

# The City of the Mind

A Parable

by

*Nyanaponika Thera*

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# The City of The Mind—A Parable

## Foreword

Man's mind is like a large, densely populated city. But just as cities greatly differ from each other, so do minds. Here, in our parable, we have chosen only one type of mentality and one type of a city's topography.

Our city, with its rather quaint features, is of course a product of fancy, and its geographical situation is in the country of Nowhere. But the mentality which our imagined city is meant to illustrate is, alas, only too real. What we wish to portray here is the deep rift between a chiefly utilitarian mind which is very alert, highly skilled, intelligent, and "progressive" yet at the *private* level has remained primitive in its instinctual behaviour and coarse pleasures, in its uncontrolled and unrefined emotions, in its general untidiness and confusion—in short, a mind having all the signs of retarded growth. This gaping contrast between these two levels of mind cannot but lead to tension and conflict, and finally to stagnation and decline, both individually and socially, as illustrated in this parable by the political upheavals in the city and the mental illnesses of its inhabitants.

The reader is invited to trace in the mind of contemporary man these and other features of our parable.

In drawing rather sharply the contours of the division in city and mind, we wanted to drive home the lesson strongly. It is true that there are cities and minds with much more attractive areas (small or large) where the inhabitants lead noble human lives, co-existing with society as they find it and even sometimes managing to exercise a salutary influence on it. But the divided mentality depicted in our little story is so widespread that it threatens, in its extreme form, to engulf a large part of humanity, East and West. Hence we needed to take a closer look at that particular City of the Mind, at its layout and at the people inhabiting it. So let us now start on our tour of inspection.

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# The City of the Mind

Cities not only tell a good part of their own history, ancient or new, but to an observant eye they also show much of the mentality of the people inhabiting them.

How many and how different are the cities I have seen in my wanderings! And I always had to take a very close look at their distinctive features, so that I could convey to them a meaningful message from among the many I carry in my bag. For I am a messenger—a messenger of the Awakened Ones to all those in the world whose hearts and minds are asleep. But raving in their tortured dreams, enchanted by their dream pleasures, engrossed in their dream projects, they believe they are awake. How hard and almost impossible a task it is to convey a message to them! Yet one must try. And there are always a few who can be roused from their slumber.

Spurred on by this hope, our travel-weary feet brought us one day to the gates of another city. As it does not appear on any map, we need not burden you with its name; the less so as we later found it to be of a rather stereotyped structure which we had often met with before.

Skirting the city's entire periphery, we soon notice that it has two distinct parts. There is the Upper Town, on a high elevation, glittering in its beauty, imposing in its grandeur, and very clean and tidy. Then there is Downtown, squalid and neglected. Its meagre houses and huts hug the uneven contours of the low-lying land, and so they often remain unnoticed by casual visitors to the city whose glances are spellbound by the wonders of Upper Town. But as to ourselves, we wish to have a complete overview of the city. Hence we ignore the official guides who want to shepherd us to the show places only, and we prefer to go our own way alone.

Upper Town is the proud and busy domain of work, of industry and trade, of science and research, of art and luxury. Through its long and straight thoroughfares shuffles a busy crowd, and from the intentness of their gait one can see that these people know where they want to go and what they want to do. If only they were not in such a hurry!

We ourselves do not feel sure at all whether what these people want and what they do is quite worth that haste and the grave and self-important look on their faces. On our part, we are not in a hurry but amble leisurely along past the tall buildings that line the streets. They are mostly sober and matter-of-fact utility structures.

We pass many large shops with tempting goods in colourful display. There are huge office buildings for commerce and administration, and there are factories. Later, however, in the residential quarter, we see many bright and beautiful apartment houses, villas and palatial mansions. Some of the buildings we saw in the city's business section rise skywards in dozens of storeys, reminding us of the Babylonian tower and its fate.

We also notice a few temples, and in that modern, strictly utilitarian environment they appear rather out of place with their old-fashioned architecture. Yet, by way of contrast, they look quite dignified, though they are mostly built in a quaint, whimsical mixture of styles.

This Upper Town seems to be a model of orderliness, cleanliness and efficiency, and it is pervaded by an air of purposefulness and self-assurance. We cannot deny that it is quite impressive in a way and that it has a beauty of its own. What we have so far seen presents a picture of prosperity and of vigorous and successful activity. So it is no wonder that the inhabitants are quite proud of what they call "our city." But they conveniently forget (or do not mention to the stranger) that this is only a part of the whole, only one sector of the entire city. Nevertheless, the citizens are fond of speaking about the high level of civilization they have reached. One of them spoke to us of his fervid conviction that they would only have to pursue

the very same path a little further to surpass even these exalted heights of achievement and to disseminate one day all these blessings to the undeveloped areas of this globe and even to other parts of the universe. But we take polite leave of our acquaintance and, as a silent reply to his exuberance, direct our steps towards Downtown.

