

Buddha, The Healer

The Mind and its Place in Buddhism

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Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

The Wheel Publication No. 22

First Edition: 1960

Reprinted:,1971

Reprinted:,1980

BPS Online Edition © (2008)

Digital Transcription Source: BPS and Access to Insight Transcription Project

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Preface

The Buddha means the Enlightened One, and is the title that was given to Siddhattha Gotama on his attaining enlightenment. The religion preached by the Buddha is known as Buddhism.

Siddhattha Gotama was born on the full moon day of the month of May in the year 623 b. c. in Lumbini near the Indian border of Nepal. His parents were King Suddhodana and Queen Mahāmāyā. As a prince he was brought up in the lap of luxury. At his birth a sage predicted that this prince, out of compassion for humanity, would one day leave his home in search of true happiness. He married Yasodharā, a beautiful princess, in his sixteenth year, and thirteen years later, at the time of the birth of his son, Rāhula, he renounced all his worldly possessions and left the palace to wander as an ascetic in search of happiness. He went from teacher to teacher, but was dissatisfied with them all. In the sixth year of the life of an ascetic, at the age of thirty-five years, while meditating under a Bo-tree at Gaya in Northern India, he realised the Supreme Truth and became the Enlightened One. He proclaimed his readiness to teach the Path of Deliverance in the words,

“Open are the doors of the deathless,
Let them that have ears repose trust.”

His first sermon was preached at Sarnath, near Benares. It was on the four Noble Truths: the existence of unhappiness or suffering; the cause of it; that there can be an end to it; and the path that leads to the end of unhappiness or suffering. For forty-five years he preached the Path of Deliverance to all that came to hear him, from the lowliest to the highest. He established the Order of Monks which exists even to this day. At the age of eighty years he finally passed away at Kusināra. His last words to his followers were,

“Behold now, O monks, I exhort you: Transient are all compounded things. With heedfulness work out your deliverance.”

His teachings gradually spread throughout India, and from India to Ceylon, Burma, Siam (Thailand), Tibet, China, Japan, Indo-China and other countries. Wherever it spread Buddhism exercised a very powerful influence on the life of the people. It elevated their moral stature, stimulated art, spread education, encouraged the care of the sick and infirm, abolished slavery, established morality as the yardstick of nobility, and introduced a humanising influence over their lives. It was propagated with missionary zeal, but without compulsion or bloodshed.

Gradually, the initial fervour was lost. Nevertheless, something of the moral code remained and high ideals such as loving-kindness were woven into the fabric of the lives of the people; Buddhist philosophy and literature continued its fructifying impact. In this state the religion lay dormant for a few more centuries. It is true to say that in practically all countries of Asia, philosophy and art among the cultured and the way of life among the poor are to a great extent influenced by the teachings of the Buddha.

This present century has been marked by a revival of Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha, which are in the Pali language and are enshrined in the collection of works known as the Tipiṭaka, are being translated into European as well as Asian languages, and many philosophers and men of religion in the world are giving thought to the teachings contained in them.

Wherein lies the appeal of Buddhism to modern man, and especially to great thinkers, philosophers and scientists? In what way does Buddhism differ from other religions?

The way of life enjoined by the Buddha is methodical and based on the three cardinal features of individual existence—impermanence, unhappiness or suffering, and soullessness or egolessness. Life consists of body and mind (*nāma-rūpa*), and there is nothing that is permanent or unchanging in either of these components. On the other hand both are themselves compounded, the former consisting of units of matter, the latter of units of mind. The units of matter are being continually replaced, and so are the units of mind, which are even more rapidly replaced; although there is continuity of the individual, there is neither permanence of mind nor matter. The second cardinal feature is unhappiness or suffering. The third is soullessness or egolessness. We all like to feel and even assert there is in us something stable, something unchanging which is our inner self, but the more we analyse it, the more we realise that there is no such entity we can call a permanent ego or a soul. The quest of man is in search of happiness, and the path of deliverance of the Buddha is based on these cardinal features of individual existence.

Buddhism's greatest appeal to modern man is its freedom from dogma. Among all leaders of religion, the Buddha alone asked his followers to accept the doctrine if it appealed to their reason and its practice brought them solace.

“Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, “The monk is our teacher.” Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: “These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness, enter on and abide in them.”

(Kālāma Sutta)

This, little book entitled *Buddha the Healer* should be regarded as one of the whole series of publications undertaken by the Buddhist Publication Society with its headquarters in Kandy, Ceylon. It emphasises an aspect of Buddhism—the healing of the mind as the cure of all worldly ills. When something goes wrong and we are unhappy we are inclined to attribute it to our environment or to others. But quite often it is a wrong view that we have taken that produces unhappiness, and the correction lies more frequently in our own ways of thought than in our environment.

The Buddha has shown this on many occasions. In the articles that follow are numerous examples. They are brought together in the hope they might be of special interest to doctors and psychologists—or it is they that have a wide knowledge and understanding of human ills. It is claimed that Buddhist psychology is rational, in that it has a yardstick of morality and that it works towards the gradual uplift of the individual from the mire of emotional conflict with its centre on “Self” to a position where emphasis on sense impressions are reduced and the emphasis on self is replaced by compassion towards others as well.

Ānanda Nimalasuria.

Homage to the Buddha

who rooted out and removed all diseases like lust, and so on, which cause delusion and indolence, and are spread over all living beings, sticking to them always. To that unique physician I Pay homage.

Introductory Stanza to Vāgbhaṭa's *Manual of Medicine*.¹

The Story of Kisā-Gotamī

In this Buddha era she was reborn at Sāvattihī, in a poor family. Gotamī was her name, and because of the leanness of her body, she was called "Lean Gotamī." She was disdainfully treated when married, and was called a nobody's daughter. But when she bore a son, they paid her honour. Then, when her son was old enough to run about and play, he died. She was distraught with grief. Mindful of the change in folk's treatment of her since his birth, she thought, "They will even try to take my child and throw it out." So, taking the corpse upon her hip, she went, crazy with sorrow, from door to door, saying: "Give me medicine for my child!" And people said with contempt: "Medicine! What's the use?"

She did not understand them. But one sagacious person thought: "Her mind is upset with grief for her child. He of the Tenfold Power (the Buddha) will know of some medicine for her." And he said: "Dear woman, go to the very Buddha, and ask him for medicine to give your child." She went to the monastery at the time when the Master taught the Doctrine, and said:

"Exalted One, give me medicine for my child!" The Master, seeing the potential in her, said: "Go, enter the town, and bring a little mustard seed from any house where no one has yet died."

"It is well, lord!" she said, with mind relieved; and going to the first house in the town said: "Let me take a little mustard seed that I may give as medicine to my child. If in this house no one has died yet, give me a little mustard seed."

"Who may say how many have not died here?" "With such mustard, then, I have nought to do," so she went on to a second and a third house until, by the might of the Buddha, her frenzy left her, her natural mind was restored and she thought: "Even this will be the order of things in the whole town."

"The Exalted One foresaw this out of his pity for my good." And, thrilled at the thought, she left the town and laid her child at the charnel-field, saying:

"No village law is this, no city law,
No law for this clan, or for that alone;
For the whole world—ay, and the gods in heaven—
This is the law: All is impermanent!"

So saying, she went to the Master. And he said: "Gotamī, have you gotten the little mustard seed?" And she said: "The work, Lord, of the little mustard seed has been done. Give me your confirmation." Then the Master spoke thus:

"To him whose heart on children and on goods
Is centred, cleaving to them in his thoughts,

¹ Vāgbhaṭa, a Buddhist physician of medieval India, was the author of a *Manual of Medicine* which is still needed by the students and practitioners of the Ayurvedic system of medicine.

Death comes like a great flood in the night,
Bearing away the village in its sleep.”

When he had spoken, she was confirmed in the fruition of the First (the Stream-entry) Path, and asked for ordination. He consented, and she, thrice saluting him by the right, went to the Bhikkhunīs (nuns), and was ordained. And not long afterwards, studying the causes of things, she caused her insight to grow. Then the Master said a inspired verse:

“The man who, living for an hundred years,
Beholds never the Ambrosial Path
Had better live no longer than one day,
So he beholds within that day the Path”

When he had finished, she attained Arahantship (Sainthood).

From the Commentary to the Therigāthā (*Songs of the Sisters*)

The Peerless Physician

by

Dr. C. B. Dharmasena, MB., B.S (Lond.)

“Subject to birth, old age, disease,
Extinction will I seek to find
Where no decay is ever known,
Nor death, but all security.”²

The Buddha was the peerless physician. He it was, who recognised the fatal malady affecting all sentient beings, to which he gave the name Dukkha or Suffering. It constitutes the first of the Four Noble Truths described by him.³ The Diagnosis is not difficult for the expert psychiatrist, who however has an extremely difficult task before him to convince his “patient” that he is really ill.

