Basic Buddhism

A Modern Introduction to the Buddha's Teaching

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Third Edition

CONTENTS

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Preface to the Third Edition

The first edition of this booklet appeared in November 1982 under the title *Basic Buddhism: an Outline of the Buddha's Teaching*. It was published by the Buddhist Society of Queensland to commemorate the centenary of the arrival of Theravada immigrants to Queensland. It grew out of a lecture given to teachers of religion in Secondary Schools in October 1980. The following is an extract from the original Preface:

"This introductory essay is confined to the *basic* doctrines propounded by the Buddha over 2500 years ago. This message is surprisingly modern, and more in keeping with the rational-scientific temper of our age than the various theistic systems to which most of the people of the world owe formal allegiance. A widespread interest in Buddhism in Australia is relatively recent. It is important that the original doctrine of the Buddha, divested of the cultural trappings and metaphysical speculations that has gathered around it during its long sojourn in a dozen Asian lands, is placed before the public. This booklet is written with that aim in mind."

A second edition of this publication appeared in 1994. It made no changes to the main text of the first edition, except for some minor corrections. However some new material, intended to amplify some of the comments in the original text, were added as footnotes. Two Appendices were also added. The first gave information for those who want to call themselves Buddhists, and gives the basic precepts lay Buddhists are expected to observe. The second identifies three main tendencies in Pali Buddhism in the West.

The present edition is a revision of the second edition. Some new sections have been added. Some of this material first appeared as articles published by the author in BSQ publications.

Since the first edition of this booklet in 1982 Buddhism has greatly expanded in Australia. However most of recent Buddhism has been ethnically oriented associated with the activity of migrants from Buddhist Asian countries. Much of the recent literature on Buddhism in Australia has also been from this perspective. The need for a statement of Buddhism divested of cultural trappings is thus still as urgent as it was in 1982. There is therefore a need for a publication like the present one giving access to the authentic message of the Buddha freed from cultural encumbrances and other innovations.

The objective of the present work is still to introduce the central principles of Buddhism to the modern reader in the Western world in a modern idiom. Buddhism has been well established in several Asian countries for many centuries, but its

expansion to other parts of the world has been comparatively recent. As far as the West is concerned in the ancient Hellenic world there was some contact with Buddhist thinking mainly due to Alexander's expedition to Asia and Asoka's missions, some of which are said to have been to the West. It has even been speculated that the ethical teaching of Christianity may have some Buddhist links. But after the conversion of Constantine to Christianity the hitherto open attitude to religions was subverted and other religions like Buddhism were barred.

The relative isolation of Buddhism to specific cultures, with very little interaction even between countries which professed in varying ways the Buddha's message, has led to the development of particular ethnic traits in the national forms of Buddhism practised in these countries. It is true that for the most part these ethnic influences have affected only relative minor aspects of the practice of the Buddha's teaching, but it has nonetheless been an impediment to the expansion of Buddhism to new areas. It is important to divest Buddhism of its national peculiarities, and to seek the essence of Buddhism, which is a message for all people irrespective of time and place. It is this "original Buddhism" that we have termed ***Basic Buddhism***. Chapter 1 looks at this concept in more detail, but it should be remembered that the term "basic" does not imply that Buddhism has been simplified in any way.

A restatement of Basic Buddhism is necessary if the Buddha's teaching is to be of use to those people who for historical reasons have not had access to it. Only a small proportion of the world's population are officially counted as professing Buddhism. This is partly due to the way in which people are classed into religious groupings. Buddhism in its original form does not fall into the conventional category of religion, and trying to count the number of Buddhists is somewhat futile. But it is true that a large number of people have scarcely heard of the Buddha, and many of those who have done so have a very incorrect view of Buddhism. This is very often deliberately propagated by the media and by other religions.

Even though the basic teaching of the Buddha has been known in the modern West for over a century, most of this knowledge was confined to academic circles. The widespread practice of Buddhism is relatively recent, and now several Buddhist centres have sprung up in the West. In the last three decades many traditional Buddhists from Asia have migrated to the West, bringing with them ethnic forms of Buddhism. This has made Buddhism more visible but it has also obscured to some extent the central message of the Buddha. All these reasons make it necessary to give a clear statement of the fundamental teaching of the Buddha to readers in the West. This is the task that is attempted in this short booklet.

It is not possible to avoid Pali terms in an exposition of Buddhism. A glossary of all Pali words used in this work is given in Appendix F. If the meaning of a Pali word used in the text is not given in the context the glossary should be consulted.

Dr V. A. Gunasekara
Go to Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Basic Buddhism

The term ***Buddhism*** is now used to denote the teaching of the Buddha, a historical person who flourished some 25 centuries ago on the Indian subcontinent. This teaching has been described variously as a religion, a philosophy, a psychological system, an ethico-moral code, a socio-economic blue-print, and so on. No doubt all these aspects could be discerned in different parts of the Buddha's teaching, but the teaching is itself something more than all these combined. The term which Buddhists use to designate the teaching is ***Dhamma*** or *Dharma*[(1)] . This term comes from a root term meaning "to uphold", and means the basic law which "upholds" the universe. It is therefore sometimes translated simply as Law or Norm. It conveys some idea of the unity that informs the whole body of the Buddha's teaching. We shall use the words *dhamma* and Buddhism as synonyms.

The term "Basic Buddhism" is used in this work to denote those elements of Buddhism as currently propagated which could be attributed fairly unambiguously to the Buddha himself. It is a basic argument here that this teaching can not only be practised effectively in the modern world but also conforms to the modern scientific view of the world[(2)] . In seeking to establish the content of Basic Buddhism we have to start with a consideration of the different schools of Buddhism that have arisen in the course of history. The Buddha did not leave written records, and his disciples transmitted his teaching initially as an oral tradition. Quite early in its history several distinct schools of Buddhism arose based partly on the interpretation of common discourses, and partly on differing texts of the discourses themselves. There is a substantial degree of agreement between these diverse schools, and they have never exhibited an animosity towards each other comparable to the schisms that have characterised many other religions.[(3)] It is from the scriptures of these various schools of Buddhism, particularly from the Pali Canon, that the original message of the Buddha, which we term Basic Buddhism, has to be reconstructed.

About three centuries after the death of the Buddha several different schools of Buddhism emerged, but the differences between them were slight and related to minor points. However towards the beginning of the Common Era (CE)[(4)] some of these groups gave a new interpretation to the Buddha's teaching and called themselves the Mahâyâna ("Greater Vehicle") School. They called the earlier schools the "Hinayâna" (Lesser Vehicle) school. However this term was never accepted by the schools who were designated by it. Of these schools only one survives today[(5)] . This is the Theravâda ("Doctrine of the Elders") school which claims to carry on the Buddhism of the early followers of the Buddha. This view is now generally accepted and the Mahâyâna is seen as a new innovation in Buddhism but still containing some of the essence of the original teaching. These two traditions have also been termed the Southern and Northern schools of Buddhism because of the geographical areas in which each prevailed. Each of these traditions has its own versions of the Buddhist scriptures. All Theravada groups subscribe to a common set of basic books (called the Pali Canon after the language, Pali, in which it is recorded). We shall however refer to the original Buddhism as Pali Buddhism rather than Theravada Buddhism.[(6)] Amongst the Mahâyâna there is a much greater diversity of schools, doctrines, languages and texts. Initially Sanskrit was the language of the Indian Mahayâna schools, but many of these were later translated to Chinese and China soon became the centre of Mahayâna Buddhism. From there it spread to many other countries including Korea, Japan (where the best known school of Buddhism is Zen) and Tibet (where a distinct variety of Mahâyâna Buddhism called the Vajrayâna or the "Diamond Vehicle" developed).

In its fundamental doctrines basic Buddhism is closer to Pali Buddhism than to the Mahâyâna schools. This is because the Pali Canon is the oldest compilation of the Buddha's teaching, and closest to the actual words of the Buddha. Its present form was settled at the Third Council of Buddhists held during the reign of King Asoka of Ancient India about 250 BCE. The Pali Canon was thus systemised quite early, and has changed very little, indeed if at all, since then. It was committed to writing in the first century BCE, and this preserved the texts from possible further verbal corruption. The Pali Canon (like some other Buddhist canons) consists of three sections (called *Piakas* or baskets) dealing with the ***Vinaya*** (monastic discipline), ***Sutta*** (doctrines) and the ***Abhidhamma*** (the analysis of the Dhamma).

While the principles and practice of basic Buddhism has to be sought in the Pali Canon (especially in the *Vinaya* and the *Sutta* piakas), actual Theravâda theory shows some development from early Buddhism. This took three directions:

1. Some of the material in the third section of the Canon, the Abhidhamma Pitaka, was composed at a later date, and employed a didactic and taxonomic method in analysing the psychological and philosophical concepts introduced by the

Buddha. The empirical method it employed to verify the Buddha's teaching was meditative contemplation (especially insight meditation), and it excluded the use of other empirical methods such as those employed by modern science.
2. The commentatorial efforts of the great medieval scholastics like Buddhaghosa and Dharmapâla tended to ossify the meaning and interpretation of the Buddha's discourses, which was taken to be authoritative interpretations of the Dhamma.
3. Some contemporary developments in the Mahayâna came to influence not only the practices of Theravâda, but also some aspects of Theravâda doctrine as well. These developments must be taken into account in the reconstruction of the original message of the Buddha.

It must not be thought that Basic Buddhism should exclude everything found in the Mahayana teachings. While Mahayana has little to contribute to the reconstruction of the theory of early Buddhism, it did retain some early Buddhist practices which play a subordinate role in Pali Buddhism but could play a useful role in modern Buddhist practice. Mahayana Buddhism shifted the Buddhist ideal from the Arahant of Theravada Buddhism to the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva was seen as a being who while being capable of enlightenment and release from samsâra, wilfully postpones becoming fully liberated in order to help others. A natural consequence of this view was that the primary Buddhist virtue was compassion (karunâ). In contrast to this Theravada had regarded *mettâ* (loving-kindness) as the dominant virtue. There is a need to reinstate compassion in Buddhist practice at least to an extent equal to that given to mettâ.

Another aspect of Mahâyâna that is important is the greater role given to the lay community in contrast to that of monks. Early Buddhism had denoted by the Sangha the community of all Buddhists who had made some progress in the Dhamma. This Sangha included both monks and lay persons, but Theravada Buddhism tended to be excessively centred on the monastic orders, and included in the Sangha only ordained monks, and sometimes reserved for them the exclusive role as teachers of the Dhamma. Mahâyâna took a more flexible attitude. While the role of monks in Buddhism cannot be underrated, and they will continue to play an important part in contemporary Buddhism, it is clear that basic Buddhism should reinstate the role of the lay community[(7)] .

Basic Buddhism should not be seen as an innovation in Buddhism but rather as an attempt to go back to the roots of Buddhism, to what would have been the actual doctrines preached originally by the Buddha. Go to Contents

CHAPTER 2

The Life of the Buddha

The founder of Buddhism was an historical person, Siddhatta Gtama who lived in North India from 563 BCE to 483 BCE.[(8)] His father was Suddhodana the ruler of the Sâkyas a people inhabiting a country which lay on the border between modern Nepal and India. At the time of his birth his mother Mahâmâyâ was on a journey and he was born in a park at Lumbini on the full moon day of the month of April-May in the year 563 BCE. A commemorative pillar was erected on the spot by King Asoka some three centuries later.

