditioned things, outside the Five Aggregates. It is in order to avoid misunderstanding that the term *dhammā* is used in the third verse.

The term *dhamma* is much wider than *samkhāra*. There is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than *dhamma*. It includes not only the conditioned things and states, but also the non-conditioned, the Absolute, Nirvāna. There is nothing in the universe or outside, good or bad, conditioned or non-conditioned, relative or absolute, which is not included in this term. Therefore, it is quite clear that, according to this statement: 'All *dhammas* are without Self', there is no Self, no *Ātman*, not only in the Five Aggregates, but nowhere else too outside them or apart from them.[\[15\]](#)

This means, according to the Theravāda teaching, that there is no self either in the individual (*puggala*) or in *dhammas*. The Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy maintains exactly the same position, without the slightest difference, on this point, putting emphasis on *dharma-nairātmya*.

In the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, addressing his disciples, the Buddha said: 'O bhikkhus, accept a soul-theory (*Attavāda*) in the acceptance of which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress and tribulation. But, do you see, O bhikkhus, such a soul-theory in the acceptance of which there would not arise grief, , lamentation, suffering, distress and tribulation?'

'Certainly not, Sir.'

'Good, O bhikkhus. I, too, O bhikkhus, do not see a soul-theory, in the acceptance of which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress and tribulation.'[\[16\]](#)

If there had been any soul-theory which the Buddha had accepted, he would certainly have explained it here, because he asked the bhikkhus to accept that soul-theory which did not produce suffering. But in the Buddha's view, there is no such soul theory, and any soul-theory, whatever it may be, however subtle and sublime, is false and imaginary, creating all kinds of problems, producing in its train grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, tribulation and trouble.

Continuing the discourse the Buddha said in the same *sutta*:

'O bhikkhus, when neither self nor anything pertaining to self can truly and really be found, this speculative view: "The universe is that *Ātman* (Soul); I shall be that after death, permanent, abiding, ever-lasting, unchanging, and I shall exist as such for eternity"- is it not wholly and completely foolish?'[\[17\]](#)

Here the Buddha explicitly states that an *Ātman*, or Soul, or Self, is nowhere to be found in reality, and it is foolish to believe that there is such a thing.

Those who seek a self in the Buddha's teaching quote a few examples which they first translate wrongly, and then misinterpret. One of them is the well-known line *Āttā hi attano nātho* from the *Dhammapada* (XII, 4, or verse 160), which is translated as 'Self is the lord of self', and then interpreted to mean that the big Self is the lord of the small self.

First of all, this translation is incorrect. *Āttā* here does not mean self in the sense of soul. In Pali the word *āttā* is generally used as a reflexive or indefinite

pronoun, except in a few cases where it specifically and philosophically refers to the soul-theory, as we have seen above. But in general usage, as in the XII chapter in the *Dhammapada* where this line occurs, and in many other places, it is used as a reflexive or indefinite pronoun meaning 'myself', 'yourself', 'himself', 'one', 'oneself', etc.[18]

Next, the word *nātho* does not mean 'lord', but 'refuge', 'support', 'help', 'protection'. [19]Therefore, *Attā hi attano nātho* really mean 'One is one's own refuge' or 'One is one's own help' or 'support'. It has nothing to do with any metaphysical soul or self. It simple means that you have to rely on yourself, and not on others.

Another example of the attempt to introduce idea of self into the Buddha's teaching is in the well-known words *Attidipā viharatha, attasaranā anaññasaranā*, which are taken out of context in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*. [20]This phrase literally means: 'Dwell making yourselves your island (support), making yourselves your refuge, and not anyone else as your refuge.' [21]

We cannot understand the full meaning and significance of the advice of the Buddha to Ānanda, unless we take into consideration the background and the context in which these words were spoken.

The Buddha was at the time staying at a village called Beluva. It was just three months before his death, *Parinivāna*. At this time he was eighty years old, and was suffering from a very serious illness, almost dying (*māranantika*). But he thought it was not proper for him to die without breaking it to his disciples who were near and dear to him. So with courage and determination he bore all his pains, got the better of his illness, and recovered. But his health was still poor. After his recovery, he was seated one day in the shade outside his residence. Ānanda, the most devoted attendant of the Buddha, went to his beloved

Master, sat near him, and said: 'Sir, I have looked after the health of the Blessed One, I have looked after him in his illness. But at the sight of the illness of the Blessed One the horizon became dim to me, and my faculties were no longer clear. Yet there was one little consolation: I thought that the Blessed One would not pass away until he had left instructions touching the Order of the Sangha'.

Then the Buddha, full of compassion and human feelings, gently spoke to his devoted and beloved attendant: 'Ānanda, what does the Order of the Sangha expect from me? I have taught the *Dhamma* (Truth) without making any distinction as exoteric and esoteric. With regard to the truth, the Tathāgata has nothing like the closed fist of the teacher (*ācariya-mutthi*). Surely, *Ānanda*, if there is anyone who thinks that he will lead the Sangha, and that the Sangha should depend on him, let him set down his instructions. But the Tathāgata has no such idea. Why should he then leave instructions concerning the Sangha? I am now old, *Ānanda*, eighty years old. As a worn-out cart has to be kept going by repairs, so, it seems to me, the body of the Tathāgata can only be kept going by repairs. *Therefore, Ānanda, dwell making yourselves your island (support), making yourselves, not anyone else, your refuge; making the Dhamma your island (support), the Dhamma your refuge, nothing else your refuge,*[\[22\]](#)

What the Buddha wanted to convey to *Ānanda* is quite clear. The latter was sad and depressed. He thought that they would all be lonely, helpless, without a refuge, without a leader after their great Teacher's death. So the Buddha gave him consolation, courage, and confidence, saying that they should depend on themselves, and on *Dhamma* he taught, and not on anyone else, or on anything else. Here the question of a metaphysical *Ātman*, or Self, is quite beside the point.

Further, The Buddha explained to *Ānanda* how one could be one's own island or refuge, how one could make the *Dhamma* one's own island or refuge: through

the cultivation of mindfulness or awareness of the body, sensations, mind and mind-objects (the four *Satipatthānas*).[\[23\]](#) There is no talk at all here about an *Ātman* or Self.

Another reference, oft-quoted, is used by those who try to find *Ātman* in the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha was once seated under a tree in a forest on the way to Urevelā from Benares. On that day, thirty friends all of them young princes, went out on picnic with their young wives into the same forest. One of the princes who was unmarried brought a prostitute with him. While the others were amusing themselves, she purloined some objects of value and disappeared. In their search for her in the forest, they saw the Buddha seated under a tree and asked him whether he had seen a woman. He enquired what was the matter. When they explained, the Buddha asked them: "What do you think, young men? Which is better for you? To search after a woman, or to search after yourselves?"[\[24\]](#)

Here again it is a simple and natural question, and there is no justification for introducing far-fetched ideas of a metaphysical *Ātman* or Self into the business. They answered that it was better for them to search after themselves. The Buddha then asked them to sit down and explained the *Dhamma* to them. In the available account, in the original text of what he preached to them, not a word is mentioned about an *Ātman*.

Much has been written on the subject of the Buddha's silence when a certain Parivrājaka (Wanderer) named Vacchagotta asked him whether there was an *Ātman* or not. The story is as follows:

Vacchagotta comes to the Buddha and asks:

'Venerable Gotama, is there an *Ātman*?'

The Buddha is silent.

'The Venerable Gotama, is there an *Ātman*?'

Again the Buddha is silent.

Vacchagotta gets up and goes away.

After the Parivrājaka had left, Ānanda asks the Buddha why he did not answer Vacchagotta's question. The Buddha explains his position:

'Ānanda, when asked by Vacchagotta the Wanderer: "Is there a self?", if I had answered: "There is a self", then, Ānanda, that would be siding with those recluses and brāhmanas who hold the eternalist theory (*sassata-vāda*).

'And, Ānanda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there no self?" if I had answered: "There is no self", then that would be siding with those recluses and brāhmanas who hold the annihilationist theory (*uccheda-vāda*).[\[25\]](#)

'Again, Ānanda, when asked by Vacchagotta: "Is there a self?", if I had answered: "There is a self", would that be in accordance with my knowledge that all *dhammas* are without self?'[\[26\]](#)

'Surely not, Sir.'

'And again, Ānanda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there no self?" if I had answered: "There is no self", then that would have been a greater confusion to the already confused Vacchagotta.[\[27\]](#) For he would have thought: Formerly indeed I had an *Ātman* (self), but now I haven't got one.'[\[28\]](#)

It should now be quite clear why the Buddha was silent. But it will be still clearer if we take into consideration the whole background, and the way the Buddha treated questions and questioners – which is altogether ignored by those who have discussed this problem.

The Buddha was not a computing machine giving answers to whatever questions were put to him by another at all, without any consideration. He was a practical teacher, full of compassion and wisdom. He did not answer questions to show his knowledge and intelligence, but to help the questioner on the way to realization. He always spoke to people bearing in mind their standard of development, their tendencies, their mental make-up, their character, their capacity to understand a particular question.[\[29\]](#)

According to the Buddha, there are four ways of treating questions: (1) Some should be answered directly; (2) others should be answered by way of analyzing them; (3) yet others should be answered by counter-questions; (4) and lastly, there are questions which should be put aside.[\[30\]](#)

There may be several ways putting aside a question. One is to say that a particular question is not answered or explained, as the Buddha had told this very same Vacchagotta on more than one occasion, when those famous questions whether the universe is eternal or not, etc., were put to him.[\[31\]](#) In the same way he had replied to Mālunkyaputta and others. But he could not say the same thing with regard to the question whether there is an *Ātman* (Self) or not, because he had always discussed and explained it. He could not say 'there is self', because it is contrary to his knowledge that 'all *dhammas* are without self'. Then he did not want to say 'there is no self', because that would unnecessarily, without any purpose, have confused and disturbed poor Vacchagotta who was already confused on a similar question, as he had himself admitted earlier.[\[32\]](#) He was not yet in a position to understand the idea of

Anatta. Therefore, to put aside this question by silence was the wisest thing in this particular case.

