



*Thadu Maha Thray Sithu
U Chan Htoon*

Formerly Judge of the Supreme Court of the Union of Burma

**Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy, Sri Lanka**

The Wheel Publication No. 36/37

First Impression 1962
Second Impression 1967
Third Impression 1981

BPS Online Edition © (2008)

Digital Transcription Source: BPS Transcription Project

For free distribution. This work may be republished, reformatted, reprinted and redistributed in any medium. However, any such republication and redistribution is to be made available to the public on a free and unrestricted basis, and translations and other derivative works are to be clearly marked as such.

Foreword

The two lectures which are here reprinted were delivered by the Honourable Justice U Chan Htoon when he was invited to represent Buddhism at two religious Conferences in the United States: the Sixteenth Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom, held at Chicago, and the Conference on Religion in the Age of Science, held at Star Island, New Hampshire, U.S.A., in August 1958.

The Sixteenth Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom, which was convened by the University of Chicago, August 9-13, 1958, was attended by distinguished representatives of the five great religions of the world, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, and its purpose was "to explore various ways in which the basic needs of men and the problems of the present day world can be met by the ethical and spiritual teachings of the great world religions, with special emphasis on the importance of mutual understanding, sympathy, appreciation and active co-operation among various religions." Over one thousand delegates from many parts of America, Canada, England and Western Europe were present besides those taking an active part in the conference. The address on Buddhism was delivered by U Chan Htoon on August 12th.

The meeting at which the second of the addresses was given was the Fifth Summer Conference sponsored by the Institute for Religion in the Age of Science. It was attended by over two hundred delegates from various parts of the United States and Canada. The principal addresses were delivered by a number of eminent scientists and religious leaders, that by U Chan Htoon on Buddhism being given on August 22nd.

In preparing these addresses the chief purpose kept in mind was to show the unique role that Buddhism plays in the dramatic present day conflict between scientific thought and established religious beliefs, a conflict which impinges upon every aspect of modern life. For this, it was necessary to sketch in outline the fundamentals of the Buddhist doctrine and, in the second lecture at least, to lay particular emphasis on those features of Buddhism which distinguish it from the theistic creeds. In order to do this systematically it was thought best to construct the second lecture on a dual pattern with the first section devoted to a very brief account of the general principles of Buddhist thought. The second section deals specifically and *seriatim* with the questions concerning religion and the scientific outlook which had been framed by the sponsors of the Conference to form the basis of its deliberations. From this factual and deliberately literal approach to the problems thus posed, Buddhism emerges sometimes as a mediator between the religious and scientific oppositions and sometimes as offering solutions quite different from those proposed by either side. It also becomes apparent that many of the problems themselves are, from the Buddhist standpoint, wrongly stated. They refer to issues which arise only as a result of contemplating life from a wrong position. In the totality of its contact with both the spiritual and the mundane world Buddhism is something more than a *via media*; it teaches values that belong to a transcending principle, one in which the seeming conflicts between science and religion melt away before the vision of an all-comprehensive truth.

In seeking answers to those questions, which have become of tremendous importance to us at this crucial point of history when perhaps the whole future of mankind hangs on the choice between the ethical values of religion and the contingent and variable expedients of materialism, the sponsors of the Conference showed themselves acutely, even painfully, aware of the failure of traditional religious beliefs to meet the challenge. It is hoped that by offering, in the form of these lectures, a very brief statement of the Buddhist world-view, the background of Buddhist thought and the concept of life and the nature and destiny of man that Buddhism

holds, and bringing this to bear upon the problems with which modern knowledge has confronted us, a desire may be stimulated among thinking men to make a further study of the Dhamma. Above all it is hoped that when the ethical principles of Buddhism are recognized as being grounded in a rational view of life, they will be applied to clarify the inherent problems of the human situation in such a way that they may give to the nations of the world, as well as to individuals, a guiding light for these troubled times. The addresses were written with the conviction that the Teaching of the Buddha, which is valid for all times, all situations and all men, holds out the greatest hope for mankind. By a doctrine and way of life that surpass all others, Buddhism is capable of bringing peace of mind to this perplexed generation; and it is only through the peace of mind of the individual that peace among nations can be achieved.

—The Anagārika P. Sugatānanda

Address to the Sixteenth IARF conference

I count it a great honour to have been invited to speak for Buddhism, the religion of nearly one-third of the entire human race—the religion of the majority of the people of Asia—in this Congress of distinguished representatives of the five great religions of mankind. At the same time, I am humbly aware of the magnitude of the task I have before me of presenting a picture of the Buddhist outlook and the beliefs which have shaped it; yet this I must do to the best of my ability, because the doctrines of Buddhism are inextricably woven into the pattern of Buddhist thought; and if I am to explain to you the Buddhist attitude to life and to the problems that confront mankind today, I must begin by acquainting you, at least in outline, with the fundamental tenets of this religion known to the West as Buddhism, but which we Buddhists prefer to call the Buddha Dhamma.

Before I begin, I wish to say that the sponsors of this Congress are to be warmly congratulated on their enterprise and their breadth of vision in bringing together, for mutual understanding and appreciation, the representatives of the world's leading faiths. The exchange of ideas, beliefs and aspirations, undertaken without any proselytizing design but purely for the advancement of knowledge and spiritual welfare, cannot fail to be of benefit to all who take part in it, whether as spokesmen or observers. I am convinced, also, that in the final summation it will be seen that those things wherein we are all agreed far outweigh, both in number and importance, the differences of theology and doctrine that too often obscure the real significance of human faith. We meet here, not to make converts or to establish superiorities, but to help one another towards a better understanding of certain fundamental principles we all share, and which are necessary for the right conduct of human affairs. It is therefore my sincere hope that by the unfolding of knowledge leading to wisdom, this object will be realized as the Conference progresses to its triumphal conclusion.

In order to place Buddhism in its true perspective it is necessary to begin with its historical background. Just as Christianity, Islam and Judaism share a common origin in Hebraic thought, so also Buddhism and Hinduism are to be understood as having their background in the Vedic religious thought of India. Hinduism came into being after the time of the Buddha and owes much of its development to the Buddha's teaching. Buddhism, however, antedates both Vedic Brahmanism and Hinduism, because it represents the rediscovery by the Buddha of the primal, spiritual Truth which has been taught by innumerable Buddhas in previous world-cycles. The historical Buddha, Gotama, is not a solitary teacher or prophet. He is one of an endless line of Enlightened Beings, reaching from remotest times into immeasurable cycles of futurity.

Buddhist cosmology teaches that time is beginningless, that universes arise and pass away in an endless succession, obedient to the cosmic law of cause and effect, and that, in the several periods of each world cycle, certain highly advanced beings attain supreme Enlightenment and Omniscience. They become Buddhas and teach the Buddha Dhamma, or Truth, for the welfare of all beings. For this reason the Buddha-Dhamma is sometimes called the *Sanantana Dhamma*, that is, primordial, eternal or timeless Doctrine. The Pāli word "Dhamma" means Law, Truth, and Doctrine. It has other significations also in different contexts, but for our present purpose the term "Buddha Dhamma" means the Doctrine taught by the Enlightened Ones, and that is the title Buddhists prefer to give to it.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, when the Buddha-to-be was born as a prince of a warrior clan in Northern India, religious beliefs had not hardened into dogma. Religion was conjoined with speculative philosophy, and there was a spirit of broad tolerance which embraced many schools of thought. In common with most of the ancient world, the majority of these schools accepted reincarnation as a basic fact. To thinking men it has always seemed impossible that life should come to an end with the disintegration of the physical body; and if this is so it is equally difficult to imagine that it comes into being for the first time with physical birth. Throughout nature there is a principle of continuity in change, which we are able to sense within ourselves, and it is this which has given rise to the concept of an immortal soul in man. As I shall explain later, the Enlightenment of the Buddha modified the idea of a transmigrating "Soul," but the principle of rebirth remains and is one of the central doctrines of Buddhism. It is this, together with the law of kamma, "as ye sow, so shall ye reap," which gives Buddhism its moral code. These two principles together explain all the anomalies of life and the problem of evil and suffering in the world. In India it was generally believed that the goal of the religious life was to obtain ultimate knowledge, or illumination, which most of the sects conceived to be an identification of oneself with the supreme Godhead, the impersonal Absolute, or Brahman.

There were, however, certain schools which taught nihilism and were equivalent to our modern agnostic and materialist systems. When the Prince Siddhattha renounced the world to become a religious ascetic he placed himself successively under two teachers of the Vedic and Upanishadic schools and mastered all that they were able to teach concerning union with the Brahman, both in theory and in meditation practice. He succeeded, in fact, in obtaining that identification with the highest consciousness which was considered to be the final goal of the religious experience. In after-years, when he was the Buddha, he was able to tell the Brahmins of his day that he was to be numbered among those who had known the highest spiritual state, and that he was a "knower of the Vedas" and one who had "seen Brahma face to face."¹

But this, he found, was not enough. Even on the highest spiritual plane the Brahma gods were not completely liberated from the processes of life and death; they were still subject to change, and hence to uncertainty and suffering. What he desired was a state completely outside all the categories of existence and non-existence, utterly free from all the bonds of conditioned being. So, although most men would have been content to accept the highest religious norm of the time, and to have taken a place as one of the qualified exponents of these doctrines, he was not satisfied, but driven by an inner compulsion he had to seek fresh ways of attainment and a goal beyond that of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*.

After six years of intense striving he at last found himself in possession of the great Truth and it was then that he became the Buddha. He found that the faith he had entertained all along in a state of absolute liberation, a state in which the conditions of birth and death, arising and passing away, could never re-establish themselves, had been justified. This state is called "Nibbāna," and it is attained by the extinction of all the life-asserting and death-bringing

¹ Tevijja Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya 13. Translated in the Wheel No. 57/58

qualities of selfhood: that is to say, by total elimination of all those craving instincts, that bind us to the life-process, and so cause repeated rebirths in this and other realms.

The Buddhist doctrine is summarized in the Four Noble Truths, which are: first, the truth that all sentient life involves suffering; second, the truth that the cause of repeated rebirth and suffering is Ignorance conjoined with craving; third, the truth that this process of birth, death and suffering can be brought to an end only with the attainment of Nibbāna; and fourth, the truth that Nibbāna can be attained by following to perfection the Noble Eightfold Path, which embraces *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, i.e., morality, meditation and insight wisdom.