Several legends are attached to the birth of Sidhatta, including a prophecy by the brahmin Asita that he would either be a great ("universal") ruler or a fully enlightened teacher. It is said that Suddhodana wanted his son to become a monarch rather than a great religious teacher, and accordingly brought him up in the lap of luxury with the training befitting a future king. But very little is known of the early life of Sidhatta. No indication of his future destiny is recorded other than a reference to an incident when as a child he went into a meditative trance while seated in an open field watching an agricultural festival. When he was sixteen Sidhatta was married to Bhaddakaccânâ (also known as Yasodarâ).

The events that forced his decision to renounce the life of luxury he was leading and take to the religious life occurred when he was about 29 years of age. It is claimed that at this time he encountered the famous four signs, that of an old man, of a sick man, of a corpse and of a religious recluse, and that these led him to question the unsatisfactoriness of life and the need to find a way of escape from its travails. The misery and brevity of human existence struck him with force, and also the desire to find a solution to the problems of life. But the critical event was the birth of his first child, a son who was named Râhula. When the child was born Gotama realised that if he were to assume the role of a parent he would never leave the household life in this quest for the meaning of life, and accordingly he decided to renounce the household life. Fearing that a public announcement would bring pressure to change his mind, he left his palace with only his charioteer accompanying him, donned the garments of a recluse and went into the homeless life.

Gotama thus became a *samana [sramana]* or religious mendicant. The samanas were people who devoted their entire time to the search for religious truth. They did not adhere to the prevailing religious orthodoxy of the day, the Brahmanical religion based on the ancient Vedas. They were highly individualistic and engaged in a variety of practices. The next seven years of Gotama's life were devoted to his quest. He became the pupils of the leading religious teachers of his day, such as Âlâra Kâlâma

and Uddaka Râmaputta. They were the leading exponents of meditation of the day, and Gotama mastered all the meditation techniques they could teach including the development of the *jhânas*. Since these did not provide the solution he was seeking he continued in his search.

By this time his wandering had taken him south of the Ganges river. He now formed an association with five other samanas, who were more inclined to the practice of austerities. But even these did not satisfy Gotama. He now continued his search alone. His search finally ended on the full moon day in the month of Vesâkha (April-May) in the year 528 BCE when he meditating under an Asattha or Pippala tree (*ficus religiosa*) near Uruvelâ (now known as Buddha-Gayâ). He had become the Buddha (a term meaning the "Enlightened One"), by which title he was henceforth to be universally known. The tree has come to be known as the Bodhi (or Bo) tree, and is regarded as a symbol of the Buddha's enlightenment.

After considerable thought he decided to proclaim his discovery for the benefit of mankind. His hesitation arose from the complexity of the system he had discovered, and its opposition to the comfortable beliefs which then as now appeared to offer an easier solution to the spiritual needs of people. The first proclamation of the Dhamma took place at the deer-park in Isipatana close to the city of Sarnath (near modern Benares) to the five former ascetic companions, who became the Buddha's first disciples. From that day on until his death some 45 years later the Buddha travelled around Northern India tirelessly proclaiming his message. The five ascetics became the first members of the Buddhist Sangha (or Community of disciples) which has survived to this day in unbroken succession.

The exact chronology of the Buddha's ministry has not been recorded and cannot be reconstructed. His more important discourses are preserved, but while they indicate the circumstances leading to each discourse, and often the place of its delivery, there is generally no indication of the date or even year of the discourse. From the places mentioned in the discourses it is possible to reconstruct the area of the Buddha's travels. This was confined mainly to the middle Gangetic plain with Kapilavatthu to the North, Uruvelâ to the South, and Campa to the East. The Western extent is not certain, some suttas being delivered not far from the modern Delhi. This area straddled the Ganges river, and included parts of two important kingdoms in the Buddha's time. These were Kosala which was located North of the river Ganges with Sâvatthi as its capital, and Magadha which was to the South of Kosala with Rajagaha as its capital. The Buddha became well known in both these kingdoms and their capital cities. There are legendary accounts of visits of the Buddha to places as far away as Sri Lanka, and even to heavenly domains, but these have no historical basis.

The Buddha and his followers initially followed the wandering life of the *samanas*, but soon developed the habit of staying at least part of the year in a monastery. The period of monastic sojourn came to be known as the "rains retreat" *(vas)* because it coincided with the Indian monsoon. The monasteries were donated by wealthy lay followers. In the early years the Buddha spent his rains retreats south of the Ganges river mainly at Râjagaha, but gradually moved north. In the later years the most frequently visited location was Sâvatthi, where the Buddha spent 23 of the last 25 rains retreats. The very last rains retreat was spent at Vesali when the Buddha was on his last journey from Râjagaha to Sâvatthi.(9) The Buddha's death (*parinibbâna*) took place at a place called Kusinâra mid-way between Vesâli and Sâvatthi.

While some debate may attach to the exact dates of the Buddha's life there can be no doubt about the historicity of the Buddha(10). The Buddha's teaching, unlike that of many other founders of religious systems, was so unique, original and consistent that it could only have been the work of a single person. The Buddha did not appropriate on himself the role of a God or of a prophet of God, in order to validate his teachings. His teachings were derived from his own unaided efforts.(11)

Recently discovered archaeological evidence corroborate the accounts in the texts. These include the discovery of urns with inscriptions indicating that they were the receptacle for the relics of the Buddha. King Asoka's pillars, though a few centuries after the death of the Buddha also identify the places associated with the life story of the Buddha. The most recent discoveries have been archaeological remains authenticating the birthplace of the Buddha as Lumbini.

There is a detailed account of the last days of the Buddha in the Mahâparinibbâna sutta, but no such detailed information is available for any other part of his life. After his death the relics of the Buddha was distributed and stupas were built over them.Go to Contents

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CHAPTER 3

The Basic Teaching of the Buddha

Buddhism recognises no creeds whose uncritical acceptance is expected of its followers. Instead the Buddha enunciated certain basic laws and truths whose veracity he invited his followers to test for themselves. One of the traditional epithets of the Dhamma is "ehipassiko" (meaning literally "come and see") which is an appeal to the empirical verification of the Dhamma.

In his very first discourse the Buddha identified Four Noble Truths as forming the core of the Dhamma. These four Truths have since become a convenient way of stating the fundamentals of the Dhamma. They are often regarded as the most basic teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha also identified three fundamental characteristics (*tilakkhana*) of the Dhamma. These basic tenets the Buddha presented in several ways. Two such presentations have become well known. These are the Three Signata (tilakkhana), perhaps better rendered as the three basic laws, and the Four Noble Truths. The acceptance of the validity of these laws and truths, if only in the first instance as a working hypothesis, is the *sin qua non* of a Buddhist. In addition the Buddha proclaimed several other doctrines, the most important being those of karma and re-birth. The validity of such doctrines is more difficult for an ordinary person to verify, but their dogmatic acceptance is not expected as a fundamental requirement of those who go for refuge to the "Three Gems" of Buddhism [(12)].

The three signata and the four truths form the core of the Dhamma. They are at the same time both alternatives and complements to each other. It may however be appropriate to consider them separately.

The Three Fundamental Laws of the Buddha

The three signata refer to the three essential marks or characteristics of all "compounded" things, animate or inanimate, microscopic or macroscopic. Because of the universality of their applicability they could be considered as having the force of universal laws. These characteristics are impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), and insubstantiality (anatta). As these translations of the basic Pâli terms are only approximate, a further elaboration of these basic concepts of the Dhamma is necessary.

(1) **Anicca**. The law of impermanence asserts that all phenomena are subject to constant change, to rise and fall, and no permanent states, either physical or animate, exists. The dynamic nature of phenomena is today a commonplace of science. But until quite recently many physical features of the universe were considered immutable, and in the human plane the belief in enduring states or characteristics is still an article of faith in many religious systems. The law of anicca establishes impermanence as the basic universal law.

(2) **Dukkha**. The law of dukkha states that all complexes of phenomena, are in the final analysis unsatisfactory. It means that no compounded thing or state could be considered as a universal norm of goodness or beauty. It imparts the normative dimension into the consideration of objective reality which is the hallmark of the Dhamma. The law of dukkha is usually considered in relation to the human situation, and here unsatisfactoriness manifests itself as "suffering", which is the popular

rendition of the term. It is in this sense that it constitutes the first of the four Noble Truths.

(3) **Anatta**. The third law states that there is no permanent essence, "self", ego, or soul in phenomena. The term originates as the negation of the concept of *atta* (âtman) which was the equivalent in the old Brahmanical religion of the Buddha's day to what other religions have called the "soul". The Buddha advanced psycho-physical explanation of the individual which leaves no room for a soul. The Buddha recognised that the delusion of self or ego was one of the most powerful of human instincts, and at the same time one of the most potent sources of ignorance and wrong action. In applying the anatta doctrine to the phenomena of the external world some care mush be exercised. Early Buddhism did not deny the reality of the external world. It argued that the phenomena of the external world could be broken down into its constituent components, and that nothing else other than these components existed. It was only in this sense that the phenomena of the external world were declared to be empty (suñña). Some schools of Mahayâna Buddhism have taken the doctrine of emptiness (suññâtâ) to imply a denial of the reality of the external world. This interpretation is foreign to early Buddhism. Early Buddhism only asserts that there is no fixed essence or being in phenomena, but only a process of becoming (bhâva).

The Four Noble Truths

The four noble truths result from the application of the three basic laws to the human condition. The Buddha frequently asserted that he was interested in the problem of the alleviation of human suffering: "Only one thing do I teach, suffering, and how to end it". His approach to the problem of suffering was similar to that of the physician to his patient. He first diagnoses the malady, then seeks the cause of the malady, next finds out whether a cure is possible. Finally he prescribes the medicine. The four truths correspond to the four steps of this diagnostic-curative procedure.

(1) **The Truth of Suffering**.

This truth affirms that the law of dukkha is applicable to the human condition:

"Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering. To be separated from the pleasant is suffering; to be in contact with the unpleasant is suffering; in short the five aggregates of existence connected with attachment are all suffering".

The validity of the truth of suffering need not be belaboured here; it is essentially a matter for personal verification. The truth of dukkha refers not to the on-existence of the pleasurable and the joyful, but to the very incompleteness and finitude of that

enjoyment. The imputation of pessimism sometimes made of early Buddhism is without foundation; suffering in the Buddhist sense encompasses what is usually termed "evil" in other religo-philosophical systems, and the existence of evil, caused either by chance events or by deliberate ill-will is not seriously denied.

(2) **The Truth of the Cause of Suffering**.

The proximate cause of suffering is craving (tanhâ), but the root cause of ignorance (avijjâ). The objects of craving are manifold: sensual pleasure, material possessions, glory, power, fame, ego, craving for re-birth, even craving for nibbâna (nirvâna). There are various degrees of craving from a mild wish to an acute grasping (upâdâna). Craving is the proximate cause of suffering and is itself caused by other conditioning factors. The full formula of causation is contained in the Buddhist formula of dependent origination, where the causes for existence and suffering are traced back through a chain of twelve links, back to ignorance.

(3) **The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering**.

This growth constitutes the "good news" of Buddhism. The cause of suffering could be counteracted. This truth affirms that a way out of suffering exists, which if followed will lead the individual to a state of non-suffering called nibbâna, perhaps better known by the Sanskrit form of the term, Nirvâna. If the first truth could be considered to have a taint of "pessimism", this truth has the full flavour of "optimism".

(4) **The Truth of the Path to Enlightenment.**

The Buddhist path to enlightenment is that discovered by the Buddha through his own personal effort and practice. It has been called the Middle Path (majjima paipadâ) because it is a *via media* between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. Both extremes of practice were common in the Buddha's day (as indeed they are in out own). The Buddha calls such extremes vain, profitless and ignoble. The path of the Buddha avoids two kinds of activity usually considered essential for salvation by many religious systems. These are: (1) prayer to supra human powers and agencies, and (2) elaborate rites and rituals. On the contrary these are considered as being positive impediments on the path to the cessation of suffering and the gaining of insight and wisdom.