We must not forget too that the Buddha has known Vacchagotta quite well for a long time. This was not the first occasion on which this inquiring Wanderer had come to see him. The wise and compassionate Teacher gave much thought and showed great consideration for this confused seeker. There are many references in the Pali texts to this same Vacchagotta the Wanderer his going round quite often to see the Buddha and his disciples and putting the same kind of question again and again, evidently very much worried, almost obsessed by these problems.[\[33\]](#) The Buddha's silence seems to have had much more effect on Vacchagotta than any eloquent answer or discussion.[\[34\]](#)

Some people take 'self' to mean what is generally known as 'mind' or consciousness. But the Buddha says that it is better for a man to take his physical body as self rather than mind, thought, or consciousness, because the former seems to be more solid than the latter, because mind, thought or consciousness (*citta, mano, viññāna*) changes constantly day and night even faster than the body (*kāya*).[\[35\]](#)

It is the vague feeling "I AM" that creates the idea of self which has no corresponding reality, and to see this truth is to realize Nirvāna, which is not very easy. In the *Samyutta-nikāya*[\[36\]](#) there is an enlightening conversation on this point between a bhikkhu named Khemaka and a group of bhikkhus.

These bhikkhus ask Khemaka whether he sees in the Five Aggregates any self or anything pertaining to a self. Khemaka replies 'No'. Then the bhikkhus say that, if so, he should be an Arahant free from all impurities. But Khemaka confesses that through he does not find in the Five Aggregates a self, or anything pertaining to a self, 'I am not an Arahant free from all impurities. O friends, with

regard to the Five Aggregates of Attachment, I have a feeling "I AM", but I do not clearly see "This is I AM". Then Khemaka explains that what he calls 'I AM' is neither matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, nor consciousness, nor anything without them. But he has the feeling 'I AM' with regard to the Five Aggregates, though he could not see clearly 'This is I AM'.[\[37\]](#)

He says it is like the smell of a flower: it is neither the smell of the petals, nor of the colour, nor of the pollen, but the smell of the flower.

Khemaka further explains that even a person who has attained the early stages of realization still retains this feeling 'I AM'. But later on, when he progresses further, this feeling of 'I AM' altogether disappears, just as the chemical smell of a freshly washed cloth disappears after a time when it is kept in a box.

This discussion was so useful and enlightening to them that at the end of it, the text says, all of them, including Khemaka himself, became Arahants free from all impurities, this finally getting rid of 'I AM'.

According to the Buddha's teaching, it is as wrong to hold the opinion 'I have no self' (which is the annihilationist theory) as to hold the opinion 'I have self' (which is the eternalist theory), because both are fetters, both arising out of the false idea 'I AM'. The correct position with regard to the question of *Anatta* is not to take hold of any opinions or views, but to see things objectively as they are without mental projections, to see that what we call 'I', or 'being', is only a combination of physical and mental aggregates, which are working together interdependently in a flux of momentary change within the law of cause and effect, and that there is nothing permanent, everlasting, unchanging and eternal in the whole of existence.

Here naturally a question arises: If there is no *Ātman* or Self, who gets the results of karma (actions)? No one can answer this question better than the Buddha himself. When this question was raised by a bhikkhu the Buddha said: 'I have taught you, O bhikkhus, to see conditionality everywhere in all things.'[\[38\]](#)

The Buddha's teaching on *Anatta*, No-Soul, or No-Self, should not be considered as negative or annihilistic. Like Nirvāna, it is Truth, Reality; and Reality cannot be negative. It is the false belief in a non-existing imaginary self that is negative. The teaching on *Anatta* dispels the darkness of false beliefs, and produces the light of wisdom. It is not negative: as Asanga very aptly says: 'There is the fact of No-selfness' (*nairātmyāstitā*).[\[39\]](#)

CHAPTER VII. THE DOCTRINE OF NO-SOUL: *ANATTA*

What in generally is suggested by Soul, Self, Ego, or to use the Sanskrit expression *Ātman*, is that in man there is a permanent, everlasting and absolute entity, which is the unchanging substance behind the changing phenomenal world. According to some religions, each individual has such a separate soul which is created by God, and which, finally after death, lives eternally either in hell or heaven, its destiny depending on the judgment of its creator. According to others, it goes through many lives till it is completely purified and becomes finally united with God or Brahman, Universal Soul or *Ātman*, from which it originally emanated. This soul or self in man is the thinker of thoughts, feeler of sensations, and receiver of rewards and punishments for all its actions good and bad. Such a conception is called the idea of self.

Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self, or *Ātman*. According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality, and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine', selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism, and other defilements, impurities and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations. In short, to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.

Two ideas are psychologically deep-rooted in man; self-protection and self-preservation. For self-protection man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety and security, just as a child depends on its parent. For self-preservation man has conceived the idea of an immortal Soul or *Ātman*, which will live eternally. In his ignorance, weakness, fear, and desire, man needs

these two things to console himself. Hence he clings to them deeply and fanatically.

The Buddha's teaching does not support this ignorance, weakness, fear, and desire, but aims at making man enlightened by removing and destroying them, striking at their very root. According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and Soul are false and empty. Though highly developed as theories, they are all the same extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology. These ideas are so deep-rooted in man, and so near and dear to him, that he does not wish to hear, nor does he want to understand, any teaching against them.

The Buddha knew this quite well. In fact, he said that his teaching was 'against the current' (*patīsoṭagāmi*), against man's selfish desire. Just four weeks after his Enlightenment, seated under a banyan tree, he thought to himself; 'I have realized this Truth which is deep, difficult to understand... comprehensible only by the wise... Men who are overpowered by passions and surrounded by a mass of darkness cannot see this Truth, which is against the current, which is lofty, deep, subtle and hard to comprehend.'

With these thoughts in his mind, the Buddha hesitated for a moment, whether it would not be in vain if he tried to explain to the world the Truth he had just realized. Then he compared the world to a lotus pond: In a lotus pond there are some lotuses still under water; there are others which have risen only up to the water level; there are still others which stand above water and are untouched by it. In the same way in this world, there are men at different levels of development. Some would understand the Truth. So the Buddha decided to teach it. [\[1\]](#)

The doctrine of *Anatta* or No-Soul is the natural result of, or the corollary to, the analysis of the Five Aggregates and the teaching of Conditioned Genesis (*Paticca-samuppāda*).^[2]

We have seen earlier, in the discussion of the First Noble Truth (*Dukkha*), that what we call a being or an individual is composed of the Five Aggregates, and that when these are analysed and examined, there is nothing behind them which can be taken as 'I', *Ātman*, or Self, or any unchanging abiding substance. That is the analytical method. The same result is arrived at through the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis which is the synthetical method, and according to this nothing in the world is absolute. Everything is conditioned, relative, and interdependent. This is the Buddhist theory of relativity.

Before we go into the question of *Anatta* proper, it is useful to have a brief idea of the Conditioned Genesis. The principle of this doctrine is given in a short formula of four lines:

When this is, that is (*Imasmim sati idam hoti*);
This arising, that arises (*Imassuppādā idam uppajjati*);
When this is not, that is not (*Imasmim asati idam na hoti*);
This ceasing, that ceases (*Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*).^[3]

On this principle of conditionality, relativity and interdependence, the whole existence and continuity of life and its cessation are explained in a detailed formula which is called *Paticca-samuppāda* 'Conditioned Genesis', consisting of twelve factors:

1. Through ignorance are conditioned volitional actions or karma-formations (*Avijjāpaccayā samkhārā*).
2. Through volitional actions is conditioned consciousness (*Samkhārapaccayā viññānam*).
3. Through consciousness are conditioned mental and physical phenomena (*Viññānapaccayā nāmarūpam*).
4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six faculties (i.e., five physical sense-organs and mind) (*Nāmarūpapaccayā salāyatanam*).
5. Through the six faculties is conditioned (sensorial and mental) contact (*Salāyatanapaccayā phasso*).
6. Through (sensorial and mental) contact is conditioned sensation (*Phassapaccayā vedanā*).
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire, 'thirst' (*Vedanāpaccayā tanhā*).
8. Through desire ('thirst') is conditioned clinging (*Tanhāpaccayā upādānam*).
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming (*Upādānapaccayā bhavo*).
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth (*Bhavapaccayā jāti*).
11. Through birth are conditioned (12) decay, death, lamentation, pain, etc. (*Jātipaccayā jarāmaranam...*).

This is how life arises, exists and continues. If we take this formula in reverse order, we come to the cessation of the process: Through the complete cessation of ignorance, volitional activities or karma-formations cease; through the cessation of volitional activities, consciousness ceases; ... through the cessation of birth, decay, death, sorrow, etc., cease.

It should be remembered that each of these factors is conditioned (*paticcasamuppanna*) as well as conditioning (*paticcasamuppāda*).^[4] Therefore they are all relative, interdependent and interconnected, and nothing is absolute or independent; hence no first cause is accepted by Buddhism as we have seen earlier.^[5] Conditioned Genesis should be considered as a circle, and not as a chain.^[6]

The question of Free Will has occupied an important place in Western thought and philosophy. But according to Conditioned Genesis, this question does not and cannot arise in Buddhist philosophy. If the whole of existence is relative, conditioned and interdependent, how can will alone be free? Will which is included in the fourth Aggregate (*samkhārakkhandha*), like any other thought, is conditioned (*paticca-samuppanna*). So-called 'freedom' itself in this world is not absolutely free. That too is conditioned and relative. There is, of course, such a conditioned and relative 'Free Will', but not unconditioned and absolute. There can be nothing absolutely free in this world, physical or mental, as everything is conditioned and relative. If Free Will implies a will independent of conditions, independent of cause and effect, such a thing does not exist. How can a will, or anything for that matter, arise without conditions, away from cause and effect, when the whole of life, the whole of existence, is conditioned and relative? Here again, the idea of Free Will is basically connected with the ideas of God, Soul, justice, reward and punishment. Not only so-called free will is not free, but even the very idea of Free Will is not free from conditions.

According to the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis, as well as according to the analysis of being into Five Aggregates, the idea of an abiding, immortal substance in man or outside, whether it is called *Ātman*, 'I', Soul, Self, or Ego, is considered only a false belief, a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of *Anatta*, No-Soul or No-Self.

