

Purification of Character

by

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Purification of View

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Abbreviations

A:	Aṅguttara-Nikāya
D:	Dīgha-Nikāya
Dhp:	Dhammapada
M:	Majjhima-Nikāya
S:	Saṃyutta-Nikāya.
Vism:	<i>Visuddhi-magga</i> or <i>The Path of Purification</i> .

(All the following Pali references refer to the volumes and page numbers of the Pali Text Society editions).

Purification of Character

By Bhikkhu Vimalo

In the Aṅguttara-Nikāya¹ the Buddha describes three kinds of defilements: coarse, medium, and subtle. The coarse ones are: wrong action (*kāya-duccarita*), wrong speech (*vacī-duccarita*) and wrong thinking (*mano-duccarita*); the medium ones are: sensual, hostile, and aggressive thoughts (*kāma-*, *byāpāda-*, *vihimsā-vitakka*); the subtle defilements are: thinking about relatives, country, and not being despised (*ñāti-*, *janapada-*, *anavaññatti-paṭisaṃyutta vitakka*).

It is not possible to get rid of these unhealthy inclinations without first making their driving forces conscious. Buddha called these driving forces (be they conscious or unconscious) *cetanā* and said, “Intention, O monks, I call *kamma*” (*cetanā ’haṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi*).² *Cetanā* may be translated as will, volition, intention, inclination, drive, striving, direction, tendency, or motivation. In the Sutta-piṭaka several types of *cetanā* are distinguished, namely, the driving forces of our action (*kāya-saṅcetanā*), speech (*vacī-saṅcetanā*), and thought (*mano-saṅcetanā*);³ *rūpa-*, *sadda-*, *gandha-*, *rasa-*, *phoṭṭhabba-saṅcetanā*,⁴ the reaction to sense-objects, or interest in them (Freud’s *cathexis*, i.e. the investing of an object with libido); and *dhamma-saṅcetanā*,⁵ the reaction to ideas, memories, imagination and their cathexis. Lastly there is our attitude towards ourselves (*atta-saṅcetanā*) and towards others (*para-saṅcetanā*).⁶

When one speaks of making unhealthy inclinations conscious, it is *cetanā* above all that is referred to. The goal of Satipaṭṭhāna, or practice of mindfulness, consists in emerging from the predominantly unconscious condition in which most people live, into a state of being fully conscious, without conflict, repression or self-deception.

The Buddha said, “When the mind is wrongly directed, then action, speech, and thought are wrongly directed,” (*citte byāpanne kāya-*, *vacī-*, *mano-kammaṃ byāpannaṃ hoti*).⁷ In other words, when our attitude towards ourselves, and others, is distorted, it influences all our activities. One should try, therefore, to get to the root of one’s problems and not be satisfied with superficial solutions.

In order to overcome the various undesirable character traits a profound knowledge of oneself is imperative. Through satipaṭṭhāna insight may be gained, not only into our mutually conflicting tendencies, conscious or unconscious fear and self-defence, resistances or self-justifications, but also into our attitude and reaction to these inclinations. Depth psychology shows that character is largely formed in early childhood. Many traits, together with basic attitudes and unconscious claims (*cetanā*), are acquired at that time, as the child learns to fit in with his environment in particular with important personalities and develops his character in such a way as to obtain the greatest security for himself in the given circumstances. Even if they should later prove themselves harmful these attitudes are retained, since they afford a certain security in dealing with life.

It is not enough, however, to recognize what has led to the formation of certain character traits in the past. One must also understand why they persist at the present time. Many an

¹ A I 254

² A III 415; S II 40

³ S II 40; A II 158.

⁴ S III 60

⁵ S III 60

⁶ D III 231; A II 159

⁷ A I 262

unhealthy inclination continues because there is an advantage or a satisfaction connected with it. The person who is not prepared to give up this advantage seeks for some subterfuge or justification. All resistances must be examined, since they oppose a possible change. They consist for example in justification, unwillingness to make an examination, forgetting, and not seeing things in their correct context. Burying one's head in the sand and pretending not to see anything that cannot be reconciled with one's ideal image (*asmi-māna*) is certainly not consistent with Buddhist mind training. Nietzsche gives a lucid account of this process: "I did it,' says my memory. 'I couldn't have done it,' says my pride and remains inexorable. In the end, memory yields."⁷ "Whoever considers clarification as the essential process of human life knows that the way to it leads through suffering, and that those who wish to avoid suffering will miss clarification."⁸

If insight penetrates sufficiently deep, it gradually brings about a change of heart as the mental conflicts are overcome; it is in this way that right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*) and the right attitude of mind (*sammā-saṅkappa*) grow stronger. "Nobody divided within himself can be wholly sincere."⁹ The right mental attitude can only arise when one surmounts the inner conflict, and is no longer driven by neurotic needs¹⁰ (*micchā-vāyāma*) for power, perfection, independence or affection.

When the Buddha wanted to investigate inner hindrances he often asked himself, "what is the cause, what is the reason ...?" (*ko hetu, ko paccayo...?*). He says in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta¹¹ that one should examine how feelings, states of mind and dhammas arise (*samudaya-dhammānupassī, vedanāsu, citte, dhammesu viharati*). The same applies to the five hindrances (*yathā ca anuppannassa kāmacchandassa byāpādassa, etc. uppādo hoti, tañ ca pajānāti*).¹² The 61st and 151st Suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya give a thorough explanation of this meticulous examination (*dhamma-vicaya*). In these Suttas the Buddha says that one should examine what one does, says or considers, not only before, but also during and after the action or thought concerned. Master Eckhart has this to say about awareness: "This 'seeing' serves two purposes: it scotches what is mischievous and makes us forthwith remedy our faults. Many a time I have laid it down that great workers, great fasters, great vigil-keepers, if they fail to mend their wicked ways, wherein true progress lies, do cheat themselves and are the devil's laughing stock."¹³

Whoever wants to advance to the higher stages of Buddhist mind training must first get the better of the "human, all too human" and for this courage, determination, and honesty with oneself are needed.

I

(1) It often happens that the compulsive nature of unhealthy activities is broken when one looks into the forces which drive them: whether it is a question of occasional petty theft or deceit or of more serious transgressions, or violence, sexual misdemeanours or heavy drinking. Self-reproaches (*kukkucca*) often do not help at all. Someone may occasionally indulge in small frauds because he is avaricious and wishes to save money, or because he finds it humiliating to ask for anything; or various objects of acquisition are used as substitutes for love and affection. He may perhaps commit these offences out of defiance or the desire for revenge. With regard to the third

⁸ F. Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*, 68.

⁹ F. Kuenkel: *Einfuehrung in die Charakterkunde*, p.153

¹⁰ K. Horney: *Our Inner Conflicts*, p.163 (Norton, New York).

¹¹ D II 292, 299, 301; M I 56, 59, 60; cp. S III 14: Samādhisutta.

¹² D II 301, M I 60; A I 272

¹³ *Master Eckhart*, transl. by C. de B. Evans (Watkins, London), vol. I p. 135.

sīla that is concerned with sexual misconduct, we should not forget that the attitude towards sex varies in different cultures, as Ruth Benedict,¹⁴ Margaret Mead¹⁵ and other anthropologists have shown. The various Buddhist countries differ markedly in their marriage customs. It is one aspect of *satipaṭṭhāna* to become aware of the cultural influences, which form the background of a person's whole outlook on life, and conditions him in many ways. There are great differences between East and West in this respect. Some forms of cultural conditioning are difficult to overcome because they are absorbed early in childhood and are later taken for granted and never questioned.

What is essential in keeping the *sīlas*¹⁶ is the right attitude of mind—an attitude, which does not look upon others as simply the tools of unbridled egotism.¹⁷ “Therefore we may briefly say here, that he who voluntarily recognizes and observes those merely moral limits between wrong and right, even where this is not secured by the state or any other external power, thus he who, according to our explanation, never carries the assertion of his own will so far as to deny the will appearing in another individual, is just. Thus, in order to increase his own well-being, he will not inflict suffering upon others, i.e. he will commit no crime, he will respect the rights and the property of others.

“We see that for such a just man the *principium individuationis* is no longer, as in the case of the bad man, an absolute wall of partition. We see that he does not, like the bad man, merely assert his own manifestation of will and deny all others; that other persons are not for him mere masks, whose nature is quite different from his own; but he shows in his conduct that he also recognises his own nature—the will to live as a thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), in the foreign manifestation which is only given to him as an idea. Thus he finds himself again in that other manifestation, up to a certain point, that of doing no wrong, i.e. abstaining from injury. To this extent, therefore, he sees through the *principium individuationis*, the veil of *māyā*; so far he sets the being external to him on a level with his own—he does it no injury. If we examine the inmost nature of this justice, there already lies in it the resolution not to go so far in the assertion of one's own will as to deny the manifestations of will of others, by compelling them to serve one's own.”¹⁸

(2) Buddha described lying (*musā-vādā*), slander (*pisunā vācā*), harsh talk (*pharusā vācā*), and gossip (*samphappalāpā*) as wrong speech (*vacī-duccarita*).¹⁹ The person who tells lies should try to discover how far he is dependent on the good opinion of others. Intimidation and too strict an upbringing often result in the child's not daring to admit that he has done something forbidden, since he is afraid of losing love. As the dependence on other people's affection—Karen Horney²⁰ calls it the neurotic need for affection and approval—is very common, it is useful to examine it more closely in all its ramifications. There is neither freedom nor love as long as one needs the affection of others (A person who is dependent on other people's affection has rarely any love for them). If someone wants to impress others and lies in the process, it can often be traced back to humiliation. Lying serves a compensatory purpose (*vacī-sañcetanā*),²¹ that of erasing the previous disparagement and substituting recognition for it.