While the Four Noble Truths and the Three Laws of Existence contain the kernel of the Buddha's teaching, and were proclaimed by the Buddha in his very first discourse, there are many other doctrines that are central to a philosophical system which is as

deep as that of Buddhism. A few of these aspects of the teaching will be mentioned here and a few of these will be considered in detail elsewhere.

The Goal of Buddhism and the Meaning of Life

The Buddhist goal is the achievement of human perfection, which should be the real purpose of life. It is in this sense that life has meaning, and which should inform the most salient aspects of human activity. A person who has made good progress along the Buddhist path would have reached a high degree of happiness, contentment and freedom from fear. Sometimes material affluence is seen as the goal of many persons, but these do not necessarily bring about the happiness which the Buddha sought to promote.

Many religions look upon the present life as a ground for laying the foundation in a future life after physical death. Some Buddhists also adopt this attitude and try to secure a good rebirth or even Nibbâna without residue. Exhortations from the Buddha could be produced to this effect. But the Buddha also affirms that we must make use of the present life, of which we are sure, and that the pursuit of the Noble Eightfold Path is the best way of doing so regardless of any consequences that may happen after death.

The Theory of Causality

One of the central doctrines of Buddhism is that all phenomena owe their origin and existence to pre-conditioning factors. Everything is the result of a some cause or other working on the thing concerned. This is a view that is also shared by modern science, for without the operation of systematic causes much of the achievement of modern science may not be possible. But whereas science generally restricts this principle to physical phenomena and events, in Buddhism the theory of causation considers causation as a central characteristic of all phenomena, even non-physical ones which do not form the subject matter of scientific enquiry.

The Buddhist theory of causation should be distinguished from the theory of the "First Cause" which is often used by theists to prove the existence of God. The theory of the first cause asserts that since God is identified as the first cause (all others being "created" by God) there is no need to explain the existence of God. Buddhism does not agree with this position and considers it as another instance of sophistry ("eel-wriggling") to which theists resort to sustain their absurd views. (13)

The Doctrine of Dependent Origination

This is one of the cardinal discoveries of the Buddha during his enlightenment. It is presented as a list of twelve bases which are causally linked to each other. Since the links from a closed circle we can break into the chain at any point. The order in the traditional list is as follows: (1) Ignorance, (2) Volitional formations (*sankhâra),* (3) consciousness, (4) mind-and-form, (5) sense-bases, (6) contact, (7) feeling, (8) craving, (9) clinging, (10) becoming, (11) birth, (12) old-age-and-death.

There are various ways of interpreting this chain, but we shall not deal with them here. The traditional interpretation of this is that it represents three phases often interpreted as lifetimes. The first phase (the past) is comprised of links 1 and 2; the second (the present) of links 3 to 10, and the third (the future) of links 11 and 12. In the ongoing process what if the present becomes and past and what is the future becomes the present. A detailed explication of this famous formula is not attempted here.

Emptiness and non-Self

The doctrine of "emptiness" (unyâtâ) is more associated with Mahayana than with Theravada. If it represents another term for the anatta doctrine described earlier it presents no new problem. However some Mahayana interpretations tend towards philosophical idealism and towards the Hindu notion that the world is an illusion (mâyâ) but such an interpretation cannot be entertained by Basic Buddhism.

Humanism and Rationalism

Basic Buddhism has some affinity with Western notions of humanism and rationalism. However these terms are used in a variety of contexts, with humanism associated with theistic notions on the one hand and extreme secular-materialist notions on the other. But if humanism means what it should mean, that is the primacy of the human as against the Divine, then it conforms to the Buddhist approach.

With rationalism as the application of reason and the scientific method to investigation there is much in common. One of the basic sutta of the Buddha, the Kâlâma Sutta given in the Anguttara Nikâya is rightly regarded as the Buddhist charter for free inquiry.Go to Contents

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CHAPTER 4

The Buddhist Path

The Buddha's path of practice is called the Noble Eightfold path. The eight components of this path, as presented in traditional order, could be briefly described as follows:

1. Right View (Understanding).

This is the right way of interpreting and viewing the world. It involves the realisation of the three signata in all phenomena, and of the Four Noble Truths as being applicable to the human condition. More generally it involves the abandonment of all dogmatically held wrong views.

2. Right Intention (Thought).

The Buddha argued that all human thought and action spring from basic "intentions", "dispositions", or "roots", which are capable of deliberate cultivation, training and control. The three roots of wrong, unwholesome or "unskilful" action are: Greed, Aversion and Delusion. The right intention which the Buddhist path requires, is an intention which is free from these roots. The Buddha called the intention "that is free from greed and lust, free from ill-will, free from cruelty".

3. Right Speech.

Since speech is the most powerful means of communication, the Buddha emphasises the cultivation of right modes of speech. These have been described as avoiding falsehood and adhering to the truth; abstaining from tale-bearing and instead promoting harmony; refraining from harsh language and cultivating gentle and courteous speech; avoiding vain, irresponsible and foolish talk, and speaking in reasoned terms on subjects of value. Naturally right speech includes in the modern context right ways of communication whatever the medium used.

4. Right Action.

This refers to wilful acts done by a person, whether by body or mind. Under the former it involves such forms of ethical conduct as not killing (or harming) living beings, theft, sexual wrong-doing, etc.[(14)] On the positive side right action, also called wholesome deeds (*kusalakamma*), involves acts of loving-kindness (*mettâ*), compassion (*karunâ*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), generosity (*câga*), etc.

5. Right Livelihood.

This involves not choosing an occupation that brings suffering to others, e.g. trading in living beings (including humans), arms, drugs, poisons, etc.; slaughtering, fishing,

soldiering, sooth-saying, trickery, usury, etc. This provides the economic blueprint for a truly Buddhist society.

6. Right Effort.

This has been described as "the effort of avoiding or overcoming evil and unwholesome things, and of developing and maintaining wholesome things" (Ñyânâtiloka). Right effort enables an individual to cultivate the right frame of mind in order to accomplish the ethical requirements under right speech, right action and right livelihood. It is generally presented as a factor of mental training, enabling individuals to develop the sublime states of loving-kindness (*mettâ*) compassion (*karunâ*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). However it has a general applicability and the effort could be directed to all wholesome activities.

7. Right Mindfulness.

This is the basic Buddhist technique of cultivating awareness. The classic sutta on the subject is the satipahâna sutta which will be considered briefly in the next chapter. Although viewed as a meditation component in fact right awareness has a wider applicability.

8. Right Concentration.

This is the concentration of mind associated with wholesome consciousness which could be achieved through the systematic cultivation of meditation. Progress along this line is indicated by the achievement of the different levels of "absorption" (*jhânas*).[(15)]

Of these eight components of the Path, the first two have usually been grouped under wisdom (*paññâ*), the next three under morality (*sîla*), and the last three under mental development (*bhâvanâ*). This classification is not quite satisfactory, but it does present a broad grouping that is useful in many contexts.

The first of these components (right view) is generally considered the most important, but there is no particular order of importance when it comes to the others. However different traditions and exponents have put different degrees of stress on the different components. It will be seen that there is no single component of the path that can be called "meditation". However in course of time the component of mental development came to be regarded as meditation. In view of the importance attached to meditation, particularly in Western practice it is necessary to examine this subject in the special subsection. This is done in the following section.Go to Contents

CHAPTER 5

The Role of Meditation

We have seen that the Buddhist path consists of wisdom/knowledge, ethical conduct, and mental development. Some teachers put an almost exclusive emphasis on the last of these (calling it "meditation") as the route to the other two. Because of the widespread propagation of this view in the West it is worth considering it in some detail[(16)] .

The widely held picture of meditation in the West is one where the meditator sits in silent company, usually in the "lotus position", and is engaged in inward contemplation. The session may last from a half-hour to several hours. It is generally a congregational activity but it is usually presided over by a teacher who determines the duration of the session and may give directions as to how the activity is to proceed. Practitioners are encouraged to engage in the activity individually at home if congregational meditation is not possible. Often special meditation retreats are held lasting from 3 to 14 days in which up to 12 hours a day may be devoted to meditation activities. Because of the long periods involved sitting meditation is alternated with "walking meditation", sometimes also with yogic exercises. Often silence is enforced during the retreat (called the Rule of Golden Silence), and the teacher has individual meetings with each participant during which the individual practitioner's "progress" is probed and special instructions given. The teacher is very often looked upon as a "guru" as in the Hindu tradition. This type of meditative exercise is often represented as the exclusive way to "practice" Buddhism. We shall use the term "stylised meditation"[(17)] to designate this kind of meditation.

Meditation on the other hand has always been a valid part of Buddhist practice (note however that is a part, nor the whole of it). The task is then to differentiate genuine Buddhist meditation from stylised meditation. Buddhist mediation is the practice of the last two components of the eightfold path (*sati* and *samâdhi*) in the "right"(*sammâ*) manner. The Pali term that is used to denote stylised meditation is *bhavanâ*. This term is not used with great frequency in the Pali Canon and when used is associated with mental development from whatever kind of activity that will improve the mind.

Stylised meditation is derived from meditation practices in the principal Asian Theravada countries, viz. Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand each of which has developed their own meditation traditions. In spite of the diversity within each country a few broad generalisation may be possible. In Sri Lanka the primary focus of

Buddhist practice has been on the cultivation of *paññâ* and in the development of ethical practice (*sîla*). Meditation has not occupied great prominence and has been undertaken on an individual basis, rarely performed in a congregational setting. In this the Sri Lankan Buddhists have generally followed the instructions on meditation given in the Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa which was composed in that country. Where meditation has been used as the principal focus in Sri Lanka it has been practised by reclusive forest monks with little contact with the rest of the Bhikkhu-sangha or the laity. The country from where stylised meditation was introduced into the West is Thailand. Here the "forest" orders have enjoyed much more status than elsewhere. They tend to look on stylised meditation as the key to the entire Buddhist practice including the achievement of wisdom and morality. This system attaches much importance to the *jhânas* which is considered almost indispensable to enlightenment. There is little attempt at sutta-study except those relating to meditation. While this kind of meditation may suit the lifestyle of forest monks it is their importation into the general community, especially of lay persons, that is questionable. If the Sri Lankan and Thai modes of meditation can be taken as occupying two ends of a spectrum the meditation practice of Burma occupies an intermediate position. Here meditation is taken more seriously than in the Sri Lankan tradition but some of the excesses of the Thai forest tradition are avoided[(18)] .

Buddhist meditation of whatever type takes two principal forms - the cultivation of calm and tranquillity (*samatha bhâvanâ*) and the cultivation of insight (*vipassanâ bhâvanâ*). The efficacy of meditation in promoting calm and tranquillity is indisputable. In fact it is for this reason that it is also adopted by some non-Buddhist schemes such as Hinduism and "transcendental meditation". But its use as a method of achieving insight into reality it may be questioned. True insight comes only we understand that the three signata underlie all phenomena. In meditation one may come to the realise this within in the ambit of ones own experience, but it will not lead one understand the universality of these traits. Thus meditation has to be supplemented by other methods such as the first two components of the Buddhist path.