Avijjā or Ignorance, and *taṇhā* or Craving are the Root Causes of the disease; this is the second of the Four Noble Truths.

Dukkha Nirodha or Cessation of Ignorance and Craving constitutes the Prognosis; and this is the third of the Four Noble Truths. The prognosis is excellent provided the necessary effort to acquire the details of the prolonged and difficult course of treatment is forthcoming, and the treatment itself is carried out with enthusiasm, with diligence, with constant mindfulness, and with wisdom. The cure once achieved is complete and permanent, without complications, and without the possibility of a relapse.

Dukkhanirodhagāmini Paṭipadā or the Noble Eightfold Path is the detailed Course of Treatment which leads to the cessation of all suffering. It forms the last of the Four Noble Truths.

Symptoms and Diagnosis.

The key to the diagnosis of this universal malady is offered to us by the Buddha when he says,⁴

“Four things, O monks, nobody can bring about, no ascetic, priest, or heavenly being, no god nor devil, nor anybody in this world. And what are these four things? That that which is subject to decay may not decay, that that which is subject to sickness may not fall sick, that that which is subject to death may not die, that those evil, impure, frightful, and pain-bestowing actions, which ever again and again lead to rebirth, old age and death may not bring results.”

The Buddha in his very first sermon after his Enlightenment⁵ and on many other occasions⁶ said,

²W. “The Story of Sumedha.” Ch. 1. (18).

³SN 56:11/S V 420, vide footnote 2 page 4; DN 22 & MN 141.

⁴,*Path to Deliverance*, Ven. Nāṇatiloka, Introduction, para 16: A IV 182.

⁵,*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*; translation in *Bodhi Leaves* No. 12 and *The Wheel* No. 17: *Three Cardinal Discourses of the Buddha*—both issued by the Buddhist Publication Society.

⁶,DN 22 305–315, *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna sutta* & MN 141, *Sacca Vibhaṅga Sutta*.

“Now, this, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth is suffering, decay (ageing) is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, to be united to the unloved is suffering, to be separated from the loved is suffering, not to receive what one craves for is suffering, in brief the five Aggregates of attachment are suffering.”

All conditioned things are impermanent, because of their continued rise and fall and change; what is impermanent is painful because of continued oppression, for the pain commencing to be felt in any body posture adopted at the moment is concealed by repeated change into a fresh position⁷. The knowledge that all conditioned things are transient and are therefore subject to suffering is the pivot on which Buddhism rests. Buddhism has no meaning except for those who feel that all life is transient and therefore painful, which observation stands in natural contrast to freedom from pain, to blessedness regarded as something changeless, i.e. Nibbāna.

Cause

The root causes of this malady besetting all sentient beings are ignorance (*avijjā*),”and craving (*taṇhā*); ignorance being an outstanding cause of kamma (action) that leads to unhappy destinies⁸

“The man who lives for sensuous joys,
And finds his delight therein
When joys of sense have taken flight,
Doth smart as if with arrows pierced.”⁹

On the other hand craving for becoming is an outstanding cause of kamma that leads to “happy” destinies in various heaven worlds.¹⁰

Prognosis or Cure

The above view of life may make the unthinking reader conclude that Buddhism is a pessimistic and melancholic religion which hinders effort. But this view is a very superficial one, the very antithesis of the truth, for the Buddha has not only given the diagnosis of disease, but an infallible remedy as well. The patient is told he has an operable cancer, or is suffering from early pulmonary tuberculosis. He is further told that a definite cure is available. In these circumstances after the patient gets over the initial shock of his discovery, is he not likely to consider himself lucky that his illness has been discovered in time, and will he not thereafter co-operate with enthusiasm, and with optimism in the carrying out of his treatment? It is this optimistic expectation and calm assurance that keeps the Buddhist happy and serene in his surroundings, and makes it possible to include joy (*pīti*), as one of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment found in Buddhism.

In dealing with the Causal Law Formula in terms of Happiness the Buddha states,¹¹

“Suffering (understood as change and transience) leads to confidence (*saddhā*); confidence to joy (*pāmojja*); joy to rapture (*pīti*); rapture to tranquillity (*passaddhi*); tranquillity to happiness (*sukha*); happiness to concentration (*samādhi*); concentration to knowledge and vision of things as they truly are (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*); the knowledge and vision of things as they truly are to disgust or repulsion (*nibbidā*);

⁷,Vism 21.6.7.

⁸,Vism 17.39.

⁹ W. Ch. 26. c.

¹⁰ Vism 17.40.

¹¹ S II *Introduction* Page ix & S 12:23, Upanisā sutta.

disgust to detachment or passionlessness (*virāga*); detachment to deliverance (*vimutti*); deliverance to knowledge of the extinction of passions (*khaye-nāṇa*).”

The above text clearly points out “how every tear can become a tutor,” how suffering and sorrow may ultimately lead to sainthood, deliverance, and happiness, even as Kisā Gotamī¹² in her distress went about asking for medicine for her dead child, until she came to the Buddha, who told her that she did well to have come to him for medicine, and requested her to go to the city and bring a mustard seed from a house where no one had died. She was cheered at this simple request, and readily went round from house to house asking for the mustard seed which, however she could not procure under the conditions specified. She thereupon realised the truth that death was common to all, and that the Buddha in his compassion had sent her round to learn the truth, which she did to such good effect that she reached then and there the first stage of sainthood, and reached Arahatsip not long after. How very different to this is Tennyson’s attitude to the death of his friend, as expressed in the following lines:¹³

“One writes, that “Other friends remain,”
That loss is common to the race...
That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more.”

We have in these two different attitudes towards sorrow a beautiful illustration of the truth that the results of sorrow depend solely on the attitude that one takes towards suffering and pain; sorrow merely experienced is pain and suffering, whilst on the other hand sorrow understood, through meditative contemplation is change and transience leading to disgust, to passionlessness, to detachment and finally to deliverance. This is the fundamental difference between the hasty critic of Buddhism as a pessimistic religion, and the one who makes a genuine effort to understand sorrow. The Buddha does not deny that there is pleasure derived through the senses, but he warns us,¹⁴ that such pleasures are temporary, and quite insignificant by comparison with the numerous dangers and perils involved in the indulgence in sense-pleasures.

Further, in the Bahuvedaniya sutta,¹⁵ whilst admitting that there is happiness in sense-pleasures, the Buddha adds there is other happiness more excellent and more exquisite. This happiness may be enjoyed by the one who relinquishes the coarse pleasures of the senses, and by meditative development of concentration (*samādhi*) attains the first *jhāna* (absorption or musing). Thereafter are seven further grades of happiness, each one more excellent and more exquisite than its predecessor; e.g. the second, third, and the fourth *rūpa-jhānas* (absorptions of the fine material sphere), and the first, second, third and fourth *arūpa-jhānas* (absorptions of the immaterial sphere).

Still further in the Aṭṭhakanāgara sutta,¹⁶ in reply to a question repeated over and over again by the householder Dasama of Aṭṭhaka, as to whether there is any one thing pointed out by the Buddha, whereby if a bhikkhu dwells diligent, ardent and self-resolute, his mind is freed, and he attains the destruction of the cankers, and the matchless security from the bonds, the Venerable Ānanda answers in the affirmative and adds,

¹² See page _

¹³ *In Memoriam*, VI, Alfred Tennyson.

¹⁴ MN 13 and 14 Mahā and Cūla Dukkakkhandha suttas.

¹⁵ MN 59.

¹⁶ MN 52.

“A bhikkhu detached from the pleasures of the senses, detached from unskilled states of the mind, enters and enjoys the happiness, excellent and exquisite, of the first rūpa-jhāna, of the second, of the third, or of the fourth rūpa-jhāna, or likewise he enters and enjoys the more and more exquisite happiness of the arūpa-jhānas, or likewise he dwells having suffused the whole world, everywhere, in every way with friendliness (*mettā*) or with compassion (*karuṇā*), with sympathetic joy (*muditā*), or with equanimity (*upekkhā*); and attains the freedom of the mind that is friendliness, that is compassion, that is sympathetic joy, or that is equanimity. Having reached any one of these high states the bhikkhu by reflection comprehends that the happiness of each one of these states, however excellent, however exquisite it may be, is effected, is thought out, is impermanent, and is liable to stopping. Firm in this conviction the bhikkhu attains the matchless security, not yet attained, from the bonds.”

In other words the thoughtful disciple, although he enjoys the bliss of jhānas in this life, assesses such happiness at its true worth, and does not hanker after rebirth in the celestial worlds which would make him wander from the straight path, away from his final goal of Nibbāna. Buddhism is unique in that the happiness provided for those who reach their goal may be experienced by the one who so wishes it, here and now in the state known as Samāpatti-phala, without the necessity to wait until his death.