In Buddhism the word *dukkha*, which we can only translate as “suffering,” signifies every kind and degree of unpleasant sensation, mental and physical; it is in fact the same as the problem of pain which we find at the root of all religions and philosophies. So long as a being lives, he experiences suffering in one form or another; in the words of the Hebrew prophet, “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.” The religious instinct itself is born of the sense of sorrow and pain, for which man has tried throughout history to find either an antidote or compensation. Not only religion but science also is primarily concerned with the amelioration of suffering. But in Buddhist philosophy the fact of suffering assumes cosmological proportions, for the very life-process itself, being a process of continual change and transformation, and therefore of unrest and uncertainty, is seen as it really is, a process of suffering. In everyday speech we talk of “growing-pains,” and both growth and decay, to say nothing of the incidental sickness and accidents, deprivations and grief, that are met with on the way, are indeed accompanied at every stage by suffering. From the moment of his birth man is overshadowed by death. In taking this view and insisting upon it, Buddhism is no more pessimistic than any other religion so far as the conditions of this world are concerned, for all religions are cognizant of this great problem of suffering.

And it is not man alone who is thus afflicted; Buddhism takes into account the life of all sentient creatures, thereby bringing within the scope of its philosophy the entire realm of living beings, all of whom are subject to the same law of cause and effect.

The second of the Four Noble Truths goes down to the cause of this suffering process, which is psychological. Mind is the activating factor in life, and the physical bodies of living beings are only the material results of preceding mental forces which have been generated in past lives. The Buddha said, “Mind precedes all phenomena; Mind dominates them and creates them.” By some process which we will be able to understand fully only when we have ourselves gained Enlightenment, the invisible force generated by the mind, when it is liberated from the body and projected outwards at death, fastens upon the elements of the material world and from them, by the natural processes of generation, moulds a new form of life. The elements are always present in the physical world, and they come together in the required order when conception takes place. It is, however, the mind—the unknown, unseen factor—that gives the new being its individuality. This mentally-generated force may be compared to the law of gravity, which operates upon material bodies without any connecting material agency, or to the force of electricity, which, travelling invisibly from its source produces a variety of different results according to the mode of transformation its energy undergoes. Both of these dominating forces in the physical realm are indiscernible except when they come to operate on and through material substance, yet they are in a sense more real than the matter which they influence; such is the case also with the mental energy that animates living beings. And here I wish to point out, because of its importance in the present day world context, that Buddhism is the precise antithesis of materialism, for whereas materialism maintains that mind is only a by-product of matter, Buddhist philosophy shows beyond dispute that it is the mind which precedes the material formations and shapes them according to its own nature and tendencies. I wish this

point to be very clear, because in it lies the answer Buddhism gives to the materialistic errors of our age. In Buddhism we try to avoid the use of the word “spirit” because this may be taken to imply some kind of enduring entity; but if “spirit” is understood to mean the current of psychic processes as opposed to the physical process then we can say that in Buddhism it is the “spirit” which is all-important. Buddhism teaches the dominance of the mind; and in the last phase of personal evolution the mind has to dominate itself rather than, as now, being directed towards dominating external things.

But the functioning of the mind in a state of ignorance—that is, the unenlightened state—is itself dominated by craving. The deeper the ignorance, the stronger the craving, as it is in the case of the lower forms of life. As we ascend the scale we find this condition much the same in primitive man, but transformed and to a certain extent controlled in the civilized human being. By “craving” I mean that thirst for life which is manifested in seeking sensual gratification and the repetition of pleasant sensations arising from the six bases of sense-cognition, that is, the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental perception. These generate a continual thirst for renewed pleasures. The process of biological evolution as it is known to science today, is simply the carrying forward from generation to generation, through immeasurable ages, of this instinct of craving, and it is this which, working through biological processes, has produced the entire range of living creatures from the single-cell protoplasm to the most highly evolved and sensitized organism we know, the human being.

The craving-instinct, therefore, is the very mainspring of the life-process; it is the will-to-live and the vital urge, ever seeking fresh intensities of experience, and for this purpose equipping living forms with more and more highly specialized organs through biological selection. This process is inseparable from its parallel process of rebirth, for rebirth is not the reincarnation of a “soul” after death, but more precisely it is the continuation of a current of cause and effect from one life to another. There is nothing in the universe that is not subject to change, and so there is no static entity which can be called a “soul” in the general acceptance of that term. This idea is not peculiar to Buddhism, for it has been known to philosophers from the time of Heraclitus down to the psychologists and neurologists of our own day; but it was left for the Buddha, by means of his enlightened wisdom, to discover how this could be so and yet to perceive that this “soulless” process is in fact the basis of a continual rebirth.

A living being is the totality of five factors, one of them being material and the remaining four psychic. They are the physical body, the sensations, the perception, the tendency-formations (volitions) and the consciousness. All of these factors are undergoing change from moment to moment and are linked together only by the causal law—the law that “this having been, that comes to be.” Hence, Buddhist philosophy regards a being not as an enduring entity but as a dynamic process, and all phenomenal existence is, in the Pāli phrase, “*anicca, dukkha, anattā*”—impermanent, subject to suffering, and devoid of any permanent ego-substance. When one life comes to an end the process still goes on, carried forward into a fresh existence. The volitional activities, both good and bad, of the past life then bear their results, the good deeds producing happiness and the evil ones misery.

Volitional activity in thought, word and deed is called kamma; the results are called *vipāka*, and in every life we are carrying out this dual process: we are at once the passive subjects of effects from our past actions, and the active originators of fresh kamma which in its turn will bear fruit either here or hereafter.

As I said at the outset, time is beginningless; and this implies that the act of creation is not one that took place once and for all at some particular moment selected from eternity, for it would be impossible to isolate any specific moment from a timeless eternity without past, present or future. The act of creation is rather one that is taking place continually within our selves. The

idea is one that will be familiar to all who are acquainted with Bergson's theory of "creative evolution." The Buddha expressed it succinctly and with profound meaning when he said, "Within this fathom-long body, equipped with mind and sense-perceptions, O Monks, I declare unto you is the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the path to its cessation." If the human mind with its limitations cannot envisage infinity of time, neither can it form any picture of a state outside its temporal and spatial situation. Nevertheless, the third of the Four Noble Truths asserts the reality of Nibbāna, which is precisely this release from the bondages of time, space and conditioned existence.

The state of Nibbāna must not be understood as annihilation, except in the sense of the annihilation of the passions of desire, hatred and ignorance, the factors which produce rebirth in saṃsāra, the round of existences. To the ordinary man whose understanding is obscured by these imperfections, there appears to be no alternative to existence on the one hand and non-existence on the other, but the absolute, as I have already indicated, lies outside and beyond both of these illusory categories. In the Christian Scriptures it is written that "Heaven and earth shall pass away," but that something remains which does not pass away. The Buddhist does not call it God or the Word of God, because these are definitions and the ultimate goal cannot be defined in relative terms. Existence on earth, in heaven or in the states of great suffering is only temporary, for beings pass from one to the other in accordance with their deeds. Beyond all these existences there lies the ultimate, supreme, unchanging and indefinable state: the state of absolute balance, equanimity and release from the conflict of opposites.

What man in his ignorance takes to be positive and real, the world of phenomenal effects and of his own existence, is nothing of the kind. It is real in a certain sense and on one particular plane of experience, but its reality is only the relative reality of a transforming process, a coming-to-be which never actually reaches the state of perfect being.

When we acknowledge that this is indeed the case, we must grant that true reality lies in some other dimension, not only outside of time and space relationships as we know them, but also outside all that they contain of unrealized potentialities. Nibbāna cannot be described because there is nothing in our mundane experience with which it can be compared and nothing that can be used to furnish a satisfactory analogy. Yet it is possible to attain it and to experience it while still living in the flesh, and in this way to gain the unshakable assurance of its reality as a *dhamma* that is independent of all the factors of conditioned existence. That is the state the Buddha achieved in his lifetime, and which he enabled others to attain after him. He pointed the way, with the invitation, "Come, and see for yourself" (*ehi-passiko*).

That way, the fourth of the Noble Truths of Buddhism, is called the Noble Eightfold Path:

Right View,
Right Resolution,
Right Speech,
Right Action,
Right Livelihood,
Right Effort,
Right Mindfulness and
Right Concentration.

For the lay Buddhist, the moral code consists of five simple precepts:

to abstain from taking life,
to abstain from taking what is not one's own by right,
to abstain from sexual misconduct,

to abstain from untruthfulness and
to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs.

In these five vows, voluntarily undertaken, the Buddhist layman establishes himself in basic morality, the everyday purification of thought, speech and conduct. On the *uposatha*, or fast days, he takes upon himself three or five additional precepts of a more ascetic character, including absolute chastity, making up eight or ten precepts for these regular observances. The Buddha did not enjoin severe asceticism, but only that which is necessary to free oneself from inordinate attachments; a simple, wholesome life is the Buddhist ideal, and the practice of generosity and the cultivation of universal benevolence are the cardinal virtues of his Teaching. For the Buddhist monk, however, there are 227 rules of conduct which are very precisely laid down in the Vinaya, or monastic discipline.

But ethical principles and discipline, whether for the monk or layman, are only the beginning of the Buddhist way of life. Their purpose is to make the way clear for spiritual progress through mental concentration which in Buddhism, is a very exact psychological science. It is called *bhāvanā* or mental development, and is of two kinds: *samatha-bhāvanā*, the cultivation of mental tranquillity, evenness and equilibrium, and *vipassana-bhāvana*, which is aimed at direct insight into the true nature of reality. In the first category, the development of a mind of boundless universal benevolence towards all beings, which is called *mettā-bhāvanā*, is of primary importance. When the Buddhist prepares for meditation he first purifies his mind by generating thoughts of love and compassion for all living beings without any exception near and far, big and small, visible and invisible, and he directs these thoughts to all quarters of the universe. He does so with compassion and with altruism (joy in attainments and advantages gained by others) and then with equanimity. These meditations are performed with discursive thoughts and then with higher states of intellection. This practice gives calm and tranquillity and a more alert and poised mind, and thus helps towards the higher practice of *vipassanā*.

Buddhist meditation consists in developing the power of concentrating the mind to what is called "one-pointedness," by the exclusion of all extraneous objects or related concepts. The techniques used to this end include the practice of concentrating attention on the ingoing and outgoing breath, and development of mindfulness fixed on any of the bodily actions such as the movements of the feet in walking. In this, the object of attention is stripped of all adventitious mental associations; the arm that is lifted ceases to be "my arm," the body that is standing, sitting or lying is no longer "my body."