In order to avoid a confusion it should be mentioned here that there are two kinds of truths: conventional truth (*sammuti-sacca*, Skt. *Samvrti-satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca*, Skt. *Paramārtha-satya*).^[7] When we use such expressions in our daily life as 'I', 'you', 'being', 'individual', etc., we do not lie because there is no self or being as such, but we speak a truth conforming to the convention of the world. But the ultimate truth is that there is no 'I' or 'being' in reality. As the *Mahāyāna-sūtrāṅkāra* says: 'A person (*puḍgala*) should be mentioned as existing only in designation (*prajñapti*) (i.e., conventionally there is a being), but not in reality (or substance *dravya*)'.^[8]

'The negation of an imperishable *Ātman* is the common characteristic of all dogmatic systems of the Lesser as well as the Great Vehicle, and, there is, therefore, no reason to assume that Buddhist tradition which is in complete agreement on this point has deviated from the Buddha's original teaching.'^[9]

It is therefore curious that recently there should have been a vain attempt by a few scholars^[10] to smuggle the idea of self into the teaching of the Buddha, quite contrary to the spirit of Buddhism. These scholars respect, admire, and venerate the Buddha and his teaching. They look up to Buddhism. But they cannot imagine that the Buddha, whom they consider the most clear and profound thinker, could have denied the existence of an *Ātman* or Self which they need so much. They unconsciously seek the support of the Buddha for this need for eternal existence—of course not in a petty individual self with small s, but in the big Self with a capital S.

It is better to say frankly that one believes in an *Ātman* or or Self. Or one may even say that the Buddha was totally wrong in denying the existence of an *Ātman*. But certainly it will not do for any one to try to introduce into Buddhism an idea which the Buddha never accepted, as far as we can see from the extant original texts.

Religions which believe in God and Soul make no secret of these two ideas; on the contrary, they proclaim them, constantly and repeatedly, in the eloquent terms. If the Buddha had accepted these two ideas, so important in all religions, he certainly would have declared them publicly, as he had spoken about other things, and would not have left them hidden to be discovered only 25 centuries after his death.

People become nervous at the idea that through the Buddha's teaching of *Anatta*, the self they imagine they have is going to be destroyed. The Buddha was not unaware of this.

A bhikkhu once asked him: 'Sir, is there a case where one is tormented when something permanent within oneself is not found?'

'Yes, bhikkhu, there is,' answered the Buddha. 'A man has the following view: "The universe is that *Ātman*, I shall be that after death, permanent, abiding, ever-lasting, unchanging, and I shall exist as such for eternity". He hears the Tathāgata or a disciple of his, preaching the doctrine aiming at the complete destruction of all speculative views... aiming at the extinction of "thirst", aiming at detachment, cessation, Nirvāna. Then that man thinks: "I will be annihilated, I will be destroyed, I will be no more." So he mourns, worries himself, laments, weeps, beating his breast, and becomes bewildered. Thus, O bhikkhu, there is a case where one is tormented when something permanent within oneself is not found.'[\[11\]](#)

Elsewhere the Buddha says: 'O bhikkhus, this idea that I may not be, I may not have, is frightening to the uninstructed world-ling.'[\[12\]](#)

Those who want to find a 'Self' in Buddhism argue as follows: It is true that the Buddha analyses being into matter, sensation, perception, mental formations,

and consciousness, and says that none of these things it self. But he does not say that there is no self at all in man or anywhere else, apart from these aggregates.

This position is untenable for two reasons:

One is that, according to the Buddha's teaching, a being is composed only of these Five Aggregates, and nothing more. Nowhere has he said that there was anything more than these Five Aggregates in a being.

The second reason is that the Buddha denied categorically, in unequivocal terms, in more than one place, the existence of *Ātman*, Soul, Self, or Ego within man or without, or anywhere else in the universe. Let us take some examples.

In the *Dhammapada* there are three verses extremely important and essential in the Buddha's teaching. They are nos. 5, 6 and 7 of chapter XX (or verses 277, 278, 279).

The first two verses say:

'All conditioned things are impermanent' (*Sabbe SAMKHĀRĀ aniccā*), and 'All conditioned things are *dukkha*' (*Sabbe SAMKHĀRĀ dukkhā*).

The third verse says:

'All *dharmas* are without self' (*Sabbe SAMKHĀRĀ anattā*).[\[13\]](#)

Here it should be carefully observed that in the first two verses the word *samkhārā* 'conditioned things' is used. But in its place in the third verse the word *dharmā* is used. Why didn't the third verse use the word *samkhārā*

'conditioned things' as the previous two verses, and why did it use the term *dhammā* instead? Here lies the crux of the whole matter.

The term *samkhāra*[\[14\]](#) denotes the Five Aggregates, all conditioned, interdependent, relative things and states, both physical and mental. If the third verse said: 'All *samkhāra* (conditioned things) are without self', then one might think that, although conditioned things are without self, yet there may be a Self outside conditioned things, outside the Five Aggregates. It is in order to avoid misunderstanding that the term *dhammā* is used in the third verse.

The term *dhamma* is much wider than *samkhāra*. There is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than *dhamma*. It includes not only the conditioned things and states, but also the non-conditioned, the Absolute, Nirvāna. There is nothing in the universe or outside, good or bad, conditioned or non-conditioned, relative or absolute, which is not included in this term. Therefore, it is quite clear that, according to this statement: 'All *dhammas* are without Self', there is no Self, no *Ātman*, not only in the Five Aggregates, but nowhere else too outside them or apart from them.[\[15\]](#)

This means, according to the Theravāda teaching, that there is no self either in the individual (*puggala*) or in *dhammas*. The Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy maintains exactly the same position, without the slightest difference, on this point, putting emphasis on *dharma-nairātmya*.

In the *Alagaddūpama-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, addressing his disciples, the Buddha said: 'O bhikkhus, accept a soul-theory (*Attavāda*) in the acceptance of which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress and tribulation. But, do you see, O bhikkhus, such a soul-theory in the acceptance of which there would not arise grief, , lamentation, suffering, distress and tribulation?'

'Certainly not, Sir.'

'Good, O bhikkhus. I, too, O bhikkhus, do not see a soul-theory, in the acceptance of which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress and tribulation.'[\[16\]](#)

If there had been any soul-theory which the Buddha had accepted, he would certainly have explained it here, because he asked the bhikkhus to accept that soul-theory which did not produce suffering. But in the Buddha's view, there is no such soul theory, and any soul-theory, whatever it may be, however subtle and sublime, is false and imaginary, creating all kinds of problems, producing in its train grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, tribulation and trouble.

Continuing the discourse the Buddha said in the same *sutta*:

'O bhikkhus, when neither self nor anything pertaining to self can truly and really be found, this speculative view: "The universe is that *Ātman* (Soul); I shall be that after death, permanent, abiding, ever-lasting, unchanging, and I shall exist as such for eternity"- is it not wholly and completely foolish?'[\[17\]](#)

Here the Buddha explicitly states that an *Ātman*, or Soul, or Self, is nowhere to be found in reality, and it is foolish to believe that there is such a thing.

Those who seek a self in the Buddha's teaching quote a few examples which they first translate wrongly, and then misinterpret. One of them is the well-known line *Āttā hi attano nātho* from the *Dhammapada* (XII, 4, or verse 160), which is translated as 'Self is the lord of self', and then interpreted to mean that the big Self is the lord of the small self.

First of all, this translation is incorrect. *Āttā* here does not mean self in the sense of soul. In Pali the word *āttā* is generally used as a reflexive or indefinite

pronoun, except in a few cases where it specifically and philosophically refers to the soul-theory, as we have seen above. But in general usage, as in the XII chapter in the *Dhammapada* where this line occurs, and in many other places, it is used as a reflexive or indefinite pronoun meaning 'myself', 'yourself', 'himself', 'one', 'oneself', etc.[18]

Next, the word *nātho* does not mean 'lord', but 'refuge', 'support', 'help', 'protection'. [19]Therefore, *Attā hi attano nātho* really mean 'One is one's own refuge' or 'One is one's own help' or 'support'. It has nothing to do with any metaphysical soul or self. It simple means that you have to rely on yourself, and not on others.

Another example of the attempt to introduce idea of self into the Buddha's teaching is in the well-known words *Attidipā viharatha, attasaranā anaññasaranā*, which are taken out of context in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*. [20]This phrase literally means: 'Dwell making yourselves your island (support), making yourselves your refuge, and not anyone else as your refuge.' [21]

We cannot understand the full meaning and significance of the advice of the Buddha to Ānanda, unless we take into consideration the background and the context in which these words were spoken.

The Buddha was at the time staying at a village called Beluva. It was just three months before his death, *Parinivāna*. At this time he was eighty years old, and was suffering from a very serious illness, almost dying (*māranantika*). But he thought it was not proper for him to die without breaking it to his disciples who were near and dear to him. So with courage and determination he bore all his pains, got the better of his illness, and recovered. But his health was still poor. After his recovery, he was seated one day in the shade outside his residence. Ānanda, the most devoted attendant of the Buddha, went to his beloved

Master, sat near him, and said: 'Sir, I have looked after the health of the Blessed One, I have looked after him in his illness. But at the sight of the illness of the Blessed One the horizon became dim to me, and my faculties were no longer clear. Yet there was one little consolation: I thought that the Blessed One would not pass away until he had left instructions touching the Order of the Sangha'.

Then the Buddha, full of compassion and human feelings, gently spoke to his devoted and beloved attendant: 'Ānanda, what does the Order of the Sangha expect from me? I have taught the *Dhamma* (Truth) without making any distinction as exoteric and esoteric. With regard to the truth, the Tathāgata has nothing like the closed fist of the teacher (*ācariya-mutthi*). Surely, *Ānanda*, if there is anyone who thinks that he will lead the Sangha, and that the Sangha should depend on him, let him set down his instructions. But the Tathāgata has no such idea. Why should he then leave instructions concerning the Sangha? I am now old, *Ānanda*, eighty years old. As a worn-out cart has to be kept going by repairs, so, it seems to me, the body of the Tathāgata can only be kept going by repairs. *Therefore, Ānanda, dwell making yourselves your island (support), making yourselves, not anyone else, your refuge; making the Dhamma your island (support), the Dhamma your refuge, nothing else your refuge,*[\[22\]](#)

What the Buddha wanted to convey to *Ānanda* is quite clear. The latter was sad and depressed. He thought that they would all be lonely, helpless, without a refuge, without a leader after their great Teacher's death. So the Buddha gave him consolation, courage, and confidence, saying that they should depend on themselves, and on *Dhamma* he taught, and not on anyone else, or on anything else. Here the question of a metaphysical *Ātman*, or Self, is quite beside the point.

Further, The Buddha explained to *Ānanda* how one could be one's own island or refuge, how one could make the *Dhamma* one's own island or refuge: through

the cultivation of mindfulness or awareness of the body, sensations, mind and mind-objects (the four *Satipatthānas*).[\[23\]](#) There is no talk at all here about an *Ātman* or Self.