“This too is an attainment which
A Noble One may cultivate;
The peace it gives is recorded as
Nibbāna here and now.”¹⁷

Treatment

Whatever definition critics may give to the words religion and philosophy it is certain that Buddhism is a way of life to be lived energetically and actively from day to day, not a subject for mere academic study, discussion or debate; for the Buddha is the all-compassionate healer, and we are his patients. His only concern is to cure his patients and not to satisfy their curiosity, or solve for them the riddle of the universe. Accordingly his main concern is first to convince his patient that he is really ill and that his illness is of a serious nature. This is no easy task.

“For in the fatness of these pury times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.”¹⁸

The task becomes still more difficult if his patient is a young adult, enjoying good physical health and is well provided with the comforts of life; for in such an event the symptoms of his illness are hardly noticeable; moreover there are long periods of apparent remissions in between such symptoms as may occasionally strike him as abnormal.

“Sorrow disguised as joy, the hateful as the loved,
Pain in the form of bliss the heedless overwhelms.”¹⁹

In these circumstances the chances are he will not even see a physician until the disease is far advanced. Second, the Buddha inspires in his patient hope, confidence, and enthusiasm born of personal knowledge and conviction that a complete cure is definitely possible, although prolonged, difficult, irksome, and perhaps painful. He explains the necessity quite early in

¹⁷ Vis 23.8.30, 31, and 52. *Buddhist Dictionary*, Ven. Nāṇatiloka, entry on *nirodha samāpatti*.

¹⁸ *Hamlet* III iv (153-155)

¹⁹ Udāna 2.8.

the course of his treatment, requiring a clear conception of his illness and the outlines of its treatment as is compatible with the current level of each patient's understanding, and for periodically improving upon that knowledge, so that the patient may follow this difficult course of treatment uninterruptedly, intelligently and with enthusiasm throughout the various stages into which it is divided. Over and over again, and in various ways suited to the intelligence of his particular audience the Buddha emphasised the basis of his doctrine as consisting of these four Noble Truths: ²⁰ the Noble Truth of Suffering, of the Origin of Suffering, of the Extinction of Suffering, and of the Path leading to the Extinction of Suffering.

Numerous are the occasions on which the Buddha uttered the following words:²¹

“It is through not understanding, not penetrating these four Noble Truths, O Bhikkhus, that we have had to wander so long in this weary round of rebirths, both you and I”
And, “By not seeing the Noble Truths as they really are, long is the path that is traversed through many a birth; when these are grasped, the cause of rebirth is removed, the root of sorrow uprooted, and then there is no more birth.”

The necessity for this emphasis even during the lifetime of the Buddha was amply demonstrated; for he had, on various occasions to send for a disciple who had misunderstood his doctrine and was spreading heretical dogmas, and subsequently to point out his error. Even today we find well-meaning Buddhists stating that the Four Noble Truths are a great stumbling block in the way of non-Buddhists, even suggesting that they do not form a part of the original teaching, but are a later accretion by the monks. Says the Buddha,²² “One thing only do I teach, that is sorrow, and escape from sorrow.” And again,²³ “Just as the mighty ocean is of one flavour, the flavour of salt; even so, O bhikkhus, the doctrine is of one flavour, the flavour of deliverance.” There is certainly no room for ambiguity or cause for misunderstanding in the above language.

Further the Buddha has always emphasised that a man can only reap what he himself has sown, whilst on the other hand he was not bound to reap all he has sown; for says the Buddha in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*,²⁴ “If anyone says that a man must reap according to his deeds, in that case there is no religious life, nor is an opportunity afforded for the entire extinction of sorrow.”

The Buddha has therefore made it clear that vicarious sacrifice by another can never secure one's salvation, and that on the other hand any kind of fatalism or predestination has no place in his doctrine. Medical and scientific men who have been trained to observe will not find the teaching of the Buddha likely to do violence to their training, or their habit of drawing scientific deductions from their observations. In Buddhism there is no Divine Power, or Divine Revelation, nor is there a belief in dogmas, or in supernatural occurrences necessary for the “patient” to commence his treatment, nor is the result of the treatment dependent on the caprice and approval of a Divine Being. The following lines:²⁵

“Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove”

²⁰ Vide footnote 2, page 1.

²¹ DN 16, Ch. II 2.3: Ch. 4.2.

²² MN 22; N. Ch. IX, last page.

²³ Udāna 5.5.

²⁴ AN 3:99/A I 249; N. Ch. XV, first page

²⁵ *In Memoriam*, Alfred Tennyson, the opening lines.

have no place in Buddhism, nor do the following words cause any misgiving, or hold any terror for the Buddhist:²⁶

“Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation”

The Buddha guarantees a lasting cure for every one of his patients, who persists in his course of treatment; not as a result of his intervention, except as a guide who merely shows the way; nor as the result of any Divine Grace; but only as the logical consequence of the treatment followed by the patient himself. The beginner in Buddhism is attracted to the Buddha even as a sick man who hears of others being cured goes to the physician, and makes up his mind to follow the course of treatment prescribed by the latter, though at first his faith in the physician may not amount to much.

Faith in Buddhism really begins with knowledge based on probable evidence. It develops with progress in morality (*sīla*), and increases rapidly with progress in concentration (*samādhi*), until complete confidence is gained through progress in the meditative development of understanding (*paññā*). The Buddha does not expect from his followers a blind respect, or admiration for himself, or for his doctrine. Says the Buddha,²⁷

“Do not accept anything on the mere fact that it has been handed down by tradition, or just because it is in one’s scriptures, or merely because it agrees with one’s preconceived notions, or because the speaker seems to be a good and respected person and his words should be accepted; when, Kālāmas, you know for yourselves these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise; these things when performed and undertaken conduce to well-being and happiness, then do you live acting accordingly.”

And again when Upāli a celebrated follower of another religious teacher was once so pleased with the exposition of the Buddha’s doctrine that he wished to become a follower, the Buddha cautioned him with these words,²⁸

“Of a verity, householder, make a thorough investigation. It is well for a distinguished man like you to first make a thorough investigation.” Upāli’s admiration at this unexpected request expressed itself in the following words, “Lord, if I had become the follower of another teacher, his followers would have taken me round the streets in procession proclaiming that such and such a millionaire had renounced his former religion and embraced theirs. The more pleased am I with this remark of yours.”

Or again the Buddha questions,²⁹

“A man comes by a great stretch of water, and sees no way of crossing to the opposite shore, which is safe and secure, and so he makes an improvised raft out of sticks, branches, leaves and grass, and utilises it to cross over to the opposite shore. Suppose now, O bhikkhus, he were to say ‘this raft has been useful to me, I will therefore put it on my head and proceed on my journey,’ will he be doing what should be done with the raft?” “No, Lord,” say the bhikkhus in reply; and the Buddha himself gives the obvious answer, and adds, “Even so, O bhikkhus, the doctrine taught by me, is for crossing over, and not for retaining.”

²⁶ *Merchant of Venice*. IV 1 (197-200).

²⁷ AN 3:65/A I 188ff. See *The Wheel* No. 8: *Kālāma Sutta* (Buddhist Publication Society).

²⁸ MN 56. Translated in *The Wheel* No. 98/99.

²⁹ MN 22, *Alagaddūpama sutta*; translated in *The Wheel* No 48/49.

The doctrine of the Buddha is clearly meant for daily practice, and not for mere academic discussion, nor for staring in a museum for relics as a mark of veneration and respect for its founder. Two final illustrations of the fact that the Buddha did not expect a blind admiration:³⁰

“Bhikkhus, if outsiders should speak against me, or against the Doctrine, or the Order you should not on that account either bear malice or suffer hatred, or feel ill-will, for if you feel angry and displeased you will not be able to judge how far that speech of theirs is well said or ill.”

And his unique declaration, made by no other founder of a religion to the effect that any one of his disciples may if he so desires become a Buddha himself.

The essence of the treatment consists of The Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*), which forms the last of the Four Noble Truths. No attempt is made in this essay to give anything more than the briefest reference to each of the eight links of the path, which consist of;

Wisdom (*paññā*)

1. Right Understanding (*Sammā-ditṭhi*)
2. Right Thoughts (*Sammā-saṅkappa*.)
3. Right Speech (*Sammā-vācā*)

Morality (*sīla*)

4. Right Action (*Sammā-kammanta*)
5. Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*)

Concentration (*samādhi*)

6. Right Endeavour (*Sammā-vāyāma*)
7. Right Mindfulness (*Sammā-sati*),
8. Right Concentration (*Sammā-samādhi*)

Right Understanding is the penetration of the truth of the universality of suffering, its origin, its cure, and its treatment. Right Thoughts are threefold; thoughts free from sensuous desire, from ill-will, and from cruelty, replacing them with thoughts of renunciation of sensuous desires (*nekkhamma*), of loving-kindness (*mettā*), and of compassion (*karuṇā*). Right Speech is abstention from lying, tale bearing, harsh talk, and foolish babble. Right Action is abstention from killing, stealing, and unchastity. Right Livelihood is abstention from livelihood that brings harm to other beings. Right Endeavour is the effort of avoiding or overcoming evil and unwholesome things, and of cultivating and developing wholesome things. Right Mindfulness is mindfulness and awareness contemplating the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects. Right Concentration is one-pointedness of the mind, which eventually may reach the jhānas (absorptions or musings.)