¹⁴ Ruth Benedict: *Patterns of Culture*.

¹⁵ Margaret Mead: *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies: Male and Female*.

¹⁶ i.e. the basic rules of morality.

¹⁷ Cf. S V 353, Dhṛp 129, 130; *attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā*.

¹⁸ Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and Idea*, 3 vols.; transl. by R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp; Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1883; tenth impression 1957; vol. I p. 478.

¹⁹ A II 141

²⁰ Karen Horney: *Self Analysis and The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (Norton, New York).

²¹ Cp. *Vacī-sañcetanā-hetu uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukhadukkhaṃ* (S II 40; A II 158).

Speaking badly of others (*para-vambhanā*) and praising oneself (*attukkaṃsanā*), especially when it develops into a character-trait, is frequently nothing more than self-justification, an attempt to avoid self-hatred (*ajjhataṃ byāpāda*).²² As long as a person lacks the courage to investigate his conflicts and will not give up superficial solutions, so long will lack of self-confidence and inferiority-feelings (*hino 'ham asmi*) persist. The latter increase the necessity to compensate the lack of self-confidence and so other people are badly spoken of.

Harsh, unfriendly speech is an expression of aggressiveness. In our Western culture limits are set on aggressiveness, and one may conclude from harsh speech that this is perhaps the only outlet for repressed hostility. A person is inclined towards harsh judgments, when similar impulses in himself are repressed or when many repressions are being maintained. Inner resistance to these drives is then turned outwards. Exaggerated severity leads one to suspect that it is nourished from unconscious sources.

An excessive need for conversation is frequently found in a person who cannot bear solitude. The tendency towards unnecessary talk is often present in those who had the feeling of not being wanted when they were children; they have to ingratiate themselves and to make sure that they are not rejected.

(3) The Buddha spoke of three distortions (*vipallāsa*):²³

- i. distorted perceptions, imaginings and projections (*saññāvipallāsa*);
- ii. distorted mind (*citta-vipallāsa*);
- iii. distorted views and prejudices (*diṭṭhi-vipallāsa*).

These distortions make us see the transitory as permanent, the painful as happy, impure as pure, and what is not self as self.

“In order to see that a purely objective, and therefore correct, comprehension of things is only possible when we consider them without any personal participation in them, thus when the will is perfectly silent, let one call to mind how much every emotion or passion disturbs and falsifies our knowledge, indeed how every inclination and aversion alters, colours, and distorts not only the judgment, but even the original perception of things.”²⁴

Together with attraction and repulsion, hope and fear, it is above all unsolved problems and complexes that distort perception since they are easily projected outwards. Whatever one does not wish to recognize in oneself may be seen much more clearly in others. Not only unhealthy tendencies are projected outwards but also unfulfilled ideals and the compensations for one-sided developments. Admiration and respect may in many cases be traced back to the transfer of unfulfilled ideals.

In *satipaṭṭhāna* these *cathexes* of the object, as Freud calls them, are made conscious. The Buddha says in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, “He knows sense-organs and sense-objects and he also knows the fetter which arises conditioned by both of them” (*cakkhuṃ ... pajānāti, rūpe ... ca pajānāti, yañ-ca tad ubhayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati saṃyojanaṃ, tañ-ca pajānāti.*)

This fetter (*saṃyojana*)²⁵ is the previously mentioned *rūpa-*, *sadda-*, *gandha-*, *rasa-*, *phoṭṭhabba-sañcetanā*; that is, interest in sense-objects as far as connected with, or followed by defiled

²² S V 110

²³ A II 52

²⁴ Schopenhauer, op. cit. vol. III p. 134.

²⁵ S IV 108, 164; A I 264; cp. C. G. Jung: “Interest I conceive as that energy-libido, which I bestow upon the object as value, or which the object draws from me, even may be against my will or unknown to myself” (*Psychological Types*, p. 521)

impulses, as greed or aversion, conceit or envy, various misconceptions, and so forth. Only when all these projections are recognized as such and abandoned can one see things with complete objectivity. Schopenhauer says:

“If, raised by the power of the mind, a man relinquishes the common way of looking at things, gives up tracing, under the guidance of the forms of the principle of sufficient reason, their relation to each other, the final goal of which is always a relation to his own will; if he thus ceases to consider the where, the when, the why, and the whither of things, and looks simply and solely at the what; if, further, he does not allow abstract thought, the concepts of the reason, to take possession of his consciousness, but, instead of all this, gives the whole power of his mind to perception, sinks himself entirely in this, and lets his whole consciousness be filled with the quiet contemplation of the natural object actually present, whether a landscape, a tree, a mountain, a building, or whatever it may be; inasmuch as he ‘loses himself in this object’ (to use a pregnant German idiom), i.e. forgets even his individuality, his will, and only continues to exist as the pure subject, the clear mirror of the object, so that it is as if the object alone were there, without any one to perceive it, and he can no longer separate the perceiver from the perception, but both have become one, because the whole consciousness is filled and occupied with one single sensuous picture; if thus the object has to such an extent passed out of all relation to something outside it, and the subject out of all relation to the will, then that which is so known is no longer the particular thing as such, but it is the *Idea*,²⁶ the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will at this grade; and, therefore, he who is sunk in this perception is no longer individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; but he is *pure*, will-less, painless, timeless *subject of knowledge*.”²⁷

There are also distortions in self-observation. When otherwise clear connections cannot be seen it means that unconscious resistance is still too strong; it is most important to make this resistance conscious. As long as an impulse is repressed it is outside conscious control. A feeling of uneasiness or embarrassment *may* be an indication that a complex has been touched or that a repressed tendency is trying to break through into consciousness. Unless attention is paid to it the unpleasant feeling (*dukkha-vedanā*) remains the only indication that there is a repression. A person is practising *Satipaṭṭhāna* if he makes emotion,²⁸ mental states,²⁹ the repressed idea³⁰ and repression³¹ itself conscious. We read in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-Sutta*, “He knows the mind, and the dhammas, and also the fetter that arises.”

Erich Fromm says in his book *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*:³² “If one carries Freud’s principle of the transformation of unconsciousness into consciousness to its ultimate consequences, one approaches the concept of enlightenment,” and Karen Horney describes the goal of psychoanalysis as follows: “By rendering a person free from inner bondages make him free for the development of his best potentialities!”³³ The person who thinks he practises *satipaṭṭhāna* and makes good progress in Buddhist mind training and still maintains his

²⁶ In Plato’s sense.

²⁷ Schopenhauer, op. cit. vol. I p. 231. The inclusion of this quote does not imply that all ideas expressed in it, are in conformity with the Buddhist viewpoint; this applies in particular to the conception of the idea as an ‘eternal form,’ and of a timeless subject of knowledge (Editor).

²⁸ *vedanā*

²⁹ *citta*

³⁰ *dhamma*

³¹ *dhamma sañcetanā (manañ-ca pajānāti, dhamme ca pajānāti, yañ-ca tad ubhayaṃ paṭicca uppajjati samyojanaṃ, tañ ca pajānāti).*

³² p. 139.

³³ ³³Karen Horney: *Self Analysis*, p.21.

complexes and neurotic strivings obviously deceives himself. Freud has shown (and anybody who has done some self-analysis can corroborate it) that repressed tendencies (*cetanā*) stay in the unconscious and persist until they are dissolved by insight. They are very little—if at all—influenced by indirect treatment. This links up with the Buddhist doctrine of *Kamma*, which holds that no one can escape the results of his evil actions, words and thoughts. Some profound discoveries in depth psychology have begun to reveal how this law of *Kamma* operates.

Citta-vipallāsa may perhaps be best explained as wrong attitude of mind. What Karen Horney calls ‘neurotic trends’ may also be near it. Such bad character-traits as greediness,³⁴ hypocrisy,³⁵ envy,³⁶ grudge,³⁷ conceit,³⁸ and self-satisfaction,³⁹ which the Buddha described as defilements of the mind, must be investigated to see how and under what circumstances they arise (*samudaya-dhammānupassanā*). The same holds for the inability to endure solitude or to get on well with others. Among the motivations that prompt greediness there may be the search for security, or it may be a compensation for earlier want, or a remnant of an infantile greed.