Here we enter an entirely different world, so near in terms of space, and yet so vastly remote from the bright and orderly uptown regions we have left. Yet, with all its strangeness, Downtown, appears to us intimately familiar, though often in a rather unpleasant way; and this gives a somewhat weird look even to the humdrum things we encounter there. It creates in us an uneasiness that remains for the duration of our walk through Downtown, as when we are confronted with a disreputable relative or with shameful memories. And what makes it worse, this familiarity with the downtown scene is not always of an entirely unpleasant character: we must admit, we sometimes feel quite at home and comfortable there, in spite of our intellect's disapproval.

Even the skies over the two sections of the city appear to be different. Daylight in Upper Town has a cold and hard glare that is slightly painful to the eye (hence many wear sun-glasses there). That peculiar kind of light tends to over-emphasise the sharp contours of objects and this might explain why as a soothing contrast, the style of painting favoured there often presents blobs of colour vaguely shaped, without clear outlines. But in Downtown the fallow, leaden twilight of the first moments of early morning prevails.

In that dim light, to which our eyes gradually grow accustomed, we saunter through narrow, winding lanes, unpaved and mostly dirty. Along these lanes and in front of the houses, there are open drains and evil-smelling, viscid water flows sluggishly in them. These drains, we hear, are fed mainly by the wastewaters of Upper Town, though also the slum dwellers of Downtown pour their dishwater into them for good measure. "Very efficient breeders of disease, indeed!" we think. And one of the slum dwellers, following, if not our thoughts, but the direction of our glances, exclaims with a snigger: "But they do get back what they send us, those uppish people there! Disease is no respecter of administrative boundaries" So, obviously, the municipal drainage system is not as perfect as its invisibility and the absence of bad odour in Upper Town had made us believe. They just channel their waste matter off, from the high elevation of their proud buildings down to the lowland of the slum area, believing that "out of sight is out of existence."

Most of the houses in Downtown are squat and dilapidated, looking almost like ruins topped by makeshift roofs. However they are not very old, but are quite recent structures, though poorly built and badly neglected. Some of them seem to have been planned for larger dimensions with an imposing façade, but the ambitious designs had been abandoned midway, and the buildings were completed hastily in a haphazard manner, with very odd results. But we also see a few quite cheerful little houses, incomplete-looking like the others, but with a gay-coloured wash and whimsical wall and roof decorations. Their inmates look as cheerful as their huts—happy-go-lucky people who carry the untidiness of their dress and dwellings with an unconcerned swagger.

But by far the majority of the houses are just grey, gloomy and miserable as are the inhabitants themselves who stand at their ramshackle doors, following us with their glances. Some of the structures are no more than low sheds, carelessly knocked together from a variety of discarded material, perhaps collected from the garbage heaps of Upper Town. Many of the houses that have proper walls are huddled close together in a bewildering medley. They seem to grow into each other, to creep over each other and, with the diversity of layout and level of elevation, they are a picturesque sight indeed. To sort out which part belongs to one building and which to another is often an intriguing puzzle.

Finally, leaving the last of the slum houses behind us, we come to a large, bare stretch of land, slightly hilly in character. It seems to be quite desolate and without any habitation. But no—in the distance we notice some vague forms moving about. Going closer, we see that the slopes of the hillocks are dotted with little caves, not very different from the holes dug by some animal. Indeed, the creatures that creep out of the holes on all fours and stare at us with animal-dumbness or frightening fierceness appear to us like beasts.

We can not suppress a feeling of fear and quickly turn back to the quaint but somehow homely slum quarters. There, in the main street, one of those who in idle curiosity had followed us some distance, addresses us and asks: "Are you searching for the Catacombs of the Unconscious?" "No, we aren't," we reply. But we were quite willing to accept the man's offer to show us the way to what seemed to be an attraction for foreigners coming to this area.

With some apprehension we realise that our way is leading us back to those desolate hillocks with their uncanny cave dwellers: "Don't be afraid of the Semis, just ignore them," says our guide (obviously using a slang word for "semi-humans"). "Who are those poor wretches?" we ask. "Well, most of them are aborigines, living here in the very same way since time immemorial., But some of them, I must admit,; are drop-outs from this place who could not or would not keep to the decent standard of our living here on which we must insist. And now we can't do anything about them. Here we don't have any rehabilitation centres and what-not, as in Upper Town; and there, of course, the Semis wouldn't be admitted."