Another reference, oft-quoted, is used by those who try to find *Ātman* in the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha was once seated under a tree in a forest on the way to Urevelā from Benares. On that day, thirty friends all of them young princes, went out on picnic with their young wives into the same forest. One of the princes who was unmarried brought a prostitute with him. While the others were amusing themselves, she purloined some objects of value and disappeared. In their search for her in the forest, they saw the Buddha seated under a tree and asked him whether he had seen a woman. He enquired what was the matter. When they explained, the Buddha asked them: "What do you think, young men? Which is better for you? To search after a woman, or to search after yourselves?"[\[24\]](#)

Here again it is a simple and natural question, and there is no justification for introducing far-fetched ideas of a metaphysical *Ātman* or Self into the business. They answered that it was better for them to search after themselves. The Buddha then asked them to sit down and explained the *Dhamma* to them. In the available account, in the original text of what he preached to them, not a word is mentioned about an *Ātman*.

Much has been written on the subject of the Buddha's silence when a certain Parivrājaka (Wanderer) named Vacchagotta asked him whether there was an *Ātman* or not. The story is as follows:

Vacchagotta comes to the Buddha and asks:

'Venerable Gotama, is there an *Ātman*?'

The Buddha is silent.

'The Venerable Gotama, is there an *Ātman*?'

Again the Buddha is silent.

Vacchagotta gets up and goes away.

After the Parivrājaka had left, Ānanda asks the Buddha why he did not answer Vacchagotta's question. The Buddha explains his position:

'Ānanda, when asked by Vacchagotta the Wanderer: "Is there a self?", if I had answered: "There is a self", then, Ānanda, that would be siding with those recluses and brāhmanas who hold the eternalist theory (*sassata-vāda*).

'And, Ānanda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there no self?" if I had answered: "There is no self", then that would be siding with those recluses and brāhmanas who hold the annihilationist theory (*uccheda-vāda*).[\[25\]](#)

'Again, Ānanda, when asked by Vacchagotta: "Is there a self?", if I had answered: "There is a self", would that be in accordance with my knowledge that all *dhammas* are without self?'[\[26\]](#)

'Surely not, Sir.'

'And again, Ānanda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there no self?" if I had answered: "There is no self", then that would have been a greater confusion to the already confused Vacchagotta.[\[27\]](#) For he would have thought: Formerly indeed I had an *Ātman* (self), but now I haven't got one.'[\[28\]](#)

It should now be quite clear why the Buddha was silent. But it will be still clearer if we take into consideration the whole background, and the way the Buddha treated questions and questioners – which is altogether ignored by those who have discussed this problem.

The Buddha was not a computing machine giving answers to whatever questions were put to him by another at all, without any consideration. He was a practical teacher, full of compassion and wisdom. He did not answer questions to show his knowledge and intelligence, but to help the questioner on the way to realization. He always spoke to people bearing in mind their standard of development, their tendencies, their mental make-up, their character, their capacity to understand a particular question.[\[29\]](#)

According to the Buddha, there are four ways of treating questions: (1) Some should be answered directly; (2) others should be answered by way of analyzing them; (3) yet others should be answered by counter-questions; (4) and lastly, there are questions which should be put aside.[\[30\]](#)

There may be several ways putting aside a question. One is to say that a particular question is not answered or explained, as the Buddha had told this very same Vacchagotta on more than one occasion, when those famous questions whether the universe is eternal or not, etc., were put to him.[\[31\]](#) In the same way he had replied to Mālunkyaputta and others. But he could not say the same thing with regard to the question whether there is an *Ātman* (Self) or not, because he had always discussed and explained it. He could not say 'there is self', because it is contrary to his knowledge that 'all *dhammas* are without self'. Then he did not want to say 'there is no self', because that would unnecessarily, without any purpose, have confused and disturbed poor Vacchagotta who was already confused on a similar question, as he had himself admitted earlier.[\[32\]](#) He was not yet in a position to understand the idea of

Anatta. Therefore, to put aside this question by silence was the wisest thing in this particular case.

We must not forget too that the Buddha has known Vacchagotta quite well for a long time. This was not the first occasion on which this inquiring Wanderer had come to see him. The wise and compassionate Teacher gave much thought and showed great consideration for this confused seeker. There are many references in the Pali texts to this same Vacchagotta the Wanderer his going round quite often to see the Buddha and his disciples and putting the same kind of question again and again, evidently very much worried, almost obsessed by these problems.[\[33\]](#) The Buddha's silence seems to have had much more effect on Vacchagotta than any eloquent answer or discussion.[\[34\]](#)

Some people take 'self' to mean what is generally known as 'mind' or consciousness. But the Buddha says that it is better for a man to take his physical body as self rather than mind, thought, or consciousness, because the former seems to be more solid than the latter, because mind, thought or consciousness (*citta, mano, viññāna*) changes constantly day and night even faster than the body (*kāya*).[\[35\]](#)

It is the vague feeling "I AM" that creates the idea of self which has no corresponding reality, and to see this truth is to realize Nirvāna, which is not very easy. In the *Samyutta-nikāya*[\[36\]](#) there is an enlightening conversation on this point between a bhikkhu named Khemaka and a group of bhikkhus.

These bhikkhus ask Khemaka whether he sees in the Five Aggregates any self or anything pertaining to a self. Khemaka replies 'No'. Then the bhikkhus say that, if so, he should be an Arahant free from all impurities. But Khemaka confesses that through he does not find in the Five Aggregates a self, or anything pertaining to a self, 'I am not an Arahant free from all impurities. O friends, with

regard to the Five Aggregates of Attachment, I have a feeling "I AM", but I do not clearly see "This is I AM". Then Khemaka explains that what he calls 'I AM' is neither matter, sensation, perception, mental formations, nor consciousness, nor anything without them. But he has the feeling 'I AM' with regard to the Five Aggregates, though he could not see clearly 'This is I AM'.[\[37\]](#)

He says it is like the smell of a flower: it is neither the smell of the petals, nor of the colour, nor of the pollen, but the smell of the flower.

Khemaka further explains that even a person who has attained the early stages of realization still retains this feeling 'I AM'. But later on, when he progresses further, this feeling of 'I AM' altogether disappears, just as the chemical smell of a freshly washed cloth disappears after a time when it is kept in a box.

This discussion was so useful and enlightening to them that at the end of it, the text says, all of them, including Khemaka himself, became Arahants free from all impurities, this finally getting rid of 'I AM'.

According to the Buddha's teaching, it is as wrong to hold the opinion 'I have no self' (which is the annihilationist theory) as to hold the opinion 'I have self' (which is the eternalist theory), because both are fetters, both arising out of the false idea 'I AM'. The correct position with regard to the question of *Anatta* is not to take hold of any opinions or views, but to see things objectively as they are without mental projections, to see that what we call 'I', or 'being', is only a combination of physical and mental aggregates, which are working together interdependently in a flux of momentary change within the law of cause and effect, and that there is nothing permanent, everlasting, unchanging and eternal in the whole of existence.

Here naturally a question arises: If there is no *Ātman* or Self, who gets the results of karma (actions)? No one can answer this question better than the Buddha himself. When this question was raised by a bhikkhu the Buddha said: 'I have taught you, O bhikkhus, to see conditionality everywhere in all things.'[\[38\]](#)

The Buddha's teaching on *Anatta*, No-Soul, or No-Self, should not be considered as negative or annihilistic. Like Nirvāna, it is Truth, Reality; and Reality cannot be negative. It is the false belief in a non-existing imaginary self that is negative. The teaching on *Anatta* dispels the darkness of false beliefs, and produces the light of wisdom. It is not negative: as Asanga very aptly says: 'There is the fact of No-selfness' (*nairātmyāstitā*).[\[39\]](#)

CHAPTER VIII. WHAT THE BUDDHA TAUGHT AND THE WORLD TODAY

There are some who believe that Buddhism is so lofty and sublime a system that it cannot be practised by ordinary man and woman in this workaday world of ours, and that one has to retire from it to a monastery, or to some quiet place, if one desires to be a true Buddhist.

This is a sad misconception, due evidently to a lack of understanding of the teaching of the Buddha. People run to such hasty and wrong conclusions as a result of their hearing, or reading casually, something about Buddhism written by someone, who, as he has not understood the subject in all its aspects, gives only a partial and lopsided view of it. The Buddha's teaching is meant not only for monks in monasteries, but also for ordinary men and women living at home with their families. The Noble Eightfold Path, which is the Buddhist way of life, is meant of all, without distinction of any kind.

The vast majority of people in the world cannot turn monk, or retire into caves or forests. However, noble and pure Buddhism may be, it would be useless to the masses of mankind if they could not follow it in their daily life in the world of today. But if you understand the spirit of Buddhism correctly (and not only its letter), you can surely follow and practice it while living the life of an ordinary man.

There may be some who find it easier and more convenient to accept Buddhism, if they do live in a remote place, cut off from the society of others. Others may find that that kind of retirement dulls and depresses their whole being both physically and mentally, and that it may not therefore be conducive to the development of their spiritual and intellectual life.

True renunciation does not mean running away physically from the world. Sāriputta, the chief disciple of the Buddha, said that one man might live in a forest devoting himself to ascetic practices, but might be full of impure thoughts and 'defilements'; another might live in a village or a town, practising no ascetic discipline, but his mind might be pure, and free from 'defilements'. Of these two, said Sāriputta, the one who lives a pure life in the village or town is definitely far superior to, and greater than, the one who lives in the forest.[1]

The common belief that to follow the Buddha's teaching one has to retire from life is a misconception. It is really an unconscious defence against practising it. There are numerous references in Buddhist literature to men and women living ordinary, normal family lives who successfully practiced what the Buddha taught, and realized Nirvāna. Vacchagotta the Wanderer, (whom we met earlier in the chapter on *Anatta*), once asked the Buddha straight-forwardly whether there were laymen and woman leading the family life, who followed his teaching successfully and attained to high spiritual states. The Buddha categorically stated that there were not one or two, not a hundred or two hundred or five hundred, but many more laymen and women leading the family life who followed his teaching successfully and attained to high spiritual states.[2]

It may be agreeable for certain people to live a retired life in a quiet place away from noise and disturbance. But it is certainly more praiseworthy and courageous to practice Buddhism living among your fellow beings, helping them and being of service to them. It may perhaps be useful in some cases for a man to live in retirement for a time in order to improve his mind and character, as preliminary moral, spiritual and intellectual training, to be strong enough to come out later and help others. But if a man lives all his life in solitude, thinking only of his own happiness and 'salvation', without caring for his fellows, this surely is not in keeping with the Buddha's teaching which is based on love, compassion, and service to others.