It is just the object of an impersonal contemplation, the instrument of movements and attitudes. By this means the mind is tamed, brought under complete control and disassociated from all false interpretations and the passions they engender. The mind, in fact, becomes depersonalized; it contemplates the physical and mental sensations as it were from the outside, detached and uninvolved. It is only when this process of mental depersonalization is completed that the mind becomes capable of perceiving the reality that lies beyond the ever-changing forms. It then becomes a keen instrument, tempered to razor-edge sharpness, with which to cut through the bonds of ignorance. To put the case in another way, the mind, which up to that point had been constructing the moment-to-moment continuum of its illusory conception of selfhood, all at once breaks the sequence of that activity, is no longer tied to it, and at once enters into a fresh realm of knowledge. When this happens, the chain of cause and effect, which is linked by the emotional and intellectual reactions, is broken; there is then no more kamma rooted in desire, and so no further projection into the future of *saṃsāra*. The incessant round of birth and deaths comes to an end: in the Buddhist phrase, the fire of the passions is extinguished and so *Nibbāna* is attained. One who has thus accomplished his task of liberation is called an arahat.

I should not conclude this short account of Buddhism without mentioning the doctrine which came to take paramount place in *Mahāyāna*, the second great school of Buddhism: the doctrine of the Bodhisatta path. A Bodhisatta is a being who dedicates himself to becoming a fully enlightened Buddha, and for this purpose renounces or postpones the attainment of Nibbāna for himself for many aeons, during which time in successive births he works for the benefit of all other living beings. In this doctrine the ideal of compassion and of service to others reaches its highest level. It has produced a rich and noble literature embodying all that is most sublime and inspiring in human thought. A Buddhist finds no difficulty in identifying many of the great teachers of other religions with those great personalities who exemplify the virtues of the self-renouncing Bodhisatta. Whosoever teaches truths that are good and enduring, who sacrifices himself for mankind and who asserts the divine potentialities of man in absolute unselfishness and love, partakes of the spirit of the Bodhisatta. A Bodhisatta is not yet fully enlightened, so he does not necessarily exhibit all the characteristics of the highest perfection, but within him there is above all else the spirit of mercy, loving-kindness and self-denial. His love encompasses all beings without distinction; and he is ready to suffer every kind of martyrdom for their benefit. He is a teacher and a guide, a loving father and the servant of all. Such was Gotama Buddha through many lives before his final enlightenment, and it is he who provides the great pattern for this ideal.

From what has already been said, certain aspects of Buddhism, as it moulds and colours the life and thought of the Buddhist peoples, must by now be clear. In the first place, Buddhism inculcates self-reliance rather than dependence upon the aid of supernatural powers. It therefore tends to promote an individualistic outlook which is characteristic of Buddhists both in their personal relationships and their national life. The rejection of all forms of authoritarianism stems from the Buddha's insistence upon freedom of will and choice, under what is nothing more than an enlightened spiritual guidance. In Buddhist society no individual is encouraged to impose his will on others; the ideal for which he must strive is to perfect his own control over his desires and impulses. In doctrine, *ex cathedra* pronouncements by religious leaders are unknown, for the sole authority is the text of the Tipiṭaka.

Buddhism requires that the freedom of the individual to determine his own destiny and to choose the kind of life he lives must never be subordinated to group interests, which seek to mould him to a standardized pattern and so deprive him of the initiative necessary for his spiritual development. For this reason the Buddha opposed caste distinctions, seeing in them an attempt to confine people in a rigid framework that would stultify their growth and prevent the full realization of their potentialities. Buddhism is democratic, but makes no attempt to achieve a classless society, considering this to be an impossible condition on account of the inherent inequalities between one man and another which are the result of personal kamma; but it classifies men according to their character and natural abilities. It is thus the antithesis of the totalitarian concept in which the individual has only a group-existence subordinate to the needs of the State. The State and its laws exist for the individual, not the individual for the State. They are merely the instruments by which men are enabled to live together in just and liberal relationships with the greatest amount of freedom consistent with a disciplined society. The problem of the exploitation of man by man is solved in Buddhism by the absolute condemnation of all forms of greed; of greed for possession, for power and for the pleasures of the senses. The worker is expected to give of his best to his employer, and the employer's duty to the worker is to compensate him generously and give him such care and protection as he would extend to his own children. The sick and needy are to be helped, and in the light of Buddhism such aid is help not only to the recipient but to the donor as well, for the law of kamma makes a reality of the truth taught in Ecclesiastes: "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days." A Buddhist lives, knowing that when he dies the only

treasure he will be able to take with him into his next birth is the treasure he has given away. This is the only true and lasting source of worldly happiness.

Buddhism teaches us not to envy or hate the rich because of their wealth, and not to despise the poor; they are what they are because of their previous deeds, and their destiny can be changed, for better or worse, by their actions in this present life. Buddhism therefore offers us the blueprint of an ideal society; not an unrealistic Utopia that disregards the obvious facts of human nature, but a practicable and attainable scheme for human improvement. If there is any meaning in the phrase "enlightened self-interest" it is to be found in this concept of each individual doing good for others and for himself at the same time. It may seem paradoxical that self-interest should ultimately lead to the realization that there is no reality in Self; yet such is the case when the highest form of self-interest is seen to be the denial of self for the welfare of others. By the conscious cultivation of compassion and benevolence, the Buddhist gradually weakens the bonds of self until he reaches the stage at which they, and the illusion of selfhood, no longer exist.

To view the whole of humanity in terms of rebirth and kamma must necessarily give a feeling of kinship and universal brotherhood. When a Buddhist thinks of the round of rebirths in saṃsāra, extending infinitely backwards in time and stretching into an immeasurable future, he realizes that he has lived in many parts of the world, as a member of many different races. He may at present be a Burmese but in his past life he may have been a European, a white or coloured American or an African tribesman. He cannot therefore feel that there is any real distinction in being what he now is, and ideas of superiority and of inferiority are equally out of place. He has brought with him into the world certain individual characteristics of mind, certain aptitudes and certain disabilities which are the results of past thinking and acting, and it is these, not his racial or national background, that are his real inheritance. He may congratulate himself on having earned his rebirth in a land of advanced culture, and be thankful for his past achievements that have caused him to be born where the Buddha Dhamma is taught and practised, but he cannot harbour the delusion that he has been specially singled out for these favours. They are there for everybody: prizes in the school of life that each may strive for and obtain. He cannot rest upon his laurels, but must either go forward or backward in the scale of spiritual evolution; and if he chooses to interpret this as free competition it is still competition without rivalry, for victory to oneself does not mean the defeat of someone else. On the contrary, every personal spiritual victory is one that should and can be shared with all. The Buddhist finds no difficulty in conceiving himself as a citizen of the world, a member of the great brotherhood of mankind. He acknowledges his kinship with all that breathes lives and hopes.

Faith in spiritual values is part of the logic of Buddhism. The universe is governed by a moral principle which is self-existent in its causal laws and so forms part of its essential mechanism. It is by living in the knowledge of those laws and in obedience to them that man reaches his highest fulfilment. They are not man-made laws, subject to variations according to time, place and circumstance, but universal principles which operate so long as life exists, and whether we are aware of them or not. To say that we cannot alter or escape them is superfluous; by scientific means one may resist the law of gravity for a time, but it must prevail in the end because it is a principle inherent in the structure of the physical universe. So it is with the moral law of causality. The urgent problems that confront the world today can only be solved by applying these moral and spiritual laws. But to do that, we must first of all have understanding of them. It is not enough to invent rules to fit our circumstances and justify our actions, yet this is in effect what men have been doing from time immemorial. We must approach the great mystery of life in a spirit of reverential enquiry, choosing the best guides and seeking to establish to our

own satisfaction the truth behind their greatness. Only in this way can we confirm the prompting of instinctive virtue and arrive at conviction.

Religion for the man of today must be supported by reason; it must be in conformity with what we know to be facts; and where it goes beyond mere facts it must have sufficient logical probability to invite our investigation on higher levels. If we assume too much we run the risk of losing contact with reality in the realms of imagination; that is the danger of theology. If too little, we wilfully restrict ourselves to a materialistic level from which it is difficult to rise. There must be a just balance between credulity and scepticism, in order that faith may be founded on reason. In Buddhism we start with only one assumption: that there is a moral principle in life. It is a sound assumption because everything we observe confirms it. From that primary assumption everything else follows logically and we are able to discern the general pattern from the portions of it that are known to us. Everywhere we see natural effects springing from natural causes; everything changes, yet the continuity of cause and effect survives the temporary forms to which it gives birth. It is the one constant element in an ever-changing universe. Matter is energy—energy manifesting in a perpetual process of transformation. As our knowledge of the physical universe expands we find the same law of causal continuity prevailing throughout. Hence it is reasonable to conclude that the animating life-principle must belong to the same order of things. Any hypothesis beyond this is an unnecessary elaboration at this stage; it does not help us at all to assume the existence of an enduring soul when there is no evidence whatever for such an entity. The energy of kamma which forms the life continuum can produce only evil if it is used for evil, and good if it is used for good. The energy itself is neutral; it is the manner in which it is directed by volitional action that produces the moral resultants. This energy can never expend itself automatically because it is incessantly being renewed by the generator, craving. Fresh impulses are incessantly being projected to sustain and carry it forward. All our mental activities motivated by desire are perpetually renewing the current. If it is to be brought to an end it must be by a conscious effort of will, a deliberate stopping of the craving impulses. Buddhism teaches that *lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*—greed, hatred and delusion—must be neutralized by *alobha*, *adosa* and *amoha*—benevolence, altruism and enlightenment. When this is achieved the current is cut off and there is no more rebirth. Nibbāna is attained.

The materialism and scepticism that are rife in the world today have their roots in the scientific attitude. Scientific facts can be proved; but for the most part religious doctrines cannot. They rest upon the willingness to believe, or the deliberate suspension of unbelief, in the faithful. In the face of scientific knowledge people are finding it more and more difficult to maintain this willingness to believe; part of their mind tells them that there is a moral and spiritual purpose in life, but they cannot reconcile any of the accepted beliefs concerning it to their knowledge and experience. Theistic religion tells them that there is a Supreme Being, who regulates the universe and that there is an immortal soul and a life after death; but there is no actual proof of these assumptions. On the contrary, the great mass of scientific evidence seems to point the other way, to a purely mechanistic explanation of life.