We pass the hillocks and beyond them we come to forest land, deeply furrowed with densely wooded ravines. We climb down a steep footpath and, having reached the bottom of one of these ravines, our guide removes some overhanging bushes and creepers covering narrow pits of unfathomable depth. "Only very few know about them or know more than the mere names they themselves have given to these pits. But now and then some learned chaps from Upper Town come and bring strange contraptions for lowering themselves into these pits as far down as their exploration tackle will allow. Those who went deep enough to get a sight of the bottom with the help of powerful artificial light say that from the wide uneven floor tunnels go in all directions. This seems to confirm a tradition among us that these tunnels not only extend below Upper Town but form a network under the entire earth. The explorers also said that at the deepest level reached with their ropes and cables, they felt exposed to great strains and stresses on body and mind, seemingly transmitted by draughts of hot air rising from the bottom. This, they further said, may explain much of these bouts of irrational behaviour plaguing our civilization. But one of them said that there were surface causes enough to account for these outbreaks." Here, we translate and interpret into orderly speech, what we can gather from the rather confused and erratic talk of our guide.

As we have neither the equipment nor the inclination to descend into the pits, we soon leave. Walking through the length of the ravine, we climb back on its opposite slope. Soon we are in open country again, quite close to the outskirts of Downtown, but at a sector different from the one where we had entered. The place we reach permits a full view of Upper Town proudly rising from the extensive tableland. But quite close to it there is another colony of cave men—a quaint contrast indeed. And still another contrast awaits us: at the edge of Downtown there is a group of buildings that has actually been erected and completed in a uniform style—certainly unique for that locality. The gaudy colours on the walls and the ugly stucco ornamentation on the facades is startling after the soberness of Upper Town and the drabness of almost everything else in Downtown. These buildings, however, are only slightly taller than other Downtown structures. But they have very wide doors, obviously meant for admitting large crowds. Yet these gates are so low that even a smallish man would have to stoop when entering. Close by, unmistakably noticeable, are the quarters of venal love, and they seem to be well patronised.

"This is the amusement district," says our guide. "It is quite famous and has as many clients from Upper Town as from our parts." And in fact, we see a steady stream of people emerging from Upper Town, wending their way towards those garish buildings and their neighbourhood. Some of them, obviously new to that pilgrimage, show rather furtive behaviour as if bent upon something disreputable. And, actually, they will lose their status and stature upon entering through these low gates. But the majority of those people seem to be "regulars" walking a familiar route mechanically and listlessly. We see no gaiety or zest in the faces of all these people as one might expect from "pleasure-seekers." Even the young among them look rather blasé. The whole migration seems to be more the performance of a habitual rite than a quest for merriment and pleasure.

We turn again to the residential quarters of Downtown. The inhabitants, shabbily but comfortably dressed, seem to be very much like their own houses: their clothes are mismatched and quaintly assorted, sometimes only dirty rags, loosely held together with strange devices. These people do not stay much in their houses, it seems; most of the day they crowd the narrow streets, standing together in little groups chatting and gesticulating, as we see in Mediterranean towns. We also notice some lonely figures moving among the crowds, murmuring or talking loudly to themselves. Monologues are obviously as common here as they are rare and despised in Upper Town.

Generally, the Downtowners appear to be quite harmless people, apart from the inhabitants of a few lanes which are the haunt of criminals and other shady characters. We took a peep into these lanes and did not feel encouraged to venture further after seeing a cluster of rather forbidding-looking individuals exchanging quite openly tools of larceny and murder. In spite of the highly praised efficiency of Upper Town administration, we were told that neither the police nor any other controlling authority ever make an appearance in Downtown. Also schools and other educational and cultural institutions are not to be found there.

The Downtowners' manner of speech is as disorderly as their dress and their housing. Their words tumble over each other, break off in the midst of a sentence, ending in a barely audible murmur; then again there are wild exclamations and even inarticulate sounds like those of animals. When they talk, they frequently interrupt each other without compunction, and often each continues quite unconcernedly with his own quite different topic. Hence we do not expect that listening to their chatter will prove informative, apart from what their confused manner of talking reveals of their state of mind.