One might now ask: If a man can follow Buddhism while living the life of an ordinary layman, why was the Sangha, the Order of monks, established by the Buddha? The Order provides opportunity for those who are willing to devote their lives not only to their own spiritual and intellectual development, but also to the service of others. An ordinary layman with a family cannot be expected to devote his whole life to the service of others, whereas a monk, who has no family responsibilities or any other worldly ties, is in position to devote his whole life 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many' according to the Buddha's advice. That is how in the course of history, the Buddhist monastery became not only a spiritual centre, but also a centre of learning and culture.

The *Sigāla-sutta* (No. 31 of the *Digha-nikāya*) shows with what great respect the layman's life, his family and social relations are regarded by the Buddha.

A young man named Sigāla used to worship the six cardinal points of the heavens-east, south, west, north, nadir, and zenith- in obeying and observing the last advice given him by his dying father. The Buddha told the young man that in the 'noble discipline' (*ariyassa vināye*) of his teaching the six directions were different. According to his 'noble discipline' the six directions were: east: parents; south: teachers; west: wife and children; north: friends, relatives and neighbours; nadir: servants, workers and employees; zenith: religious men.

'One should worship these six directions' said the Buddha. Here the word 'worship' (*namasseyya*) is very significant, for one worships something sacred, something worthy of honour and respect. These six family and social groups mentioned above are treated in Buddhism as sacred, worthy or respect and worship. But how is one to 'worship' them? The Buddha says that one could 'worship' them only by performing one's duties towards them. These duties are explained in his discourse to Sigāla.

First: Parents are sacred to their children. The Buddha says: 'Parents are called Brahma' (*Brahmāti mātāpitāro*). The term *Brahma* denotes the highest and most sacred conception in Indian thought, and in it the Buddha includes parents. So in good Buddhist families at the present time children literally 'worship' their parents every day, morning and evening. They have to perform certain duties towards their parents according to the 'noble discipline': they should look after their parents in their old age; should do whatever they have to do on their behalf; should maintain the honour of the family and continue the family tradition; should protect the wealth earned by their parents; and perform their funeral rites after their death. Parents, in their turn, have certain responsibilities towards their children: they should keep their children away from evil courses; should engage them in good and profitable activities; should give them a good education; should marry them into good families; and should hand over the property to them in due course.

Second: The relation between teacher and pupil: a pupil should respect and be obedient to his teacher; should attend to his needs if any; should study earnestly. And the teacher, in his turn, should train and shape his pupil properly; should teach him well; should introduce him to his friends; and should try to procure him security or employment when his education is over.

Third: The relation between husband and wife: love between husband and wife is considered almost religious or sacred. It is called *sadāra-Brahmacariya* 'sacred family life'. Here, too, the significance of the term *Brahma* should be noted: the highest respect is given to this relationship. Wives and husband should be faithful, respectful and devoted to each other, and they have certain duties towards each other: the husband should always honour his wife and never wanting in respect to her; he should love her and be faithful to her; should secure her position and comfort; and should please her by presenting her with clothing and jewellery. (The fact that the Buddha did not forget to mention even

such a thing as the gifts a husband should make to his wife shows how understanding and sympathetic were his humane feelings towards ordinary human emotions). The fire, in her turn, should supervise and look after household affairs; should entertain guests, visitors, friends, relatives and employees; should love and be faithful to her husband; should protect his earnings; should be clever and energetic in all activities.

Fourth: The relation between friends, relatives and neighbours: they should be hospitable and charitable to one another; should speak pleasantly and agreeably; should work for each others' welfare; should be on equal terms with one another; should not quarrel among themselves; should help each other in need; and should not forsake each other in difficulty.

Fifth: The relation between master and servant: the master or the employer has several obligations towards his servant or his employee: work should be assigned according to ability and capacity; adequate wages should be paid; medical needs should be provided; occasional donations or bonuses should be granted. The servant or employee, in his turn, should be diligent and not lazy; honest and obedient and not cheat his master; he should be earnest in his work.

Sixth: The relation between the religious (lit. recluses and brāhmanas) and the laity: lay people should look after the material needs of the religious with love and respect; the religious with a loving heart should impart knowledge and learning to the laity, and lead them along the good path away from evil.

We see then that the lay life, with its family and social relations, is included in the 'noble discipline', and is within the framework of the Buddhist way of life, as the Buddha envisaged it.

So in the *Samyutta-nikāya*, one of the oldest Pali texts, Sakka, the king of the gods (*devas*), declares that he worships not only the monks who live a virtuous holy life, but also 'lay disciples (*upāsaka*) who perform meritorious deeds, who are virtuous, and maintain their families righteously'.^[3]

If one desires to become a Buddhist, there is no initiation ceremony (or baptism) which one has to undergo. (But to become a *bhikkhu*, a member of the Order of the *Sangha*, one has to undergo a long process of disciplinary training and education). If one understands the Buddha's teaching, and if one is convinced that his teaching is the right Path and if one tries to follow it, then one is a Buddhist. But according to the unbroken age-old tradition in Buddhist countries, one is considered a Buddhist if one takes the Buddha, the *Dhamma* (the Teaching) and the *Sangha* (the Order of Monks)- generally called 'the Triple-Gem'- as one's refuges, and undertakes to observe the Five Precepts (*Pañca-sila*)-the minimum moral obligations of a lay Buddhist-(1) not to destroy life, (2) not to steal, (3) not to commit adultery, (4) not to tell lies, (5) not to take intoxicating drinks-reciting the formulas given in the ancient texts. On religious occasions Buddhists in congregation usually recite these formulas, following the lead of a Buddhist monk.

There are no external rites or ceremonies which a Buddhist has to perform. Buddhism is a way of life, and what is essential is following the Noble Eightfold Path. Of course there are in all Buddhist countries simple and beautiful ceremonies on religious occasions. There are shrines with statues of the Buddha, *stūpas* or *dāgābas* and Bo-trees in monasteries where Buddhist worship, offer flowers, light lamps and burn incense. This should not be likened to prayer in theistic religions; it is only a way of paying homage to the memory of the Master who showed the way. These traditional observances, though inessential, have their value in satisfying the religious emotions and needs of those who are

less advanced intellectually and spiritually, and helping them gradually along the Path.

Those who think that Buddhism is interested only in lofty ideals, high moral and philosophical thought, and that it ignores the social and economic welfare of people, are wrong. The Buddha was interested in the happiness of men. To him happiness was not possible without leading a pure life based on moral and spiritual principles. But he knew that leading such a life was hard in unfavourable material and social conditions.

Buddhism does not consider material welfare as an end in itself: it is only a means to an end—a higher and nobler end. But it is a means which is indispensable, in achieving a higher purpose for man's happiness. So Buddhism recognizes the need of certain minimum material favourable to spiritual success—even that of a monk engaged in meditation in some solitary place.[\[4\]](#)

The Buddha did not take life out of the context of its social and economic background; he looked at it as a whole, in all its social, economic and political aspects. His teachings on ethical, spiritual and philosophical problems are fairly well known. But little is known, particularly in the West, about his teaching on social, economic and political matters. Yet there are numerous discourses dealing with these scattered throughout the ancient Buddhist texts. Let us take only a few examples.

The *Cakkavattisihanāda-sutta* of the *Digha-nikāya* (No.26) clearly states that poverty (*dāliddiya*) is the cause of immorality and crimes such as theft, falsehood, violence, hatred, cruelty, etc. Kings in ancient times, like governments today, tried to suppress crime through punishment. The *Kūṭadanta-sutta* of the same *Nikāya* explains how futile this is. It says that this method can never be

successful. Instead the Buddha suggests that, in order to eradicate crime, the economic condition of the people should be improved: grain and other facilities for agriculture should be provided for farmers and cultivators; capital should be provided for traders and those engaged in business; adequate wages should be paid to those who are employed. When people are thus provided for with opportunities for earning a sufficient income, they will be contented; will have no fear or anxiety, and consequently the country will be peaceful and free from crime.[5]

Because of this, the Buddha told lay people how important it is to improve their economic condition. This does not mean that he approved of hoarding wealth with desire and attachment, which is against his fundamental teaching, nor did he approve of each and every way of earning one's livelihood. There are certain trades like the production and sale of armaments, which he condemns as evil means of livelihood, as we saw earlier.[6]

A man named Dighajānu once visited the Buddha and said: 'Venerable Sir, we are ordinary lay men, leading the family life with wife and children. Would the Blessed One teach us some doctrines which will be conducive to our happiness in this world and hereafter.'

The Buddha tells him that there are four things which are conducive to a man's happiness in this world: First: he should be skilled, efficient, earnest, and energetic in whatever profession he is engaged, and he should know it well (*utthāna-sampadā*); second: he should protect his income, which he has thus earned righteously, with the sweat of his brow (*ārakkha-sampadā*); (This refers to protecting wealth from thieves, etc. All these ideas should be considered against the background of the period.) third: he should have good friends (*kalyāna-mitta*) who are faithful, learned, virtuous, liberal and intelligent, who will help him along the right path away from evil; fourth: he should spend

reasonably, in proportion to his income, neither too much nor too little, i.e., he should not hoard wealth avariciously, nor should he be extravagant- in other words he should live within his means (*samajikatā*).

Then the Buddha expounds the four virtues conducive to a layman's happiness hereafter: (1) *Saddhā*: he should have faith and confidence in moral, spiritual and intellectual values; (2) *Sīla*: he should abstain from destroying and harming life, from stealing and cheating, from adultery, from falsehood, and from intoxicating drinks; (3) *Cāga*: he should practice charity, generosity, without attachment and craving for wealth; (4) *Paññā*: he should develop wisdom which leads to the complete destruction of suffering, to the realization of Nirvāna.^[7]

Sometimes the Buddha even went into details about saving money and spending it, as, for instance, when he told the young man Sigāla that he should spend one fourth of his income on his daily expenses, invest half in his business and put aside one fourth for any emergency.^[8]

Once the Buddha told Ānāthapindika, the great banker, one of his most devoted lay disciples who founded for him the celebrated Jetavana monastery at Sāvatti, that a layman, who leads an ordinary family life, has four kinds of happiness. The first happiness is to enjoy economic security or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means (*atthi-sukha*); the second is spending that wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds (*bhoga-sukha*); the third to be free from debts (*anana-sukha*); the fourth happiness is to love a faultless, and a pure life without committing evil in thought, word or deed (*anavajja-sukha*). It must be noted here that three of these kinds are economic, and that the Buddha finally reminded the banker that economic and material happiness is 'not worth one sixteenth part' of the happiness arising out of a faultless and good life.^[9]

From the few examples given above, one could see that the Buddha considered economic welfare as requisite for human happiness, but that he did not recognize progress as real and true if it was only material, devoid of a spiritual and moral foundation. While encouraging material progress Buddhism always lays great stress on the development of the moral and spiritual character for a happy, peaceful and contented society.