The Buddha, the all-compassionate physician, has explained ways suited to the mental capacities of each one of us the serious illness that we are suffering from, and how its dangerous symptoms are often masked. He has explained the cause of this illness, and he has told us that an infallible remedy exists. Further he has explained the details of his treatment and has given us the prescription. It is up to us to study the nature of the treatment offered, to reason it out, and then take the remedy ourselves.

³⁰ DN 1.1.5. The Brahmajāla sutta.

The Buddha has spoken of three grades of wisdom, i.e. by learning (*sutamāyapaññā*), by reasoning (*cintāmāyapaññā*), and thirdly by meditative development (*bhāvanāmāyapaññā*). The first two grades come under the term knowledge, whilst it is only the third grade that may be correctly classified as understanding. The “taking of the remedy” consists of the gradual development of knowledge, side by side with faith and devotion (*saddhā*), so that neither of these faculties is in excess of the other (*indriyasamatta*). Excessive faith with deficient wisdom leads to blind and perhaps foolish belief, whilst excessive wisdom with deficient faith leads to cunning.

One cannot conceive of any other system of treatment, which has been so thoroughly analysed, so clearly explained, and apparently so reasonable as to fit in with our own observations. Let those of us, who are not satisfied with things as they are accept tentatively the remedy offered by the Buddha as a working hypothesis, until we gradually prove to ourselves that the hypothesis fits in with each one of our limited observations. Let us thereafter increase the number of our observations by utilising the appropriate instruments for the purpose, e. g., by meditative development of understanding, so that each fresh observation that is found to agree with the tentative hypothesis may add to our confidence, and ultimately convert what was at the beginning merely a working hypothesis into a well established fact, i.e., convert knowledge into understanding; for this is the only means by which the remedy offered by the peerless physician, for this universal malady of dukkha may be utilised successfully.

Two Kinds Of Disease

Monks, there are these two kinds of disease. What are they? Bodily disease and mental disease. People are seen who say they have been physically healthy for a year, or two years, three years, four years, five years, ten years, twenty years, thirty years, forty years, fifty years, or one hundred years, or for more than one hundred years. But, apart from those whose cankers are destroyed (i.e. the saints or Arahants), beings who say that they have been mentally healthy for even a moment are rare in the world.

From the Discourses of the Buddha (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Catukka-Nipāta. No. 157).

Buddhist Mental Therapy

by

Francis Story (Anāgārika Sugatānanda)

It has been estimated that one out of every four persons in the world's great cities today is in need of psychiatric treatment, which is equivalent to saying that the percentage of neurotics in present-day civilisation runs well into two figures.

This high incidence of personality disorders is believed to be a new phenomenon, and various factors have been adduced to account for it, all of them typical features of modern urban life. The sense of insecurity arising from material economic discord; the feeling of instability engendered by excessive competition in commerce and industry, with booms, slumps, redundancy and unemployment; the fear of nuclear war; the striving to "keep up" socially and financially with others; the disparity between different income levels combined with a general desire to adopt the manner of life of more privileged groups; sexual repression which is at the same time accompanied by continual erotic titillation from films, books and the exploitation of sex in commercial advertising — all these and a host of subsidiary phenomena are characteristic of our age. As a disturbing influence not least among them is the need to feel personally important in a civilisation which denies importance to all but few.

Each of these factors is doubtless a potential cause of psychological unbalance. Taken all together they may well be expected to produce personality maladjustments of a more or less disabling nature, particularly in the great capitals where the pressures of modern life are felt most acutely. The widespread emotional unbalance among the younger generation which has developed into an international cult with its own mythology and folklore and its own archetypal figures symbolic of the "beat generation" seems to substantiate the belief that we are living in an era of psychoneurosis.

Yet it is necessary to review this startling picture with caution. We have no statistical means of judging whether people of former days were less subject to neuroses than those of the present. The evidence of history does not entirely bear out the assumption. Patterns of living change radically, but human nature and its themes remain fairly constant in the mass. When Shakespeare, in the robust and full-blooded Elizabethan era, drew his picture of neurosis in Hamlet he was drawing from models that had been familiar from classical times and could doubtless be matched among his contemporaries. Greek and Roman history records many outstanding cases of behaviour which we now recognise as psychotic, while the Middle Ages abounded in symptoms of mass neurosis amounting to hysteria. The fear of witchcraft that held all Europe in its grip for three centuries was a neurosis so prevalent that it constituted a norm, while almost the same may be said of the more extravagant forms of religious behaviourism characteristic of that and later periods. The extraordinary Children's Crusade of 1212, when thousands of children from France and Germany set out on foot to conquer the Holy Land for Christendom, and never returned, is one example. Here the influence of a prevailing idea on young and emotionally unstable minds is comparable to the international climate of thought which in our own day has produced the "beat generation."

There is no strict line of demarcation between a religious ecstasy and a nihilistic expression of revolt, as we may learn from Dostoyevsky, himself a neurotic of no mean

stature. The private mystique of the neurotic may be caught up in the larger world of mass neurotic fantasy, where it adds its contribution to a world that is apart from that of its particular age but which reflects it as in the distortions of a dream. Because of this, the neurotic is often found to be the spokesman and prophet of his generation. Modern communication has made this more than ever possible, creating a mental climate of tremendous power that knows no barriers and can only with difficulty be kept within the bounds of the prevailing norm. Adolph Hitler turned a large section of German youth into psychopaths, first because his personal neurosis found a response in theirs, and then because he was able to communicate it to them directly by means of radio, newspapers and other modern media of propaganda. At the same time, the unstable personality of the neuropath drew support and an intensification of its subliminal urges from the response it evoked in countless people who had never come into personal contact with the source. The real danger of neurosis today is its increased communicability; people are in contact with one another more than they have ever been before. The tendency to standardize, undesirable in itself, has the further disadvantage that it too often results in the wrong standards being accepted. Epidemic diseases of the mind are more to be feared than those of the body.

But those who are inclined to believe that personality disorders are a phenomenon of recent growth may draw comfort from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. There we have a compendium of cases of individual and collective neuroses gathered from all ages, showing every variety of hallucinatory and compulsive behaviour ranging from mild eccentricity to complete alienation from reality classed as insanity. Psychopathic degeneration, criminality, alcoholism, suicidal and homicidal tendencies are as old as the history of mankind.

Nor is there any real evidence that people living in simpler and more primitive societies are less prone to psychological disturbances than those of modern urban communities. The rural areas of any European country can show their proportion of neurotics in real life no less than in fiction, while in those parts of the world least touched by Western civilisation the symptoms of mental sickness among indigenous peoples are very common, and are prone to take extreme forms. Where an inherent tendency to confuse the world of reality with that of dreams and imagination is worked upon by superstitious fears, morbid neurotic reactions are a frequent result. The psychosomatic sickness produced by the witch-doctor's curse, which so often culminates in death, is even more common than are the mentally-induced diseases of the West that are its counterpart.

In one respect primitive societies are superior to those of today, and that is in the preservation of initiation ceremonies. These give the adolescent the necessary sense of importance and of "belonging"; they serve as tests which justify the place in tribal life that the initiate is to take up. By their severity they satisfy the initiate that he is worthy. Initiation rites have survived to some extent in the boisterous "ragging" given to new arrivals in most institutions for the young, but they have no official sanction and do not confer any acknowledged status. To be psychologically effective an initiation ceremony must be either religious or in some way demonstrative of the new manhood or womanhood of the initiate. It then dispels feelings of inferiority and the self-doubtings which are a frequent cause of neurosis, and sometimes of delinquent behaviour in young people. Primitive societies, however, have their own peculiar cause of mental disturbance and it is a mistake to suppose that they are superior in this context to more sophisticated social structures.

More attention is given to minor psychological maladjustments today than in former times. Departures from the normal standards of behaviour are more noticeable in civilised than in primitive societies. The instinct to run to the psychiatrist's couch has become a part of contemporary mores. It is true that modern life produces unnatural nervous stresses; but

strain and conflict are a part of the experience of living, in any conditions. There has been merely a shifting of points of tension. The more man is artificially protected from the dangers surrounding primitive peoples, the more sensitive he becomes to minor irritants; yet man in a completely safe environment and free from all causes for anxiety—if that were more than theoretically possible—would be supremely bored, and boredom itself is a cause of neurosis.