Hypocrisy is found in people with a strong need for recognition. Their principal aim is to ensure that others have a good opinion of them. Envy and jealousy may often be traced back to the attitude towards brothers and sisters in early childhood. Psychoanalysis has shown what anyone may verify in himself and in his friends—that the attitude towards others in the early environment is easily projected on to other people in later life. Obstinance is closely related to feelings of inferiority. People with insufficient self-confidence are often obstinate when they are with someone else who is superior to them. They assert themselves by saying no and by contradicting. It is all too often the case that a person becomes complacent and ceases to strive for something higher when he has overcome certain inhibitions and difficulties.

The Buddha says that one must not remain satisfied with what has been already achieved (*oramattakena viśesādhigamena asantuṭṭhi*⁴⁰; *asantuṭṭhitā kusalesu dhammesu*).⁴¹ “For it is well known that, on this road, not to go forward is to turn back, and not to be gaining is to be losing.”⁴² “Why then do we not become wise? There is much to it. The most important thing is that one should go out of all things, beyond them all and their origins; this is too much for most men and so they remain within their limitations.”⁴³

A distinction should be made between genuine love for others and a flight from oneself, between a real need for solitude and a neurotic one. Neurotic striving for solitude is based on the incapacity to get on well with others, which often comes from a wrong attitude towards them. “If it is well with him, then indeed it is well in all places and with all people. But if it is ill with him, then it is ill in all places and with all people.”⁴⁴

Mutually contradictory unconscious claims on others, for example the wish to dominate them and at the same time be loved by them, make it difficult, if not impossible, to establish satisfactory relationships. These claims are bound to bring up resistance in others. This rejection again strengthens the fear of defeat: a person either moves further and further away from others

³⁴ *abhijjhā*

³⁵ *makkha*

³⁶ *issā*

³⁷ *macchariya*

³⁸ *māna*

³⁹ *pamāda*

⁴⁰ A IV 22

⁴¹ A I 50; D III 214

⁴² *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, transl. by E. Allison Peers; Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd. p. 51.

⁴³ Quint: *Meister Eckhart*, p. 203

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p. 58

and makes up in fantasy and day-dreams for what reality denies him, or else feelings of insecurity and inferiority already in existence are strengthened and show themselves in awkward behaviour. This insecurity, together with compensatory feelings of superiority, is felt by others and rejected. So the whole cycle begins again: the tension between inferiority feelings and the need for recognition increases, and suffering becomes more acute.

In these vicious circles one can see clearly how the law of Kamma operates. The Enlightened One said, “*Kamma is cetanā.*”

So long as one does not change these wrong attitudes to oneself (*atta-sañcetanā*) and others (*para-sañcetanā*), one must suffer. We may remember here the first verse of the Dhammapada: “If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, sorrow follows him even as the wheel follows the foot of the ox which draws the cart.” To bring these unconscious claims into the clear light of consciousness is not easy and it demands long practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* and development of intuitive understanding. “I grant you this needs effort, application, careful cultivation of the interior life and good sound sense and understanding whereon to stay the mind in things and with people. This is not learnt by flight, by one who runs away from things, who turns his back upon the world and flees into the desert: he must learn to find the solitude within where or with whomsoever he may be.”⁴⁵

Prejudices, distorted views (*diṭṭhi-vipallāsa*), conceptions of good and evil, are often taken over uncritically from parents or those in authority.

It is a part of *satipaṭṭhāna* to make these sometimes completely unconscious attitudes conscious and to restrict self-centredness. As a rule the stronger the feelings of inferiority the higher the ideal of oneself will be, and hence the possibility of understanding the *anattā*-doctrine of the Buddha will be similarly limited. Only he who removes the tension between inferiority feelings and the need for recognition can understand, “This is not mine; this am I not; this is not my Self.”

II

IN the 20th Sutta of the *Majjhima-Nikāya* the Buddha explains how unhealthy thoughts should be overcome: 1. by attending to a healthy idea; 2. by seeing the danger in unhealthy thoughts; 3. by not attending to unhealthy thoughts; 4. by cutting off this mental activity; 5. by forcefully suppressing these thoughts. Above all, one should try to gain insight into those states of mind, which always lead to the arising of sensual, hostile and aggressive thoughts. In addition one should endeavour to practise meditation and awareness and to develop those factors, which exclude or at least weaken unhealthy thoughts. According to the Buddha, it is essential for the overcoming of sensuality that higher happiness and serenity be found⁴⁶; in freeing oneself from animosity one develops *metta*⁴⁷; in abandoning aggressive thoughts one develops compassion.⁴⁸ The Buddha said that if one practises *Satipaṭṭhāna* correctly these unhealthy thoughts are gradually extinguished.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Meister Eckhart, transl. by Evans, vol. II p. 9.

⁴⁶ See The Wheel No. 21: *The Removal of Distracting Thoughts* (Vitakkasanthāna Sutta; MN 20) Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy

⁴⁷ M I 91 & 504.

⁴⁸ A III 291; D III 248, 280.

⁴⁹ S III 93.

(1.) In the Salla-Sutta⁵⁰ the Buddha says that the ordinary person knows no other escape from unpleasant feelings except sensual pleasures. Painful feelings, threats to the ego-ideal, and inner conflicts may lead to the arising of sensual thoughts.

There are many ways of forgetting suffering, such as alcohol, sex, forced activity or distraction. Such a flight from unpleasant feelings is not a permanent solution, since the conflicts persist as long as they are not deeply investigated. By practising patience a person may learn to bear unpleasant feelings without immediately seeking sensual pleasures or other escapes.

Repressed sensuality may break through in daydreams and fantasy, and gives them their force and compulsiveness. A person acts out in fantasy what he does not dare to put into actual effect, owing to his inhibition. If one looks for what is common to all these fantasies the insight gained into unconscious driving forces and compensations may cut the ground from under them. Repressed sensuality, and negative attitude towards it, may often be traced back to early childhood. As long as these repressions persist, unconscious *anti-cathexes*, will be maintained, unproductively consuming energy. Repression of drives is not a lasting solution, since they remain in the unconscious. Those who practise Buddhist mind training should learn gradually to put conscious control into effect, instead of submitting to a fear of these tendencies that leads to repressions. Freud says:

“The laws of logic—above all the law of contradiction—do not hold for processes in the *id*.⁵¹ Contradictory impulses exist side by side without neutralising each other or drawing apart; at most they combine in compromise formations under the overpowering economic pressure towards discharging their energy ... In the *id* there is nothing corresponding to the idea of time, no recognition of the passage of time, and (a thing which is very remarkable and awaits adequate attention in philosophic thought) no alteration of mental processes by the passage of time. Conative impulses, which have never got beyond the *id*, and even impressions which have been pushed down into *id* by repression and are preserved for whole decades as though they had only recently occurred.

They can only be recognized as belonging to the past, deprived of their significance, and robbed of their charge of energy, after they have been made conscious by the work of analysis.”

⁵²

(2.) Many people unconsciously expect from others love, pity, admiration, fear or submission. A few examples suffice to show the connection between unconscious claims, often of a compensatory nature, and resistance or open hostility. The person for instance who has a neurotic need for independence conditioned perhaps by previous coercion and injustice, will set himself against any outside influence. Another may strive for intellectual superiority and becomes angry if his ideas are not accepted. If anything taboo is touched upon, such as a complex, the emotional reaction is particularly strong. Unconscious resistance to repressed impulses turns outwards and directs itself against the person who dares to disturb it.

This anger may also be repressed, especially when one recognizes that love and hate of the same person are incompatible, or when a loss of love is feared if free rein is given to anger. Repressed aggressiveness shows itself in day-dreaming and fantasies of killing and destroying, but in most fantasies there is some displacement or compromise-formation, so that the aggression is turned against other people or objects. It may also be projected outwards, in which

⁵⁰ S IV 207

⁵¹ The *id* is “the sum total of crude, unmodified instinctual needs.” (*New Ways in Psychoanalysis* by Karen Horney, p. 184).

⁵² Sigmund Freud: *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*; chapter on ‘The Anatomy of the Mental Personality.’

case all the animosity, which one does not dare recognize in oneself is seen in others. The next step, so well described by Karen Horney,⁵³ is that one finds thunder, animals and other objects dangerous and threatening. Hate, aggressiveness and fear of retaliation are displaced from their original object on to a neutral one.

While unconscious claims are made on others it is impossible for the person to feel genuine goodwill (*mettā*) towards them. If he fears rejection he is incapable of loving, since his deep inner insecurity bars the way; nor can he love while he strives for power and is concerned to arouse envy, admiration or sympathy.

In the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*⁵⁴ the Buddha describes various ways of overcoming ill-will. He advises the practice of *mettā*, sympathy (*karuṇā*) or equanimity if animosity arises; one should remove one's attention from it, or consider that each person will experience the results of his own *kamma*.