Before returning to Upper Town, we wish to rest a while on the outskirts where it is quieter. Our glance wanders to the tableland above, from where the tall buildings of Upper Town rise. On closer inspection, we notice a group of people emerging from there and slowly walking down the slope in the direction of where we sit. Close to us, they reach the first houses of Downtown, and then something uncanny and strange happens: before our eyes they lose their well-groomed appearance, their keen and intelligent facial expressions, their purposeful and energetic movements, and suddenly change, adopting the slovenly appearance, behaviour, and dress of typical Downtowners. Some of them disappear into the amusement district; others join the chatting groups in the streets and obviously feel quite at home. They seem to lead a kind of ghostly double life. Later, when back in Upper Town; we hear this tentatively confirmed: though there are many who never leave Downtown, there are only a few in Upper Town who do not pay regular visits to that disreputable twin of the great city.

But from our vantage point we observe that some traffic also moves in the opposite direction: from slum land up to the heights of civilization. We see a long procession of children with satchels, hurrying to their uptown schools; and there are also large groups of adults obviously going to work in the factories and offices up there. After what we have just now observed, we

do not doubt that all these children and workers will likewise transform themselves when they reach their destination, but in their case it will be to conform with their temporary Upper Town environment. What a strange faculty of adaptation this is, surpassing that of the chameleon. It seems to come from a biological and sociological need to maintain the vital communication between these two sectors of the city.

Thoughtfully, we return to Upper Town, and we look again at the people there with more perceptive and critical eyes as a result of our recent experiences. Looking closer into those self-assured faces, we notice the tension behind the apparent firmness and strength of their features. Now and then their self-control gives way and a twitch in their faces or fidgeting of limbs betrays what is hidden behind the proud facade. We now understand that these people need Downtown as a relaxation of their enforced self-control so that they may be able to cope again with the demands of Upper Town life. So what was first just a lack of social and psychological integration has become a deep-rooted, almost organic need which is hard to dislodge. Yet, the optimism of our Message says that although this is a vicious circle, there is a Way Out of it.

There are also cases where the enforced composure of these people completely breaks down. With our own eyes we see how one of the passers-by collapses in the street and sits down trembling at the curb; and on another day we meet one who suddenly starts to run wildly through the streets shouting and gesticulating. Quickly both are taken care of by city officials. The first, the less serious case, is taken into a friendly-looking building situated in park land; on its gate, we read the words: "House of Calm No. 24" (so, it seems, they need many of them). The other man, the runner, requires some rougher handling before he yields; he is finally carried off into a huge multi-storied building with a high wall around it, its entrance gate carrying the legend "House of Healing No. 6." They are experts here in coining pleasant and deceptive names for not so pleasant realities. The first building doubtlessly is a mental hospital and the second a lunatic asylum of a shockingly large size.

As we pass a fairly young man in the street, we notice in him the first symptoms of what they here call "civic failure": his face is twitching and a slight shiver runs over his body. We address him politely and before the Health Police can espy him, we take his arm and lead him gently to the quiet back room of a little restaurant. There we make him relax and offer him a soft drink while we send to the drugstore for a packet of "Tranquil-Pills." These pills are almost a staple diet here and by too frequent use they have lost efficacy with many of those who take them. But our friend's is obviously a first and very light attack, and he quickly responds to the drug; and, perhaps, also to the quietness of the little semi-dark room and our encouraging, cheerful words, fortified by the good meal that we offer him.

When he recovers, he is touchingly grateful for the little help we have given. "Had they got hold of me," he says "I would have been taken to that awful segregation colony which they call a holiday camp. It would have been my first stay in it and from what I have heard about that place, it would have been sure to have made me worse and riper for the next stage, the "House of Calm." Do they really think that those indoctrination talks at the camp and the silly amusements they provide will cure anybody?

"This will only increase the nausea that many of us feel about the way we live in this wonderful city! Well, I am thankful to you for your help. It has given me some respite from being subjected to the type of therapy they mete out here. I had better not bother you with my personal problems of "maladjustment" as they call it, but please tell me: can an adjustment to that kind of life really be called "just," and how can such an adjustment be justified?

"Please forgive me for going off at a tangent again! That is part of my illness: I do feel provoked by those pleasant phrases we are taught to accept and use. I really did not want to

worry you with my personal idiosyncrasies. But what I did want to tell you is something about our city which you, as a stranger, cannot easily see; and you can hear it only from people like me who are border cases between sanity and insanity, that is, according to their definition of these terms.”