The Buddha was just as clear on politics, on war and peace. It is too well known to be repeated here that Buddhism advocates and preaches non-violence and peace as its universal message, and does not approve of any kind of violence or destruction of life. According to Buddhism there is nothing that can be called a 'just war' - which is only a false term coined and put into circulation to justify and excuse hatred, cruelty, violence and massacre. Who decided what is just or unjust? The mighty and the victorious are 'just', and the weak and the defeated are 'unjust'. Our war is always 'just', and your war is always 'unjust'. Buddhism does not accept this position.

The Buddha not only taught non-violence and peace, but he even went to the field of battle itself and intervened personally, and prevented war, as in the case of the dispute between the Sākya and the Koliyas, who were prepared to fight over the question of the waters of the Rohini. And his words once prevented King Ajātasattu from attacking the kingdom of the Vajjis.

In the days of the Buddha, as today, there were rulers who governed their countries unjustly. People were oppressed and exploited, tortured and persecuted, excessive taxes were imposed and cruel punishments were inflicted. The Buddha was deeply moved by these inhumanities. The *Dhammapadatthakathā* records that he, therefore, directed his attention to the problem of good government. His views should be appreciated against the social, economic and political background of his time. He had shown how a whole country could become corrupt, degenerate and unhappy when the heads

of its government, that is the king, the ministers and administrative officers become corrupt and unjust. For a country to be happy it must have a just government. How this form of just government could be realized is explained by the Buddha in his teaching of the 'Ten Duties of the King' (*dasa-rāji-dhamma*), as given in the *Jātaka* text.[\[10\]](#)

Of course the term 'king' (*Rāja*) of old should be replaced today by the term 'Government'. The Ten Duties of the King', therefore, apply today to all those who constitute the government, such as the head of the state, ministers, political leaders, legislative and administrative, etc.

The first of the 'Ten Duties of the King' is liberality, generosity, charity (*dāna*). The ruler should not craving and attachment to wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people.

Second: A high moral character (*sila*). He should never destroy life, cheat, steal, and exploit other, commit adultery, utter, falsehood, and take intoxicating drinks. That is, he must at least observe the Five Precepts of the layman.

Third: Sacrificing everything for the good of the people (*pariccāga*), he must be prepared to give up all personal comfort, name and fame, and even his life, in the interest of the people.

Fourth: Honest and integrity (*ajjava*). He must be free from fear or favour in the discharge of his duties, must be sincere in his intentions, and must not deceive the public.

Fifth: Kindness and gentleness (*maddava*). He must possess a genial temperament.

Sixth: Austerity in habits (*tapa*). He must lead a simple life, and should not indulge in a life of luxury. He must have self-control.

Seventh: Freedom from hatred, ill-will, enmity (*akkadha*). He should bear no grudge against anybody.

Eight: Non-violence (*avihimsā*), which means not only that he should harm nobody, but also that he should try to promote peace by avoiding and preventing war, and everything which involves violence and destruction of life.

Ninth: Patient, forbearance, tolerance, understanding (*khanti*). He must be able to bear hardships, difficulties and insults without losing his temper.

Tenth: Non-opposition, non-obstruction (*avirodha*), that is to say that he should not oppose the will of the people, should not obstruct any measures that are conducive to the welfare of the people. In other words he should rule in harmony with his people.[\[11\]](#)

If a country is ruled by men endowed with such qualities, it is needless to say that that country must be happy. But this was not a Utopia, for there were kings in the past like Asoka of India who had established kingdoms based on these ideas.

The world today lives in constant fear, suspicion, and tension. Science has produced weapons which are capable of unimaginable destruction. Brandishing these new instruments of death, great powers threaten and challenge one another, boasting shamelessly that one could cause more destruction and misery in the world than the other.

They have gone along this path of madness to such a point that now, if they take one more step forward in that direction, the result will be nothing but mutual annihilation along with the total destruction of humanity.

Human beings in fear of the situation they have themselves created, want to find a way out, and seek some kind of solution. But there is none except that held out by the Buddha – his message of non –violence and peace, of love and compassion, of tolerance and understanding, of truth and wisdom, of respect and regard of all life, of freedom from selfishness, hatred and violence.

The Buddha says: 'Never by hatred is hatred appeased, but it is appeased by kindness. This is an eternal truth.'[\[12\]](#)

'One should win anger through kindness wickedness through goodness, selfishness through charity and falsehood through truthfulness.'[\[13\]](#)

There can be no peace or happiness for man as long as he desires and thirsts after conquering and subjugating his neighbour. As the Buddha says: 'The victor breeds hatred, and the defeated lies down in misery. He who renounces both victory and defeat is happy and peaceful.'[\[14\]](#) The only conquest that brings peace and happiness is self-conquest. 'One may conquer millions in battle, but he who conquers himself, only one, is the greatest of conquerors.'[\[15\]](#)

You will say this is all very beautiful, noble and sublime, but impractical. It is practical to hate one another? To kill one another? To live in eternal fear and suspicion like wild animals in a jungle? Is this more practical and comfortable? Was hatred ever appeased by hatred? Was evil ever won over by evil? But there are examples, at least in individual cases, where hatred is appeased by love and kindness and evil won over by goodness. You will say that this may be true; practicable in individual cases, but that is never works in national and

international affairs. People are hypnotized, psychologically puzzled, blinded and deceived by the political and propaganda usage of such term as 'national', 'international', or 'state'. What is a nation but a vast conglomeration of individuals? A nation or a state does not act; it is the individual who acts. What the individual thinks and does is what the nation or the state thinks and does. What is applicable to the individual is applicable to the nation or the state. If hatred can be appeased by love and kindness on the individual scale, surely it can be realized on the national and international scale too. Even in the case of a single person, to meet hatred with kindness one must be tremendous courage, boldness, faith and confidence in moral force. May it not be even more so with regard to international affairs? If by the expression 'not practical' you mean 'not easy', you are right. Definitely it is not easy. Yet it should be tried. You may say it is risky trying it. Surely it cannot be more risky than trying a nuclear war.

It is a consolation and inspiration to think today that at least there was one great ruler, well known in history, who had the courage, the confidence and the vision to apply this teaching of non-violence, peace and love to the administration of a vast empire, in both internal and external affairs - Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India (3rd century B.C.) - 'the Beloved of the gods' as he was called.

At first he followed the example of his father (Bindusāra) and grandfather (Chandragupta), and wished to complete the conquest of the Indian peninsula. He invaded and conquered Kalinga, and annexed it. Many hundreds of thousands were killed, wounded, tortured and taken prisoner in this war. But later, when he became a Buddhist, he was completely changed and transformed by the Buddha's teachings. In one of his famous Edicts, inscribed on rock, (Rock Edict XIII, as it is now called), the original of which one may read even today, referring to the conquest of Kalinga, the Emperor publicly expresses his 'repentance', it was for him to think of that carnage. He publicly declared that he

would never draw his sword again for any conquest, but that he 'wishes all living beings non-violence, self control, the practice of serenity and mildness. This, of course, is considered the chief conquest by the Beloved of the gods (i.e., Asoka), namely the conquest by piety (*dhamma-vijaya*).' Not only did he renounce war himself, he expressed his desire that 'my sons and grandsons will not think of a new conquest as worth achieving. ... let them think of that conquest only which is the conquest by piety. That is good for this world and the world beyond.'

This is the only example in the history of mankind of a victorious conquerer at the zenith of his power, still possessing the strength to continue his territorial conquests, yet renouncing war and violence and turning to peace and non-violence.

Here is a lesson for the world today. The ruler of an empire publicly turned his back on war and violence and embraced the message of peace and non-violence. There is no historical evidence to show that any neighbouring king took advantage of Asoka's piety to attack him militarily, or that there was any revolt or rebellion within his empire during his lifetime. On the contrary there was peace throughout the land, and even countries outside his empire seem to have accepted his benign leadership.

To talk of maintaining peace through the balance of power, or through the threat of nuclear deterrents, is foolish. The might of armaments can produce fear, and not peace. It is impossible that there can be genuine and lasting peace through fear. Through fear can come only hatred, ill-will and hostility, suppressed perhaps, for the time being only, but ready to erupt and become violent at any moment. True and genuine peace can prevail only in an atmosphere of *mettā*, amity, free from fear, suspicion and danger.

Buddhism aims at creating a society where the ruinous struggle for power is renounced; where calm and peace prevail away from conquest and defeat; where the persecution of the innocent is vehemently denounced; where one who conquers oneself is more respected than those who conquer millions by military and economic warfare; where hatred is conquered by kindness, and evil by goodness, where enmity, jealousy, ill-will and greed do not infect men's minds; where compassion is the driving force of actions; where all, including and love; where life peace and harmony, in a world of material contentment, is directed towards the highest and noblest aim, the realization of the Ultimate Truth, Nirvāna.

