

BASIC BUDDHISM

An abstract collage artwork featuring various textures and colors. The central focus is a dark, textured shape resembling a Buddha figure, surrounded by layers of reddish-brown, green, and white paper or fabric. The overall composition is layered and textured, with a warm, earthy color palette.

HENRY VAN ZEYST

Basic Buddhism

Henry van Zeyst

1979

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This is version no. 20210701.

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Foreword

More than thirty years have passed since these pages were first published by the All-Ceylon Buddhist Students' Union. Several times suggestions were made for a reprint, a revised edition. The author was not very keen, as so many things could be said differently with a new approach.

But it still remains "Basic Buddhism", and as such it is presented once more with very few alterations of a mere word here and there. It had its usefulness then, and it will have it still; for, "basic man" has not changed much either. And after 34 years there are quite many new men about.

Henri van Zeyst,
Kandy,
17th March 1979.

The Psychological Aspect of Religion

Just as history is made by man's aspirations, which are the effects of his social evolution, so religion is made by man's aspirations which are the effects of his mental evolution. Religion is a mental growth, a spiritual growth, which has to be accepted as a fact and which cannot be overcome by argument. If mental growth is little, religion will be crude. When the mind is free, there is no need for religion.

The question: "What is religion?" has been answered in many different ways. "Belief in spiritual things", says Prof. E.B. Tyler. "A force of belief cleansing the inward parts", says Prof. Whitehead. "Recognition of superhuman controlling power", says the Oxford Dictionary. Faith in God, belief in spiritual values, in a supernatural force, may be a kind of religion, but this definition is not comprehensive.

The etymological meaning of the word "religion" is a bond (*re-ligare*: to bind). Man binds himself, restrains his conduct. Thus, if religion is taken as a system of morality we can embrace all religions and denominations as striving with one purpose, even though the end and the means differ. Morality is the backbone of religion. Morality is the backbone of humanity, for to lead a moral life is to lead a natural life. Morality is the norm, the law of nature.

How did this law of nature, so simple in itself, develop into

so many systems of elaborate rites and rituals? “The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord¹”. Owing to this fear, religion becomes “morality tinged with emotion²”. Fear is the law of religion, because man, in his craving for power, wanting to rule even the super-nature, became subject to superstition. Man is surrounded by mystery and it is this unexplained nature which first gave rise to faith. “Wherever fear arises, it arises in the fool, not in the wise man³”. And thus the distinction between the known and the unknown became also the distinction between the natural and supernatural, which, of course, was only possible in an unenlightened age, when the unknown forces of nature could not be calculated, still less regulated.

Frustration of man’s natural expectations through causes which he could not control, such as cyclones or earthquakes, naturally produced fear; and means were sought and thought out to avert those harmful influences.

As the causes were felt to be supernatural, the means to control or to placate them had to be supernatural also. Here we see the origin of sacrifice and prayer as quite natural outgrowths of fear. Prayer is sublimated fear. One prays, because one feels powerless to help oneself, powerless against unknown forces. The forces in nature were known in their action, and their beneficial or harmful influences were experienced; but man could not rule them; they were ruling man. Good influences were accepted gratefully, and friendly relationship had to be maintained. Yet, the uncertainty of this friendliness and benevolence always remained a source of anxiety. For, not knowing why they were friendly, one could never say at which moment these forces would turn themselves against man. Bad influences had to be appeased, reconciled, bribed, and if possible kept at a distance. It is the natural tendency, the innate disposition to satisfy the primary want of protection, the search for shelter and security.

¹Psalm 110

²Matthew Arnold

³Majjh. Nik. 115

From the child's earliest reactions to and dependence on the strength of its father can be traced that spirit of reliance and blind faith in the midst of unknown danger. The forces of non-human nature are personified and everything is thought of as alive or inhabited by a spirit. Brightness⁴ if good becomes "divine", "deva", but if bad, it becomes the "devil".