The classic discourse on which the theory of meditation is based is the Satipahâna Sutta, which occurs twice in the Canon. Here the Buddha identifies four methods (or foundations) of meditation. These are the contemplation of the body (*kâyânupassanâ*), of feeling (*vedanânupassanâ*), of the mind (*cittânupassanâ*) and finally that of the dhammas (*dhammânupassanâ*). Some preconditions are laid down in the Sutta before these contemplations are attempted. One is that the practitioner should have "overcome in this world covetousness and discontent" (*vineyya loke abhijjâ domanassa*). In the case of lay persons this does not require complete withdrawal from the world, but the development of a sufficient degree of detachment from it. The Satipahâna cannot be attempted by those completely given to greed. The second is

that the contemplations should be done in an empty room (*suññâgâra*) or if outdoors at the root of a tree. This rules out the congregational sessions in which stylised meditation takes place.

The contemplation of the body, with the initial focus on the breath, is the initial contemplation that is taught by most teachers. The Buddha used it purely as the starting point of his sequence of contemplations, and he even recommends the "lotus position" in which to undertake the contemplations, which is a classic yogic stance. The Buddha extended the traditional Vedic meditation concerns by extending the contemplation to other physical postures and awareness of other bodily actions, and finally to the contemplation of the foulness of the body. The progress of the meditation from the body to feelings is also relatively easy for many practitioners. The next stage of the contemplation of the mind is relatively more difficult. The objective here is to achieve one-pointedness of mind. This is relatively difficult because of the propensity of the mind to shift quite fast.

The last one requires contemplation of the Dhammas. In the Buddha's time when the corpus of dhamma was memorised, this contemplation was the only way of acquiring the knowledge of the dhamma. Today the situation is somewhat different and this particular foundation of mindfulness could be acquired by discursive study.

The view that the awakening of wisdom can only come through intense meditation is not only found in schools like Zen but is also held by some teachers of Theravâda[(19)] . However meditation in Buddhism is primarily a method of mental training. It could be used to calm the mind, to instil tranquillity, and to set the stage for the realisation of true insight. In fact fascination with meditation can be a distraction from the true path. A capable exponent of early Buddhism David Maurice puts this quite well: "There is meditation at the very beginning of the practice but the practice is to get away from meditation" [(20)] .

Even though stylised meditation may not be necessary it is necessarily harmful. It could suit the temperament of some people, especially those who desire a strict discipline. On the other hand what we have termed Buddhist meditation is something that anyone can do with profit. It may not lead to the final goal in itself, but it could be a great help in the fulfilment of the other components of the path.
Go to Contents

CHAPTER 6

The Buddhist Attitude to God

It is first of all necessary to establish what is meant by the term "God". This term is used to designate a Supreme Being endowed with the qualities of omnipotence and omniscience, who is the creator of the universe with all its contents, and the chief law-giver for humans. God is generally considered as being concerned with the welfare of his human creatures, and the ultimate salvation of those who follow his dictates. God is therefore a person of some kind, and the question whether such an entity exists or not is fundamental to all theistic systems.

In contrast to this notion of a personal God some modern theologians have interpreted the term "God" as representing some kind of abstract principle of good (or "ground of being"). This view was first developed in the ancient Indian *Upanishads* where God is equated with an abstract principle (*Brahman*). The ancient Indian philosophers could entertain such a view because they also had a theory of karma which really does away with the need for a personal God. Buddhists too have a theory of karma, which is different from that of the Hindus, and which even more unequivocally dispenses with the need for a Deity. The use of the term "God' to denote an abstract reality by monotheistic theologians who have no theory of karma is difficult to justify; one suspects that this is merely a device to explain away the contradictions that arise from the notion of a personal God. In fact the actual practice of theistic religion proceeds as if God is a real person of some kind or other.

Just as Buddhism rejects the notion of a Supreme God it also rejects the notion of an abstract God-principle operating in the universe. The notion of *Brahman* (in the neuter) is not discussed at all in the Buddhist texts, and even in India it may well be a post-Buddhist development resulting from the attempt to reconcile the belief in God(s) with the powerful critique of the Buddha. It is therefore the attitude of Buddhism to the notion of a supreme personal God animating the Universe that we must consider.

One popular misconception of Buddhism must be dismissed at this point. This is view that the Buddha is some kind of God figure. In the Theravada tradition the Buddha is regarded as a supremely enlightened human teacher who has come to his last birth in samsra (the Buddhist cycle of existence). Even Mahayana traditions which tend to think in terms of transcendental Buddhas do not directly make a claim for Buddha as God. Thus the Buddha cannot be considered as playing a God-like role in Buddhism.

In the Buddhist texts Mahâ Brahmâ is the equivalent of God and is represented as claiming the following attributes for himself: "I am Brahmâ, the Great Brahmâ, the Supreme One, the Mighty, the All-seeing, the Ruler, the Lord of all, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief of all appointing to each his place, the Ancient of days, the Father of all that is and will be." (*Dgha Nikya*, II, 263).

The Buddha dismisses all these claims of Mahâ Brahmâ as being due to his own delusions brought about by ignorance. Mahâ-Brahmâ is seen simply a *deva* unenlightened and subject to the samsric process as determined by his kamma (cf the Brahmajla and the Aggañña Suttas). In the Khevadda Sutta he is forced to admit to an inquiring monk that he is unable to answer a question that is posed to him, and advises the monk to consult the Buddha. This clearly shows the Brahm acknowledges the superiority of the Buddha.

In the West a number of "arguments" have been adduced to prove or disprove the existence of God. Some of these were anticipated by the Buddha. One of the most popular is the "first cause" argument according to which everything must have a cause, and God is considered the first cause of the Universe. The Buddhist theory of causation says that every thing must have preconditions for its existence, and this law must also extend to "God" should such an entity exist. But while the "first cause" claims that God creates everything, it exempts God from the ambit of this law. However if exemptions are made with respect to God such exemptions could be made with respect to other things also hereby contradicting the principle of the first cause.

But the argument which the Buddha most frequently uses is what is now called the "argument from evil" which in the Buddhist sense could be stated as the argument from *dukkha* (suffering or unsatisfactoriness). This states that the empirical fact of the existence of *dukkha* cannot be reconciled with the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient being who is also all good. The following verses from the Bhûridatta Jataka bring this out clearly:

If the creator of the world entire	*sace hi so issaro sabbaloke*
They call God, of every being be the Lord	*Brahmâ bahûbhûtapati pajâna*
Why does he order such misfortune	*ki sabbaloke vidahîalakkhi*
And not create happiness but only discord?	*ki sabbaloka na sukhi akâsi*
If the creator of the world entire	*sace hi so issaro sabbaloke*
They call God, of every being be the Lord	*Brahmâ bahûbhûtapati pajâna*
Why prevail deceit, lies and ignorance	*mâyâmusâvajjamadena c'api*
And he such inequity and injustice create?	*loka adhammena kimatthaksi*
If the creator of the world entire	*sace hi so issaro sabbaloke*
they call God, of every being be the Lord	*Brahmâ bahûbhûtapati pajâna*
Then an evil master is he, (O Aritta)	*adhammiyo bhûtapatî Ariha*
Knowing what's right did let wrong prevail!	*dhamme satî yo vidahi adhamma*

[Translated by the Author]

The Buddha argues that the three most commonly given attributes of God, viz. omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence towards humanity cannot all be mutually compatible with the existential fact of *dukkha*.[21] Go to Contents

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CHAPTER 7

The Buddhist Attitude to Man

In considering the Buddhist view of man we are essentially looking at the psychological postulates of Buddhism which has sometimes been described as a psychological system. Given the meaning normally attached to Psychology this is too narrow a description of psychology. Buddhism deals with many other matters which are not normally included in psychology.

But there is a psychological dimension to Buddhism. This is because of the great concern which Buddhism has with the mind and with the training of the mind. In this sense Buddhism is unique amongst the world religions. The first stanza of the well-known book of Buddhist aphorisms the *Dhammapada* sums up very well the primacy that Buddhism gives to the mind:

monopubbagamâ dhammâ manosehâ manomayâ
manasâ ce paduhena bhâsati vâ karoti vâ Tato na dukkhamanvet cakka va vahato pada

Mind is the forerunner of all states, mind-based and mind-made are they

If one speaks or acts with an evil mind

Suffering results, just as the wagon wheel follows the ox drawing it Similarly good thoughts lead to good actions.

Most religious systems decompose the individual into a body and a soul. In this division the body includes what Buddhists (and modern psychologists) would regard as the mind. Very often in this scheme the mind is located in the heart. There is no location given for the soul. It is in fact a mysterious entity created by God. While the physical body perishes at death the soul goes either to Heaven or to Hell where it is reunited with a body (perhaps similar to the old one) and continues its existence as one of sensuous conform or of torment depending on the destination.

The Buddha dispensed with this scheme which was similar to the system advocated in the old Vedas[22] . Instead the Buddha identified five constituents of the empirical person, the first of which (*rûpa*) was physical and the last four (collectively called *nâma*) were mind components. These five components have been called Groups of existence or Five Aggregates (*pañcakkhandâ*). These are:

1. **Corporeality** (*rûpa*). This is the physical basis of existence. The five sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) are especially important in generating the various signals which are processed by the mind (which is also recognised as an organ in is own right).

2. **Feeling** (*vedanâ*). Feelings are a by-product of the contact between the organs of the physical body and the external world. They are classified in various ways - wholesome and unwholesome, gross and subtle, painful and pailful, etc.

3. **Perception** (*saññâ*). This is how the mind processes the feelings that its sense organs transmit. No two individuals have the same perception of the same feelings they may experience.

4. **Formations** (*sankhârâ*). The formations are the deliberative acts of the individuals. it is often referred to as karmic formations.

5. **Consciousness** (*viññâna*). This is the condition of being aware of the environment in which the individual exists.

While corporeality is readily understood the other four components are more subtle. Three of these, viz. feeling, perception and consciousness, are known to modern psychological science, and the Buddhist interpretation does not differ substantially from the scientific one. But the concept of "formations" is not known to modern psychology. At the same time there is nothing in conventional psychology that denies its existence. Here the Buddhist view transcends that of the conventional analysis of mental components. Go to Contents

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CHAPTER 8

Knowledge, Wisdom and Enlightenment

The Buddha traced the root cause of suffering to ignorance; so the search for enlightenment is the supreme activity for the Buddhist[23]. The activity proceeds at both the intellectual and the intuitive levels. Pure intellectual understanding is not

sufficient, although it is often a very good starting point. When enlightenment is attained pure intellectual understanding is transcended by an intuitive grasp of the truths of the Universe.

If knowledge is the outcome of "intellectual" activity, a person's fund of knowledge at any moment of time is made up of a number of beliefs that he considers valid. The Buddha was quite clear on what he considered legitimate to believe in. In his discourse to the Kâlâmas (a people who were confused by the diversity of viewpoints they were confronted with) the Buddha said:

"Come, O Kâlâmas, do not accept anything from mere hearsay, or from what you have been told, or because it is mentioned in sacred teachings, or because of logic merely, or because of its methods, or in consideration of plausible reasoning, or by tolerating views based on speculation, or because of its appearance of its possibility and because `your teacher is venerable'. But when you, Kâlâmas, realize by yourself that views are unwholesome, faulty, condemned by the wise, and that they lead to harm and misery when practised and observed, then Kâlâmas, you should reject them"

This is the criterion of acceptability which the Buddha wanted to apply to all claims, including his own. In Buddhism there cannot be room for blind faith, and all propositions, religious or otherwise should be subjected to analysis and practice. The reference to "mere logic" and "plausible reasoning" in the quotation given serves as a caution concerning some extreme forms of "rationalism" which argue that "pure reason" is sufficient to establish the truth of metaphysical propositions (like that of the existence of God). Deductive methods are useful, but as they can only bring out what is already contained in the premises of the argument, they cannot be used as a vehicle for the discovery of *new* truths. Rightly has the Kâlâmasutta been termed the Buddhist charter of free enquiry.