NOTES

Chapter 1

- [1] Dhp. XII 4.
- [2] D II (Colombo, 1929), p. 62 (*Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*).
- [3] *Tathāgata* lit. means 'One who has become the to Truth' i.e., "One who has discovered Truth'. This is the term usually used by the Buddha referring to himself and to the Buddhas in general.
- [4] Dhp.XX
- [5] *Sangha* lit means 'Community'. But in Buddhism this term denotes 'The community if Buddhist monks' which is the Order of Monks. Buddha, *Dhamma* (Teaching) and *Sangha* (Order) are known as *Tisarāma* 'Three Refuges' or *Tiratana* (Sanskrit *Triratna*) 'Triple-Gem'.
- [6] D II (Colombo, 1929), p. 62.
- [7] A (Colombo, 1929), p. 115.
- [8] *Vimamsaka-sutta*, no.47 of M
- [9] The Five Hindrances are : (i) Sensuous Lust, (2) Ill-will, (3) Physical and mental torpor and languor, (4) Restlessness and Worry, (5) Doubt
- [10] D II (Colombo, 1929), p. 95; A (Colombo, 1929), p. 239.
- [11] Mahāvira, founder of Jainism, was a contemporary of the Buddha, and was probably a few years older than the Buddha.
- [12] *Upāli-sutta*, no.56 of M.
- [13] Rock Edict, XII.
- [14] In India potter' sheds are spacious, and quite. References are made in the Pali texts to ascetics and recluses, as well as to the Buddha himself, spending a night in a potter's shed during their wanderings.
- [15] It is interesting to note here that the Buddha addresses this recluse as *Bhikkhu*, which term is used for Buddhist monks. In the sequel it will be seen that he was not a bhikkhu, not a member of the Order of the Sanga, for he asked the Buddha to admit him into the Order, Perhaps in the days of the Buddha the term 'bhikkhu' was used at times even for other ascetics indiscriminately, or the Buddha was not very strict in the use of the term. Bhikkhu means 'mendicant' one who begs food' and perhaps it was used here in its literal and original sense. But today the term 'bhikkhu' is used only of Buddhist monks, especially in Theravāda countries like Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and in Chittagong.
- [16] In the chapter on the third Noble Truth, see p.38.
- [17] The term used us *Āvuso* which mean friend. It is a respectful term of address among equals. But disciples never used this term addressing the Buddha. Instead they use the term *Bhante* which approximately means 'Sir' or 'Lord'. At the time of the Buddha, the members of his Order of Monks (*Sangha*) addressed one another as *Āvuso* 'Friend'. But before his death the Buddha instructed younger monks to address their elders as *Bhante* 'Sir' or *Āyasmā* 'Venerable'. But elders should address the younger members by

name, or as *Āvuso* 'Friend'. (D II Colombo, 1929, p. 95). This practice is continued up to the present day in the Sangha.

- [18] It is well-known that cows in India roam about the streets. From this reference it seems that the tradition is very cold. But generally these cows are docile and not savage or dangerous.
- [19] An *Arahant* is a person who has liberated himself from all seflements and impurities such as desire, hatred, ill-will, ignorance, pride, conceit, etc. He has attained the fourth or the highest and ultimate stage in the realization of Nirvāna, and is full of wisdom compassion and such pure and noble qualities. Pukkusāti had attained at the moment only at third stage which is technically called *Anāgāmi* 'Never-Returner'. The second stage is called *Sakadāgāmi* 'Once-Returner' and the first stage is called *Sotāpanna* 'Stream-Entrant'
- [20] Karl Gjellerup's *The Pilgrim Kamanita* seems to have been inspired by this story of Pukkusāti.
- [21] Abhisamuc, p.6
- [22] *The role of the Miracle in Early Pali Literature* by Edith Ludowyk- Gyomroi takes up this subject. Unfortunately this Ph.D. thesis is not yet published. On the same subject see an article by the same author in the University of Ceylon Review, Vol.I, No. I (April, 1943), p. 74 ff
- [23] Here the word *saddhā* is used in its ordinary popular sense of 'devotion, faith, belief'.
- [24] S II (PTS), P. 117
- [25] *Ibid.* III, p.152.
- [26] E.g. S V, (PTS), p.423; III, p.103; M III (PTS), p. 19.
- [27] S V (PTS), p. 422
- [28] *Canki-sutta*, no.95 of M.
- [29] Sn (PTS), p. 151 (v.798)
- [30] In the *Mahātanhāsankhaya-suttu*, no. 38 of M.
- [31] M I (PTS), p. 260
- [32] M I (PTS), pp.134-135. *Dhamma* here, according to the Commentary, means high spiritual attainments as well as pure views and ideas. Attachment even to these, however high and pure they may be, should be given up; how much more then should it be with regard to evil and bad things. MA II (PTS), p. 109
- [33] S V (PTS),p. 437
- [34] *Cūla-Mālunkya-sutta*, no.63 of M.
- [35] i.e. both are free and neither is under obligation to the other.
- [36] These Four Nobble Truths are explained in the next four chapters.
- [37] It seems that this advice of the Buddha had the desired effect on Mālunkyaputta, because elsewhere he is reported to have approached the Buddha again for instruction, following which he came an *Arahant*. A (Colomo, 1929), pp. 345-346; S IV (PTS), p. 72 ff.

Chapter 2

- [1] *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta* 'Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth'. Mhvg. (Alutgama, 1922), p. 9 ff; S V (PTS). P. 420 ff.
- [2] A (Colombo, 1929), p. 49

- [3] *Mahādukkhakkhandha-sutta*, M I (PTS), p. 90.
- [4] M I (PTS), p. 85 ff; S III (PTS), p. 27 ff.
- [5] M I (PTS), p. 87.
- [6] *Vism* (PTS), P. 499; *Abhisamuc*, p. 38.
- [7] *Samkhittena pancupādānakkhandhā dukkhā*. S V (PTS), p. 421
- [8] S III (PTS), p. 158
- [9] S III (PTS), p. 59
- [10] *Abhisamuc*, p. 4. Vibh.p.72. Hhs. p. 133&594
- [11] S III (PTS), p. 59.
- [12] S III (PTS), p.60
- [13] Mental Formations' is the term now generally used to represent the wide meaning of the word *samkhāra* in the list of Five Aggregates. *Samkhāra* in other contexts may mean anything conditioned, anything in the word, in which sense all the Five Aggregates are *samkhāra*.
- [14] A (Colombo, 1929), p. 590- *Cetanā'ham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi. Cetayitvā kammam karoti kāyena vācā manasā*.
- [15] *Abhisamuc*, p.6.
- [16] S III (PTS), p.60.
- [17] According to Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy the Aggregate of Consciousness has three aspects: *citta*, *manas* and *vijñāna*, and the *Ālaya-vijñāna* (popularly translated as 'Store-Consciousness') finds its place in this Aggregate. A detailed and comparative study of this subject will be found in a forthcoming work on Buddhist philosophy by the present writer.
- [18] S III (PTS), p.61
- [19] *Mahātanhāsamkhaya-sutta*, M I (PTS), p. 256 ff.
- [20] MA II (PTS), pp. 306-307
- [21] S III (PTS), p. 58.
- [22] A (colomo, 1929), p. 700. These words are attributed by the Buddha to a Teacher (*Satthā*) named Araka who was free from desires and who lived in the dim past. It is interesting to remember here the doctrine of Heraclitus (about 500 B.C) that everything is in a state of flux, and his famous statement: 'You cannot step twice onto the same river, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.'
- [23] The doctrine of Anatta 'No-Self' will be discussed in Chapter VI.
- [24] In fact Buddhaghosa compares a 'being' to a wooden mechanism (*dāruyanta*). *Vism*. (PTS), pp. 594-595
- [25] *Vism*. (PTS), p.513
- [26] S II (PTS), pp. 178-179; III pp.149, 151
- [27] A V (PTS), p. 113
- [28] S V (PTS), p. 437. In fact the Buddha says that he who sees any one of the Four Noble Truths sees the other three as well. These Four Noble Truths are interconnected.
- [29] There is a statue from Gandhara, and also one from Fou-Kien, China, depicting Gotama as an ascetic, emaciated, with all his ribs showing. But this was before his Enlightenment, when he was submitting himself to the rigorous ascetic practices which he condemned after he became Buddha.
- [30] *Abhisamuc*, p. 7.

[31] M II (PTS), p. 121

[32] For these Seven Factors of Enlightenment see Chapter on Meditation, p. 75

Chapter 3

[1] Mhvg. (Alutgama, 1922), p. 9; S V (PTS), p. 421 and *passim*.

[2] *Vedanāsamudayā tanhāsamudayo*. M I (PTS), p. 51

[3] See p.53.

[4] Abhisamuc, p. 43, *prādhānyārtha, sarvatragārtha*.

[5] See Vibh. (PTS), p. 106 ff.

[6] M I (PTS), p. 51; S II p. 72; Vibh. P. 380.

[7] M I, p. 86.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[9] It is interesting to compare this 'mental volition' with 'libido' in modern psychology.

[10] MA I (PTS), p. 210.

[11] *Manosañcetanā' ti cetanā eva vuccati*. MA I (PTS), p. 209.

[12] See above p. 22.

[13] S II (PTS), p. 100. The three forms of 'thirst' are: (1) Thirst for sense-pleasures, (2) Thirst for existence and becoming, and (3) Thirst for non-existence, as given in the definition of *samudaya* 'arising of *dukkha*' above.

[14] See above p. 22.

[15] M III (PTS), p. 280; S IV, pp. 47, 107; V, p. 423 and *passim*.

[16] Prmj. I (PTS), p. 78 '*Khandhese jāyamānesu jiyamānesu miyamānesu ca khane khane ivam bhikkhu jāyase ca jiyase ca miyase ca.*' This is quoted in the *Paramatthajotikā* Commentary as the Buddha's own words. So far I have not been able to trace this passage back to its original text.

Chapter 4

[1] Lanka. p. 113

[2] Sometimes positive terms like *Siva* 'Auspicious', 'Good', *Khema* 'Safety', *Suddhi* 'Purity', *Dipa* 'Island', *Sarama* 'Refuge', *Tāna* 'Protection', *Pāra* 'Opposite shore'. 'Other side', *Santi* 'Peace', 'Tranquillity' are used to denote Nirvāna. There are 32 synonyms for Nibbāna in the *Asamkhata-samyutta* of the *Samyutta-nikāya*. They are mostly metaphorical.

[3] Mhvg. (Alutgama,1922), p. 10; S. V p. 421. It is interesting to note that this definition of *Nirodha* 'Cessation of *Dukkha*', which is found in the first sermon of the Buddha at Sarnath, does not contain the word *Nibbāna*, though the definition means it.

[4] S I, p. 136

[5] *Ibid.* IV, p. 359.

[6] *Ibid.* III, p. 190.