Human beings can be psychologically as well as physically overprotected. As the civilised man falls a prey to psychological conflicts brought about by situations which are much less truly anxiety-producing than those that menace the lives of primitive peoples every day. Habituated by education and example to expect more of life than the human situation gives him any reason to expect, the modern man feels the impact of forces hostile to these expectations more keenly than he need do. Modern commercial civilisation is continually fostering and propagating desires which all men cannot satisfy equally and desire, artificially stimulated only to meet with frustration as a prime cause of psychological disorders. Herein lies the chief difference between our own and former eras. There is a need for periods of true relaxation which many people deny themselves in their desire to be continually entertained.

The systematic study of abnormal psychology began with the work of J.M. Charcot in 1862. The advent of psychoanalysis closely followed, bringing the subject of personality disorders into prominence. Then came a breaking down of distinctions formerly made between normal and abnormal psychology. The two became merged in what is now called dynamic psychology. It was found that the obsessions and compulsions of neurosis are not something distinct from the ordinary modes of behaviour but are only extreme and sharply-defined forms of the prejudices and habit patterns of the “normal” person. In defining abnormality it has become the custom to place the line of demarcation simply at the point where the extreme symptoms make some form of treatment necessary for the person who deviates persistently from the average standards of his group. Thus “normal” and “abnormal” are purely relative terms whose only point of comparison is that provided by the generally-accepted habit patterns of a particular group. If the group itself is collectively abnormal its units must be considered “normal,” with the result that we are compelled to make a reinterpretation of what is meant by these terms of reference.

All behaviour is a form of adjustment, and this is true equally of behaviour that is socially acceptable (the “norm”), or socially unacceptable. It is really the active response of a living organism to some stimulus or some situation which acts upon it. The ways in which certain persons deviate from normal standards in behaviour are nothing but individual ways of meeting and adjusting to situations. This new way of regarding the problem is of the utmost importance, particularly when we come to examine the Buddhist system of psychology. In Buddhism, all modes of consciousness are seen as responses to sensory stimuli, and these responses are conditioned by the predetermining factors from past volition. For example, where one person sees an object and is attracted to it, whilst another is repelled by the same object, the cause is to be found in mental biases set up in the past: All reactions, furthermore, are conditioned by a universal misapprehension of the real nature of the object as it is cognised through the senses.

There is therefore a common denominator of misunderstanding which takes the form of collective delusion; it constructs the world of sensory apperceptions and values out of the abstract world of forces which is the actuality of physics. Where there is in reality nothing but processes and events, an ever-changing flux of energies, the mind construes a world of things and personalities. In this world the human consciousness moves selectively, clinging

to this, rejecting that, according to personal preferences of habit and prior self-conditioning. The dominating factors known to Buddhism as *avijjā* (nescience), *moha* (delusion) or *vipallāsa* (misapprehension) are a condition of mental disorder, a hallucinatory state. The Pali axiom *sabbe puthujjanā ummattakā*,³¹ “all worldlings are deranged,” indicates the whole purpose of Buddhism is to apply mental therapy to a condition which, accepted as the norm, is in truth nothing but a state of universal delusion.

The puthujjana or “worldling” who is thus described is, the average man; that is, all human beings except those who have entered on the four stages of purification, the *sotāpanna* (stream-enterer), *sakadāgāmi* (once-returner), *anāgāmi* (non-returner) and *arahant* (saint). The *puthujjana* is characterised by mental reactions of craving for states which are impermanent, subject to suffering, devoid of reality and inherently impure. These he wrongly imagines to be permanent, productive of happiness, invested with self-existence and pleasurable. His hankering for them is accompanied by mental biases (*āsavas*), mind-defiling passions (*kilesa*) and psychological fetters (*saṃyojana*), which in Buddhism are seen as the root causes of wrong action and consequent unhappiness. What we call the “norm” is an average balance of these mental factors and their opposites, in exactly the same way that a state of normal physical health is merely the “balance of power” between the various classes of bacteria in the body. If one class of bacteria gains ascendancy over the others it begins to have a destructive effect on the living tissues, and a state of disease supervenes. Psychologically, an increase in any one of the mental defilements constitutes the change over from a normal to an abnormal psychology. Since all “worldlings” are deranged, what we are concerned with in dynamic psychology is the degree of derangement and its underlying causes. This is the case also in Buddhist psychology.

Freudian psychoanalysis works on the assumption that when the origin of a personality disorder is known its influence on unconscious motivation will automatically disappear. Freud endeavoured to trace all psychic traumas to experiences in infancy or early childhood, and made the libido the basis of his system. His work opened up many hitherto unsuspected areas of personality and made a great contribution to our knowledge of the subject. But the defects of Freud’s theories can be understood in terms of his system, for he tended to exaggerate certain motives, unduly, and in deliberately searching for these he worked on a method of personal selectivity that was bound to become apparent to Jung and others among his successors. His therapeutic methods may also be questioned, for the conflicts engendered by unconscious motivation do not always cease when the original cause of the trauma is brought to the surface. For this and other reasons psychotherapy has not so far produced the benefits which were once expected of it. In many cases the most it can do is to enable the subject to come to terms with himself and “live with” his condition. The limited nature of its success is indicated by the need to resort to physical treatment for cases that have passed from neurosis to psychosis, such as electroconvulsive therapy for acute depressive moods, insulin injections for the early stages of schizophrenia, frontal lobotomy for prolonged anxiety states and the use of the class of drugs known as tranquillizers which act upon the vegetative, interneurotic circuits of the brain.

In contrast to the expedients of Western psychiatry, Buddhist mental therapy aims at total integration of the personality on a higher level. Since craving is the root cause of suffering it is necessary to diminish, and finally extinguish, craving. But desire is also the mainspring of volition, so the first stage of the process must be the substitution of higher objectives for the motivations of the libido and their offshoots. The libido-actuated urges must give place to the consciously-directed motives of the *adhicitta* or higher mind. It is here that Buddhism

³¹ Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā.

introduces a point of reference which Western psychotherapy has been unable to fit comfortably into its theories—the field of ethical values.

The discarding of many conventional and religious moral attitudes, on grounds they are for the most part contingent and arbitrary, has left the psychologist without ethical determinants in certain important areas of his work. Whilst accepting as the norm the standards of contemporary life he has not been able to work out any universal basis on which what is “right” and what is “wrong” in some aspects of human conduct can be established. The defect has been a serious handicap in the treatment of anti-social and delinquent behaviour. The psychiatrist confronted with examples of deviationist and unacceptable behaviour finds himself unable to decide on what authority he is setting up as the “norm” a standard which he knows to be mostly a product of environment and social convenience. Clinical diagnoses and moral judgements do not always point in the same direction.

Buddhist ethical-psychology cuts through the problem by asserting boldly the measure of immoral behaviour is simply the degree to which it is dominated by craving and the delusion of selfhood. This at once gives an absolute standard and an unchanging point of reference. It is when the ego-assertive instinct overrides conventional inhibitions that behaviour becomes immoral and therefore unacceptable; it is when the over-sensitive ego fears contact with reality that it retreats into a fantasy of its own devising. The neurotic creates his own private world of myth with its core in his own ego, and around this revolve delusions of grandeur, of persecution or of anxiety. Neurosis then passes imperceptibly into psychosis. The ordinary man also, impelled by ego-assertiveness and the desire for self-gratification, is continually in danger of slipping across the undefined border between normal and abnormal behaviour. He is held in check only by the inhibitions imposed by training. The attainment of complete mental health requires the gradual shedding of the delusions centred in the ego; and it begins with the analytical understanding that the ego itself is a delusion. Therefore the first of the fetters to be cast away is *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*, the illusion of an enduring ego-principle.

The doctrine of non-self (*anattā*) is a cardinal tenet of Buddhism and the one that distinguishes it from all other religious systems, including Hindu Yoga. Ever since the time of Aristotle the “soul,” the *pneuma* or *animus* which is supposed to enter the body at birth and permeate its substance, has been taken as the entelechy of being in Western thought. Buddhism denies the existence of any such entity, and modern psychology and scientific philosophy confirm this view. Everything we know concerning states of consciousness can be postulated without reference to any persisting ego-principle. Like the body, the mind is a succession of states, a causally-conditioned continuum whose factors are sensation, perception, volition and consciousness. Introspective examination of the states of the mind in order to realise this truth is one of the exercises recommended in Buddhism.³²

Understanding Buddhist principles of impermanence, of suffering (as being the product of craving) and of non-ego brings about a re-orientation of mind characterised by greater detachment, psychological stability and moral awareness. But Buddhism points out this is not an effect which can be obtained by external means; it is the result of effort, beginning with and sustained by the exercise of will. First of all there must be the desire to put an end to suffering, and that desire must be properly canalised into *sammappadhāna*, the Four Great Exertions; that is, the effort to eliminate existing unwholesome states of mind; to prevent the arising of new unwholesome states; to develop new wholesome states and to

³² This is part of *Satipaṭṭhāna* on which see *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera (Rider & Co.) and *The Wheel* No. 18; 60; 121/122.

maintain them when they have arisen. The unwholesome states of mind are nothing but products of mental sickness that derive from the ego and its repressed desires.