As a result of the Buddha's rational and tolerant attitude early Buddhism never had concepts like heresy, apostasy and blasphemy (and this is true of all subsequent Buddhist schools). In many theistic systems imprisonment, torture and death have been inflicted on people who have refused to bow before dogma.

In Buddhist epistemology three levels of understanding are recognised. These are (using the Pali terminology): *dii* ("views"), *ñâna* ("science"), and *bodhi* ("wisdom"). *Dii* refers to views accepted more or less dogmatically. Not all such beliefs are necessarily harmful, because some people could be motivated to act wholesomely even though motivated by incorrect views. But more usually such "views" can be extremely harmful[(24)] . The Buddha did not consider knowledge consisting of *dii* to be useful in the longer term. *Dii* is often contrasted with scientifically based knowledge, which results from thinking, from learning and from

mental development. This is usually terms *ñâna* or *paññâ*. The acquisition of this kind of knowledge is useful, and is not discouraged; but it alone will not lead to enlightenment. This is clearly seen in the case of many eminent scientists, who have progressed far in the acquisition of particular kinds of knowledge, but have not been able to outgrow the dogmatic views inculcated in early childhood.

P>True enlightenment can arise out of the third kind of knowledge, consisting of wisdom (*bodhi*) and insight (*vipassanâ*). This results from the intuitive realisation of the Buddhist laws and truths after the successful traverse of the Middle Path. The enlightenment process involves the breaking of the ten fetters (*sayojanâ*) that bind people to the phenomenal world. These are the five lower fetters of personality belief, sceptical doubt, clinging to rite and ritual, sensuous craving and ill-will, and the five higher fetters of craving for "fine material" existence, craving for "immaterial existence", conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.[(25)]
Go to Contents

CHAPTER 9

The Doctrines of Karma and Rebirth

The Buddhist doctrine of kamma [karma] ("deeds", "actions"), and the closely related doctrine of rebirth, are perhaps the best known, and often the least understood, of Buddhist doctrines. The matter is complicated by the fact that the other Indian religious traditions of Hinduism and Jainism have their own theories of Karma and Reincarnation. It is in fact the Hindu versions that are better known in the West. The Buddhist theory of *kamma* (to give the Pali word) and rebirth are quite distinct from their other Indian counterparts.

In Buddhism the law of kamma is the moral law of causation - good actions give good results and vice versa. It is the quality of an act which determines its consequences. But what determines the karmic quality of a deed? In Hinduism it is the correct performance of a person's "duty", especially his caste duties that counts. Early Buddhism, which recognised no caste distinctions, evaluates the karmic quality of an act in terms of moral and ethical criteria. In particular it is the mental factors which accompany the commission of deed that determines its consequences or "fruits" (*vipâka*). All negative kamma (i.e. those leading to bad consequences) arise from the three roots of unwholesomeness. These are greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Accordingly good kammic results follow from deeds that spring from generosity (*caga*), loving-kindness (*mettâ*) and wisdom (*vijjâ*). The Buddha emphasised that it is the mental factors involved, rather than the deeds themselves,

that determine future consequences. Thus the same deed committed with different mental factors will have different consequences. Likewise purely accidental deeds *may* have neutral consequences; however if the accident occurred because insufficient mindfulness was exercised it could have adverse results for the person responsible for it.

The theory of kamma presupposes that individuals have "free will". Everything that happens to an individual is not the fruit of some past kamma. In fact the experiences that involve an individual may be of three kinds: some are the result of past action, some are deliberately committed free acts; and the remainder could be due to chance factors operating in the environment. The doctrine of kamma is not a theory of predestination of any kind. One common misunderstanding is not to distinguish between the action and its results - between *kamma* and *vipâka*. It must also be mentioned that the fruiting of an act may be postponed, and that it is possible to reach enlightenment - the goal of the Buddha's path - before all the previous kammas have yielded their results.

The Buddhist theory of rebirth asserts that the fruits of some kamma may manifest themselves in "future lives". This brings us to the Buddhist theory of rebirth. Similar concepts occur in other religious systems - e.g. the Platonic theory of the "pre-existence of the soul" and the Hindu-Jain theory of re-incarnation. Such reincarnation theory involves the transmigration of a soul. In Buddhism, however, it is the unripened karmic acts outstanding at the death of an individual which conditions a new birth. The last moment of consciousness too is also a conditioning factor, but it is the store of unripened kamma generated by volitional acts (the *sankhâras*) of previous existences which generates the destiny of the new individual. A newly born individual needs not only the genetic blueprint derived from the genes of the natural parents, but also a kammic blueprint derived from the volitional acts of a deceased person.

The question has been posed whether the new individual is the same as the old individual whose kamma it has inherited. The Buddha's answer to this question was somewhat enigmatic: "It is not the same, yet it is not another" (*na ca so, na ca añño*). To understand the Buddha's reply we have to investigate the criteria which establish personal identity. Is the child the same as the adult it later becomes? In the Buddhist sense we are making two observations at two points of time in a constantly changing psycho-physical entity. For legal and conventional purposes some arbitrary criteria are used, such as physical continuity over time, or the retention of memory. These define only a conventional person. Just as it is a conventional or "fictional" persons who lasts continuously from birth to death, so it is just such a conventional person who persists from one life to another. In the Buddhist view of rebirth the only links between two successive lives is the karmic residue carried over and an element of consciousness, called the re-linking consciousness: (*paisandhi viññâna*), which momentarily links the

two lives. In Buddhism there is no conception of a transmigrating soul which inhabits successive material bodies until it unites with God.

Buddhism uses the Pali term *sasâra* to denote the "round of births" in various planes of existence governed by the law of kamma. The acceptance of the validity of the hypothesis of sasâra is very difficult for some people, while for others it is the most natural of hypotheses. Some features of the observable world suggests it. In the Culakammavibhanga Sutta the Buddha is asked: "What is the reason and the cause for the inequality amongst human beings despite their being human?" (the context making it clear that it is inequality at birth that is meant). The Buddha answered: "Beings inherit their kamma, and it is kamma which divides beings in terms of their inequality". The theistic hypothesis cannot give a rational answer, except in terms of an iniquitous and unjust "God".

Some support for the theory of rebirth comes from reports of recollections of past lives, whether spontaneously or under hypnosis, which have been reported from all parts of the world. While many such reports may be mistaken or even fraudulent, some are undoubtedly genuine. According to Buddhism individuals can develop the power of "retrocognition" (i.e. the ability to recall past lives), but the development of such supernormal powers is usually the accompaniment of progress along the spiritual path of enlightenment. IT may be possible that some karmic factors may predispose some individuals towards such experiences. However parapsychological experimentation is still in its early stages, and many people have no personal recollection of their own previous lives. For such individuals the dogmatic acceptance of the doctrines of kamma and rebirth is not expected.

The central tenets of Buddhism relate not to any abstract theories about rebirth or karma but to the interpretation of human experience which is within the capacity of every person to verify. This verification can be undertaken, not in terms of an abstract cycle of lives, but also in terms of the one life we are all familiar with. The Buddhist *sasâra* is to be seen in every moment of existence, as well as the whole "cycle of births".

One would expect that in the Kâlâma Sutta, the discourse in which the Buddha decries the acceptance of theories on the basis of authority (which was quoted earlier), that he would address himself to the question of belief in the doctrine of kamma and rebirth. This he does. Referring to the "four-fold confidences" which the "noble person" (*âriya puggala*), i.e. the person who follows the path of the Buddha, attains to, the Buddha states:

" `If there is the other world and if there is the fruit and result of good and bad deeds, then there is reason that I shall be reborn into the state of bliss, the celestial world, on the dissolution of the body, after death.' This is the first confidence that he attains.

" `If, however, there is no other world and if there is no fruit and no result of good and bad deeds, then I shall myself lead he a happy life, free from enmity, malice and suffering in this very life'. This is the second confidence that he attains."

Thus even the extreme rationalist who would suspend judgement on the truth of the sasâric hypothesis (i.e. the doctrines of karma and rebirth) would find that the Buddha-Dhamma would not have lost its rationale. He can aspire to the second confidence of the "noble person" and make the one life that he is sure of, a happy one.[(26)]

Go to Contents

CHAPTER 10

Buddhist Cosmology and Nibbâna

The Buddhist scriptures contain a cosmology of the Universe which provide an interesting contrast to the cosmologies of other religions (e.g. that of the Bible) and even the modern scientific cosmology (on which there is no complete agreement). The cosmological claims in the Buddhist scriptures should not be seen as an accurate description of the physical universe, but as establishing the stage on which the great sasâric drama is enacted. While considering this cosmology we may also consider the important concept of *Nibbâna* which is the state of final release. The latter term is better known in its Sanskrit version as "Nirvana". We shall use the Pali term because the concept of Nirvana is also used in other Indian religions notably Jainism.

We may first consider the planes of existence which form the arenas for samsaric existence. The number of planes recognised depends on the fineness with which they are classified. In the earlier more succinct listing only 3 states of existence are mentioned. These are:

1. **The sensuous realm** (*kâma lôka*). This is the physical world as accessible to be person who entirely on the physical stimuli, without subjecting these stimuli to a refined degree of conscious mental processing.

2. **The fine-material realm** (rpa lôka). This is the same physical world as it is perceived by the active meditator.

3. **The immaterial world** (ârpa lôka). Is the physical world as it is apprehended by the advanced meditator who realises the "emptiness" of the phenomena that assail the senses of the ordinary person.

The last two realms of existence are meditative stages. In the Buddhist literature there are other ways of classifying meditative states, including some such as those that are induced by *vipassanâ* (insight) meditation which differ is some details from the *ârpa-lôka*, but we need not be concerned here; they are dealt with fully in manuals dealing with Buddhist meditation. The two contemplative states of existence are subjective and would not fall into what is considered by cosmology in the modern scientific sense. Some consider the realm of *Nibbâna* as also falling into the "meditative states", but this is regarded as something completely outside all planes of existence.

The first realm, the *kâma-lôka*, clearly deals with actual realms of existence, which is the only realm for those not subject to some degree of enlightenment, and even in the case of the latter still provides the physical dimension of existence. It is this realm that could be compared to other cosmologies, whether held by scientists or religionists or ordinary people.

A word may be said about the Buddhist views on the phenomenal worlds which constitute the arenas of sasâric existence, and of the concept of nibbâna [Nirvâna] (the state of final release) which is the antithesis of sasâra. These views contained in early Buddhist writings should not be looked upon as dogmas whose acceptance is expected of Buddhists. Many of them are beyond the capacity of unenlightened people to verify. Some of them are burrowed from the prevailing cosmological views in the India of the Buddha's time, and would have been used by the Buddha as illustrations to clarify his own theories.

In the Pali literature five "planes of existence" characterised in varying degrees of unsatisfactoriness are recognised. These are (in increasing order of "suffering"): (1) the sphere of the plane of the *devas* ("shining beings" often translated as "gods"); (2) humans; (3) The spirit world; (4) the animal world; (5) the lower world (duggati, niraya) often translated as "hells". According to the law of kamma beings could be born into any of these planes of existence, but the sojourn in any of these destinations is never permanent. There is no necessary "progression" from the lower to the higher levels. The cycle of rebirth in these various states of existence could be terminated only on the achievement of nibbâna (which itself is not included in the sasâric planes). Nibbâna, the final liberation, can only be achieved by beings in the first two planes of existence, but more usually only by humans.