The more the *mettā*-meditation is practised, and the right attitude of mind developed, the less will animosity and aggressiveness be able to find a foothold. He will feel compassion instead of anger for those who are overwhelmed by their angry impulses. He preserves his equanimity since he regards unwelcome experiences as a practice in patience and self-discipline. Because he has made conscious the influence on his own mind of both the conscious behaviour of others and their unconscious attitude,⁵⁵ he does not get excited. He remains objective and realizes that the behaviour of others is not his business. If he becomes angry this will hinder his own development and will increase the force of unhealthy impulses in others.

(3.) "Freedom from vengeance is to me the bridge to the highest hope, a rainbow after continual storm."⁵⁶ Whoever harbours thoughts of vengeance would do well to examine closely his ambition, feelings of inferiority and need for recognition. In people who were often humiliated when they were young, the search for revenge and the tendency to belittle others are frequently stronger than the wish to advance themselves, especially when fear of defeat is involved. Fear of failure restricts the ability to make a decision and the consequent feelings of inadequacy are compensated by aggressiveness and putting others in their place.

Such is often the purpose of sarcasm. Habitual sarcasm and irony destroy the character: in the end one is like a fierce dog, which has not only learnt to bite but to laugh as well."⁵⁷

If one does not understand why thoughts of revenge arise from slight causes, one should try to discover what is common to all these different reactions, remembering that it may be a question of compensation. In this way a complex or a 'sore point' may be discovered. It is necessary, above all, to look for the cause when our reaction is stronger than the occasion warrants (*ko hetu, ko paccayo*).

III

The Buddha described the more subtle defilements of the mind as thoughts of relatives (*ñāti-vitakka*), country (*janapada-vitakka*), and the thought of not being despised (*anavaññattipatisaṃyutta vitakka*).

⁵³ Karen Horney: *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*.

Cp. also Freud's analysis of the 'Little Hans' in his *Collected Papers*, vol. III.

⁵⁴ A III 158

⁵⁵ *ajjhataṃ ca bahiddhā ca cittānupassanā* (D II 216); cp.: *pare vā taṃ kāya-, vacī-, mano-saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharonti, yaṃ-paccayā 'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukhadukkhāṃ* (A II 158; S II 40).

⁵⁶ Nietzsche: *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

⁵⁷ Nietzsche: *Menschliches, Allzu Menschliches*.

(1.) In the case of thoughts about relatives we should not forget that in the Buddha's time the bonds of family in India were incomparably stronger than they are in contemporary Western Europe. Perhaps the problem for 'modern' man exists in the form of strong attachments to father, mother, brother or sister. For example a man who as an only child, or the youngest, had a strong link with his mother, may marry a considerably older woman who then takes the place of his mother. Another who has developed still stronger and more exclusive attachments to his mother may find it impossible to enter into any sort of relationship with the opposite sex. He will probably declare that he has a 'natural' inclination to asceticism. Freud's explanation would sound a little different and might mention an unsolved Oedipus complex and fixation of the libido.⁵⁸ Wherever it is a question of an exclusive attachment to a single person, accompanied by jealousy, one should see if it is perhaps a fixation or compensation.⁵⁹

(2.) Thoughts of country and home may occur if one lives in a foreign country and suffers from homesickness. To live abroad for a time may at least help one to see the relative nature of one's customs and habits. National pride, which some consider as the most stupid sort of pride, falls into this category.

(3.) One cannot avoid the impression that in our Western culture, in which so much stress is laid on competition, the fear of failure—so far from being one of the weaker fetters—has assumed an almost neurotic force. A person may have developed this fear through unpleasant early experience; he may have been an unwanted child, or his brothers and sisters may have been given precedence over him. If he also has great ambition he will generally try to avoid superior people. He will surround himself with people who do not arouse inferiority feelings in him, and he will—in a somewhat compulsive fashion—unconsciously evaluate everyone he meets:

"I am superior" (*seyyo'haṃ asmi*); "I am inferior" (*hīno'haṃ asmi*); or "we are equal" (*sadiso'haṃ asmi*).

The inability of such people to live together with a superior person lies in the fact that they must make up for the painful experience of the past, and must prove to themselves that they are in no way inferior. They cannot bear any reminder that their inflated self-evaluation, which is a compensation for past humiliation and the resultant feelings of inferiority, rests on self-deception.

These people all too easily project their self-hatred outwards and are convinced that others see them as they see themselves, with all their unsolved problems, complexes and contradictions. In order to avoid a fresh rebuff they wait for others to take the initiative, and they approach someone who interests them only after they have assured themselves they will not be cold-shouldered. When they are recognized they easily overvalue the person who, at least momentarily, releases them from the torturing doubt about their own worth.

Since they cannot bear that others think badly of them, they are often insincere. It is essential for their well-being that others have a good opinion of them; they cannot bear the thought of being despised. The recognition of others cannot for long liberate them from their insecurity for they may have a profound doubt whether their strivings are genuine. This doubt arises because the driving forces (*cetanā*) of their actions are registered in the unconscious, despite all their deceptive manoeuvres and the splendid mask they show to the world.

⁵⁸ "A person whose experience is determined by 'his fixation to his family,' who is incapable of acting independently, is in fact a worshipper of a primitive ancestor cult, and the only difference between him and millions of ancestor worshippers is that his system is private and not culturally patterned." E. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p.49 (New York).

⁵⁹ Love which can only be experienced with regard to one person demonstrates by this very fact that it is not love but a symbiotic attachment." (ibid. p.130).

Fear of defeat drives others to collect possessions, offices and titles or to pursue power and security. As long as feelings of inferiority are the motivation, the pursuit takes on a compensatory and compulsive character and even success can only relieve unhappiness and insecurity for a short time. "Really poor in spirit is the man who prefers to do without all unnecessary things ... And best is he who knows how to dispense with what he has no need of."⁶⁰

The wish not to be despised may show itself in resisting any influence and criticism, particularly when the compulsion towards independence and perfection is present. A person who has these characteristics to a serious extent easily develops into a tyrant.

Equanimity with regard to praise or blame cannot be attained while a person is dependent on the opinions of others and possesses only slight self-confidence. Self-confidence arises when repressions are lifted and the split between incompatible tendencies overcome. Then one sees: "This is not mine; this am I not; this is not my Self."

Nāgārjuna says, "Because the arising of all dharmas is conditioned all dharmas are empty" (*apratitya samutpanno dharmah kascin na vidyate; yasmāt tasmād asūnyo hi dharmah kascin na vidyate*).⁶¹ All things are empty and are not only made such by wisdom" (*na prajñā asūnyān bhāvān sūnyān karoti; bhāvā eva sūnyāḥ*)⁶² *yan na sūnyatayā dharmah sūnyān karoti; api tu dharmā eva sūnyāḥ*).⁶³ "Therefore then, Subhūti, the Bodhi-being, the great being, after he has got rid of all perceptions, should raise his thought to the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment. He should produce a thought which is unsupported by forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables, or mind-objects, unsupported by *dharma*, unsupported by no-*dharma*, unsupported by anything."⁶⁴ "Whoever searches for something or strives after it searches and strives for Nothing, and he who asks for something receives Nothing."⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Meister Eckhart, op. cit., vol. II: p. 39.

⁶¹ *Mādhyamikā Kārikā* 24 19.

⁶² Samādhirāja Sūtra.

⁶³ Kāsyapa-parivarta Sūtra.

⁶⁴ Edward Conze: *Buddhist Wisdom Books*; Allen & Unwin, Lond.

⁶⁵ Quint: *Meister Eckhart*, p. 211.

Purification of View

by

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How blest from passion to be free,
All sensuous joys to leave behind;
Yet far the highest bliss of all
To quit the illusion false—'I am.'⁶⁶

The inner tangle and the outer tangle,
This generation is entangled in a tangle.
And so I ask of Gotama this question:
Who succeeds in disentangling this tangle?⁶⁷

There is hardly any need to stress the hopelessness of the tangle that the present generation has found itself entrapped in through its inordinate craving, for one's own requisites (inner tangle), and for requisites belonging to others (outer tangle). Today we are in greater need of an answer to the above question than the generation that lived in the time of the Buddha. The Blessed One, the perfect physician for mental ills, specifically those concerned with the 'I' and 'mine,' and with 'we' and 'our' provided the answer to the above question in the following stanza:

When a wise man, established well in Virtue
Develops Concentration and Understanding,
Then as a Bhikkhu ardent and sagacious
He succeeds in disentangling this tangle.⁶⁸

Development of understanding or *paññā* referred to above is divided by the buddha into five stages, the first of which consists of *purity of view* or *ditṭhi-visuddhi*, the subject matter of this essay. This implies the vision according to reality that what is commonly referred to as a living being consists merely of mental and material (corporeal) phenomena, i.e. mind and body, or *nāma-rūpa*, and is void of an ego.