Here it should be pointed out Buddhist teaching is non-violent, and non-violence is to be exercised towards one's own mind as well as towards the external world. To repress natural desires is merely to force them below the surface of consciousness where they are liable to grow into morbid, obsessions, breaking out in hysteria or manic depressive symptoms. Buddhism does not favour this rough treatment of the psyche, which has produced so many undesirable results in Western monasticism. Instead of repression Buddhism works by attenuation and sublimation. Visualising the passions as fire, Buddhism seeks to extinguish them by withholding the fuel. For example, sensuality is reduced in stages by contemplation of the displeasing aspects of the body so there comes a turning away from the sources of physical passion. Attraction is replaced by repulsion, and this finally gives way to a state of calm indifference. Each impure state of mind is counteracted by its opposite.

Techniques of meditation (*bhāvanā*) in Buddhism are designed for specific ends according to the personality of the meditator and the traits necessary to eliminate. They are prescribed by the teacher just as treatment is given by a psychiatrist; the mode of treatment is selected with the requirements of the individual patient in view. The forty subjects of meditation, known as *kammaṭṭhāna* (bases of action), cover every type of psychological need and every possible combination of types. Their salutary action is cumulative and progressive from the first stages to the ultimate achievement. From the beginning, the Buddhist system of self-training makes a radical readjustment within the mental processes, a readjustment which is founded on the acceptance of certain essential concepts that differ from those ordinarily held. The old scale of values, with its emphasis on the cultivation of desires, is seen to be false and a source of unhappiness; but this realisation does not result in a psychic vacuum. As the old, unwholesome ideas are discarded, new and invigorating ones take their place, while the lower motivations give place to consciously-directed impulses on the higher levels of being. So the personality is moulded anew by introspective self-knowledge.

One defect of psychoanalysis as practised in the West is that it often reveals ugly aspects of the personality before the patient is ready to accept them. This sometimes has highly undesirable side effects and may even cause disintegration of the personality. The Buddhist system of mental analysis teaches us to confront every revealed motivation in a spirit of detached and objective contemplation in the knowledge there is nothing "unnatural" in nature, but that an impulse which is "natural" is not necessarily also desirable. The Buddhist who has brought himself to think in terms of the kinship of all living organisms, a concept inherent in the doctrine of rebirth, is not appalled by the coming to light of subconscious desires that are contrary to those permitted in his particular social environment.

The distinction between human and animal conduct, which science has done much to prove illusory, is not sharply defined in Buddhist thought, where all life is seen as the product of craving-impulses manifesting now on the human, now on the animal level. Where sadistic or masochistic impulses exist they are viewed realistically and with detachment as residual factors of past motivation, and they can be dealt with accordingly. Terms such as "perversion", already obsolete in modern psychology although they survive in popular writing and speech, have never existed in Buddhist thought. All Buddhism recognises is craving and its various objects and degrees. Because of this, the moral climate of Buddhist thought as it concerns libidinal impulses and inclinations is different from that of the West with its Judeo-Christian discriminations.

The distinction that this craving is "good" while that is "bad" is foreign to Buddhism, for Buddhism is not concerned with the morality of fluctuating social conventions but with a

concept of mental hygiene in which all craving is seen as a source of misery, to be first controlled and then eradicated. Thus, although its ultimate ideals are higher, the rational morality of Buddhism as it still operates in many Buddhist communities is not so destructive in its effects as the discriminative theological morality prevailing in the West. No Buddhist feels himself to be a “lost soul” or an outcast from society because his desire-objects are different from those of the majority, unless his ideas have been tainted with Judeo-Christian influences. The Western psychiatrist who seeks to reassure a patient whom he cannot “cure” suffers from the disadvantage that he has the whole body of theological popular morality against him and nothing can remove this devastating knowledge from his patient’s mind. Hence we find that guilt and inferiority complexes, a dangerous source of psychological maladjustment, are certainly more prevalent, coming from this particular cause, than they are where standards common to the antique world still survive.

The three unwholesome roots of conduct, greed, hatred and delusion, are nourished by unhealthy thoughts that arise spontaneously in association with memories of past experiences. The mind also absorbs a great deal of poison from its environment. Through the channels of sense perception there is continual exposure to suggestions from the outside world. This, together with the natural desire to conform to the behaviour patterns and ways of thinking characteristic of one’s particular generation or society, brings an almost compulsive pressure to bear upon the individual. The norms of primitive societies are directed towards conformity with the laws of the tribe, enforcing respect for taboo and inter-tribal relations; but in the complex civilisations of today, disruptive influences that deny or at least weaken the traditional patterns of behaviour, often bringing them into contempt, are gathering force and momentum. An increasing part is being played in this process by the media of mass entertainment.

It would be well if more attention were to be paid by present-day moralists to the cult of violence that has arisen as the outcome of commercially-exploited sadism in films, popular literature and “comics” which give children and adolescents a morbid taste for the torture and extermination of their fellow-beings. Aggression is another instinct natural to man, but to encourage it for profit is certainly one of the true sins against humanity. Here again, of course, we have nothing entirely new; cruelty is a prominent feature of many traditional and classic stories for children. What is new is the enormous quantity of such entertainment and the facility with which it is distributed on a global scale to create an international climate of thought and a subconscious reversal of all the standards that civilisation, nominally upholds. We should not feel surprised at the psychological dichotomy it produces. Sooner or later we shall again have to pay heavily for the cult of outrage we have encouraged.

This however is a question of social psychology; we are now dealing with individual psychology as it is affected by modern conditions and in the light of the Buddhist axiom, *Sabbe puthujjanā ummattakā*. We have already noted the four stages of mental purification beyond the puthujjana state begin with the attainment of *sotāpatti-magga*, the “path” of one who has “entered the stream” of emancipation. This is followed immediately by *sotāpatti-phala*, the “fruit of stream winning.” It is at this point the erstwhile puthujjana becomes one of the four (or eight) classes of Noble Persons. In the scheme of the ten *saṃyojanas* (fetters) he has eliminated the first three fetters: ego-delusion, doubt as to the truth, and addiction to vain rituals which have no place in the higher endeavour. He then goes on to the next stage, that of the *sakadāgāmi*. This is marked by the weakening of the next two fetters in the series: sensuous passion and ill-will.

In the next phase of development he completely frees himself from these first five, which are called the “lower fetters.” The remaining five fetters are attachment to existence on the

higher levels of being (intellectualised existence), craving for existence on the purely mental plane (the spiritual life freed from the body), pride (the “pride of the saint in his sainthood”), restlessness (the perturbed condition of the mind distracted by desires) and nescience. The last of these is the root-condition referred to previously; it is only eliminated in full at the last stage. The aspirant has then gained the full mental liberation of an Arahant. While the mental and bodily formations continue to function he experiences sa-upādisesa-nibbāna, or Nibbāna with the elements of existence still present: At death this becomes an-upādisesa-nibbāna or parinibbāna, the complete extinction of the life-asserting, life-sustaining factors. No form of Nibbāna can be attained before this last stage; the three classes of Noble Personalities that precede it gain assurance of the reality of Nibbāna but they do not experience the actual sa-upādisesa-nibbāna until all the defilements are removed.

It is not the purpose of this article to deal with the state of Nibbāna, but merely to indicate the difference between the condition of the “worldling” with his illusions and cravings, and that of the fully-emancipated and mentally healthy being. Buddhism itself is concerned more with the path than with the end, since it is the path which has to be followed, and the end must automatically reveal itself if the path is followed rightly. It is true the goal Nibbāna is never very far from Buddhist thought; it is the motivating principle and *raison d'être* of the entire Buddhist system.