In some of the earliest strata in the Pali Canon only three spheres of existence are recognised. These are: (1) the sensuous world (*kâma loka*); (2) the fine material world

(*rûpa loka*); and (3) the immaterial world (*ârûpa loka*). Here the "sensuous world" comprise all the realms of physical existence, and the other two correspond to states of meditation. In the later literature (especially in the Abhidhamma), the "planes of existence" are further subdivided, and some 32 planes of existence are recognised. There are three ways of interpreting these "planes of existence":

(1) They could be actual physical locations somewhere in the physical universe.

(2) They could be forms of psycho-physical existence which could be reached from any given physical location depending on mental disciplines exercised.

(3) Some states belong to the first type, and others to the second type.

The earliest interpretation leans towards the second given above[(27)], but the 32-fold classification favoured by many modern exponents of Buddhism leans towards the third, which of course implies that some states must correspond to the first. This raises the question of Buddhist cosmology on which something needs to be said.

In terms of physical location the planes of existence could be located anywhere in the Universe. That the Buddhist view of the physical world is not much different from that of modern science is brought out clearly in this quotation:

"As far as these suns and moons revolve shedding their light in space, so far extends the thousand-fold universe. In it there are thousands of suns, thousands of moons, thousands of inhabited worlds of varying sorts. ... This is the thousand-fold minor world system (*culanika lokadhâtu*). Thousands of times the size of the thousand-fold minor world system is the twice-a-thousand Middling World System (*Majjima lokadhâtu*). Thousands of times the size of the Middling World System is the thrice-a-thousand Great Cosmos (*mahâ lokadhâtu*)."

With such a multiplicity of inhabited worlds it is possible to interpret the planes of existence in realistic terms. But the interpretation in terms of psychological and meditation states may be the more appropriate. Heavens and hells are not specific locations with pleasant or unpleasant experiences, but they could be experienced even in the human earthly form.[(28)]

The claim that "devas" exist should not be taken as a concession to theism. Even though this term is commonly translated as "gods" it does not imply the existence of divine authority. The devas are a category of beings, subject to their own kammas formations and reverting to human or other form after the expiry of their kammas, and quite incapable of granting concessionary prayers addressed to them. In the Buddhist scheme all of the leading deities of the Hindu pantheon, including Mahâ Brahmâ, the

"creator" of the universe in the Hindu scheme, are reduced to the status of devas with only a transient existence in the deva-sphere. This treatment of the powerful Gods of the Brahmanical system, to whom the sacrifices and prayers of the system were directed, instead of being a support of theism was a powerful critique of this system.[(29)]

As against the varied planes of sasâric existence the Buddha postulated the existence of a state called nibbâna [nirvâna] which serves as the *summum bnonum* of Buddhism. This, the most difficult of Buddhist concepts, cannot really be grasped unless some considerable progress has been made on the Buddhist path. It is usually described in negative terms. It is the "Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed"; it is the complete annihilation of all defilement; it is the complete destruction of the five components of beings; it is a situation where no kammas are being formed or previous kammas fruited; it is the extinction of the three roots of unwholesome action (greed, aversion and delusion); it is the end of rebirth itself. Two misconceptions of nirvâna may be mentioned - one, entertained by the materialist, is that it implies nothingness; the other, entertained by the theist, is that it involves merger with a higher entity. The Buddha answered both questions "Does the arahant exist after death?" and "Does the arahant not exist after death?" (where an arahant is a person who had attained to the status of Nibbâna) in the negative. It is only the limitation of our conceptualisation process that leads us to pose such questions.

Sometimes a distinction is made between "sasâric Buddhism" and "nibbânic Buddhism" [(30)] . It is claimed that in the former the aim is improvement in sasâra, while in the latter it is the attainment of nibbâna. It is also claimed that the former should be the aim of the lay Buddhist and the latter that of the Buddhist monk. However even in the Buddha's day many monks did not attain nibbâna, while there was never advanced the claim that a lay person could not attain to the nibbânic state. The true position is that each person should proceed along the Buddhist path according to his own capacities and priorities. The lay person is neither at a disadvantage nor at an advantage relative to the monk (Bhikkhu) when it comes to the question of progress along the path. The lay Buddhist and the Bhikkhu, because of their differing life styles, will apply the Dhamma to different areas. In particular the lay person can engage in activity aimed at the social and economic upliftment of suffering humanity to a greater extent than the Bhikkhu, while the latter will concentrate more on personal advancement through the development of meditation and the keeping of the strict moral code expected of the Bhikkhu Sangha.
Go to Contents

CHAPTER 11

Buddhism and the Modern World

The Buddha delivered the fundamental principles of Dhamma some 2500 years ago. Initially it spread over most of Asia in some form or other, but since then it has been declining until it now has much less adherents than the other main religions[(31)] . There has also been many changes in several other areas and it might to appropriate to consider the Buddhist position with regard to some of them.

The Dhamma and Theistic Religion

Theism essentially means the service of an unseen God. Since this God never addresses individuals directly, but through "prophets" there has never been a shortage of the latter. And when the rival prophets make irreconcilable and conflicting claims, and impose mutually inconsistent rites, rituals, and codes of behaviour on their followers, it is not difficult to see in these a potent cause of conflict. Indeed a large part of the violence and crimes we see in history has been caused by the attempt of the followers of one "prophet of God" to impose dominion over those of another.

In the modern world the bulk of the people owe formal allegiance to Christianity and Islam, religions which arose long after the death of the Buddha. They are offshoots of another religion Judaism which has remained confined to a small ethnic group. All three religions affirm the existence of an all-powerful creator God . The Buddha had long ago repudiated the notion of a supreme creator God. The Buddhist views of the subject of God has already been dealt with in an earlier chapter.

Both Christianity and Islam have been fundamentally intolerant religions dedicated to the goal of converting others, and persecuting those of different faiths. In the last century or so Christianity has been forced to give up some of its traditional methods of persecution, but it has not abandoned its evangelical zeal. Islam continues very much in the way it has even though conquest by the sword is becoming less easy. As a result of these attitudes Buddhism has not been able to penetrate into those countries where Christianity and Islam have established themselves historically.

Buddhists should seek to spread its message of religious tolerance and the peaceful dialogue between religions. Whether it will succeed in this has still to be seen.

The Dhamma and Materialism

The great development in the last century has been the rise of materialism. Quite apart from philosophical system that have extolled materialism there has also been a growth of materialist objectives in many people.

Philosophical materialism may not be very detrimental to Buddhism because much of the argument which materialists have directed at religion have been against theistic religion. However political movements which have formally proclaimed materialism as their creed have acted against religions, and Buddhism has suffered perhaps relatively more from such movements.

What is unsatisfactory if philosophical materialism is that it often denies the existence of absolute, objective moral standards. Buddhism of course insists on the existence of such a moral code. The failure of materialism is been mainly due to its lack of a universal norm of goodness, truth and justice.

The increase in the materialist motivation of people has been seen even in people who would consider themselves as being religious. Where this leads to an increase in greed it would reduce the ability of these people to practice Buddhist values. However Buddhism is not against the growth of material affluence provided that it results from the pursuit of right livelihood. But much of the pressures that result from the scamble to reach the top of the economic pile often lead to an abandonment of the principles of right livelihood.

The growing conflicts of the modern world arise from a continuous proliferation of greed and craving. The ethical systems of both the leading forms of theism and materialism encourage and endorse this tendency by giving a license to humans to prevail over other forms of life, and encouraging the "prudent" and ceaseless accumulation of material wealth as an individual and social blessing. While such ethical systems may have given a measure of material affluence to their followers, this material gain has been at the cost of seriously heightening conflict within these societies as well as in the world at large, even endangering the very future of mankind itself. The Buddhist ethic, which involves the pursuit of a middle policy, by dampening the acquisitive instinct, could offer mankind with a viable and more appropriate alternative.

The Dhamma and Science

The Dhamma is closely related to what is understood by Science or Philosophy. Science investigates the nature of phenomena, and some of the latest discoveries in the areas of the physical and the psychological sciences are in conformity with Buddhist principles. However Science has a self-imposed limitation - it has no procedure to move from the positive to the normative. The Dhamma can make this transition, and thus has the ability to transcend Science. It is also in this sense that the Dhamma can be considered a Philosophy. However a substantial part of philosophy in the west since the time of Aristotle has been concerned with metaphysical speculation.

The Buddha however looked on most such metaphysical speculations as being baseless and unprofitable, and very often a cloak for ignorance.

An outstanding feature of the modern world has been the triumph of science and the explosion of knowledge. These have posed a serious challenge to theistic religion. Many of the dogmas that lie at the basis of revelatory religions have been exploded by scientific developments. While one section of theists have been busy in reinterpreting the old dogmas in "metaphysical" terms (a hopeless task as it has proven to be), and other group of "fundamentalists" have turned their backs on scientific discovery and by boldly using modern methods of propaganda and psychological conditioning have tried to reassert the old dogmas in all their simplicity. These developments have raised the real possibility of a return to the "dark ages". Materialism seems to have been better in coping with scientific discovery, but has been totally helpless in evaluating correctly the uses to which such discovery has to be put. Buddhism on the other hand has been able to reconcile scientific discovery with its basic laws, and the path of practice that Buddhism proclaims has provided a norm for the optimal use of man's ever increasing knowledge. For the Buddhist there is no conflict between the claims of science and religion (as there is for the theist), nor a quandary as to how knowledge could be applied for the betterment of man (as it is for both the materialist and the theist).

Buddhism and Humanism

The primary appeal of Buddhism was to the dignity of man, not the glory of God. In this sense the Dhamma is primarily a humanistic philosophy. In describing Buddhism as a humanism some care must be taken in defining the latter term. Theists have defined humanism broadly as embracing "any attitude exalting man's relationship to God, his free will, and his superiority over nature". Such definitions leave out an essential quality of humanism, viz. the primacy of man and the inconsequence of God. There is no implication in Buddhism that human beings have some prior claim over other forms of living beings, or for that matter over "nature", as is implied in the definition of humanism quoted. Buddhists however hold that of all forms of existence possible, the human form is the one most conducive to deliverance. These aspects of Buddhist humanism make the Dhamma once again unique.

Another aspect of Buddhist humanism is that it makes an individual the master of his own destiny. On his death-bed when asked by his followers as to whom they should follow when he was gone, the Buddha replied: "Be ye a lamp (*dîpa*) unto yourselves; work out your own salvation with diligence". The Pali word *dîpa* also means an island, and the Buddha's final exhortation could also be rendered as "Be ye an island unto yourselves..." etc. In either case the fundamental idea is that of self-reliance rather than reliance on an external agency. The Dhamma, as could be reconstructed

from the Pali Canon remains the source of the Buddha-word. The follower of the Buddha would need to understand this, if need be with the help of a teacher but be alone has to practice it. In this respect it may be mentioned that the Mahâyâna Schools of Buddhism have introduced the notion of salvation by the grace of beings called "Bodhisattvas", i.e. beings who have achieved enlightenment but postponed their entry into Nirvâna in order to help others to get there through their grace. This notion is foreign to early Buddhism or to present-day Theravada Buddhism.

The Relevance of Buddhism

In the modern world Buddhism has to contend with two broad alternatives to itself. These are theism and materialism. Paradoxically the Buddha had to contend with the very same ideologies in his own day. And now as then Buddhism offers the better alternative for the realisation of the greater happiness of all beings inhabiting the world (and not just humans alone).

The relevance of Buddhism for the contemporary era would depend on its ability to meet the challenges posed by the contemporary world better than the rival ideologies of theism and materialism and very often a combination of the two.

The unbridled exploitation of the earth's resources, almost amounting to a rape of these resources, has been another example of this greed. Buddhism teaches that man should live in harmony with the Universe. We have seen the extinction of many species of birds, animals and fish, and the threat of extermination of many more, because of the dominance of theistic and materialistic ethics, which have consistently refused to conceded the "right to life" to non-human forms of existence. It is only a step from this position to the exploitation of natural resources to the extent that eco-systems have been destroyed beyond repair, and has put into question the long-term possibility of survival.