This fact we cannot ignore when we try to assess the place of religion in modern thought. Buddhism answers the challenge by asserting that spiritual truth *can* be proved; that it is open for every man to discover and confirm for himself. The Buddha said that it is natural to doubt, until complete confirmation is obtained through personal experience. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Buddha Dhamma is that it is *ehi-passiko*—that which invites everyone to come and see for oneself. The way to do this is by means of the Buddhist system of meditation, a technique of mental development taught by the Buddha himself and expounded in great detail in the Buddhist texts and commentaries. Its object is to break through the veils of ignorance and delusion which hide the truth from our sight, and thereby to liberate the mind. One who has attained even the first stage of this development receives absolute certainty as to the truth of the

Doctrine. For him it is proved, as a scientific theory is proved, by successful practical experiment.

He sees the truth, not “through a glass darkly,” but “face to face.” When he attains the fourth stage of purification he is completely liberated and enlightened and he can speak of the Dhamma as one who is actually living and experiencing it. His faith becomes knowledge; and Nibbāna, the state of final liberation from all sorrow, is for him the only reality.

The goal of Buddhism is very high, nothing less than absolute perfection; but there are stages of attainment on the way, and it is with these that the ordinary man is more immediately concerned. The ordinary man will ask, “What will Buddhist meditation do for me or do to me?” The answer is given by the many, who without attaining the highest path of arahatship, have yet benefited in an access of mental alertness and spiritual awareness in a wider sphere. The manifold problems of our worldly life, our social problems and problems of international relations, clamour for our attention, with an urgency greater than ever before. If we do not succeed in resolving them the consequences threaten to be disastrous to civilization, if not to humanity itself. When we look back on history we cannot say that religion—any religion—has ever for any long period, succeeded in preventing war; but the fault lies in human nature rather than in religion. The desire for self-preservation, if necessary at the cost of others, is, in all but the most exceptional people, stronger than the appeal religion makes to the nobler side of their nature. The remedy for this can only lie in a form of religion which carries the fullest conviction; one that is impregnable against the cold blast of scientific knowledge and is philosophically comprehensive enough to include all the elements of human experience. It is only a religion of this kind which can so dominate the minds of men as to make them follow the path of virtue fearlessly, knowing that in the end right will triumph, and that there is a spiritual goal that makes their sufferings in this world bearable. Secure in this conviction, men will strive and live nobly, and the highest standards of today will become the average standards of the future. Despite all the anti-religious trends of the present day there is a growing desire on the part of great numbers of people to embrace religion. They are seeking a solid basis for faith. This is the most encouraging feature of our times, the one that offers the greatest hope for the future of mankind.

The sponsors of this Conference, and the delegates who have attended it, have in their grasp a unique opportunity for promoting spiritual values all over the world. It is my earnest wish that their labours may be richly rewarded and that we may live to see a great moral and spiritual regeneration of mankind.

May the Triple Gem of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha shed light and tranquillity on all present here. May they and all beings be happy, and may peace prevail in the world.

Buddhism—the Religion of the Age of Science

When I received the invitation to this Conference I was deeply impressed by the thoughtful approach shown by its sponsors in framing the questions that are to be the subject of our discussion. They are searching questions—questions of tremendous import to all of us at this crucial point in the history of mankind. They are indicative of a growing awareness of the lack of spiritual values in our materialistic civilization, and of an honest and realistic attempt to get to grips with the problems of the human situation in a world that is fast losing faith in the old religious beliefs.

In view of their importance I propose to deal directly with each of the points raised, from the standpoint of a practising Buddhist. But first I must give you, as briefly as possible, an outline of the Buddhist world-view, the background of Buddhist thought and the Buddhist concept of life and of the nature of man. This is necessary because, as you will see, Buddhism differs fundamentally from every other religious system on many points. As the pattern unfolds you will find that Buddhism gives answers to these problems that are quite different from the answers given by Western religion, while in many cases from the Buddhist point of view there is no problem at all.

Gotama Buddha, as you all know, was an Indian Prince who renounced the life of a ruler to become an ascetic, seeking spiritual realization in a life of self-discipline and contemplation. As Prince Siddhattha he was a man like ourselves; he never claimed any divine nature, inspiration or even guidance. It was not until he achieved ultimate realization and became the Buddha of this world-cycle, a perfectly Enlightened Being, that he spoke with any authority on spiritual matters. This status he achieved, also, by his own unaided efforts. The proof that he then gave in support of his claim to Enlightenment and spiritual emancipation is a proof that can be found by us today in the nature of the Doctrine he taught. He said in effect, "Come: examine, criticize and analyze my Teachings for yourself; practise the method of gaining emancipation that I shall show you. I do not ask you to take anything on blind faith; but when you have fully accomplished the method, you will see the Truth face to face, as I see it now."

That Teaching, the Dhamma, and that method, the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, have been preserved and handed down to us by word of mouth and written texts in unbroken continuity since the time of the Buddha himself. Throughout the centuries a long line of *Arahats*—that is, Disciples who have gained the highest fruits of liberation through self-purification—attests the truth of the Doctrine and the effectiveness of the method. The Dhamma itself includes ethics, psychology, religion and a complete cosmic philosophy that embraces all forms of life in a harmonious moral order. Whether it can also be called scientific, in the sense of being in accordance with principles that later science has revealed to us, I shall leave for you to judge when you have heard me. You will in any case agree that the Buddha in his Teaching appealed both to the reasoning and emotional sides of man's nature, and that the loftiest spiritual aspirations of mankind are to be found in the ideal he set before us.

To begin with, it must be understood that in the Buddhist system there is no place for a Creator God. There is moral law and moral order, and these principles are supreme. They are the spiritual aspect of the law of cause and effect that prevails in the physical universe. But Buddhist cosmology is based upon relativity; the related and composite nature of all phenomena. World systems, or universes, arise and pass away in obedience to natural law, but there has never been any first act of creation or any first cause. Time and relativity are a closed circle in which no point of beginning can be found. This concept has its parallel in the physical world: in former days people imagined that the horizon must indicate a rim to the earth, but as we move in the direction of the horizon it constantly recedes from us, so that at whatever point on the earth's surface we stand the horizon still spreads all around us.

In the same way we mistakenly imagine that time and phenomena must in some way be bounded by a beginning. But with time and eternity it is just as it is with ourselves in relation to the physical horizon. Time, the present, is the spot on which we stand; infinity is the endless recession of such spots. Just as there is no spot at which the earth begins, so there is no point in time at which the world's causal antecedents began. It is very probable, according to the latest scientific notions, that the entire universe, or cosmos, is constructed on the same physical principle, and the fact that its nature is outside our present range of comprehension does not at

all affect the mathematical indications. The relativity of space and time, a new concept to science, is and always has been implicit in Buddhist philosophy.

The moral order works through the continuum of events on the psycho-physical level which we call life, the life-continuum of conscious being. That also is beginningless, an incessant flux of cause and effect. It is true it had a beginning on this earth, but that beginning was only the continuation of a series; its causal antecedents existed before, in former universes. When a universe comes to an end in the course of natural processes, the forces which constituted it are resolved into their atomic elements, but after aeons of disintegration they again re-assemble and another universe gradually forms.

The cause of this cyclic process is kamma, the totality of thought-force that is being generated from moment to moment. Man's free will operates within a space-time complex that has been created by his own previous activities, having their origin in mental processes. These previous activities are called kamma; their results are called *Vipāka* in Buddhism. The kamma of the past has created the conditions of the present, while the kamma of the present is creating the conditions that will exist in the future. In the Buddhist texts it states definitely that the arising of a fresh world-cycle is brought about by the kamma of all the beings that lived in the previous one.

The idea of reincarnation, or, as we prefer to call it, rebirth, is not nowadays so unfamiliar a one to the West as it used to be. It may perhaps be said that the moral necessity for rebirth is transcendent. It is the only way in which we who believe in moral justice in the universe can account for the seeming injustices we see all about us—the thousands of cases of apparently unmerited suffering, of people stricken by incurable diseases, of children born blind, deaf and dumb, deformed or mentally-deficient, or doomed to an early death beyond human or divine aid. All these evils are due to past bad kamma. Would the words of Jesus to the man he had healed, "Go, and sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee," apply to a child born with an affliction that could not have been brought about by any sin it had committed in this life? But if these words of Jesus did not point to a universal truth they were meaningless.

Such evils as these can be avoided in the future by generating good kamma here and now. The individual's present situation may be (but not necessarily is) beyond present remedy, but the nature of his response to it is subject to his will. He can make his future a happy one by the performance of good deeds. No man's destiny is fixed, except by his own intention. It is subject to continual alteration and change of direction. As remedy for present evils, the Buddha laid down the principles of noble conduct; the cultivation of harmlessness towards all beings, accompanied by positive thoughts and deeds of loving-kindness; the practice of charity, sexual restraint, self-discipline and mental cultivation. To avoid evil in the future we must shun evil in the present; there is no other way.

This is the reason why, we believe, science alone will never be able completely to eradicate disease and mental and bodily suffering from human life. It is also the reason why a completely equalitarian society can never be achieved; the innate differences in character, intellect and capability between one individual and another, due to past kamma, are too great. Nature will always defeat any attempts to put false values into human life.

The doctrine of kamma is the direct opposite of fatalism or predestination. While our present condition is the result of past actions, the future is being moulded by our present ones, and every man can raise himself in the scale of spiritual evolution, as well as improve his worldly position, by well-directed effort. Buddhism, in its teaching that nothing is permanent, shows that there is no constant, immutable element in the process of rebirth. The phenomenal personality is a succession of moments of consciousness, each conditioned by the ones that have

preceded it, yet subject to the intervention of free-will, which can change the nature of the current of personality. The aphorism “character is destiny” is shown by Buddhism to be a deep psychological truth, for when we change our character we change our destiny with it. In truth, man has the divine power to shape his own nature and his own mode of being. He can not only improve his condition in this world but can attain higher realms. His highest destiny of all, however, is to gain his release from all forms of conditioned existence, even from the highest heavenly states, because all these are impermanent. There are altogether thirty-one major spheres of being, some of them lower than the human while others are realms of greatly refined spiritual existence; but in none of them is life eternal. After death beings are reborn in whatever sphere, human, sub-human or divine, their mental development has fitted them for but they remain there only so long as the kamma they have generated continues to bear results in that specific order of being. When that particular kamma-result is exhausted they pass away from that state and are again reborn, in whatever sphere their residual kamma conducts them to. If you will conceive these states of being as different mental planes on which our consciousness can operate while we are still here on earth, you will have formed a more or less correct picture of the spiritual cosmos. In his moods of greed, lust, hatred or violence man places himself on a low mental plane, and if it is that particular mood which manifests in his last conscious moment before death he will be reborn on the sub-human life-plane that corresponds to it. If, on the other hand, he has cultivated the higher attributes of universal love, compassion, unselfishness and detachment from material concerns, it is these qualities that will preside over his last moment, and will conduct him to the higher states of being to which they correspond. Moral law operates with mechanical precision; man cannot cheat it, but he can make use of it to advance his spiritual growth. In all this incessant round of rebirth there is no permanent “Soul” or ego-entity that is reborn; there is merely the life-continuum of cause and effect producing a succession of beings, each pursuing the line of individual causality.