But the stages on the way are our immediate concern. They involve an approach which is fundamentally therapeutic and progressive. Buddhist meditation is of two types, complementary to each other: *samatha-bhāvanā*, the cultivation of tranquillity, and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, the cultivation of direct transcendental insight. For the latter it is necessary to have a teacher, one who has himself taken the full course of treatment, but much benefit can be obtained by an intelligent application of Buddhist ideas in the preliminary stages without a guide other than the original teachings of the Buddha. Everyone can, and should, avoid what he knows to be unwholesome states of mind, should cultivate universal benevolence in the systematic Buddhist manner, should endeavour to impress on his deepest consciousness the truths of impermanence, life-suffering and its cause, and the unreality of the ego. A period of quiet meditation, in which the mind is withdrawn from externals, ought to be set aside every day for the purpose. By this method Buddhism enables every man to be his own psychiatrist, and avoids those dependences on others which so often produce further emotional entanglements in the relationship between the psychotherapist and patient.

Any philosophy of life which does not include rebirth must be incomplete and morally unsatisfactory, and the same is true of psychological systems. Some psychological disorders have their origin in past lives: they are then often congenital and sometimes involve the physical structure of the brain or neural system. These are the psycho-somatic conditions which call for the use of surgery, drugs and the other physical treatments already mentioned. As resultants of past Kamma they may respond to treatment or they may not; all depends upon the balance of good and bad Kamma and the interaction of causes, not excluding external and material ones. But in any case, the knowledge that no condition is permanent, and the certainty that the disorder will come to an end with the exhaustion of the bad Kamma result, be it in this life or another, gives courage and fortitude to the sufferer.

By understanding our condition we are able to master it, or at least to endure it until it passes away. This salutary understanding can also be applied beneficially in the case of those who have developed personality disorders through bad environmental influences, childhood traumas or any other cause traceable in this present life. Feelings of inadequacy, grievances against the family or social framework, emotional maladjustments can all be

understood in terms of Kamma and rebirth. The question “Why has this thing happened to me?” with the sense of injustice that comes from experiencing undeserved pain, is answered fully and logically by Buddhism. With that comes the beginning of an adjustment to circumstances which is in itself therapeutic. Together with this, the knowledge one can be the sole and undisputed master of one’s own future fate comes as the most effective psychological tonic and corrective that can be administered.

On Egolessness

From the Discourses of the Buddha

Better it would be to consider the body as the “Ego” rather than the mind. And why? Because this body may last for ten, twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years, even for a hundred years and more. But that which is called “mind, consciousness, thinking,” arises continuously, during day and night, as one thing, and as something different again it vanishes.

SN 12:61

There is no corporeality, no feeling, no perception, no mental formations, no consciousness that is permanent, enduring and lasting, and that, not subject to any change, will eternally remain the same. If there existed such an ego that is permanent, enduring and lasting and not subject to any change, then holy life leading to the complete extinction of suffering will not be possible.

SN 22:96

One should not imagine oneself as being identical with the six sense organs (including mind) with the six sense objects (including mind objects) and with the (corresponding) six kinds of consciousness; one should not imagine, oneself as being outside them; one should not imagine, “they belong to me.” Nor should one imagine oneself as being identical with the totality of things.

Thus not imagining any more, the wise disciple clings no longer to anything in the world. Clinging no longer to anything, he trembles not. Trembling no longer, he reaches in his own person the extinction of all vanity: “Exhausted is rebirth, lived the holy life, and no further existence have I to expect,” thus he knows.

SN 35:90

The Teaching of Egolessness (*Anattā*)

A Solace in Illness

by

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Quite frequently the Discourses of the Buddha make reference to the problem of disease, and of man as a being unavoidably afflicted with disease. We find such reference, for instance, in a Discourse of the Buddha, called “Nakulapitā.”³³

Nakulapitā, an old and sick man, comes to see the Buddha for obtaining solace in the afflictions of old age: “I am decrepit and old, O Lord, aged, advanced in years, have come to the end of my life. My body is ailing and I am frequently unwell. Rarely now, O Lord, can I enjoy the sight of the Enlightened One and of his venerable monks. May the Exalted One instruct me, may the Exalted One teach me so that it may be for my benefit and happiness for a long time!”

And the Buddha replied: “Yes, householder. Truly this body of ours is feeble, fragile and delicate. If one who carries this kind of body along and deems it free of illness even for a moment, what else could that be called but ignorance! Therefore, householder, you should train your self in the thought: “May not my mind be ill, though my body be ill”! Thus, householder, should you train yourself.” The Buddha and his monks are thoroughly realistic in their way of thinking. They accept things as they are, they do not hide facts nor do they embellish them; they see in them neither more nor less than what is actually involved. Therefore the Buddha listens calmly to Nakulapitā’s complaint about his illness, without contradicting him and without trying to persuade him that his condition was not serious as far as his aged body was concerned. The Buddha admits that Nakulapitā’s complaints are justified, but he tries to turn his attention from his ailing body to his unimpaired mind which may well stay healthy even in bodily illness, and is sure to be healthy if the patient does not cherish wrong ideas, but preserves his clarity of thinking,

The Buddha’s words first dispose of a theoretical misunderstanding that is very often attached to that well-known Latin saying *Mens sana in corpore sano*, “sound mind in sound body”. There is certainly truth in that tag if it is taken as pointing to the close interrelations existing between body and mind. But then it should consistently be supplemented by the statement *Corpus sanum in mente sana*, “A healthy body, with a healthy mind.” For there is no doubt about it: as frequently as a sound mental life will develop based on a sound body likewise wrong ideas and misconceptions about life will harm the body and cause illness.

Furthermore, those words of the Buddha to old Nakulapitā, if they are fully understood and practically applied, will help mitigate the actual suffering of the patient, and in some cases make his ailment cease.

After Nakulapitā had listened to the Buddha’s advice and had left him, he meets one of the Master’s chief disciples, the venerable Sāriputta, and requests him to elucidate further that brief utterance so that he may better grasp its implications. What Sāriputta now explains, offering it as a solace in old-age and illness, may well surprise us at first. Sāriputta tells the ailing man true health, of mind manifests itself in the rejection of wrong ideas about one’s personality, for instance the belief that the five aggregates (*khandha*) which, according

³³ Saṃyutta Nikāya Vol. 3 Discourse No 1. (SN 22:1)

to Buddhist doctrine constitute the so-called individual or personality, have anything to do with an abiding core, an eternal soul, ego or self. These five aggregates are corporeality, feeling, perception, volition and other mental formations, and consciousness. They implicitly comprise the entire world of our perception. They are also called “the groups of clinging” (*upādānakkhandhā*) because, through ignorance, they are made the objects of clinging and craving, the targets of possessive greed by which a deluded mind identifies itself with these Groups, calling them “I” or “mine.” But reality, so teaches the Buddha, has no equivalent for these erroneous conceptions.

To hold out this denial of an abiding Ego against the harsh experience of old-age and illness may first appear as a rather poor consolation. But let us listen to how Sāriputta continues his exposition. “Suppose,” says Sāriputta, “man’s so-called self were identical with any of these five aggregates, or it were their rightful owner; or they were inherent within the Self, or the Self were enveloped in them. If that were the case, then an ailing man would have good reason for being mortally afraid of the illness that constantly attacks the one or the other of the five aggregates,” and afflicts also the other aggregates with resulting repercussions. His fear, in that case, will be so deep-rooted because he believes it is his imagined Self that undergoes all these painful changes, and that hence the possibility of complete destruction of that Self cannot be excluded. But if, in the light of the Buddha’s teaching of *anattā* (not-self), the ailing man sees all constituents and functions of the body as but transient life-processes in which no self is hidden and hence cannot perish; if he understands that no abiding ego exists and that the belief in it is a myth; that the conception of an ego is produced, mirage-like, by the interplay of the five aggregates; if in this way the ailing man comes to understand that in truth there is no self or soul, then he will regard his organism as something alien, even as the objects of the external world. He will feel no regrets about the changes in the five aggregates, their arising and then passing away. He will recognise and accept it as a fundamental fact of reality and will not cherish any grief or sorrow about it. With a serene mind, he will face the impending disintegration of the body and of the physical and mental processes bound up with it. Calm and collected will be his death. An event dreadful in itself may lose half of its impact if it is clearly understood and thoroughly examined in the light of Buddhist methods of thinking. To gain such insight or helping others to gain it, does not of course signify, a cure of illness but it does take the sting out of it.

In addition, the cultivation of such a way of thinking may be of decisive importance for one’s future if, following the Buddha, one accepts the view that the energy set free in death, cannot vanish but will continue to be active, searching a new womb, a new physical basis for its activity, in conformity with the volitional tendencies developed during previous lives. Now a mind that accepts the teaching of egolessness, that thereby has shed many disquietening illusions and has found serene equanimity, will in consequence have much better chances for a favourable rebirth than a mind agitated by fear of death and confused by the passionate clinging to an imagined self—thus torn between fear and hope. Moreover, a mind that has seen through the illusion of self, may, under favourable circumstances, become capable of freeing itself entirely from the ever-revolving Wheel of Life, and reach Nibbāna, the final cessation of life-affirming passions and life-creating energies. This, however, will come to pass only if the teaching of *anattā* (egolessness) has been grasped not merely intellectually, but if it has been realised fully through a completely transformed and truly selfless way of life.