Together with prayers for help, sacrifices for atonement, ritualistic ablutions for mental purification, sprang up a class of men who by profession made this their daily task and living, acting on behalf of the people in the world. Thus, with fear arose religion and priestcraft; for, the priest stood between god and man; he spoke on behalf of the first and prayed on behalf of the last, while he lived on the offerings of the faithful which were meant for his god, thus getting the better of both.

Where the birth of religion was natural, its corruption is due to the pedantic spirit in the invention of creeds, formulas, mantras, articles of faith, doctrines, dogmas and apologies, rationalisation of beliefs. "When religion ceases to be wisdom, it becomes superstition overlaid with reasoning⁵". Thus, religion has become associated with the worst forms of bigotry, narrow-mindedness and even pure selfishness in personal life. That is why we find that selfishness of nature goes so well with some of the most religious and regularly church-going people.

As the primitive man is generally more extroverted than the civilised man, the earlier stages of religion under uncultivated people will show greater tendencies towards rites and ceremonies, in order to please therewith the unknown forces of nature. Fear thereof produces a tendency to be good, to please, to be submissive. But, if notwithstanding submissive fear and blind faith, things go amiss, those same factors which ascribed good things to a benevolent supernatural power, will take the blame for all evil as a just punishment for sin. The burden of sin and the desire

⁴Sanskrit div =

⁵George Santayana

for the freedom thereof constitute strong elements in the composition of religious feeling. The feeling of having sinned feeds religious emotion, creates an inferiority complex, and increases fear and faith, the roots from where it sprang.

Thus, the religious impulse is an outgrowth in certain characters, not something sacred introduced from divine spheres, but a part of man's feeling and emotions, i.e. of his weakness. Morality, however, is born from the fact of living in society, from social rights which create social duties, formulated by convention, fashion, custom, tradition, etc. Morality, based on man's nature, will remain the same in its structural form, while religions change, faiths spring up with superstitious fear and disappear with the growth of understanding. Thus, religion in the true, natural sense is but a natural system of thinking and living, based on the need of thinking and living together as social beings with mutual rights and duties.

The Personality of the Buddha

The teaching of the Buddha has no beginning in a certain sense, for the truth is eternal, even though the doctrine as we know it, being subject to the law of impermanence like everything else, will disappear from this world, as it has disappeared previously from the knowledge of living beings. Occasionally, and with very long periods between, when life has become so abnormal that the truth as the norm of living is forgotten and adulterated, beings will arise in this world, who after long striving and searching find out the truth again and proclaim it to the world. Thus, the teacher who proclaimed the truth again to us in this period of the world-cycle is not the first. The number of previous Buddhas is indeed incalculable and only the names of some are known to us. Yet some previous Buddhas become of importance even to us, for it was in that unimaginable distant time in the past that a being was striving under their guidance to become a Buddha himself. It is the Bodhisatta, a being bent upon enlightenment.

After a period of aspiration and expression thereof, the Bodhisatta in his existence as Sumedha, a hermit, could have broken all the fetters of craving which bind all of us to the wheel of ever-repeated rebirths. He could have made an end of suffering and its cause by attaining the deliverance of heart and mind, the state of Nibbāna in arahantship. But his spirit of renunciation was so great that for the sake of helping others he renounced his

own happiness and thus started upon the long journey through thousands of lives, practising in more than heroic degree the ten perfections of unselfishness in the highest degree by giving all (*dana*), but keeping virtue (*sīla*), by renouncing all pleasures (*nekkhamma*), and, in scorning lower joy, developing the highest wisdom (*paññā*); by showing the courage of the strongest (*virīya*) and the patience of the weakest (*khanti*); by utter sincerity and truthfulness (*sacca*) and determination in the search for truth (*adhiṭṭhāna*); by loving all (*mettā*), yet none with passion in perfect equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Then finally the time was full, the proper season in the many aeons, when the blossom of spirituality could yield the ripe fruit of Buddhahood. The ripeness of the fruit proves the fullness of the season and the readiness of the world. For, though the readiness of a Buddha to blossom in enlightenment comes from the ripeness of his *kamma*, yet an intensely spiritual atmosphere is needed to produce the proper season in the world.