In the Four Noble Truths the Buddha summarized his doctrine thus:

The life-process involving rebirth and consequent old age and death in all spheres of conditioned existence is associated with suffering. This is so because all sentient existence bears the three characteristics of impermanence, “unsatisfactoriness” and the absence of any real, enduring ego-entity.

The cause of this painful round of rebirths is craving—that is, thirst for the enjoyment of pleasure of the senses, from the lowest animal indulgences up to the most refined mental pleasure. All desires are cravings for experience and renewed experience, and it is these which promote the psychic will-to-live. Craving is thus the generator of mental energy, the strongest force in the cosmos. This craving-force is associated with Ignorance of the nature of reality.

There is a point at which craving, and the rebirth-process arising from it, can be brought to an end. At that point, craving and Ignorance are eliminated altogether, and with them the psychic elements of grasping and attaching. This cessation of the unreal life-process is called Nibbāna, the extinction of the fires of passion. It is the end of suffering and the sole unchanging reality.

The way to that final perfection is the Noble Eightfold Path of mental or spiritual development; that is right view, right resolution, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Each of these terms has a very exact ethical and psychological significance; they are not simply vague, unformulated ideals but are minutely and systematically delineated modes of thought and behaviour. Taken all together they constitute the three essentials of spiritual development *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (mental concentration) and *paññā* (insight-wisdom). This is the way to the cessation of suffering.

To the question, “What is human personality?” Buddhism gives the answer that it is a combined psychophysical process in which nothing is stable or unchanging. It is a flux of dependent relationships brought into being and sustained by past kamma and natural laws. A human being consists of five aggregates or *khandhas*, one of which is physical and the other four psychic. They are: *rūpa* or physical body; *vedanā* or sensation; *saññā* or perception; *saṅkhāra* or mental-formations; and *viññāṇa* or consciousness. Of these five, *saṅkhāra* is the most difficult to define because there is nothing even remotely corresponding to it in Western thought, and there is no single English word that covers all its meanings. Broadly speaking, it signifies the tendencies or characteristics that have been set in motion by past kamma; but it also includes the faculty of willing and other functions of the mind. I cannot dwell upon the subtleties of Buddhist psychological analysis now; it is a vast subject and one that, if it were to be studied systematically by competent Western specialists in psychology, would completely transform modern ideas concerning the nature of the mind. It is sufficient to say that Buddhism views living beings not as entities but as processes—or, if you like, a series of *events*—taking place within a causal nexus that gives us our concepts of time, space and phenomena. The intangible force of kamma generated in the past works through the processes of the physical universe to produce living beings; but each of these is a composite product. Just as an automobile is composed of the engine, with its various parts, the chassis, the wheels, the upholstery and so on, no single item of which by itself constitutes the automobile, but which when all put together on the assembly-line make the finished product, so a living being is formed of the various elements of mind and physical substance, not one of which alone constitutes the being. The “self,” therefore, is a phenomenal product of various causes; it is not an enduring or self-existing entity. This is the meaning of the Buddhist doctrine of “*anattā*” or “non-soul.” The personal ego is an illusion of ignorance, and so to attain liberation it is necessary to free the mind of self-delusion. The whole of Buddhist morality and discipline is directed towards this ultimate end.

To the question, “How did it all begin?” I can only say that there is no answer, because the question itself is merely a product of man’s limited comprehension. If we understand the nature of time and relativity we must see that there could not have been any beginning. It can only be pointed out that all the usual answers to the question are fundamentally defective. If it is assumed that in order to exist a thing must have had a creator who existed before it, follows logically that the creator himself must have had a creator, and so on back to infinity. On the other hand, if the creator could exist without a prior cause in the form of another creator, the whole argument falls to the ground. The theory of a Creator-god does not solve any problems; it only complicates the existing ones.

Buddhism then, views life and the cosmos as a process—a complex of interrelated causes and dependent relationships. To find his way out of this maze, man has to develop Insight-Wisdom. This is done by cultivating the virtues, all of which are aimed at diminishing the sense of “self” and the grasping instincts associated with it. Side by side with this cultivation of moral purity there are the exercises in concentration which go by the general name of meditation. Meditation in Buddhism is not the giving up of one’s mind to fantasies born of the myth-content of the unconscious; it stands for scientifically arranged and systematic mental exercises. In the course of this training, psychic powers are developed, such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy and the recollection of previous lives, but these are not the real object of meditation. They represent, in fact, another form of attachment to be overcome. Its real object is liberation. By the development of Right Concentration it is possible to break through the walls of ignorance that encompass us with illusions—to crash through time and relativity as a jet propelled aircraft crashes through the sound barrier. Once beyond this, the disciple of the Buddha finds himself face to face with Nibbāna, the Ultimate Truth in which all artificially created problems of ignorance and delusion have ceased to exist.

The Buddha was not only the Lord of Wisdom. He was also the supreme Lord of Compassion. It was out of pity for suffering humanity that he sought and found the Truth. He taught his followers to develop a heart of loving-kindness that embraces without distinction all beings. This he called the godlike state of consciousness. There are four of these *brahmavihāras*: they are *mettā* or universal benevolence; *karuṇā* or compassion, *muditā* or sympathetic joy, and *upekkhā* or equanimity and non-discrimination. They form, for Buddhists, the ideal of what should be our attitude towards our fellow men, and, indeed, to all living beings. One who attains them in this life is already living mentally in the highest heaven, the realm of the Formless Beings whose nature is entirely of the spirit. In this way alone is it possible to realize the kingdom of heaven on earth. That kingdom is of the mind, and is entirely independent of external circumstances. Whosoever reaches it in this life will, if he does not go on to the final goal of all, Nibbāna, be reborn after death in the spiritual sphere corresponding to his attainment.

It is in the light of this view of the world that I now ask you to consider the answers I am going to give, as a Buddhist, to the problems confronting religion in this age of science.

Does man in a civilization pervaded by the ideas of science still require beliefs that inform him concerning his own highest goals?

The purpose of science has always been to examine the physical universe and discover the laws by which it operates. Its function in civilization has been to transform the life of man by the development of technical means of better living, the conquest of disease and in general the mastery of man's physical environment. It is not primarily concerned with man's purpose or goal, but in discharging its first function it has automatically laid bare certain principles that throw light on man's own nature and his origin. In so doing it has caused a great disturbance in the accepted ideas of theistic religion. From the time when Galileo discovered that the earth is not the centre of the solar system up to Darwin's first treatise on biological evolution, western religious ideas have been subjected to a series of shocks.

Nevertheless, religion despite its conflict with reason and knowledge, has survived, precisely because man does need a working hypothesis to account for his existence, his sense of moral values and his instinctive belief that there is a higher goal beyond mere comfortable living on this earth. In any case, most thinking people are now agreed that science, with all its wonders will never be able to create a heaven in this world. We have seen how, when one disease is brought under control, another source of disease arises. Bacteria which have been mastered by science proceed to transform themselves, and in the course of a few generations produce a variant of their type which is immune to the old attack; and so science has to start all over again seeking a fresh technique. I am not decrying the triumphs of science; but science as a source of knowledge seems to me superior to science as a palliative, since the benefits it has brought us have in many cases been outweighed by the dangers it has placed in our path. Disease, old age and death will always be with us; and this being so, human life will continue to be imperfect, darkened always by the shadow of grief and uncertainty.

Religion as it is understood in the West may have failed man, yet the *need* for religion still continues.

To what extent is it the function of traditional religions to interpret to man his own ultimate concerns in relation to the totality of powers, known and unknown, with which he must come to terms?

The only possible reply to this is that traditional religions can perform this function only to the extent permitted by man's present and future knowledge. It is a function that can no longer be performed through dogmas. Where traditional religion is able to assimilate new facts and

hitherto unknown aspects of reality without sacrificing anything of its fundamental teachings it can continue to serve humanity as an interpreter of the “totality of powers, known and unknown” with which man must come to terms. But where dogma has been laid down once and for all as an infallible divine revelation, this adjustment is not possible. When one teaching once held to be a divinely-revealed truth is found to be false the whole edifice is shaken. This has already happened, not once but a thousand times, and there are limits to the elasticity of faith. Where most educated people are concerned those limits have already been exceeded and faith in “divine revelation” is as dead as the brontosaurus.

Buddhism, as I have already pointed out, is not a religion of “divine revelation” or of unsupported dogmas. It is the ultimate truth concerning life as discovered by one who approached the subject without any preconceived ideas, and who reached it in the only way possible, by delving into his own consciousness. Just as a scientist investigates the external world, so the Buddha investigated the internal world of the mind—or, if you like, the spirit. Everything that he taught thereafter was knowledge that is accessible to each and every one of us, if we will but follow his method of self-purification. On the intellectual side we find that there is no point at which science comes into conflict with Buddhism, nor is it ever likely to do so. The Teaching of the Buddha, therefore, can continue to perform the function indicated in this question and in the one that follows it, namely:

To what extent can the traditional religions perform this function in a community which accepts the scientific interpretation of reality?

What science interprets are natural phenomena, and science has reached the point of realizing that, since all the information we have concerning these phenomena are received through our physical senses, and the picture of the external world they present is quite different from the picture presented by physics, it is extremely doubtful whether science by investigating the external world of appearances will ever be able to bring us nearer to ultimate reality. But so far as knowledge concerning the nature of these phenomena will take us we have to accept the overall picture, including such established scientific facts as that of biological evolution. Buddhism is, I believe, the only religion which has no difficulty in accepting the theory of evolution as taught by modern biology and genetics. In one of his great sermons, the Brahmajāla Sutta, the Buddha describes how evolution and devolution take place in the course of a world-cycle, and all that he said is fully in conformity with present day knowledge. I will go even further, and tell you something that may surprise those who believe that religion is inseparable from the idea of a creator-god. *Even if science succeeds in generating living organisms in a test-tube, or even in creating a sentient being equal to man, the truth of Buddhism is not in the least affected by it.* The reason for this is that no matter how life may come into being, whether by any of the natural birth-processes or by artificial means, it is past kamma which supplies the life-continuum, and it can operate in this manner wherever the constituents necessary for a living organism come together. There cannot be any achievement of science, no matter how revolutionary, that will ever contradict the teachings of Buddhism.