Thus it was not an empty and false consolation but a practical help, and a beneficial clarity of insight which the Buddha and his disciple bestowed upon ailing Nakulapitā. The same realistic outlook will become evident when considering another aspect of Sāriputta’s

words. In his explanations he deals with wrong ideas about a self only to the extent of actual experience. Beyond that we cannot know more about ourselves than what Buddhist psychology teaches us: what we call “man” or “person” is the interplay of the five aggregates: corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. These five groupings are classifications of all physical and mental phenomena that constitute the human being. The Discourses of the Buddha and later Buddhist psychology give many interesting details about them.

Modern psychology of the West has developed quite kindred ideas which have been summarized by Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy*: “What can we know about Mr. Smith? When we look at him, we see a pattern of colours; when we listen to him talking, we hear a series of sounds. We believe that, like us, he has thoughts and feelings. But what is Mr. Smith apart from all these occurrences? A more imaginary hook from which the occurrences are supposed to hang. They have in fact no need of a hook, no more than the earth needs an elephant to rest upon... Mr. Smith is a collective name for a number of occurrences. If we take it as anything more, it denotes something completely unknowable.”

If a thinker wishes to remain on the firm ground of experience and yet postulates an abiding ego, he will have to assume that this ego is identical with one of the five aggregates or with the totality of the physical and mental processes of life which these groups represent. But this belief will collapse as soon as the arising and vanishing of these aggregates has been perceived; because what arises and thus constantly changes can never constitute an eternal and abiding self

However, those who believe in a soul only too often override the limits set by experience and concern themselves with “something completely unknowable,” as Russell says. Moving along these wrong tracks of thought, they readily admit that all cognizable and experiential constituents of the “personality” are subject to constant change, to an unceasing rise and fall; and for that reason they of course cannot be considered as an abiding ego. But it is, so they believe, just from behind or beyond the cognizable and experiential components of the personality that the true eternal self or soul appears which, naturally, must be beyond cognition and experience. What is wrong in such a position and in these conclusions, has chiefly to be attributed to the fact that an empty concept has been raised to the dignity of man’s true essence or core—a concept obtained by mere abstract ratiocination, having no longer anything in common with observation and experience. The futility of such a play with words has been shown by Kant. For him a way of thinking that transgresses the limits drawn by experience is a playing with ideas, and the alleged vision of something imperceptible is “a poetic fiction transcending everything imaginable, a mere whim.”

The Buddha and his monks, however, are no dreamers chasing after metaphysical phantoms. They are sober realists who will not admit such groundless speculations even to the range of their considerations or refutations. This may be the reason why the Buddha and his followers appear so realistic and quite modern in their outlook.

From the Questions of King Milinda

Certain drugs, O king, have been made known by the Blessed One: drugs by which the Blessed One delivers the whole world of gods and men from the poison of evil dispositions. And what are these drugs? The four Noble Truths made known by the Blessed One, that is to say, the truth as to sorrow, and the truth as to the origin of sorrow, and the truth as to the cessation of sorrow, and the truth as to that path which leads to the cessation of sorrow. And whosoever, longing for the highest insight (the insight of Arahatsip), hear this doctrine of the four truths, they are set quite free from rebirth, they are set quite free from old age, they are set quite free from death, they are set quite free from grief, lamentation, pain, sorrow, and despair.

“Of all the drugs in all the world,
The antidotes of poison dire,
Not one equals that Doctrine sweet.
Drink that, O Bhikkhus. Drink and live!”

Certain medicines, O king, have been made known by the Blessed One, medicines by which he cures the whole world of gods and men. And they are these: “These four Foundations of Mindfulness, the four Right Endeavours, the four Roads to Power, the five Faculties, the five Powers, the seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path.” By these medicines the Blessed One purges men of wrong views, purges them of low aspirations, purges them of evil speaking, purges them of evil deeds, purges them of evil modes of livelihood, purges them of wrong endeavours, purges them of attention to the wrong, purges them of erroneous meditation; and he gives emetics to the vomiting up of lusts, and of malice, and of dullness, and of doubt, and of pride, and of sloth of body and inertness of mind, and of shamelessness and hardness of heart, and of all evil.

“Of all the medicines found in all the world,
Many in number, various in their powers,
Not one equals this medicine of the Truth.
Drink that, O Bhikkhus. Drink and live!”

For having drank that medicine of the Truth,
You shall have passed beyond old age and death,
And—evil, lusts, and Kamma rooted out
Thoughtful and seeing, you shall be at rest!

Buddhism in the Modern Age

by

Nimalasuria

Scientific achievement has revolutionised the way of human life. The most characteristic feature of the modern age is its material progress. Modern men and women, whatever their social condition, expect a higher degree of physical comfort and a greater satisfaction of their material needs than their ancestors. The machine with its high productivity is responsible for this.

Another feature of the modern age is the very large number of people every country has to support.

Increased material needs and the vast populations which states have to support have made organisation the only means of “delivering the goods to the people.” In all the far-reaching changes that have taken, those religious beliefs and moral attitudes without the sanction of science or reason have been or are in danger of being swept away. Buddhism alone stands firm and the belief in it becomes stronger every day. The reason is Buddhism is based on fundamentals—the acceptance that impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and soullessness are characteristics of individual existence, of which craving (*tanhā*) is the root cause, and that the change that occurs in the individual from moment to moment follows the law of “dependent origination”.

How may the basic truths of Buddhism and the way of life it enjoins be used for the benefit of modern society? The answer, perhaps over-simplified, is by the encouragement of those states of consciousness that are productive of good, and the discouraging of those states that are productive of evil.

“*Pañcasīla*” may be accepted as the universal code of moral conduct—the first four precepts regarding the taking of life, stealing, wrongful sexual relations and the deceiving of others—are an endeavour to live one’s life without interfering with the legitimate rights of others. The fifth is to refrain from taking intoxicants which have the effect of lowering man from a poise of high endeavour and calm judgment to a coarse expression of emotional behaviour.

The ordinary layman spends much of his time in the pursuit of his livelihood. His first requirement therefore is that the nature of his work should be such as not to bring him into conflict with the practice of the five precepts, or to make him an intermediate link in encouraging others to break them. In modern society, the acceptance by science of a diet which satisfies the physiological requirements of man, but which does not involve the slaughter of animals, is a pressing need.

The work of many people today tends to be dull and monotonous. It may involve, for example, the repetition of a certain movement several hundred times a day. Few have the satisfaction of creative work, of seeing a job to its finish. The lack of creative work dulls the mind, but little has been done to correct this during the hours of leisure. If leisure time is spent in the pursuit of pleasure alone, there can be little or no improvement of the individual or of society as a whole. The reason for the failure to use leisure time to the best advantage of the individual and society is the lack of a rational view of morality—a defect in modern society which Buddhism alone can correct.

In the pursuit of a moral life a positive attitude towards good is as important as a negative attitude towards evil. In the ordinary world of sense desires the opportunity for good lies in selfless service and in giving. Whatever one's livelihood, it should be possible to render this service, and however poor one is one should still be able to share what one has with another.

An opportunity to practise the "higher *sīla*" (morality) is a necessary part of the Buddhist way of life. Without a recognition of this need, neither the individual nor society as a whole can make any progress. Observing of the eight precepts on full moon days by lay people gives an opportunity at least once a month for the practice of the higher *sīla* as well as for *bhāvanā*" (meditation) which should accompany it.

In the Buddhist way of life, monks are those who have abandoned worldly pleasures, and with it worldly cares. They should live in temples or places of meditation and be strictly guided by the rules of the order. With the clarity of thought born of detachment, their capacity for higher understanding is great. They are a help not only to themselves but to all those who wish to tread the path of Buddhism, and to society itself. In the organisation of modern life, the place of the monk as one who devotes his whole life to his calling must be accepted. His endeavour must be supported not only for his own sake, but also for the benefit of society as a whole. A society which does not accept this responsibility will suffer sooner or later from moral degradation.

Abbreviations

All translations published by the Pali Text Society, except:

- N.: Nārada Thera, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Saigon 1964, Colombo 1973, BMS 1977, BPS 1980.
- Vism: Ñāṇamoli Thera (tr.), *Visuddhimagga, or The Path of Purification*, Kandy: B.P.S. 1985–2007
- W.: Warren, Henry Clarke (tr.), *Buddhism in Translations*, Harvard 1896, New York 1972, Delhi 1987. Also reprinted as *Buddhist Discourses*, Delhi 1980. Comprises selections from VP and SP, Jātakas, Sumaṅgalavilasini, Milindapañha and Visuddhimagga.

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