*Modern Conception of Matter*⁶⁹

Until the beginning of the present century our conception of the material world was one in which all things including our own bodies were made up of various permutations and combinations of 92 different kinds of atoms, meaning indivisible units, static and unchanging. But during the twentieth century it has been found that atoms, despite their name are no longer the indivisible and static units they were once supposed to be, and they are themselves complex structures composed of still smaller and more fundamental units moving at incredible speeds, and separated from each other by distances enormous by comparison with the minuteness of the size of these units themselves. We are told that the composition of the atom is comparatively

⁶⁶ Solemn utterance of the Buddha at the foot of the Mucalinda tree after his attainment of Buddhahood. Translated by H. C. Warren in *Buddhism in Translations* § 9, from Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahā Vagga I.3.

⁶⁷ Vism §1 (quoted from Saṃyutta-Nikāya I 13).

⁶⁸ Vism §1 (quoted from Saṃyutta-Nikāya I 13).

⁶⁹ Most of the statements in this paragraph has been taken from *What is Atomic Energy?* by K. Mendelssohn.

simple, and consists of three kinds of 'elementary particles' or building bricks, the proton, the neutron, and the electron.

However the actual arrangement of these 'elementary particles' within the atom is complex, but a simplified picture consists of a central core or nucleus made up of a varying number of protons and neutrons, whilst electrons equal in number to the protons within the nucleus are disposed around the nucleus in 'shells,' at a very much greater distance from the centre. Different combinations of these elementary particles form all the 92 naturally occurring elements from which all things including our own bodies as already mentioned are made.

The modern conception of the *properties of matter* in terms of atomic physics is that these 'elementary particles,' the protons, neutrons and electrons occupy an infinitesimally small volume compared to the remainder of the empty space within the atom. The *difference in the various qualities displayed by different objects of matter is a property not of the mass possessed by these minute elementary particles, but of the forces between them*, firstly that of attraction between dissimilar charges of the negative electrons and the positive protons, secondly of the *tremendously powerful forces of repulsion* between protons of similar (positive) charges, and thirdly of the still obscure phenomenon of 'exchange forces' due to change between protons and neutrons of the recently postulated 'mesons,' whereby the strong forces of repulsion between the protons are more than counter-balanced, and result in the *strong cohesion* of the atomic nuclei. Lastly the properties of matter are greatly modified by the particular arrangement of the protons and neutrons within the nucleus, and of the electrons in the varying number of shells of the electronic cloud, particularly in the 'open' outermost shell, where most changes take place owing to its varying degrees of 'un-saturation.' Further Einstein has demonstrated that mass and energy are equivalent. The property called mass is simply concentrated energy. In other words, *matter is energy, and energy is matter, and the distinction is simply one of temporary state*⁷⁰.

Buddhist Conception of the Properties of Matter

What is thus outlined in the language of popular science of today was described by the Buddha in the ordinary or conventional language of his time so as to be understood by the educated people of his day. The Buddha described a living being as made up of mind and body or *nāma-rūpa*; the latter, i.e. the body, he described as being made up of four *primary qualities* or 'elements'⁷¹ and of the *space 'element,'* or *ākāsa-dhātu*.

The importance of the four primary 'elements' lies not in their tangibility, but in their qualities and in the forces inherent in them.

One cannot conceive of an object, animate or inanimate existing apart from its qualities, and in reality one should not say that an object *has* this shape, this colour or this odour; but the object *is* this shape, this colour or this odour. Material bodies are nothing but groups of qualities coming together in different ways and proportions that constitute them and exist in and with them. Such a group of qualities is called a *kalāpa*.

The *earthy quality or element*, or *paṭhavi-dhātu*, derives its name from the word *paṭhavi*, which means earth; it refers to qualities possessed by earth, e.g. of hardness (and of its opposite softness, for if something is less hard than something else, the first may be described as soft by comparison), of density, of heaviness and its opposite lightness, and of roughness and its

⁷⁰ *The Universe & Dr. Einstein* by Lincoln Barnett.

⁷¹ MN 140, Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta. MN 28, Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta. MN 62. Mahā-Rāhulovāda Sutta. Vism II.31–38, 81–92, 109.

opposite smoothness. The function of the earthy element is to act as a foundation for the other three elements.

The *watery quality* or *element* or *āpo-dhātu*, from *appoti* to flow, refers to the quality that a fluid has to spread out and diffuse. If a small quantity of the watery element diffuses and penetrates amidst solid particles such as clay, cement, or flour, the loose particles of the latter will be bound together into a lump. The function of the watery element therefore is that of cohesion, or binding the three remaining elements together.

The *element of heat* or *the fiery element*, or *tejodhātu*, has a powerful control over the three remaining elements, varying their consistence even to the extent of converting a solid to a liquid or a gas. To this 'element' belong the properties of anabolism or building up and maturing, and of catabolism or breaking down, ageing and disintegrating, and in the case of living beings, of keeping them warm and of digesting the food they ingest.

The *airy element*, or *vāyo-dhātu*, has two important characteristics, firstly that of motility; and secondly that of distending, of being prevented from collapse, of repulsion, of being blown out, or causing to be blown out. The above description of the airy element may be compared with the following statement: "The tendency of any gaseous atmosphere is to dissipate away into space."⁷² All material things must possess all the four 'elements' or qualities at one and the same time; no three of these elements can exist without the fourth being present simultaneously. Each quality or element is so intimately connected with the remaining three that together they appear as objects. Each 'object' thus merely consists of the coming together of the four primary elements, in groups of qualities or *kalāpas*, *the difference in the appearance of objects being due to the vastly different proportions in which the primary elements blend*. Generally when one element predominates in comparison with the remaining three elements it is conveniently, and conventionally, spoken of as an object belonging to that element, e.g. solid, liquid, or gas.

The *space element*⁷³ has the characteristic of delimiting matter. Its function is to display the boundaries of matter. It is manifested as the confines of matter, or as the state of gaps and apertures. It is on account of it that one can say of material things that 'This is above, below, around.'

It is solely on account of this space element that the tiniest parts of one's body are, or the body as a whole is, able to move about freely, and to function properly; without the presence of the space element no movement or activity or function is possible.

To summarise: the main property of the earthy element is that of stiffening and acting as a foothold for the other three elements, and of the watery, airy and fiery elements that of cohesion, of distending or causing motion, and of maturing respectively.

The Buddha time and again, and in numerous ways, and with varying analogies suited to the intelligence of his audience, and the circumstances under which he spoke, emphasised the lack of a permanent ego in living beings including man. Says the Buddha, "Just as when the component parts such as axles, wheels, frame, poles etc. are arranged in a certain way, there comes to be the mere term of common usage 'chariot'⁷⁴ yet in the ultimate sense when each part is examined, there is no chariot'- and just as when the component parts of a *house*⁷⁵ such as wattle, clay, timber, creepers, and grass are placed so that they enclose a space in a certain way there comes to be the mere term of common usage 'house,' yet in the ultimate sense there is no

⁷² *The New Outline of Modern Knowledge* by Alan Pryce-Jones. Chapter on Astronomy by Sir Harold Spencer Jones.

⁷³ MN 140, and Vism XIV.63.

⁷⁴ MN 28; Vism XVIII .28.

⁷⁵ Vism XVIII .28.

house—so too *when a space is enclosed with bones and sinews, and flesh and skin there comes to be the mere term of common usage a 'being' a 'person,'*⁷⁶ yet in the ultimate sense there is no being as a basis for the assumption of 'I am' or 'I'; in the ultimate sense there is only mind and body."

No doer of the deed is found
No being that may reap the fruits
Empty phenomena roll on,
This is the only right view.⁷⁷

In modern terminology, the same thought may be seen in the following lines from *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* by Lincoln Barnett. "However theoretical systems may change, and however empty of content their symbols and concepts may be, the *essential and enduring facts of science and of life are the happenings, the activities, the events.* Within the framework of modern physics one can depict a simple physical event or happening, such as the meeting or collision of two electrons—two elementary grains of matter, or two elementary units of electrical energy—as a concourse of particles or of probability waves, or as a co-mingling of eddies in a four-dimensional space-time continuum. Theory does not define what the principles in this encounter actually are. *Thus in a sense the electrons are 'not real,' but merely theoretical symbols. On the other hand the meeting itself is 'real,—the event is 'real.'"*

Immaterial States

Now for the Immaterial States taught by the Buddha, and made evident to us through any act of cognition or consciousness, e.g. the four Groups or *Khandhas*—feelings, perception, mental formation (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), which are inseparable and which may be spoken of under the one term mentality or *nāma*. The *five modes of cognition through the five bases* (exclusive of the mind-base), eye, ear, nose, tongue and body have now to be appreciated.⁷⁸

The eye and a visual object constitute materiality (*rūpa*), the visual (eye) – consciousness, which arises by their coming together, constitutes mentality (*nāma*). Similarly,

the ear and sound constitute materiality, and the ear- consciousness, which arises by their coming together, constitutes mentality;

The nose and odour constitute materiality, and the nose consciousness, which arises by their coming together, constitutes mentality;

The tongue and taste constitute materiality, and the tongue consciousness, which arises by their coming together, constitutes mentality;

The body and tangible object constitute materiality, and the body-consciousness, which arises by their coming together, constitutes mentality.