Our friend’s voice lowers now to a whisper: “Things are really bad in this city! Don’t be deceived by appearances! Enemies threaten us. And how can this city, divided as it is, resist them? And how could we possibly resist if the chief enemy is this very division itself! There are many more people like me who have lost faith in what they call here “our proud city civilization.”

“How can one live here and remain sane if in constant opposition to all that one sees, hears and does? There are those here who actually embrace that proud belief “with a vengeance”: they “go whole hog” in their conceit and everything in them turns rigid like stone. You can meet them in our “Houses of Healing” where they are known as the “stone images.”

“Then you will find others who have fallen victim to their conceit in a different way: they just collapse like a house of cards; the slightest whiff of a counter-wind in their lives is enough to make them topple. But the majority of the inmates are of my type: the “subversives,” the non-believers, who were not strong enough to carry on with their two-faced life of conforming outwardly and opposing inwardly—and are resentful of such a life and of their own weakness.

“And there are still other things which I have to tell you. Do you know that we are plagued by barbarian invasions? They disturb our city again and again. No, I do not mean any savage tribes. It is “the enemy within,” which I speak to you about. This trouble comes from those of our own people who have absorbed too much of Downtown’s ways, and the worst of them have become so by visiting there too often and too long.

“When these people grow in strength and become arrogant, they even usurp for some time the city administration and we have much trouble in chasing them out again. This requires some repressive measures, under which our own loyalists, too, have to suffer. Though it is a lesser evil than allowing barbarian control to continue, yet we know that these coercive methods only add to the tensions within our society, and this again causes more frequent upheavals. How this will end I do not know. I am not sure the loyalists will always be victorious and perhaps one day the barbarians will come to stay for good.

“Many of us know that this predicament can be solved only by integrating the two divisions of our society into a single and well-balanced unit. But how to set about this tremendous task? Apart from the inherent difficulties, we would have to face opposition and obstruction from many quarters: from those conceited “defenders of our civilization,” from others who are too self-centred to give up privileges or to bother about reforms, and finally and foremost, from those who have become addicted to their slum visits and are unwilling to forgo the pleasures they find there; they wouldn’t even agree to a modest slum-cleaning.

“All this delay in tackling our problems and the connivance with things as they are makes our situation steadily worse.

“The greatest danger to our city can be clearly seen in the fate of those who are carefully segregated in our Houses of Healing: they are those who have entirely lost the capacity to live on two levels. They have kept for good the features, behaviour, and mentality of the worst of the Downtowners and cannot drop them as we do when we enter Upper Town again. “In those people the Upper Town personality has been entirely obliterated, and their growing numbers are a cause of great anxiety to us. They are, of course, quite different from those who engineer those barbarian coups in our city, who for such a venture to succeed even temporarily must still possess a certain amount of uptown intelligence. “Well, I suppose there is no remedy for the ills

of our city. There is a vague rumour among us subversives that there *is* a Way Out. But even to talk about it and to believe in it is regarded here as treason.

“True, our Temple Teachings are based on such yearnings. But these yearnings are now safely buried in archaic phrases and obscure symbols which no one takes seriously. At best, they are prescribed and used as soporifics so that we may bear with the miserable present in the hope of a happy Beyond. As to our modern and modernised Temple Teachings, they are perfectly adapted to our dubitable city values. And as to those rumours of a “Way Out,” no one so far has appeared who has been able to show us an exit that opens from where we actually stand here and now. Or do *you* know, perchance, of such a Way Out?”

“Come and see,” we reply. Guided by the directions of the message we carry, we take his hand and we lead him out of the city. After a gentle climb we reach a range of wooded hills—the Hills of Stillness. Having negotiated the fairly steep, rocky crest of one of the hills that allows an unobstructed view, we silently point to the East. There, in the distance, and yet in beckoning nearness, flows the broad, silvery band of a majestic river, shining in the dazzling intensity of the sunlight. On the still further horizon, the river merges with the mighty ocean that opens beyond the coastline, which we can just faintly distinguish.

“This river is called ‘The Middle Stream’ and the mighty sea is the ‘Ocean of Enlightenment.’ Here, friend, is your Way Out of the city’s eternal plight in which your weary mind shares. It is, however, a Way Out only for those who can navigate the river and reach the ocean. But the vessel, the good strong ship, you must build yourself.” And we point to the tall and sturdy trees girdling the hills.