To what extent can science itself contribute to this religious function?

In the light of what I have already said it will be clear that where science is able to confirm the teachings of religion, as it does in the case of Buddhism, it changes its role from that of a destroyer of faith to that of an ally and most valuable friend. But it is useless to expect science, which confines itself to facts, to adapt those facts to the requirements of myth and dogma. It will never do so. In the struggle between religion and science in the West it is always religion that has had to give way. Buddhism welcomes science as the promoter of knowledge. More than this, it looks confidently to modern science to bring about that change of outlook which is essential if man is to realize the higher spiritual truths. We claim for the Buddha that he was the

only religious teacher to bring scientific methods of approach to bear on the questions of ultimate truth.

What among the traditional religious beliefs remains effective?

This can only be answered from the viewpoint and experience of each of the representatives, speaking for one's own creed. As regards Buddhism, all its doctrines remain valid, and therefore all remain effective.

Is there some way in which the incompatible and competing claims among different systems of religious belief can be reconciled or reduced to a commonly acceptable denominator so that a rational mind can accept them?

Various attempts have been made throughout history to reconcile different systems of religious belief, but none of them has been successful. To quote only one instance, Sikhism began as an effort to reconcile Hinduism and Islam. Circumstances decreed, however, that in a matter of a few generations the Sikhs were to become the greatest opponents of Islam in India. Syncretism in religion sometimes enriches human thought, but more often than not it ends in confusion and failure. The modern attempts in this direction, such as Theosophy, have never attracted any large following because their efforts at reconciling the irreconcilable lead to a result that is even less acceptable to a rational mind than the original doctrines.

The reasons for this are perfectly clear; each theistic religion claims that its doctrines have been revealed by a "Supreme Being"—God. These "revelations" contain different accounts of "creation," different interpretations of the "Supreme Being's" nature and intentions, and different versions of man's position in relation to "God" and his destiny after death. Arising from these conflicting doctrines there are widely differing systems of morality. Since none of the "divine revelations" can be altered in any fundamental way (except, presumably, by a fresh "divine revelation") the dogmas will always remain an insuperable obstacle to religious unity. Even between the various Christian sects there are deeply-rooted antagonisms although they all claim to take their inspiration from the same scriptures. Each theistic religion will always maintain that its own God is the only true deity, and will condemn the beliefs of all others. In the Semitic religions this is particularly marked; it began in Biblical times with disputes between the followers of various tribal gods, and it has carried on to the present day. There is absolutely no hope of these religions ever combining. Where such religions are concerned, tolerance of the views of others only comes when religious indifference sets in.

In Buddhism there are many reasons why tolerance of the religious views of others is enjoined as a necessary virtue. In the first place, Buddhism does not teach that any individual is eternally damned because he happens not to be a Buddhist. Followers of other religions may be reborn after death in heavenly states, if they have been virtuous during their lifetime. Suffering or happiness comes about as the result of actions (*kamma*), not as the result of having blind faith in any particular creed. There is no "salvation by faith" in Buddhism. Furthermore, Buddhist *mettā* or universal benevolence, extends to all beings, whatsoever their creed, race or colour. Buddhism is not a "divine revelation" which claims absolute faith and unquestioning obedience; it is a system for discovering truth and reality for oneself, and therefore invites reasoned criticism and objective analysis. History bears witness that Buddhists have always been able to live peacefully side by side with those of other faiths, so long as those faiths do not produce fanatics with whom it is impossible to live. Buddhist tolerance has been carried so far that for many centuries past it has ceased even to be a proselytizing religion.

Or, is only one of them valid? If so, how can it be established in the minds of all men?

If each of us did not personally believe that his own religion is the only valid one, he would not go under the banner of that religion. He would call himself an agnostic, a rationalist or a materialist.

The only way in which the validity of any religious belief can be established is to put it to the test of realization. First the question must be asked, "Are its doctrines compatible with reason and experience, and with the knowledge we have gained concerning the nature of the universe and of life? Secondly, does it offer us a way in which we, individually, can verify its claims in a manner which places it beyond all dispute?"

Here I must ask you to take note of the fact that not once throughout history, has any one of the supposed "Creator-Gods" given man a revelation of so final and conclusive a character that all men would be forced to accept it. On the contrary, all that the "revelations" have done has been to cause further dispute, and too often religious persecution.

What I have already said provides the answer to the first of my questions, so far as Buddhism is concerned. Buddhist philosophy is fully in accordance with reason and experience; it agrees with the general picture of the universe given by science and it does not ask us to believe in anything outside the normal order of nature. To my second point, the answer is that Buddhism does provide each of us with a means of verifying it for himself, through the practice of a scientific system of mental training and meditation which culminates in *vipassanā* or direct insight.

Jesus of Nazareth said, "By their fruits shall ye know them." We recognize the *Arahats* or Purified Ones of Buddhism by their spiritual and moral nature. If the whole of humanity were sufficiently developed intellectually and spiritually, all men would acknowledge a truth so completely demonstrated. But as I have said before, human beings are on different levels, due to their past kamma, and it is not likely that all men at the same time will ever be able to recognize truth with the same clarity. When the Buddha first gained full Enlightenment he felt doubtful whether any human beings would be able to understand the truth he had discovered, so utterly different was it from any of the accepted ideas of his time. But almost immediately he realized that there were some few "whose eyes were but lightly covered" with the dust of ignorance, and he determined to teach the Dhamma for their sake.

For our own age, however, there is one ray of hope. It comes from the fact that the majority tend in the long run, to follow the leadership of the intellectuals. If a sufficient body of intelligent men can be convinced of the reality of the spiritual truths, apart from all irrational dogmas and all sectarian associations, we might yet see a great religious revival and restoration of moral values in the world. It would be sufficient if each man would follow the religion of truth so far as he is able to comprehend it.

Or, is it impossible for man to be rational about religion?

Here, honesty compels me to be very blunt. Man can be rational about religion only when his religion is itself rational. If religion has up to now been associated with irrationality it is because the faith it demands is of a kind that can only be fed by unreason. To what else can "the willing suspension of disbelief" lead? The disgust felt by rationalists at the excesses of religious fanaticism is perfectly natural. So also is the reaction against irrational religion which has taken the form of scientific materialism. The sad fact, however, is that if the irrational elements are removed from most of the traditional religions there is very little left. This is the reason for the failure of religion in the western hemisphere.

What May Science Offer for Religious Belief?

What do the psychological sciences offer for the cure of sick souls, and the social sciences for the cure of a sick society?

To what extent are the psychoanalyst and the social worker the heirs of the priest and preacher?

Why are the psycho-social sciences so ineffective in performing these religious tasks?

These three questions must be taken together, since they form three aspects of a single problem.

The psychological sciences have had a limited success in the treatment of sick minds but they are still in the experimental stage. In many cases they fail to relieve the tensions and inner conflicts that come through the lack of a spiritual anchorage in our turbulent and distracted society. There is now a tendency for medical science to fall back on drugs – “tranquilizing tablets” and sedatives—for the relief of neuroses. Psychological science has not yet got down to the cause of man’s psychic unrest, and until the cause is found and removed there can be no permanent cure. The methods of psychological treatment are lengthy and laborious, and results can never be guaranteed. Further, they are beyond the reach of most income-groups. It is more than doubtful whether psychological science as it is practised in the West today will ever succeed in restoring man’s confidence and inner harmony as does a firmly-held religious conviction. It can never be a substitute for that deep inner awareness of spiritual values, and that sense of security in a dangerous world, which religion gives.

The social sciences are concerned only with man’s environment and external conditions. They bring happiness only to the extent to which they are capable of improving these conditions and within the limitations of the individual’s response to them. They do not touch the inner, subjective life of man. It is there that he needs comfort and assurance, a refuge from the ever-present threat in the *sturm und drang* of life. Accidents, disease, the failure of the faculties, and finally old age and death are not to be prevented by the social sciences, so that they, too, can never be a substitute for religion. Man, who is something more than an animal requiring only creature comforts, needs to be informed concerning his purpose and destiny, and the need is so strong in him that for centuries he has been ready to accept even the most improbable theories in the name of religion, rather than nothing at all. Science has made it more difficult for him to do so, but has not been able to provide a satisfactory replacement for the beliefs it has destroyed.

What do the medical and biological sciences have to offer? Can the new medicine men bring peace of mind and loving spirit more effectively via the drugstore than the old rites did? Can we have personal salvation through surgery and pills?

These questions are all statements of the same problem in different terms. The “old rites” being no longer effective for modern man, he has had to have recourse to the drugstore, and possibly what it gives him is psychologically on a par with what his ancestors got from their religious rituals. Temporarily, one may be as effective as the other, but neither gets down to the basic cause of psychological unrest, which is desire. But whereas most of the traditional religions do at least urge man to curb his desire, our modern commercial civilization increases it while giving the illusion of satisfying it. The individual from his earliest years is taught to be competitive and acquisitive, and these qualities are exalted to the status of virtues. But it is not everybody who can be successful in competition, or who can acquire more wealth than his neighbour, and when there is no other objective in life set before a man he suffers from a feeling

of frustration and personal inadequacy if he is one of the failures. At the same time, the failures of necessity outnumber the successful. In a materialistic society, the man who has failed materially is the equivalent to the man who was damned under the old religious dispensation. What has science to offer him? Nothing but empty palliatives. It is from this that we get mental disorders, psycho-somatic sicknesses, neuroses, alcoholism and crime.

There is only one remedy—knowledge and understanding. By this I mean that man must understand the laws that govern his being. If circumstances seem to be against him, he should understand why they are against him, and why it is that his neighbour appears to be more favoured than himself. He can then endure the circumstances without being cast into despair, and he can work confidently to improve his prospects for the future. It is this rational understanding that Buddhism gives us through the knowledge of kamma and rebirth. It is a source of strength and an incentive to moral endeavour. In every way it is far superior both to the priest and his rites, and to the new medicine man with his drugstore remedies. By showing man that he is truly the master of his fate, and can transcend the errors of the past, it makes every day a day of spiritual regeneration and hope. The real and lasting psychological treatment is that which a man gives to himself, by self-understanding and self-mastery. This is the basis of Buddhist psychology, which is timed at removing the causes of misery through the attainment of wisdom and insight.