"If an ear consciousness (mentality) arises owing to the presence of a sound and the ear-base (materiality), one is inclined to think of it as 'I hear it'; in the ultimate sense however this is incorrect for if these two be identical when at death the mind (ear-consciousness in this example) disappears, the body should disappear at the same time; and again the mind must remain so long as the body remains.

But neither of these is true; the reason is that in the ultimate sense there is only mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*), and no 'being' or person, which are only terms of convenience."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Vism X .43 & XVIII.28; MN 28.

⁷⁷ *Path to Deliverance*, Nyanatiloka, paragraph 176.

⁷⁸ Vism XIV.54–57

⁷⁹ *Diṭṭhi Vipassanā*, Ven. Mohyinyin Sayādaw, p. 20.

Says the Buddha:⁸⁰ “Even the ignorant, unconverted man, O Bhikkhus, may conceive an aversion for this body which is composed of the four elements, may divest himself of passion for it, and attain freedom from it: for the increase and the wasting of this body which is composed of the four elements, and the way in which it is obtained (conceived), and afterwards laid away (at death) are evident. But, O Bhikkhus, what is called the mind, intellect, consciousness—here the ignorant, unconverted man is not equal to conceiving aversion, is not equal to divesting himself of passion, is not equal to attaining freedom, because, O Bhikkhus, from time immemorial the ignorant, unconverted man has held, cherished, and affected the notion ‘This is mine; this am I; this is my ego.’ But it were better, O Bhikkhus, if the ignorant, unconverted man regarded the body which is composed of the four elements as an ego, rather than the mind. And why do I say so? Because it is evident, O Bhikkhus that this body which is composed of the four elements lasts one year, lasts two years ... fifty years, lasts a hundred years and even more. *But that which is called the mind, intellect, consciousness keeps up an incessant round by day and by night of perishing as one thing, and springing up as another.*”

Interdependence of Mind and Body (nāma-rūpa)

Time and again the Buddha laid stress on the interdependence of these two factors. Here is the analogy of the *two sheaves of reeds* that are propped one against the other:⁸¹ “Each one gives the other consolidating support, and when one falls the other falls, so too mind and body occur as an interdependent state, each of its components giving the other consolidating support, and when one falls owing to death the other falls too”. And again the analogy of the *marionette*:⁸² “Just as a marionette is void, soul-less and without curiosity, and while it walks and stands merely through the combination of strings and wood, yet it seems as if it had curiosity, and interestedness; so too, this mind and body are void, soulless and without curiosity, and while it walks and stands merely through the combination of the two together, yet it seems as if it had curiosity and interestedness. This is how it should be regarded.” Furthermore, “The mind has no effective power; it cannot occur by its own efficient power. It does not eat, it does not drink, it does not speak, it does not adopt postures. The body is without efficient power; it cannot occur by its own efficient power. For it has no desire to eat, it has no desire to drink, it has no desire to speak, and it has no desire to adopt postures. But rather it is when supported by the mind that the body occurs. *When the mind has the desire to eat, the desire to drink, the desire to speak, the desire to adopt a posture it is the body that eats, drinks, speaks, and adopts a posture.*”⁸³

Concepts of Compactness and Continuity

Despite all that has been said so far, and despite all that one has learnt on numerous occasions it is no easy matter to loosen—much less to get rid of, even temporarily—the notion of an ego that is so deeply ingrained within each and every one of us. In the first instance, the notion is so widely held and mental apathy for the effort necessary in the search for an alternative explanation precludes one from taking the trouble to question its validity. Further, appearances are so very plausible that the idea of an ego is readily accepted just as the view that the sun rises and sets ‘because the sun revolves round the earth’ used to be accepted at one time not so long ago. Further, because of the concept of compactness,⁸⁴ we take phenomena in their entirety;

⁸⁰ H. C. Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, Ch. 18, from Saṃyutta-Nikāya (12:62).

⁸¹ Vism XVIII .32.

⁸² Vism XVIII .31.

⁸³ Vism XVIII .34.

⁸⁴ Vism XXI. 3–4

hence the characteristics of 'not self' e.g., the absence of an ego, does not become apparent, until resolution of the compact into the various elements is given attention; and because of the concept of Continuity the characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent, until continuity is disrupted by discerning that phenomena rise and fall, and that nothing remains static even for the minutest fraction of a second. The Buddha has given us an apt illustration in *the difference between our attitude to a cow and its meat*.⁸⁵ Whilst feeding a cow, bringing it to the slaughter house, keeping it tied up after bringing it there, and seeing it slaughtered and dead, the butcher does not lose the perception of 'cow' so long as he has not carved it up and divided it into parts: but when he has divided it up and when he sits down to sell it he no longer retains the perception of 'cow,' and in its stead the perception of meat occurs, he does not think 'I am selling cow,' or 'they are carrying cow away,' but rather he thinks 'I am selling meat' or 'they are carrying meat away,' so too this Bhikkhu, whilst still a foolish ordinary person does not lose the perception 'living being' or 'man' or 'person' so long as he does not by analysis of the compact into its elements review the body however placed, however disposed as consisting of elements. But when he does review it as consisting of elements, he loses the perception of 'living being,' and his mind establishes itself upon elements.

The corrective to these concepts of compactness and continuity in the corresponding terminology of modern physics is well illustrated by the following analogies. We are told,⁸⁶ "The nuclei of matter in an armour plate are as separately placed as a collection of apples separated from each other by a distance of about three miles, and yet the armour plate appears to be impregnable." Again⁸⁷ "It is beyond belief, but scientific proof shows that if it were possible to assemble atoms into a mass the size of an average marble such as children play with, the weight of the marble would be four hundred billion pounds"; and again⁸⁸ "Electrons circle round their nuclei with enormous velocity, and atoms and molecules themselves rush about with incredible speed. The speed of the molecules in the air for instance is about one thousand miles per hour." In these circumstances no movement can possibly be noticed by our senses even with the aid of the most powerful instruments, since these speeds occur within such a very limited space as is available within molecules of matter.

Knowledge and Understanding

We have so far made a study and gained some knowledge of the vision according to reality showing that what is commonly referred to as a living being consists merely of mind and body or *nāma-rūpa*, and is void of an ego. We have merely attempted to acquire the theoretical knowledge required for gaining purification of view, which is the first of the five stages towards the attainment of understanding. But we are yet a long way, a very long way, from the actual understanding of purification of view. the buddha has spoken of *three grades of wisdom*⁸⁹: by learning (*sutamaya paññā*), by reasoning (*cintāmayaya paññā*), and thirdly by meditative development (*bhāvanāmayaya paññā*). This last grade is the one by which alone higher truths can be grasped, and to which alone the term understanding or insight may correctly be applied. Understanding is a very precise form of realization, and never a vague kind of mystic vision. Says the Buddha,⁹⁰ "The *dhamma* one has learnt and mastered *must be tested by intuitive wisdom; these things that are not so tested their meaning does not become clear*."

⁸⁵ Vism XI. 30

⁸⁶ *What is Atomic Energy?* by K. Mendelssohn

⁸⁷ *More Modern Wonders and How They Work* by Captain Burr W. Leyson.

⁸⁸ *What is Atomic Energy?* by K. Mendelssohn

⁸⁹ Vism XIV.14.

⁹⁰ MN 22.

Some foolish men master the *dhamma* simply for the advantage of reproaching others, and for the advantage of gossiping, and they do not arrive at the goal for the sake of which they mastered the *dhamma*. They are *like the man who catches a large snake by its tail or by its body, and not by its neck, and because of his wrong grasp is stung by the snake,*” or they are like the “cowherd who counts others’ kine, for they do not share in the blessings of a recluse.”⁹¹

Aldous Huxley illustrates clearly the difference between knowledge and understanding when he states⁹²: “Understanding can only be talked about, and that very inadequately; it can be passed on; it can never be shared. There can of course be knowledge of such an understanding, and this knowledge may be passed on. But we must always remember that knowledge of understanding is not the same thing as understanding, which is the raw material of that knowledge. It is different from understanding as the doctor’s prescription for penicillin is different from penicillin. Understanding is as rare as emeralds, and so is highly prized. The ‘knowers’ would dearly love to be ‘understanders’; but either their stock of knowledge does not include the knowledge of what to do in order to be ‘understanders,’ or else they know theoretically what they ought to do, but go on doing the opposite all the same. In either case they cherish the comforting delusion that knowledge, and above all pseudo-knowledge are understanding.”

Our generation has undoubtedly grown rapidly in knowledge and in intelligence, but can we say that we have grown in Understanding? Is not this ‘inner tangle’ and this ‘outer tangle’, referred to in the opening paragraph of this essay, of our own making? If we hope to disentangle this tangle are we prepared firstly to make a study of the basic teaching of the Buddha, and once we have begun to appreciate its fundamentals, *perhaps at first with a few reservations*, are we prepared to undertake the training, arduous and prolonged, that is essential, in the words of Huxley, from being ‘knowers’ to become ‘understanders’? Buddha the perfect physician for mental ills has given us the prescription, and it is left to us to have it dispensed by studying his teaching, and most important of all to start taking the medicine ourselves by putting his teaching into practice. The illness is of a very serious nature although often showing little or no symptoms to the unwary and the thoughtless. It is ‘infectious,’ deep-rooted and extremely chronic. Moreover, it is beset with many complications, and the patient is a danger to society.