“You will first have to seek the soothing friendship of these trees and hilltops. The Hills of Stillness will wean you from the compulsive urge to make the habitual trips to Downtown. Spend all your leisure hours here and build yourself a little sheltering hut. The silence of the hills and, the fragrance of the trees and flowers will gladden your heart and will give you strength. And then start building the ship! Hard work for a great purpose, joy and satisfaction in making progress, will make you fit again to stand up to the demands of your city life. For, I suppose, you will have to go on living in the city for some time to come. Therefore, you must keep open the road between the city and the Hills of Stillness, lest it become overgrown by the jungle, or in its lower parts, by the garbage dumps of both city divisions.

“This road is called ‘The Way of Mindfulness.’ Now it is only that narrow footpath by which we have come. Though it is sufficient for a holiday excursion, it is not good enough for your regular, perhaps daily, walk between city and hill. You will have to broaden and level the road and remove the obstacles on it. Otherwise, the strain of your daily walk will widen in you the gulf between your working life and the few peaceful hours in the hills; and the awareness of that gulf will make your inner conflict more acute and painful. Hence do not neglect clearing the Way of Mindfulness!

“If you keep it open and improve it, you will soon feel that it leads you directly and smoothly to and from your office desk. Your life and work in the city will have become an extension of that Way. Unless this happens, you will not be able to heal the rift within yourself, nor will you be able to help in bridging this city’s unhappy division.

“Soon, perhaps, friends will join you in the hills and in your work of building the ship. The joy and strength growing in you will be a silent call which will reach those who can hear it within. The time may come when there will be a regular trek from the city to the Hills of Stillness, as it now proceeds to the slums. But when going to the Hills and returning from them, there won’t be any subtle changes in body and mind as with those whose life and mind are divided.

“When that time comes, your companions may have gained enough influence in city affairs to carefully and thoughtfully take up the work of the city’s unification, beginning from both sides. But we should not think so far ahead, just yet. I shall come again. Until then, among the friends you will gather, there are sure to be also Downtowners. As so many of them are commuting to work in the factories of Upper Town, you might well be able to find at least a few willing and fit ‘to commute to the Hills of Stillness’ and join you in the common task. You should try. So, out of your first lone hut in the Hills, a significant settlement might grow, and the work on the ship’s completion will quicken.

“It will at first be a settlement of those who spend in it only their hours or days of leisure. But in time to come, when the ideal of a united and harmonious city and the higher goal of the final Way Out gain strength and support, city dwellers might give you their backing when you and others decide to leave city life behind. Happily renouncing the city’s faded pleasures and its constant problems which you have outgrown, you will come to stay and live in the Hills of Stillness, to enable complete commitment to your work and goal. From those who follow you, a ‘Brotherhood of the Hills’ will arise, with a single-minded aim of launching the ship, of entering the Stream, and of reaching one Ocean, as it was enjoyed by He who was the Finder of the Way and the Embodiment of Enlightenment. It is His message which I have brought to you.

“If you strive to do this, it will not be merely a dream.”

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## Courageous Faith

Faith involves not merely a belief in the existence of a thing or in the truth of a creedal formula, but also confidence in the power of its object. Religious faith is the belief and confidence in the power of the Supreme Good, and in Buddhist faith in particular, belief in the incomparable power of the Noble Eightfold Path and confidence in its purifying and liberating efficacy.

Among those calling themselves “believers” or “religious people” or, in our case, Buddhists, there are still too few who have that kind of genuine faith in the actual power of the Good to transform and elevate the life of the individual and of society, to protect them from the evil in themselves and in the world outside. Too few dare to entrust themselves to the powerful current of the Good, too many secretly believe, in spite of a vague sort of “faith,” that the power of the evil in themselves and the world is stronger—too strong to be contested. Many politicians throughout the world seem to believe this, particularly those who call themselves “realists,” implying that only evil is “real.” They think that submission to its greater power is inevitable. If they are not willing to challenge this idea, it is no wonder that they cannot achieve much good.

To be sure, in face of the great forces of evil and stupidity, this kind of genuine faith in the Good requires a certain amount of courage. But no progress of any kind is possible without courage. Progress means overcoming the natural inertia of present unsatisfactory conditions in the individual and in society. It certainly requires courage to take the first step in breaking through that resistance of the natural inertia and the self-preserving tendency of things and minds. But just that courage is the preliminary condition of success.

The ancient teachers of the Buddhist doctrine were well aware that courage is an essential feature of true faith. They therefore compared faith to a strong and courageous hero who plunges ahead into the turbulent waters of a stream to lead safely across the weaker people who timidly stop at the shore, or who, excitedly and in vain, run up and down the bank engaged in useless arguments about the proper place to cross. This simile can be applied to the social as well as to the inner life. In the case of social life, the “weaker people” are those who are willing to follow and support a leader but who cannot make a start by themselves. In the case of the inner life, those qualities necessary for spiritual progress are either undeveloped or isolated from their supplementary virtues in the “weaker people”..