The lack of tolerance of diverging viewpoints has been one of the most potent causes of misery and war. Even though we would like to think that the worst excesses of sectarian conflict are behind us, we have no real ground to such optimism. The world meeds a measure of Buddhist tolerance. It has been said that the flavour of the Dhamma is the flavour of freedom (vimutti). The freedom that is meant here is primarily the freedom of the mind unburdened by crippling dogma (be they of ego or of God); but such mental freedom is the basis of all other freedom, even those of the more "worldly" kind, like political, social or economic freedom. In a world where freedom is constrained in many ways the liberating effect of the Dhamma is sorely needed.

True freedom cannot be attained until the mind is set free. The Dhamma actually provides a therapy for the freeing of the mind from mental defilement. Modern society seems to have aggravated rather than lessened the need for mental purification and calm. The pace of change has quickened, and external pressure on individuals increased. A balanced mind, created by a true understanding of the world and man's place in it, coupled with the practice of the Buddha's path, could serve as a radical new therapy.

The importance of the Buddhist principle that a person should be free to believe according to one's freely formed and informed opinions, can hardly be overstated. The current practice of indoctrinating children with the religious views of their parents is one that comes to mind. Many religious organisations carry this process into formal schooling, and reinforce it later by using the latest technology of the information revolution. It then becomes a veritable "brain-washing" no less insidious because it has the full approval of the establishment. The right of a child to have its mind free of religious indoctrination until it can made a decision on this vital matter in full maturity with all the information at its command, is a right that is rarely mentioned, but one in which Buddhists can take a lead.

Basic Buddhism is relevant for the problems of modern society in several other ways. But it must be remembered that the traditional practices of Buddhism in several of its schools, including to some extent in the Theravâda tradition, departs considerably from the principles enunciated by the Buddha. Here too what is needed is a return to the principles and practice of basic Buddhism.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: On Becoming a Buddhist

It is possible for a person to live as a lay Buddhist without any formal ceremony, declaration or rite. However the traditional formality associated with identifying oneself as a Buddhist is to recite the formula of *Going to the Threefold Refuge (tisarana gamana)* [(32)] This involves the formal utterance of the following statements with full understanding as to their import:

buddham saranam gaccâmi	I go for refuge to the Buddha
dhammam saranam gaccâmi	I go for refuge to the Dhamma
sangam saranam gaccâmi	I go for refuge to the Sangha [(33)]
dutiyam pi buddham saranam gaccâmi	For the second time I go for refuge to the Buddha
dutiyam pi dhammam saranam gaccâmi	For the second time I go for refuge to the Dhamma
dutiyam pi sangam saranam gaccâmi	For the second time I go for refuge to the Sangha

tatiyam pi buddham saranam gaccâmi	For the third time I go for refuge in the Buddha
tatiyam pi dhammam saranam gaccâmi	For the third time I go for refuge in the Dhamma.
tatiyam pi sangam saranam gaccâmi	For the third time I go for refuge to the Sangha

This need not be a public utterance, but could be a self-administered declaration. The person making this choice should have a clear understanding of what the Dhamma of the Buddha is. This booklet is meant to provide such an understanding.

Buddhists repeat this formula periodically, as occasion permits, in order to re-dedicate themselves to the Buddhist goal.

Appendix B: The Five Precepts

The Going for Refuge formula is very often followed by the formula of *Taking of the Five Precepts (pañca sîla)*. These precepts constitute the basic ethical norms Buddhists hope to follow, i.e. forms the layman's code of conduct. They define the ethical rules which a lay Buddhist must follow in daily life. They are not commandments but "rules of training" (*sikkhâpada*). It is customary to formally state these rules either daily or on formal occasions but it is not the recitation of the rules that matter but their observance. In many Buddhist countries the precepts are "administered" formally by monks, but this is not necessary.

In the following we give the precept in Pali, its approximate translation, and a few explanatory comments:

1. ***Non-Destruction of life***. *pânâtipâthâ veramanî sikkhâ pada samâdiyâmi* (I agree to follow the precept of abstaining from the taking of life). This involves not contributing to the death of any living being. This means not only the actual killing but also "causing to kill". However this rule does not require one to be a vegetarian, only that meat consumed should not have been "specially killed" for direct, personal consumption. Meat purchased in the market does not come under the "specially killed" category.

2. ***Abstention from Theft.*** *adinnâdânâ veramanî sikkhâ pada samâdiyâmi* (I agree to follow the precept of not taking that which is not given). Theft is interpreted widely as taking that which is not given. It includes fraudulent behaviour generally.

3. ***Avoidance of Sexual Misconduct.*** *kâmesu miccâcârâ veramanî sikkhâ pada samâdiyâmi* (I agree to follow the precept of abstaining from sexual wrongdoing). Misconduct here means not only overt acts of sexual violence like rape, but also adultery in general. It must be remembered that Buddhism does not endorse any

particular kind of marriage, so this precept requires that sexual relations should be confined to what is socially and legally acceptable as a marriage relationship.

4. ***Abstention from Wrong Speech***. *musâvâdâ veramanî sikkhâ pada samâdiyâmi* (I agree to follow the precept of abstaining from wrong speech). Wrong speech involves a great many things apart from uttering falsehoods. It includes insulting speech, malicious speech, even gossip.

5. ***Refraining from Intoxicants.*** *surâmeraya majja pamâ dahânâ veramanî sikkhâ pada samâdiyâmi* (I agree to follow the precept of abstaining from the liquor and spirits that cause inattention). This is generally taken to mean avoiding alcohol, drugs, etc. which tend to "confuse the mind". Some people interpret this precept not as an absolute prohibition of alcohol (as in Islam) but only against intoxication and inebriation through the use of alcohol or drugs.

While the five precepts are usually stated in negative terms they have their positive counterparts (e.g. the principles of non-injury and loving-kindness, honesty, sexual propriety, truthfulness and sobriety.

Appendix C: Higher Precepts and Meditation

Some Buddhists observe the Eight Precepts once a month (usually on the Full Moon Day, which has traditionally been a day of religious observance amongst Buddhists). The three additional precepts are:

6. Abstaining from eating after mid-day

7. Abstaining from dancing, singing, music and shows

8. Abstaining from garlands, scents, cosmetics and adornment

It will be seen that these three additional precepts do not involve weighty moral principles like the 5 basic precepts. They are of use for those who are desire some degree of withdrawal from lay life but are not prepared to make a full-time commitment. A further step in this direction is to take two additional precepts making 10 in all, which are often taken for a longer time than the once-a-month practice of the eight precepts. These two additional precepts are:

9. Abstaining from luxurious beds

10. Abstaining from accepting gold and silver

The third precept is also expanded to a rule enjoining chastity.

The extreme step along this line of renunciation is to become a Buddhist monk (which involves following some 220 rules). This will suit only a very few persons in any given Buddhist community. Since monks live on the charity of lay Buddhists only a very small proportion of Buddhists can be monks.

For lay Buddhists the keeping of the five basic moral precepts of Buddhism, is quite adequate. It must however be kept in mind that keeping these precepts in their totality is quite demanding, but it is a goal that lay Buddhists should aspire to.

Buddhists should also seek to engage in short periods of meditation as a regular activity (e.g. 15 - 30 minutes every day). Chapter V has given some information about the types of Theravâda meditation that are available in the West.

Appendix D: The Three Gems of Buddhism

The formula for Going for Refuge involves the recognition of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha as the three highest entities in Buddhism often referred to as the Three Gems (*tiratana*) of Buddhism.

Salutation to the three gems could be turned into a formula for meditation. Many Buddhists perform this meditation, either in their own home, or in visits to Buddhist temples and monasteries. Three standard stanzas is often used in this meditation. These stanzas enumerate the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. The stanzas are given below, both in Pali and in English. (It must be remembered that the English translation is only approximate and each term could be discussed at length).

Appendix E: Main Buddhist Tendencies in the West

In the West there are several modes of Buddhism. The main distinction is still between Pali Buddhism and the Mahayana. This booklet is written from the Pali Buddhist perspective which is closest to Basic Buddhism. But it is always advisable to study other Buddhist tendencies which may contain useful insights.

Even amongst those drawing inspiration from the Pali sources there are several practical orientations, three main orientations may be identified:

1. Ethnic Buddhism. This is practised by migrants from Asian countries. There is a heavy admixture of cultural practices associated with Buddhism in the native countries and these are imported along with the Dhamma. This stream of Buddhism

gives great emphasis to faith, worship, rite and ritual. This is seen in such practices as the *Buddha-pujâs* (ritual offering of food and other things before statues of the Buddha), worship of relics, chanting of suttas as magic incantations, transference of merit to deceased persons, etc. Such Buddhism is usually practised in Temples set up according to Asian cultural archetypes.

2. Meditational Buddhism. This is the kind of meditation that we have called stylised meditation in Chapter 5.

3. Rationalist-Humanist Buddhism. Here the Buddha's message is seen as being in conformity with the scientific-humanistic spirit of the West. This sprit had a long struggle to liberate itself from the anti-scientific attitude of Christianity and its subordination of man to God. Until Buddhism arrived in the West there was no framework within which these Western tendencies could be rationalised. An important focus of this kind of Buddhism is its secularism and ethical orientation. Monks are seen as Buddhist professionals who could devote their time to the intellectual and moral uplift of people and to advance Buddhist thinking into new areas not considered traditionally. But lay persons can play an equally (or even more) active role. This kind of Buddhism is usually practised in secular Buddhist Societies in the West and dispenses with the need for temples and ritual.

Of these three tendencies Basic Buddhism is most at home with the last mentioned, i.e. the ethico-rationalist-humanist tendency. But the essence of Buddhism is that it is a middle path, not advocating unthinking adherence to any particular extreme. While Basic Buddhism in the West should emphasis the ethical, scientific, and humanistic aspects it should not neglect anything that is good and useful in other tendencies. It is for the individual groups to strike the right balance keeping in mind that the essence of Buddhism is the search for enlightenment and with it the elimination of the roots of unwholesome action.

Appendix F: Glossary of Pali Terms

abhidhamma	Higher Dhamma
akusala	unwholesome
anatta	no-self, non-ego
anicca	impermanance
ârûpa	formless
ârya	noble
atta	soul, self
avijjâ	ignorance, nescience
bhâva	becoming

bhâvanâ	mental development
bhikkhu	Buddhist monk
bodhi	wisdom
Buddha	Enlightened One
câga	generosity
culanikâ	minor, small
deva	celestial being
Dhamma	Law, Norm
digha	long
dîpa	lamp, island
ditti	view, dogma
dosa	aversion
dukkha	unsatisfactoriness
ehipassiko	come-and-see, verifiable
jhâna	absorptive meditative state
kâma	sensuality
kamma	action, deed
karunâ	compassion
khandâ	aggregates
kusala	wholesome
lobha	greed
lokadhâtu	world system
mahâ	great
mahâyâna	"Great Vehicle" School
majjima	middle
mettâ	loving-kindness
moha	delusion, ignorance
muditha	sympathetic job
nâma	non-physical component
nibbâna	extinction of defilements
paññâ	wisdom, insight
paipadâ	precepts
paisandhi	relinking
pitaka	basket, section
puggala	person
rûpa	physical form
samâdhi	concentration
samana	religious ascetic

sammâ	right, appropriate
sasâra	round of births
samyojana	fetter
saññâ	perceptions
sangha	Buddhist community
sankhâra	volitional formations
suñña	empty
suññatâ	emptiness
sutta	discourse
sati	mindfulness
tanhâ	craving
Theravâda	School of Elders
tilakkhana	Three signata
tipitaka	The Pali Canon
upâdâna	grasping
upekkhâ	equanimity
vedana	feeling
vijjâ	science, knowledge
vimutti	freedom
vinaya	discipline
vipâka	fruit, result
vipassanâ	insight

Guide to Pronounciation.