For better crops is it more effective to take our gifts to the geneticist and chemist than to the altar.

Most educated people today would place their reliance on the scientists. And in this particular field they would be right. Religion, as Buddhists understand it, has nothing whatever to do with good crops. If the fields have not been tended diligently and fertilized as they should be, no amount of supplication at the altar will produce better crops. And if the cultivator's past kamma is bad, no amount of science will prevent blight, unseasonable weather or sickness from ruining his work. In this, as in all else, cause and effect, are the deciding factors, but it always takes more than one cause to produce a given result. To trust entirely in the altar, the scientist or one's own labour, or in a combination of all three might equally prove a mistake. I make this point expressly to impress upon you the fact that Buddhism gives answers that are different from those of the scientific materialist, the theistic religionist and the common sense "men-in-the-street" in equal degree. But any farmer, knowing from his own experience how often what appears to be sheer "chance" has ruined his crops, despite all his precautions, will be bound to agree that the Buddhist explanation fits the facts better than any other.

Can biological science do anything to prevent social disorder and injustice?

Short of interfering with the natural biological processes to such an extent as to amount to a remaking of man—that is, artificially creating a new type of humanity—there is surely not much that science can do about social disorder and injustice. Operations on the brain might make law abiding citizens out of criminals and potential criminals, but even if these doubtful techniques were to be brought to perfection there would still remain the problem of administering them. They would involve a heavy moral responsibility in interfering with an individual's personality and freewill. Such operations could only be carried out on a large scale in a totalitarian society where individual rights had ceased to exist.

The problem of injustice raises this question to its highest factor. Biological science could only prevent injustice by making all men equal and producing a general uniformity in human nature. This is already theoretically possible, in that certain techniques are being developed by which mass-produced thinking tends to iron out the differences in outlook between one person and another. It may become possible in the future to direct mass thinking to such an extent that

human beings lose their individual identity and become like the units of an ant-community, controlled from a brain centre radiating thought-influences as required by the State. Injustice only exists where there is awareness of it; if it vanished as a human concept it would for all practical purposes cease to exist. But there is a wide gulf between what is theoretically possible and what is possible in practice. Man's attempts to interfere with the law of kamma, which is what in reality lies behind inequality and seeming injustice, have always failed. By democratic laws man may give equal opportunities, but no means has yet been discovered of making all men equal in intellect or character. The most fundamental injustices are those which are inherent in human nature itself. Why is one child born with a brilliant intellect while another is mentally deficient? The biologist may think he has the answer when he speaks of the characteristics inherited through the genes, but he is only describing a process; he is not explaining why that process takes place. To say that the genes have combined in a certain way to produce a given result is not the same as explaining why they have so combined and not in any other way. Buddhism does not deny the process, but it points to kamma as the underlying cause. Science might try to impede the working of kamma, and perhaps succeed in diverting it up to a point, but the end-result for humanity would be disastrous. It is not in man's nature to live in a state of ant-like uniformity because in such a condition he could never fulfil his highest potentialities.

I have said that if man's sense of injustice were obliterated, injustice would cease. But a much better solution to the problem is for mankind to realize that there are two kinds of injustice: human injustice, which can be remedied and natural injustice, which is only injustice in appearance. A visitor to a prison, knowing nothing of the offences for which the convicts had been sentenced, but seeing only their present wretched condition, would denounce it as a terrible injustice. So it is with persons who in this life are handicapped in some way, apparently for no fault of their own. The man who knows nothing of kamma is like the ignorant visitor to the prison; he sees only injustice in their present condition. But one who understands the law of cause and effect as it operates from birth to birth sees the workings of a just moral principle. He knows that there is no unmerited suffering. At the same time he knows how this suffering can be avoided, by adhering to the moral law. This understanding can eliminate the crushing sense of injustice under which many people labour, far more effectively than anything that can be expected from biological science.

Do the physical sciences answer our prayers for greater comfort and safety amid the hazards of the earth? But, are not all the benefits brought by scientifically based engineering more than offset by the dangers coming out of the laboratories of the nuclear and other scientists? And, what avail all the comforts if we are left depressed by the suggestion that the cosmos is indifferent to human value, and is a cosmos where our warm hopes are doomed to the ultimate cold of the death of our sun and all life? Can the physical sciences console or transform the hearts of men?

Every achievement of science, from the internal combustion engine onwards, has brought in its train as many perils as it has provided comforts. Everything science has given us is a potential cause of injury or death. People are killed by automobiles and airplanes; they are electrocuted by labour-saving devices and death frequently comes to them via the surgeon's knife or the doctor's hypodermic syringe. These mishaps are called accidents, but there is also the misuse of scientific discoveries due to man's greed, hatred and ignorance or disregard of moral laws. In every direction nature thwarts science either by natural hazard or else through man's own imperfect nature. Life must always be a balance of opposites; there is nothing that has not its evil as well as its beneficial aspect. It is useless to look to science to give man increased happiness, unless science is applied in full knowledge of the spiritual laws. Even if

that were to come about, it would only be the intentional misuse of science that would be eliminated; the accidental mishaps would still remain. And they would still require explanation.

We must accept the fact that the cosmos is indifferent to human values. The physical universe gives no indication whatsoever of the existence of a beneficent deity or of a purpose. The Buddhist is not disturbed by this fact. The life-process is a blind, groping force of craving, which in itself has no purpose except the satisfaction of desire. This life-process, involving rebirth after rebirth, is called in Buddhism *saṃsāra*. It has no higher purpose than the satisfaction of craving for sentient existence in one form or another. This is a very important and fundamental point on which Buddhism is in agreement with science and completely at variance with the theories of theistic religion. In Buddhism the only higher purpose in life is what man puts into it. This higher, spiritual purpose is the extinction of craving, which brings rebirth to an end.

The goal of Buddhism is the supreme goal of Nibbāna, which lies outside the *saṃsāra* or cosmic order. There alone is absolute peace to be found. Within *saṃsāra* all is strife, an unremitting struggle for existence; that is the very essence of what we call living. The “pleasure-principle” of modern psychology and the “struggle for survival” known to biological evolution are both facts which have always been recognized by Buddhism. Yet at the same time moral order is inherent in the law of cause and effect. If a man is crushed by it, as in a blind, impersonal and indifferent machine, it is because he himself is blind to the moral law and misuses his freewill. The law of cause and effect is pitiless and inexorable. All the more reason, therefore, for man himself to cultivate pity, for he must put into *saṃsāric* life the higher qualities which it lacks. Whatsoever of divinity there is in life is of man’s creation. By self-purification, eliminating the worldly instincts of lust, ill will and delusion, man can make himself into a god. The higher planes of *saṃsāra* are inhabited by such beings, *visuddhi-devas*, or “gods by purification.” The arahat while alive on this earth is also a *visuddhi-deva*, enjoying the bliss and unbroken peace that can come only when all the worldly attachments are severed. The attainment of this state is the purpose which we ourselves can put into an otherwise purposeless round of existences. The cosmos does not impose any purpose on us; we are free to choose what our purpose shall be. We have the choice of two paths; either to go on being reborn for the satisfaction of sensual craving, with all the suffering that rebirth brings in its train, or to extinguish the fires of passion and gain the supreme and unchanging state of Nibbāna. Conditioned existence is impermanent, subject to suffering and devoid of self-reality. Therefore it is not real in the absolute sense. The supreme reality lies outside and beyond *saṃsāra*. Nibbāna cannot be described, for the simple reason that there are no words or concepts that we can derive from our experience of life in the sphere of relativity to apply to it. It can be experienced, but it cannot be described.

Nevertheless, the Buddha used certain terms to convey some idea of what Nibbāna means. He called it *asaṅkhata*, the unconditioned; *pāra*, the other shore (beyond *saṃsāra*); *ajarā*, the ageless; *amata*, the deathless; *dhuva*, the permanent; *ṭhāna*, the refuge, and *leṇa*, the shelter. But for that which has no qualities, since qualities mean relative values, there can be no exact description. It is sufficient to know that because there is this *saṃsāra*, which is impermanent, subject to suffering and void of reality, there must be that which is permanent, free from suffering and real in the ultimate sense. It is that reality which we mean by Nibbāna. It is not, as some people have imagined, a negative concept. It is beyond both negative and positive, for negative and positive are opposite poles of a relativity-complex. Neither is absolute because each depends upon the other for its existence. The cosmos exists by virtue of such opposites; hence it must always have good and evil mixed, each of them being relative to the viewpoint of the illusory “Self.” Nibbāna being freedom from self-delusion, is also free from the opposites created by man’s egocentric viewpoint.

The Buddhist is not dismayed by the prospect of the ultimate cold of the death of our sun. The Buddha taught that universes, or world-cycles, arise and pass away in endless succession, just as do the lives of individual men. Certainly our world must at some time come to an end. It has happened before, with previous worlds, and it will happen again. But so long as their kamma and vipāka life-continuum carries on, the beings now living in this world continue to be reborn in other spheres and other universes. All these states of being are impermanent; only Nibbāna is unchanging. The physical sciences can never console or transform the hearts of men. Only wisdom and understanding have this power; one who understands the nature of the universe and of life can face reality without fear. Knowing that all compounded things must pass away, he views even the destruction of universes with equanimity. His kingdom is not of this world.

Is the contribution of the several sciences to religion a negative one?

Should we frantically scratch among the old beliefs for some comfort and hope, and hold fast to them no matter how illogical and irrational they are, in the light of the scientific system or belief that we prefer to hold for resolving our other problems?

Can we be irrational and survive?

Scientific knowledge has shown itself not only negative towards dogmatic and “revealed” religion, but positively hostile to it. If it were not so, these questions would not be asked. It is man’s awareness that his old religious ideas have broken down under the impact of science that has brought about this heart-searching quest for truth on some different level.

In the case of Buddhism, however, all the modern scientific concepts have been present from the beginning. There is no principle of science, from biological evolution to the General Theory of Relativity, that runs counter to any teaching of Gotama Buddha. Einstein himself wrote that if there is any religion which is acceptable to the modern scientific mind it is Buddhism. Yet it is doubtful whether even Einstein quite realized the extent to which modern science confirms the teachings of Buddhism. Only one who has both studied and meditated upon every aspect of the Buddha Dhamma can fully appreciate the light that it throws upon the problems that science itself has raised. In fact, Buddhism continues where science leaves off; it carries scientific principles to higher planes of realization. It shows that the laws of physics are the counterpart of spiritual laws and that there is a common meeting-ground for both.