Two factors of inner progress which supplement, support and balance each other are intellect (*paññā*) and faith (*saddhā*). If intellect remains without the confidence, devotion and zeal of faith, it will stop short at a mere theoretical understanding and intellectual appreciation of teachings which are intended to be put into practise and not merely thought or talked about. In the words of our simile, intellect, if not aided by the hero of faith, will merely “run up and down the bank of the stream,” an activity which looks busy and important but which produces few actual results. Intellect separated from faith will lack a firm belief in its own power to be the guide on the path of life. Without this inner conviction it will hesitate to follow in earnest its own conclusions and commands; it will lack the courage to make an actual start on the task of “crossing over.”

Faith as a supplementary quality, supported by the vigour and endurance of energy (*virīya*), will give wings to the intellect, enabling it to rise above the barrenness of unused knowledge and the futile wordy wars of conceptual thought. In exchange, intellect will give to faith discriminative judgement and reliable guidance. It will prevent faith from becoming exhausted, from wasting its energies on ineffective emotional outpourings and misdirected efforts. Therefore, faith and intellect should always work in harmony. With right mindfulness keeping

them balanced, the two together will prove to be ideal companions, able to meet by their combined efforts any dangers and difficulties on the road to liberation.

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## Why End Suffering?

The Buddha declares that he teaches the Dhamma for the sole purpose of leading beings to freedom from suffering. If, moved by that teaching, we resolve to make an end to suffering, it is of prime importance that we understand the problem of suffering clearly and in its true width and depth. If our grasp of the problem is incomplete, our endeavours to eliminate it will also be incomplete, incapable of garnering the strength needed to yield fully satisfactory results.

When asked “Why end suffering?” the obvious answer is that one wishes to end suffering because it is the natural innermost urge of one’s being to be free from affliction. However, in aspiring to the extinction of suffering, we should think not only of our own affliction, but also of the pain and sorrow we inflict upon others whilst we have not attained the perfect harmlessness of a passion-free heart and the clear vision of a liberated mind. If we regularly recollect the fact that, on our way through *samsāric* existence, we inevitably add to the suffering of others too, we shall feel an increased urgency in our resolve to start earnestly upon the path leading to our own liberation.

The suffering we may inflict upon our fellow beings affects firstly those who become passive objects of our harmful actions. Our greed robs, impoverishes, deprives and detracts, soils and violates. Our hate kills and destroys, hurts and rouses fear. The turbid waters of our interfering ignorance flood and devastate the neighbour’s peaceful shores; our misjudgements lead him astray and leave him in calamity.

Then there is a second and even more detrimental way our defilement may cause harm to others. Our evil or impure actions often provoke in others a harmful response that entangles them further in the meshes of their defilements. Our own greed increases the competitive greed of others; our own lust rouses in others lustful desires which might have slumbered had we not awakened them. Our own hate and anger provoke hostility in return, starting thus the endless round of mutual revenge. Our prejudices become infectious. By our own illusions we deceive others who, by believing them, lend them increased weight and influence. Our wrong judgements, false values and erroneous views, sometimes only casually expressed, are taken up and expanded by others into extensive systems of deceptive and perverted notions working untold harm on people’s minds. In all these cases a good part of the responsibility will be ours. How careful we must be in what we speak and write!

A third way we may cause suffering to others is due to the limited and varying lifetime of our emotions. Our own love towards a certain person may die a natural death, while the person whom we loved still loves us, and thus suffers under our neglect. Or, in reverse: while the other’s love for us has died, our own still lives and constantly urges him, encroaches upon his need for freedom, disturbs his peace and tears at his heart, causing him sorrow because he cannot help us. These are quite common situations in human relationships, and their consequences are often tragic. We feel their poignancy particularly strongly because no moral guilt seems to be involved, only the stern impassive law of impermanence impressing its painful stamp upon this aspect of life. Yet there is a moral principle which applies here, though it is a matter of definition whether we should use the word “guilt.” Understood rightly, the situation presents a case of lust, attachment or craving causing pain through lack of fulfilment. Looking at the case in this light, how clear will become the second noble truth: “Craving is the origin of suffering.” And so too that seeming paradox: “From what is dear to us, suffering arises.” When deeply contemplating that little specimen of life’s suffering as presented here, we shall feel indeed: “Truly, this alone is enough to turn away from all forms of existence, to become disenchanted with them, to become detached from them!”