Vowels and consonants are pronouned as in English with the following exceptions. The vowel u is like `oo' in look. Long vowels are â, î and û; e is intermediate; the other vowels are short. Consonants and are dentals (tongue touching the teeth); d and t are palatals (tongue touching palate). is nasalised and ñ is pronounced as in Spanish. c is like `ch' in child. h after a constant aspirates that consonant.

1. The earliest Indian Buddhist texts were maintained in the Pali language, and these now constitute the authoritative texts of the Theravada school of Buddhism. Subsequently Buddhist texts were composed in the Sanskrit language, these being favoured by the non-Theravada schools of Buddhism. Most Buddhist terms thus have a Pali and a Sanskrit form. In this work the Pali form will be used unless the Sanskrit form is better known. A glossary of the principal Pali terms used is given in Appendix F. The Sanskrit term *dharma* is also used to denote Hindu and Jain scriptures. The Pali term *dhamma* is used only in Theravada Buddhist teachings.

2. Note that "scientific view" does not necessarily mean the view of people generally considered to be scientists. There is a tendency now current for certain scientists to propagate metaphysical views which are contrary to the methodology of classical science.

3. No Buddhist has been killed, tortured, or imprisoned by another on account of his interpretation of Buddhism. This tolerance has been extended to other religions and philosophical system as well.

4. The Common Era is the era now in general use. Dates before its commencement will be referred to as B.C.E. (Before the Common Era. The terms B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (Anno Domini) are specific to Christianity and should not be used to refer to historical dates generally.

5. The Hinayâna term is now used only by some unrepentant Mahayanists and by some Buddhist scholars who want to refer to the early schools. There were many non-Mahayana schools (such as Sarvâstivâda, Dharmaguptikas, etc) in the early centuries of the Buddhist era. Their scriptures were composed in the Sanskrit language and are now lost in their original form. Some of these were translated into Chinese and Tibetan and some of it is still available. But these schools are distinctly later than the Theravâda school. In fact they dissented in some areas from the Theravâda position and composed their scriptures in Sanskrit translating the parts of the Pali Canon they agreed with and introducing their own innovations.

6. This is because some Theravadins regard not only the Pali Canon as authoritative but also later works composed in the Pali Language like the Commentaries and work of the great medieval scholar Buddhaghosa. We shall use the term Pali Buddhism to refer to the Buddhism contained in the Pali Canon.

7. The classic Mahayâna text extolling the position of the layman vis-a-vis the Bhikkhu is the Vimalakirthinirdesha Sutra. Here a layman Vimalakirthi is seen as expounding the Dhamma even to Sâriputta the famous arahant who in Theravâda is considered a foremost exponent of the doctrine.

8. There is considerable debate on the actual dates of the Buddha. It is generally accepted that the Buddha's death occurred some 180 years before the coronation of King Asoka. The traditional dates, based on the Sri Lankan chronicles dates Asoka's coronation at 363 BCE and therefore the Buddha's death at 543 BCE, which is 60 years earlier than the date given in the text. However modern historians place the coronation at 303 BCE, and the dates given in the text are based on this. There are some Western scholars that puts the dates about a century later. However the evidence

for this is not convincing, and we shall use the dates given in the text as the approximate dates of the Buddha.

9. The other cities where the Buddha is recorded to have spent the rains retreat include Vesâli, Kosambî, Pârileyya, Nâlâ, Verañja, Kapitalvatthu, and Alâvi. He also spent rains retreats in mountainous areas such as Câlika and Mankula.

10. Some early writers, mainly Christian, have cast doubt on the historicity of the Buddha. They were no doubt trying to extend to the Buddha the doubts that have been raised about the historicity of Jesus. It is well-known that contemporary records are silent about Jesus, and some references have been shown to be later forgeries. But while we have only details of a only a couple of years of the life of Jesus there is much fuller information on the career of the Buddha. While it may be possible to manufacture what would have occurred on a couple of years of a person's life it is more difficult to do so where an extended period of time is involved.

11. Most other religious teachers (including Jesus and Mohammad) gave teachings which were substantially similar to what others had given, validating them by claiming that they had a special relationship with God. The charge that the Buddha merely reformed the Vedic religion of his day cannot be maintained because of the fundamental differences with the Vedic religion.

12. The three gems or jewels are the Buddha (the discoverer), the Doctrine (the content of the discovery) and the Sangha (the community of followers). A formal affirmation of "going for refuge" is generally taken as a formal mark of adherence to Buddhism.

13. The so-called "proof" of the existence of God based on the first cause runs as follows: everything must have a cause, therefore there must be a cause for the origin of the world, and this cause is God. However if everything must have a cause then God also must have a cause. The question immediately arises: Who created God? Naturally theists are incapable of answering this question; in effect they abandon their own premise that "everything" must have a cause. This is not the case with the Buddhist theory or causation.

14. These are usually detailed in the "precepts" of Buddhism. See the Appendix B for the layman's code of ethics.

15. The term *jhâna* is often translated as "trance", and might indicate some kind of hypnotic state. While accomplished meditators may be able to reach such psychic stages they are neither necessary nor sufficient to reach enlightenment.

16. Our comments will be confined to meditation related to the Pali Buddhism. In Mahayana too some schools have laid a great deal of emphasis on it. The best known of these are Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. We shall not be considering these forms of Mahayana meditation here.

17. Alternative terms that could be used are "ritualised meditation" and even "meditationism". None of these is suitable, including the one used in the text. But at the same time there is a need to distinguish this practice from what we shall refer to as Buddhist meditation.

18. Amongst contemporary teachers of these Asian meditation traditions in the West we may mention, for the Sri Lankan tradition, Bhante Henepola Gunaratana in America; for the Burmese tradition Goenka who has established centres in many countries; and for the Thai tradition the pupils of Ajahn Chah and others who established centres in the U.K. (Chithurst, Amarawati) and later in other countries. Of all these the present writer considers Bhante Gunaratana to be the most suited to a Western audience. He has written an excellent monograph on his technique *Mindfulness in Daily Practice.*

19. The "exclusive meditation" school of Theravâda belongs to the so-called "forest tradition". This may suit the temperament of a small number of recluses, but it is not the normal way to practice the Dhamma which could be adequately done by lay persons living ordinary lives in the real world. The personal example of the Buddha is very relevant here; he was no mere forest recluse but lived and taught in the great urban environments of his day. The real author of the forest tradition with its associated austerities (*dhutângas*) was Devadatta, the Buddha's schismatic cousin, whose views were rejected by the Buddha.

20. See his work *What the Buddha Really Taught*. Maurice was a westerner who developed a profound understanding of Buddhism, and the work mentioned here is a very good resume of Buddhism for Westerners (and indeed others).

21. The stock answer to this is that man's "free will" leads him to disobey God and bring down disaster. But if man is complete creature of God then the grant of free will too is the responsibility of God, as his "omniscience" would have told him that free-will would be abused.

22. The Hindu notion of the soul going through several incarnations inhabiting different kinds of bodies until it finally reaches Moksha is actually a later development in Hinduism and is not seen in the early Vedic texts.

23. In Buddhism we can distinguish two meanings of the term "enlightenment". The lower one is replacing ignorance (in the more prosaic sense) with knowledge. The higher one is the supreme enlightenment associated with the realisation of *nibbâna* through the extinction of craving and other roots of unwholesome action. It is possible to be enlightened in the second sense without being enlightened in the first sense. A supreme Buddha (*sammâ-sambuddha*) of course is enlightened in both senses of the term. In this section the word is used sometimes in the one and sometimes in the other sense.

24. Harmful views are called *miccâ-dii* ("wrong view") in contrast to which the correct Dhamma view is called *sammâ-dii* ("right view"). In the modern world the fundamentals of the mono-theistic religions, as well as extreme forms of materialism would fall into the wrong category.

25. The enlightenment resulting from the elimination of the fetters is the enlightenment in the higher sense identified in the previous note. The Pali terms for the 10 fetters and a brief description of them are as follows: (1) *sakkâya-dii*, elimination of the ego-belief and realisation of the third law of *anatta*; (2) *vicikiccâ*, development of total confidence in the accuracy of the Buddhist analysis of reality; (3) *sîlabbata-parâmâsa*, not performing ritual and rite and a method of spiritual activity; (4) *kâma-râga*, liberating oneself from sensuality; (5) *vyâpâda*, elimination of animosity towards others, (6) *rûpa râga*, not seeking rebirth material realms; (7) *arûpa-râga*, not seeking rebirth in "immaterial" realms; (8) *mâna*, elimination of conceit in oneself, (9) *uddhacca*, developing full control over one's actions, and (10) *avijjâ*, the final elimination of residual ignorance.

26. Strictly speaking the Buddha claims that knowledge of the working of kamma can only be got by an enlightened person. Hence all opinions expressed on this subject will have to be tentative.

27. This is the interpretation which most Buddhists in the West will be comfortable with. It takes the problem of cosmology out of the concern of the religionist and places it on the lap of the scientist where it should properly rest. Also the view that suffering is the creation of our own mind is well established in some schools of modern psychology.

28. Care must be taken in interpreting Buddhism in terms of Buddhist cosmology. The dominant theory amongst cosmologists today is the "Big Bang" theory. Against this are ranged the theories of the oscillating universe (Hubble, James-Jeans) and the steady-state universe (Hoyle). The support for the Big Bang theory comes from those who are biased towards the Christian theory of creation (e.g. Paul Davies). Buddhists

should contest this interpretation of the Big Bang theory which asserts a definite beginning to the universe, a proposition which the Buddha contested.

29. The best way of interpreting *devas* in modern terms is to view them as extra-terrestrial beings. While this is a common view especially in science fiction the current scientific views of the formation of life on the planet is that it is not a unique process (as religions like Christianity would have it) by a physical process that could go on in the billions of stellar systems which comprise the universe. Furthermore life need follow the same evolutionary pattern that has taken place on the earth. Thus beings in these other planets could be considered *devas*, having a different physical appearance to humans. The Buddhist theory of karma would add a further dimension that might give them different psycho-physical powers to humans. But such speculations are not really necessary because of the inconsequence of the *devas* to human existence even if they exist at all.

30. These terms are new but the idea is quite old. There is a tradition that the Buddha spoke in terms of heavens and hells when preaching to ordinary people (who in the Buddha's time would have had little education) and spoke in the more abstract terminology of nibbâna only in discourse with more learned persons.

31. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* claims that about half of the world's 5 billion people adhere to the main religions. Of this 40% are Christians and 20% are Muslims. Buddhists number about 247 million (9.6%) almost all of them in Asia.

32. "Refuge" in this context means with respect to the Buddha the acceptance of the Buddha as a supremely enlightened teacher, with respect to the Dhamma that the teaching is fundamentally correct, and with respect to the Sangha the recognition that one is a part of a wider community seeking to practice the Buddha's teaching.

33. The word "Sangha" has different connotations. In its original meaning, and the one used in this formula, it means those persons who have made some progress on the Buddhist path (at least to the level of *sôtapanna* or "stream winner"). It is also used in two other meanings: (1) the body of ordained persons and (2) the body of Buddhist disciples both monk and lay irrespective of actual level of accomplishment.

Source: ***THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY OF QUEENSLAND****, http://www.uq.net.au/slsoc/budsoc.html*