If physics says that the apparently solid universe is not in reality composed of solid substance at all, but is actually a flux of electronic energy, Buddhism said it first. If the scientific philosopher says that our senses deceive us in presenting this insubstantial series of nuclear events in the guise of solid, enduring matter, Buddhism anticipated him by saying the same thing and making it the basis of the Buddhist analysis of phenomena. If the psychologist, neurologist and biologist say that there is no indication of an immortal soul in man, they have made the discovery two thousand five hundred years after the Buddha. If science says that there is no ground for belief in a Creator-god, it is merely confirming an essential doctrine of Buddhism. But if the most advanced thinkers believe, as they now tend to do, that in some way mind, or mental activity, is the activating force behind the phenomena of life, they have hit upon one of the eternal verities which Buddhism has always proclaimed. For the Buddha said: “*Mano pubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā.*” “Mind precedes all phenomena; mind predominates them and creates them.” It is man’s mental activity which creates them; and that act of creation is going on from moment to moment. Kamma is mental volition: the will-to-act followed by the action. If the mental volition is of an immoral order the resulting states of consciousness are fraught with suffering because of the reaction. But if the mental volition is of a moral type and the action is a good and beneficial one, the resulting states of consciousness are

happy. In other words, good actions bring as their result good conditions and the pleasurable consciousness associated with such conditions.

Thus we create the world, making it good or bad for ourselves by the process of kamma and *Vipāka*. Truly, life is exactly what we make it for ourselves. Therefore Buddhism tells us not to look to any external agency for salvation, but to rely entirely upon our own efforts. It is the science of the mind, which teaches us how to harness the tremendous power of mind for our own benefit and that of all beings. It is for this reason that Buddhism places such great importance on its profound system of psychology, the Abhidhamma means the “highest law” and this system gives a minute analysis of all the states of consciousness; it is the complete path to self-understanding and self-mastery. Abhidhamma goes much further than modern Western psychology because it deals with basic principles of the mind and relates the mental processes to the universal system of moral values. It is precisely here that Western psychology fails, for the psycho-analyst of the West is not concerned with moral values; in fact, he doubts whether they have any existence outside man’s imagination. He is unable to give guidance on questions of right or wrong. But Buddhism explains the relationship between mental activity and ethical laws, showing that morality is an integral part of the pattern of cause and effect which is set up by our mode of thinking and the actions produced by it.

Science is concerned with discovering the causes of phenomena. So also is Buddhism; but Buddhism goes further in revealing how these causes can be moulded to produce better results. In placing mind at the centre of all phenomena, Buddhism is the opposite pole of materialism; yet its picture of the physical world corresponds exactly with that of modern science. This in itself is a remarkable fact which should claim the attention of all intelligent persons. That the Buddha was able, by direct insight, to fathom the nature of the universe, without any of the aids of modern science, two thousand five hundred years ago, is the proof of his Enlightenment. No other religious teacher in the world’s history has achieved this. Where the physical sciences will never be able to console or transform the hearts of man, Buddhism does both. It satisfies the intellect and the heart in equal measure, and it gives hope founded upon a rational and verifiable faith. To the Buddhist there is no question of having to decide between faith and reason. For us, followers of the Supreme Buddha, faith is reasonable, and reason confirms faith.

Or, is it possible to re-examine the human situation in the fuller light of the spectrum of knowledge, to establish a picture of man and his opportunities in the cosmos that is hopeful as well as honest?

This is precisely what Buddhism enables us to do. Accepting all the facts of science, even those most disturbing to man’s complacency and egoism—seeing human life, just as science does, a mere fraction of the vast mass of phenomena cast up by the cosmos—it yet places the highest possible value on human life and human endeavour. It shows that man, despite his seeming insignificance in this tremendous cosmic process is really the master of it, if he can become the master of himself. Pascal saw that man is greater than the blind forces of nature because even though he is crushed by them he remains superior by virtue of his understanding of them. Again, Buddhism carries the truth further: it shows that by means of understanding man can also control his circumstances. He can cease to be crushed by them, and can use their laws to raise himself. The Buddha said, “Behold, O monks, within this fathom-long body, equipped with sense-perception and mind, I declare unto you is the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world and the way to its cessation.” The mastery of the external world is not in the external world, but in ourselves.

Has there not been revealed to us, if we will but look at the newer truths or beliefs yielded by the sciences, that man finds himself indeed a creature created by the cosmos, and thus ordained by it, and so endowed by that creator with a mind which can in its finite way learn to appreciate

the whole, and to enter creatively and consciously into the grand scheme of development in which the infinite cosmos is engaged?

Here is a wonderful mass of contradictions, such as Buddhism could never have produced. Man, created by the cosmos, which is blind, impersonal and mindless, cannot have been endowed by that mindless cosmos with a mind. The cosmos being mindless, how could it give its creation a mind? And if the mind is finite, how can it ever appreciate the whole, and “enter creatively and consciously into the grand scheme of development” of a cosmos that is infinite? What, in any case, is that “grand scheme of development”? Where is there any evidence of a purpose in the cosmos beyond the blind, groping force of craving which I have already mentioned? We have seen that science pictures a cosmos that is indifferent to man; what possibility, then, is there of his being able to co-operate with whatever scheme it may have? The reply of the scientist to this would be merely that the question is another example of man’s petty conceit. Why should man suppose that his efforts one way or another are of any interest to the cosmos? Here, it is obvious the word “cosmos” is being used simply as a substitute for “God.” A cosmos with a purpose becomes the same as the theistic idea of “God.” But whereas the theistic idea of a scheme evolved by “God” gives man individual hope—the hope of a personal immortality—the idea of a scheme being worked out by the blind, impersonal forces of a cosmos which clearly cares nothing for the units of the human race holds out no such promise. Those who can derive hope from the contemplation of a remote futurity when the cosmos will have perfected humanity, but they themselves will have totally ceased to exist, may be satisfied with this concept, but it will never be a source of inspiration to better living for the majority. The individual ants composing an ant army may be content to form a bridge across water for their fellows with their own drowned bodies, but human beings are not ants. The average human being desires that his own life should have a meaning and a goal, and not be just a stepping-stone towards a doubtful goal for his remote descendants. In any case, the ultimate perfection of humanity by biological processes is now more than doubtful. Science has shown that evolution simply does not work that way; it produces retrogression as well as progress. Some species have entirely disappeared from the earth. Have we any guarantee from science that man will not vanish also—perhaps with the aid of science itself?

The answer to this question can only be an emphatic “No.” This view of life will never fulfil human aspiration or give comfort and support to suffering mankind. But now we come to the final query.

What thrilling and life-giving and hopeful beliefs are possible from an honest contemplation of the new revelations of reality?

We can derive thrilling, life-giving and hopeful convictions from contemplating the “new revelations of reality” in the light of Buddhism. No other way is possible. There are no “new” truths, and there is certainly nothing in the new revelations of science that is not already in the Teaching of Gotama Buddha. By way of summing up I will repeat:

Buddhism does not depend upon any of the commonly accepted religious dogmas which science has exploded, such as that of a Creator-God, an immortal soul, a supernatural scheme of salvation or a particular “revelation” made at one specific point of history and one special geographical location to a select person or group of persons. It does not maintain that man is a special creation marked off from the rest of living beings by having an unchanging, undying element that has been denied to others. It does not require any myths, such as that of “original sin” to explain the presence of evil and suffering in the world.

These are the negative aspects of its agreement with science. The points of agreement are many. They include the view that all phenomena, including life, are a flux of energies; the

correspondence between biological evolution and spiritual evolution; the truth that craving, or the “life-urge,” is the motivating factor behind the processes of evolution; the fact that ours is not the only planet capable of producing and supporting life; the truth that mankind and the animals differ from one another only in a qualitative sense, as one species differs from another, not in essential kind; and the view that although the cosmos is itself mindless, the operative force behind it is an activity corresponding to mind.

The Buddhist explanation of the cosmos is that, as I have indicated, it is man’s own mental activity which creates the cosmos; every successive world-cycle is brought into being and supported by a combination of natural causes—the physical causes known to science, and the kamma of beings who have lived before. Buddhism, like, science, is based on cause and effect.

Herein lies the greatest hope for mankind. Buddhism gives a positive and rational motive for moral endeavour and spiritual aspiration such as cannot be found in any other religious system. It asserts the supremacy of moral law without resorting to supernatural causes. It shows that there is no injustice in the causal law, yet at the same time gives us the knowledge that in extending compassion to those who are suffering the results of their past misdeeds we are advancing the higher spiritual laws. Even though we cannot undo the past kamma of ourselves or others, we can yet help to mitigate the suffering it may have brought, or provide some compensation for the handicap, such as blindness or deformity, which is its present result. In so doing we are originating good kamma which will produce beneficial results in the future. Thus Buddhism teaches the cardinal virtues of *mettā*, universal benevolence, and *karuṇā*, compassion. It is man himself who puts pity into a pitiless universe. And the highest effort and highest aspiration of all is that which is directed to the attainment of Nibbāna. Man need not despair of all worldly improvement, since such improvement is within his reach by obedience to the moral laws; yet even though earthly conditions were to be rendered hopeless by human greed, hatred and ignorance, there is still a temporary refuge in the higher planes of existence, and a final, unchanging certainty in Nibbāna, the Eternal peace—which, however, must be won by individual effort in self-purification.

That is the message of hope I bring in the name of Buddhism to the delegates to this conference. The Supreme Buddha’s Teaching is for all times and all men. It is capable of bringing peace, happiness and prosperity to our troubled world. As the humble spokesman of millions of Buddhists I earnestly entreat that all men of understanding and good will here present will weigh in their hearts the things I have said and form their own judgement as to whether they are true, reasonable and good. The Buddha himself did not ask more than that.

May all beings be happy!

The Buddhist Publication Society

The BPS is an approved charity dedicated to making known the Teaching of the Buddha, which has a vital message for all people.

Founded in 1958, the BPS has published a wide variety of books and booklets covering a great range of topics. Its publications include accurate annotated translations of the Buddha's discourses, standard reference works, as well as original contemporary expositions of Buddhist thought and practice. These works present Buddhism as it truly is—a dynamic force which has influenced receptive minds for the past 2500 years and is still as relevant today as it was when it first arose.

For more information about the BPS and our publications, please visit our website, or contact:

The Administrative Secretary
Buddhist Publication Society
P.O. Box 61
54 Sangharaja Mawatha
Kandy, Sri Lanka
E-mail: bps@bps.lk
Web site: <http://www.bps.lk>
Tel: 0094 81 223 7283
Fax: 0094 81 222 3679