We still have not exhausted all the ways our own imperfections may draw others into the whirlpool of suffering. But it may suffice here to add a fourth and last point. Our own passions and ignorance, whether they involve another directly or only as an observer, may contribute to his harm by destroying his trust in man, his belief in high ideals, and his will to contribute to the fund of goodness in the world. Our own imperfections may thus induce him to become egocentric out of disappointment, a cynic or a misanthrope out of personal or impersonal resentment. Owing to our own imperfections, the forces of Good will again have been weakened not only in us, but in others too.

There are many who will reply to the Buddhist doctrine of suffering by saying: "We are well aware that happiness and beauty, joy and pleasure, have to be paid for by a certain amount of suffering. But we are willing to pay the price without grumbling, even the last price, death; and we think it is worth the price, and that it adds zest to our enjoyment." Before those who speak thus, we may place the facts indicated above, and ask them: "Are you aware that the price you are speaking of is paid not only by your own suffering, but also by the suffering of others? Do you think that it is right and fair for you to make *others* pay for your happiness? Will you still find "added zest" if you look at your happiness from that angle?" And our partner—provided he is honest and noble-minded (and only then would it be worthwhile to speak to him)—will pensively say: "I did not think of that. It is true, I must not make others pay for my shortcomings. If I consider it unfair and ignoble to do so in my everyday dealings, should it not likewise be so in relation to these higher problems of life?" We may then be sure that we have planted in his mind and conscience the seed which will sprout in due time.

We return now to our initial line of thought. We have seen how our actions may affect others through many channels, how our shortcomings may drag others into suffering, entanglement and guilt. Thus our constantly accumulating responsibility for much of the suffering and unhappiness in the world should be an additional and powerful incentive for us to become holy and whole for the sake of others, too.

Certainly our own wholeness and health will not cure others, at least not directly and not in all cases. Our own harmlessness will only rarely keep others from doing harm. But by gaining spiritual health, we shall diminish at least by one the sources of infection in the world and our own harmlessness will lessen the fuel feeding the fires of hate which ravage this earth.

By remaining conscious of the suffering we cause and the suffering we might prevent, we add two powerful motives to those already urging us to embark upon the path of liberation: the challenge of manly responsibility, and the richness of motherly love and compassion. These complementary ideals of duty and love, which we may call the male and the female principles, will help to keep us unswervingly on the path. Love and compassion towards those who might become the victims of our own imperfections will urge us to fulfil our duty towards them in the only way possible: by fulfilling our duty towards ourselves.

The thoughts outlined above are tersely expressed in a saying of the Buddha that is much too little known:

By protecting oneself, one protects others;  
by protecting others, one protects oneself. (SN 47:19)

In the light of the observations made above, these simple yet profound words of the Master will become still more translucent, charged with a magical power stirring the very depth of our being. By contemplating how our own defiled actions can have detrimental effects upon others, we shall still better understand that both statements in this passage are complementary: by guarding ourselves we are doing our best to protect others; wishing to protect others against the suffering we ourselves can cause, we shall do our utmost to guard ourselves.

Therefore, for our own sake and for the sake of our fellow beings, we have to be watchful of every step we take. Only with a high degree of mindfulness shall we succeed. Thus it is said in the same discourse that the method of practising that twofold protection is the firm establishment of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*), which here too proves to be “the sole way” (*ekāyano maggo*):

“I shall protect myself,” thus the establishing of mindfulness has to be cultivated. “I shall protect others,” thus the establishing of mindfulness has to be cultivated.

The same idea and method is expressed in a passage of the Buddha’s “Advice to Rāhula” (MN 61):

After reflecting again and again, actions by deed, word and thought should be done....

Before doing such actions by deed, word and thought, while doing them and after doing them, one should reflect thus: “Does this action lead to the harm of myself, to the harm of others, to the harm of both?” After reflecting again and again, one should purify one’s actions by deed, word and thought. Thus, O Rāhula, should you train yourself.

Again it is said:

Thus, O monks, should you train yourselves: Considering one’s own welfare, this is sufficient to strive untiringly. Considering the welfare of others, this is sufficient to strive untiringly. Considering the welfare of both, this is sufficient to strive untiringly. (SN 12:22)

These three sayings of the Master will illuminate each other. By reminding us of the right motives of our quest, and supplying us with the right methods to accomplish our task, they will be infallible guides in treading the path.

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