[7] Here the word *pipāsa* which lit. means thirst

- [8] A (PTS) II, p. 34.
- [9] S (PTS) IV, p. 251
- [10] Sāriputta's words. M I, (PTS), p. 191
- [11] Words of Musila, another disciple of the Buddha. S II (PTS), p. 117
- [12] Ud. (Colombo, 1929), p. 129
- [13] *Ibid.* p. 128; D I (Colombo, 1929), p. 172.
- [14] Notice that all the spiritual and music states, however pure and high they may be, are mental creations, mind-made, conditioned and compound (*samkhata*). They are not Reality, not Truth (*sacca*).
- [15] This means that he does not produce new karma, because now he is free from 'thirst' will, volition.
- [16] This expression means that now he is an Arahant.
- [17] V (PTS), p. 369.
- [18] Cf. *Lamka*. P. 200; 'O Mahāmati, Nirvāna means to see the state of things as they are.'
- [19] Nāgārjuna clearly says that '*Samsāra* has no difference whatever from Nirvāna and Nirvāna has no difference whatever from *Samsāra*.' (Madhya. Kari XXV, 19).
- [20] It is useful to remember here that among nine supra-mundane *dhammas* (*navalo-kuttara-dhamma*) Nirvāna is beyond *magga* (path) and *phala* (fruition).
- [21] S III (PTS), p. 189
- [22] There are some who write 'after the Nirvāna of the Buddha' instead of 'after the Parinirvāna of the Buddha'. 'After the Nirvāna of the Buddha' has no meaning, and the expression is unknown in Buddhist literature. It is always 'after the Parinirvāna of the Buddha'.
- [23] S IV (PTS), p. 375 f.
- [24] M I (PTS), p. 468
- [25] *Ibid.* I, p. 487; III, p. 245; Sn (PTS), v. 232 (p. 41).
- [26] See Aggregates of Formations above pp. 22, 31.
- [27] A (Colombo, 1929) p. 218.
- [28] S I (PTS), p. 5.
- [29] M II (PTS), p. 121.

Chapter 5

- [1] M I (PTS), p. 301
- [2] See Chapter VII on Meditation.
- [3] Vism. (PTS), p. 510
- [4] Mhvg. (Alutgama, 1922), p. 10

Chapter 6

- [1] Mhvg. (Alutgama, 1922), p. 4 f; M I (PTS), p. 167 f.
- [2] Explained below.
- [3] M III (PTS), p. 63; S II (PTS), pp. 28, 95, etc. To put it into a modern form:

When A is, B is;
A arising, B arises;
When A is not, B is not;
A ceasing, B ceases.

[4]Vism. (PTS), p. 517

[5]See above p. 29

[6]Limited space does not permit a discussion here of this most important doctrine. A critical and comparative study if this subject in detail will be found in a forthcoming work on Buddhist philosophy by the present writer.

[7]Sārattha II (PTS), p. 77

[8]Mh. Sūtrāṅkāra, XVIII 92.

[9]H. von Glasenapp, in an article 'Vedānta and Buddhism' on the question of Anatta, *The Middle Way*, February, 1957, p. 154.

[10]The late Mrs. Rhys Davids and others. See Mrs. Rhys Davids' *Gotama the Man, Sākyā or Buddhist Origins, A Manual of Buddhism, What was the Original Buddhism, etc.*

[11]M I (PTS), pp. 136-137

[12]Quoted in MA II (PTS), p. 112.

[13]F.L.Woodward's translation of the word *dharmā* here by 'All states by 'All states compounded' is quite wrong. (The Buddha's *Path of Virtue*, Adyar, Madras, India, 1929, p. 69.) 'All states compounded' means only *samkhārā*, but not *dharmā*.

[14]*Samkhārā* in the list of the Five Aggregates means 'Mental Formations' or 'Mental Activities' producing karmic effects. But here it means all conditioned or compounded things, including all the Five Aggregates. The term *samkhārā* has different connotations in different contexts.

[15]Cf. also *Sabbe samkhārā aniccā* 'All conditioned things are impermanent', *Sabbe dharmā anattā* 'All *dhammas* are without self'. M I (PTS), p. 228; S III pp. 132, 133.

[16]M I (PTS), p. 137

[17]*ibid.*, p. 138. Referring to this passage, S. Radhakrishnan (*Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, London, 1940, p. 485), says: 'It is the false view that clamours for the perpetual continuance of the small self that buddha refutes'. We cannot agree with this remark. On the contrary, the Buddha, in fact, refutes here the Universal *Ātman* or Soul. As we saw just now, in the earlier passage, the Buddha did not accept any self, great or small. In his view, all theories of *Ātman* were false, mental projections.

[18]In his article 'Vedānta and Buddhism' (*The Middle Way*, February, 1957), H. von Glasenapp explains this point clearly.

[19]The commentary on the Dhp. Says: *Nātho ti patitthā* '*Nātho* means support, (refuge, help, protection),' (Dhp. A III (PTS), p. 148.) The old Sinhalese *Sannaya* of the Dph. Paraphrases the word *nātho* as *pihita vanneya* 'is a support (refuge, help)'. (*Dhammapada Purānasannaya*, Colombo, 1926, p. 77). If we take the negative form of *nātho*, this meaning becomes further confirmed: *Anātha* does not mean 'without a lord' or 'lordless', but it means 'helpless', 'supportless', 'unprotected', 'poor'. Even the PTS Pali Dictionary explains the word *nātha* as 'protector', 'refuge', 'help, but not as 'lord'. The translation of the lord

Lokanātha (s.v.) by 'Saviour of the world', just using a popular Christian expression, is not quite correct, because the Buddha is not a saviour. This epithet really means 'Refuge of the World'

[20]D II (Colombo, 1929), p. 62

[21]Rhys Davids (*Digha-nikāya* Translation II, p. 108) 'Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge.'

[22]D II (Colombo, 1929), pp. 61-62. Only the last sentence is literally translated. The rest of the story is given briefly according to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*.

[23]*Ibid.*, p.62. For *Satipatthāna* see Chapter VII on Meditation.

[24]Mhvg., (Alutgama, 1929), pp.21-22

[25]On another occasion the Buddha had told this same Vacchagotta that the Tathāgata had no theories, because he had seen the nature of things. (M I (PTS), p. 486.) Here too he does not want to associate himself with any theorists.

[26]*Sabbe dhammā anattā*. (Exactly the same words as in the first line of Dh. XX, 7 which we discussed above.) Woodward's translation of these words by 'all things are impermanent' (*Kindred Sayings* IV, p. 282) is completely wrong, probably due to an oversight. But this is a very serious mistake. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons for so much unnecessary talk on the Buddha's silence. The most important word in this context, *anatta* 'without a self' had been translated as 'impermanent'. The English translations of Pali texts contain major and minor errors of this kind-some due to carelessness or oversight, some to lack of proficiency in the original language. Whatever the cause may be, it is useful to mention here, with the deference due to those great pioneers in this field, that these errors have been responsible for a number of wrong ideas about Buddhism among people who have no access to the original texts. It is good to know therefore that Miss I. B. Horner, the Secretary of the Pali Text Society, plans to bring out revised and new translations.

[27]In fact on another occasion, evidently earlier, when the Buddha had explained a certain deep and subtle question-the question as to what happened to an Arahant after death-Vacchagotta said: 'Venerable Gotama, here I fall into ignorance, I get into confusion. Whatever little faith I had at the beginning of this conversation with the Venerable Gotama, that too is gone now.' (M I (PTS), p. 487). So the Buddha did not want to confuse him again.

[28]S IV (PTS), pp. 400-401

[29]This knowledge of the Buddha is called *Indriyaparopariyattañāna*. M I (PTS), p. 70; Vibh. (PTS), p. 340.

[30]A (Colombo, 1929), p. 216.

[31]*E.g.*, S IV (PTS), pp. 393, 395; M I (PTS), p. 484.

[32]See p. 63 n. 2.

[33]*E.g.*, see S III (PTS), pp. 257-263; IV pp, 391f., 395 f., 398f., 400; M I, pp. 481f., 483f., 489f., A V p. 193

[34]For, we see that after sometime Vacchagotta came again to see the Buddha but this time did not ask any questions as usual, but said: "It is long since I had a talk with the Venerable Gotama. It would be good if the Venerable Gotama would preach to me on good and bad (*kusalākusalam*) in brief." The Buddha said that he would explain to him good and bad, in brief as well as in detail; and so he did. Ultimately Vacchagotta became a disciple of the Buddha, and following his teaching attained

Arahantship, realized Truth, Nirvāna, and the problems of *Ātman* and other questions obsessed him no more. (M I (PTS), pp. 489 ff.)

[35] S II (PTS), p. 94. Some people think that *Ālayavijñāna* 'Store-Consciousness' (*Tathāgatagarbha*) of Mahāyāna Buddhism is something like self. But the *Lankavatāra-sūtra* categorically says that it is not *Ātman* (Lanka. P. 78-79.)

[36] S III (PTS), pp. 126 ff.

[37] This is what most people say about self even today.

[38] M III (PTS), p. 19; S III, p. 103.

[39] *Abhisamuc*, p. 31.

Chapter 7

[1] A (Colombo, 1929), p. 276.

[2] *The Yogāvacara's Manual* (Edited by T.W. Rhys Davids, London, 1896), a text on meditation written in Ceylon probably about the 18th century, shows how meditation at the time had generated into a ritual of reciting formulas, burning candles, etc.

See also Chapter VII on the Ascetic Ideal, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon* by Walpola Rahula, (Colombo, 1956), pp. 199 ff.

[3] See Above p.38.

[4] See *Sallekha-sutta* (no. 8), of M.

[5] S I (PTS), p. 5.

[6] M I (PTS), p. 100.

[7] See above p. 65

Chapter 8

[1] M I (PTS), pp.30-31.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp.490 ff.

[3] S I (PTS), p. 234.

[4] MA I (PTS), p. 290f. (Buddhist monks, members of the order of the *Sangha*, are not expected to have personal property, but they are allowed to hold communal (*Sanghika*) property).

[5] D I (Colombo, 1929), p. 101.

[6] See above p.47.

[7] A (Colombo, 1929), pp. 786 ff.

[8] D III (Colombo, 1929), p. 115.

[9] A (Colombo, 1929), pp. 232-233.

[10] Jataka I, 260, 399; II, 400; III, 274, 320; V 119, 378.

[11] It is interesting to note here that the Five Principles or *Pancha-sila* in India's foreign policy are in accordance with the Buddhist principles which Asoka, the great Buddhist emperor of India, applied to

the administration of his government in the 3rd century B.C. The expression *Pancha-sila* (Five Precepts or Virtues), is itself a Buddhist term.

[12]Dhp. I 5.

[13]*ibid* XVII 3.

[14]*ibid* XV 5.

[15]*ibid* XIII 4.