The treatment is difficult, and is so prolonged that for the preponderating majority of us, for want of an adequate trial, it will have to be spread over many, many lifetimes before a cure can even be reasonably expected. However a beginning must be made sometimes, and fortunately an amelioration of the symptoms may be noticeable shortly after one commences the treatment in proportion to the enthusiasm with which it is followed. This will infuse fresh enthusiasm and hope as to the final efficacy of the treatment. *From the point of view of society however it is most fortunate that the benefits of the treatment are spectacular and immediate.* It is as if the patient who is suffering from violent maniacal fits is calmed down within a few days of the commencement of the treatment, although a cure may be ever so remote; it is as if a patient with an infectious disease requiring prolonged treatment is rendered non infectious from the very outset of the treatment. This aspect of the Buddha’s teaching ought to make a firm appeal to all those who control the affairs of their community or their country, and should create an enthusiasm in the minds of those in a position to mould international relationships. For is there any doubt that it is the greed to satisfy the ‘me’ and the ‘us’, so deep-rooted within us, and the *ill-will* resulting from any obstacles in our path in the attainment of that satisfaction, both of which are the result of ignorance that are the causes of all our entanglements—the jealousy and rivalry, the suspicion, fear and anxiety, and man’s inhumanity to man, that we see all round us? What other cause is

⁹¹ Dhp 19.

⁹² *Adonis and the Alphabet and Other Essays*, Aldous Huxley. Ch. 2—“Knowledge and Understanding.”

there for all this misery, for the obstacles to our economic and our spiritual development, and for the meanness and the degradation resulting from the exploitation of man by man? A knowledge of the Buddha's teaching, and much more even a far off glimpse of its understanding will convince those who hold the destiny of their country in their hands, that so long as they avoid the ugly features of greed, of lust for power, and of exploitation of one nation by another, they may safely concede to nations, who wish to develop their nationhood along any lines, and through any stages of nationalism peculiar to their own genius the right to do so. *In this way the minds of national leaders may be infused with the ultimate ideal of a world brotherhood of nations.*

Understanding the Practice

The conversion of knowledge into understanding and final deliverance rests on a systematic development and perfection to a minimum but definite extent of each of the seven stages of purification in successive steps. It is not possible to by-pass any of these stages. It will thus be seen that purification of morality is the first essential requisite, and purification of concentration the second before one can profitably embark on the five final stages of purification of understanding, which commences with the stage of purification of view.

Purification of morality or *sīla-visuddhi* is

To refrain from all evil,
To do good."

"Refraining from all evil," is not a mere negative and physical phenomenon of abstaining from wrong action and wrong speech. It is based on the internal restraint of a clear conscious and guiding mind: and for the layman this consists in the abstention from bodily and vocal misconduct, 'unskill' in action and speech.⁹³ The first includes killing or inflicting injury, acquisition either by stealing, fraud, threat, or violence, sexual misconduct, the use of intoxicants and undesirable modes of livelihood. The second consists of lying, harsh speech, slander and frivolous talk. In order 'to do good' one develops characteristics directly opposed to unskillful acts and speech already enumerated, for instance, the practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), liberality (*dāna*), the practice of restraint of the senses (*indriya-saṃvara-sīla*) with constant mindfulness, self-possession and detachment, the practice of truthfulness, of kind and helpful talk, a golden silence where speech is not indicated and the practice of the difficult art of rejoicing at the good fortune of others (*muditā*). By 'refraining from evil' one has the great reward amongst other things, in the Buddha's own words, of freedom from remorse, of a sense of ease without alloy, and of tranquillity and facility to concentrate.⁹⁴ Besides these daily practices one practises from time to time for periods of one or more days at a time and as frequently as possible *other rules of morality*⁹⁵, such as celibacy, abstention from all food after the hour of twelve noon, abstention from dancing, music, shows and other amusements, from the use of cosmetics, perfumes, garlands and adornments and lastly abstention from the use of lofty and comfortable seats and couches. These periodic practices are meant to develop control over one's sexual appetite, and the craving for food, and to lessen one's inordinate craving for the floating pleasure of the senses. They further stimulate one's

⁹³ *Pañca Sīla* (the five precepts).

⁹⁴ A V Ch. 1.

⁹⁵ E.g. The eight precepts, consisting of the five precepts, with the substitution of strict celibacy for abstention from sexual misconduct, and with the addition of the three abstentions mentioned as regards food, amusements, and comfortable seats.

enthusiasm for the more satisfying and stable enjoyment of voluntary renunciation and of detachment.

Purification of Concentration (citta-visuddhi or samādhi)

This is the second of the seven stages of purification. It is profitable unification of the mind on a single object, whereby the mind remains undistracted, unscattered, pure and tranquil—a preliminary condition absolutely necessary as a foundation either for developing insight, i.e. *vipassanā* (understanding), or for the acquisition of the various *jhānas*. The latter are super-sensual states of perfect mental absorption, in which the fivefold sense activity has ceased, and where perfect unification of the mind is associated with various *Jhāna* factors, which in the fourth or highest *jhāna* of the *rūpa* world consists of the finest *jhāna* factor of equanimity (*upekkhā*) alone, unmixed with any of the less refined factors associated with the earlier *jhānas*. this fourth *jhāna* is also known as the *pādaka* or foundation-*jhāna*, as it is the foundation from which may be developed either the *jhānas* of formless existence (*arūpa jhānas*), or the supernormal powers or *abhīññās*, e.g. various psychical powers - the ability to read the minds of others, the remembrance of past lives, the divine ear and the divine eye.

It is left to one's own wish to decide the stage in mental concentration at which he would desire to begin developing understanding (*vipassanā*), for it is not essential for final deliverance to develop mental concentration (*samādhi*) to the lofty heights mentioned above. On the other hand it must be clearly borne in mind that mental concentration can never be by-passed altogether, as some would have us believe, before one may profitably embark on meditative development of understanding (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*). When one is able to prevent the attention from jumping from one thought to another, and to keep it steady on one line of thought, and when the strain of such concentration on a single line of thought no longer exists one is ready to embark on meditative development of understanding. The *Visuddhimagga* has summarised for us the instruction given by the Buddha in forty subjects for meditation for the development of concentration,⁹⁶ giving us the choice of selecting one to two or three subjects suited to our temperament, and to the circumstances and surroundings under which we are placed for carrying out the practice. No attempt is made in this essay to enumerate these, much less to describe them even briefly.

A good friend and teacher to guide one in the choice of a suitable subject for meditation, and to help one from time to time with advice and encouragement during the course of one's meditation, is invaluable, but failing such a person, one may rely on a careful study of the written word. Next, as to the choice of a *suitable place* for meditation, a room where one can lock oneself up for half an hour daily free from intrusion, and from noise is the most practicable. As for a *suitable time* for meditation, a brief half hour, when one is not too tired either physically or mentally, and when the necessary privacy and freedom from noise is available should be chosen. Once such a time is chosen the practice of meditation should be carried out regularly every day at the same time, either reckoning by the clock, or relative to some other regular event of the day, say within a specified number of minutes from waking up, or some specified period of time either before or after dinner. The aim of such regularity in the practice is the formation of a *habit of meditation*, a habit as regular as that of taking meals, for habit regulates one's life. This calls for thought and rearrangement of the day's program, which in turn means some inconvenience, which however is negligible in relation to the benefits to be gained from regular meditation. The formation of a habit of meditation will convert a practice that was at the beginning irksome, into one of pleasant anticipation and privilege. The duration of these

⁹⁶ Vism XVIII .23.

practices will vary considerably depending on circumstances, and on the degree of one's enthusiasm. However for the layman living in a town under present-day conditions, and occupied in earning a living, a regular half-hour per day once or preferably twice daily is perhaps what ought to be aimed at, with longer periods at intermittent intervals. One cannot reasonably expect marked benefits from meditation undertaken for periods much shorter than half an hour. However, regular ten minutes or even five minute periods are of benefit in the sense that it will ultimately infuse enthusiasm into the meditator sufficient to want him to extend the duration of his meditative practice. It is important to *adopt a comfortable position* to which one can, without much difficulty, get accustomed to. The essential point is to keep the spine erect so that one may not be fidgety, or sway one's body. For a brief period just prior to sitting down for meditation one should forget all business interests, and personal likes and dislikes and prejudices. This is conveniently done either by a brief period of quiet reading from a portion of the *dhamma*, or of worship of the Buddha (*vandanā*). Lastly one has to *cultivate patience and enthusiasm* if one is not to be discouraged by one's lapses in not maintaining the regularity of one's meditative practice in the early stages.

Bhāvanāmayā Paññā

This connotes meditative development of Understanding. Purification of View, as already mentioned, is the vision according to reality, that what is commonly referred to as a living being, consists merely of name and form or *nāmarūpa*, and is void of an ego. The meditative development of this view may be done in one of several ways.

Meditation on the Body

Taking the body first, materiality may be discerned in one of several way—by way of the 18 elements (*dhātu*); by way of the 28 properties of materiality (*mahābhūta* and *upādāya-rūpa*); by way of the corporeal groups (*kalāpas*); or lastly by way of the four primary elements (*mahābhūta*). By way of the last mentioned, one may discern materiality in his own person by meditation either with constituents of the body in brief, or with constituents by analysis in detail, taking each of the thirty-two parts separately, one by one.⁹⁷ Meditation on the body, with constituents in brief is done in the following manner: “In this body all parts whose predominant quality is that of hardness or roughness are said to belong to the *earthy element*. Every such solid part of one's body—e.g. head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, or skin, flesh, sinews, bone, marrow or mesentery, every solid organ such as kidney, liver, spleen, or brain, every hollow organ such as stomach, intestines, or the heart, and all the solid contents of hollow organs such as undigested food in the stomach, or excrement in the intestines—is made up of a multitude of groups or *kalāpas* of all the four primary elements or qualities coming together in a certain manner, and in varying proportions. The four primary elements are widely separated from one another by the element of space (*ākāsa-dhātu*), which makes it possible for the former to be in a continual state of movement, of change, and of activity; and which enables the primary elements to function properly. In each solid part of one's body the earthy element predominates; hence it appears as a stiffened solid. These groups of the earthy element are, on the one hand held together by the small quantity of the watery element present, ‘flowing out’ amongst these groups and binding them, whilst on the other hand they are prevented from collapsing by the quality of distension possessed by the airy element. Further these groups of the earthy element are maintained, matured, removed, and renewed by the fiery element. The earthy element present in the solid parts throughout one's body is in its fundamental characteristics in no way different from the

⁹⁷ MN 140; Vism VIII .44; and XI .47–82.

earthy element present in solids outside one's body. Just as the solid element present in a tree or a rock does not represent a living being, even so what is called hair, teeth, or bone or any other solid part of one's body is a particular component of one's body, without thought, morally indeterminate, void, and not a living being."

One next meditates, in a similar manner on all the fluid parts of one's body thus: "In this body all parts whose predominant quality is that of 'flowing out,' and subsequently of 'holding together' the other qualities are said to belong to the *watery element*. Every such fluid portion of one's body, e.g. bile, blood, oil of the joints, or other secretion, sweat, tears, spittle, urine or other excretion, is made up of a multitude of groups or *kalāpas* of all the four primary elements or qualities coming together in a certain manner, and in varying proportions. In every drop of fluid in one's body the watery element predominates; hence it appears as a liquid having the quality of flowing out, or spreading out. The small quantity of the earthy element present gives the liquid the necessary foundation or 'substance.' Each drop of liquid present in one's body is prevented from collapsing by the quality of distension possessed by the airy element. Further each drop of fluid is secreted, maintained, altered, and matured by virtue of the fiery quality or element present. The watery element present in each drop of fluid in one's body is in no way different to the watery element present in liquids outside the body. Just as the watery element present in a pond, or well, or a river does not represent a living being, even so what is called bile, or blood, sweat or urine or any other liquid part of one's body is a particular component of one's body, without thought, morally indeterminate, void, and not a living being."

One next meditates on the 'fiery' and the 'airy' qualities in one's body thus: The *fiery quality* in one's body has the function of warming (*santāpana*), of ageing (*jirāpana*), of burning up or breaking down (*pariḍayhana*), and of digesting (*pācaka*). It maintains this body, keeps it warm, ensures its proper appearance and prevents it from putrefying."

"In this body all parts whose predominant quality is that of distending and preventing from collapse, of motility, and of lightness belong to the *airy element*. Every such gaseous portion of one's body, e.g. up or down going winds, wind both inside and outside hollow organs in the chest and in the abdomen, wind in gaps and apertures such as the ears or the nostrils, is made up of a multitude of groups or *kalāpas* of all the four primary qualities coming together in a certain manner, and in varying proportions. In each gaseous portion of one's body the airy element predominates; hence it appears as a gas having the quality of distending, of motility and of lightness. The small portion of the earthy element present gives the gas the necessary foundation or 'substance.' These gases are held together by the watery quality present, and they are maintained, by the fiery quality. The airy quality present in the gases in one's body is in its fundamental characteristics in no way different to the airy element present in gases outside one's body. Just as the airy element present in the atmosphere does not represent a living being, even so what is called up or down going winds, or wind in the lungs or in the intestines, or in any other part of one's body is a particular component of one's body, without thought, morally indeterminate, void, and not a living being."

One may profitably do the above meditation in stages, as it has to be done when the meditation is carried out in detail, where each of the thirty-two parts of the body are taken up separately one by one. Firstly, one *learns by heart* the summary of the meditation as given above, or suitably modified. Secondly, there is the *verbal recitation*⁹⁸ of what has been learnt by heart. "This shall be done even if one is a master of the Tipiṭaka, for the meditation subject only becomes evident to some through recitation." Thirdly, when one is proficient in the verbal recitation, one should do the *recitation mentally*.⁹⁹ "Just as it was done verbally, for the mental

⁹⁸ Vism VIII. 49.

⁹⁹ Vism VIII. 57.

recitation is a condition for the penetration of the characteristics of the primary elements.” Fourthly, when one becomes proficient in both the verbal and the mental recitation, one commences the actual meditation itself.

Instead of doing the meditation in the above manner, one may do it in terms of recent atomic physics. One may make one’s own summary from the facts gathered from this essay, and from other sources. This summary should embody the following facts: that everything in the universe, including our own bodies, is made up of one or a combination of two or more of the 92 elements or atoms, in varying combinations; that these atoms themselves are complex in structure, and are made up of three elementary particles or building bricks, the protons, the neutrons, and the electrons; that, of these, the first two are placed within a central core or nucleus, and that the electrons are disposed at great distances from, and around the nucleus; that the size of these elementary particles, in comparison to the space in which they are disposed, is infinitesimally small; that the difference in the qualities displayed by different objects is a property not of the mass possessed by these minute elementary particles but of the forces of attraction, and of repulsion between them; that these minute elementary particles are not static, but are constantly moving at incredible speeds; that the property called mass is simply concentrated energy. One would then conclude thus: “The elementary particles, e.g. the protons, the neutrons, and the electrons present throughout one’s body, are in no way different to the protons, neutrons, and electrons present in solid objects, liquids or gases outside one’s body. Just as the protons, neutrons, and electrons present in solid objects, liquids or gases outside one’s body do not represent a living being, even so the protons, the neutrons, and the electrons, present in one’s body are without thought, morally indeterminate, void, and not a living being.”

One meditates in this way—either in terms of the four ‘primary elements’ or in terms of the three elementary particles that go to form the atom—regularly, with enthusiasm, and with increasing confidence, for months, for years, or for a lifetime until one is ‘quite sure of discerning materiality (*rūpa*), in one’s body. If and when one has thus become quite sure of discerning materiality in this way, and *not until then*, should one undertake the task of discerning immaterial states (*nāma*).¹⁰⁰

Meditation on the Immaterial States

This meditation is based on the formula given in the paragraph on immaterial states above, and is carried out thus: “The eye and a visual object constitute materiality (*rūpa*); the eye-consciousness, which arises by their coming together constitutes mentality (*nāma*): besides the eye, the object that impinges on the eye, and the resulting eye-consciousness there is no ‘being,’ or ‘person,’ which are only terms of convenience. The ear and sound constitute materiality. The ear-consciousness, which arises by their coming together, constitutes mentality. Besides the ear, the sound, and the resulting ear-consciousness there is no ‘being’ or ‘person,’ which are only terms of convenience.” Similarly one carries out the meditation for the nose and odour, and the resulting nose-consciousness; for the tongue and taste, and the resulting tongue-consciousness; and for the body and tangible object, and the resulting body-consciousness. Further “through the mind-element (*mano-dhātu*), and mind-object (*dhamma*) there arises the mind-consciousness element (*mano-viññāṇa-dhātu*); besides the mind-element, the mind-object, and the resulting mind-consciousness element there is no ‘being’ or ‘person,’ which are only terms of convenience.”

¹⁰⁰ Vism XVIII .23.

In addition to the above one runs one's mind through everything that has been described in the remaining portion of this section, on immaterial states, through the section on interdependence of mind and body, and through the section above on the concepts of compactness and continuity.

The above meditation undertaken for discerning the immaterial states will have to be carried out with diligence, with enthusiasm, and with regularity, and for an ever increasing duration of time daily for years or for a lifetime until one gains purity of view—that “correct vision of mind and body, which after defining mind and body by these various methods, has been established on the plane of non-confusion by overcoming the perception of a being, is what should be understood as *“purification of view.”*”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Vism XVIII. 37.

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