The historical birth of prince Siddhattha, although proved and fixed in time and place beyond doubt, derives its historicity solely from the fact of his later greatness.

There is for us a spur of encouragement in the fact that prince Siddhattha was not born a Buddha, but had to make himself so. In his self-enlightenment, he stands out super-eminently among all founders of religion, even where some claim divine origin. For, it is through his natural human birth not less than through his super-human and super-divine teaching, that he has shown the way of transcending and delivering from all birth and life and death.

It seemed to be his destiny to pass his whole life in dreaming, without ever having to face the actuality of life as it appears to millions of us. Sages who were called to read the horoscope of the young prince, to read his character from the lines in his palms and the soles of his feet, predicted a great future. Their findings are

put together in the Lakkhana sutta⁶ and their symbolical meaning shows how the future greatness is already anticipated in the child. His recollectedness and mindfulness are indicated by a stiff neck which does not easily turn left and right to satisfy the spirit of curiosity. The open hands keep nothing hidden: his is not the closed fist of a teacher of esoteric doctrines. The fingers of equal length indicate the absence of grasping, for unequal fingers form an easy grip like a claw to grab and to cling. Flat feet indicate the manner of walking: the footprint of a lustful man is divided in the middle as a dancer's; a person with a malicious character will walk jerkily with rubbing feet and digging toes, always aggressively on the alert, while a person with a sluggish mind will walk with dragging feet, lacking interest and understanding. Thus, the Buddha's freedom from the three roots of all evil is symbolically indicated by the flat soles of his feet.

Prince Siddhatta's education as the future ruler being completed, he expressed the wish to come in personal contact with his subjects. It was only then that he heard and saw that not the whole world is a flower garden, that many had to work and toil and slave to procure him the satisfaction of his desires. It was on such occasions that he met with sickness, old age and death. Why all that suffering that nobody seemed to be able to escape, and that one day would be lot also? He wanted to help his people, but how?

The sight of a recluse made him realise, "how difficult it is for the man who dwells at home to live the higher life in all its purity, in all its fullness, in all its bright perfection. Free as the air is the life of him who has renounced all worldly things⁷". And so the plan ripened in his mind to leave his luxury and to experience the poverty and misery of his people so as to understand them better and to find a solution of their difficulties, which had now become his also. Then, on a certain day, the message was brought

⁶Digha Nik. 30

⁷Digha Nik. II, 42

to him that the princess, his wife, had given birth to a son. Seeing in this child but a fetter which would bind him to home, he called him Rāhula, which means fetter. Understanding that he would not be able to start even on his self-imposed mission, if he would let this new affection take roots in his heart, he left palace and possessions, father, wife and child that very night.

In the world of luxury he had tried to satisfy the “self”, thus to attain freedom from desire through indulgence. When he failed there he tried to kill that “self” by mortification. Full six years he spent in extreme asceticism, in loneliness and starvation, in jungle and caves, in denial of all demands of body and mind, till physical exhaustion to the point of a complete breakdown made it impossible for the mind to apply its keenness to psychological truths. Through failure he began to understand that the world of desire and self is only in the mind and is thus entirely subjective. And so, in the realisation of non-self (*anatta*), by avoiding both extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, he found the middle path (*majjhima patipada*) and the peace he had been looking for so long. He failed because he had been searching for the truth outside himself, but through his failures he saw the truth of the falseness thereof; and he taught that to the world. His was a final victory, for in conquering himself, he had conquered the whole world.

The rest of his life, another 45 years, was spent in rousing others from their sleep to action, lethargy to life. His compassionate heart is cool and free from passion. His compassion does not stoop down to cure some bodily ailments, a cure which at most can last but for a couple of years; for, from the woe of death a cure there is not. He does not cure effects or symptoms, but he prevents causes. His was the understanding of suffering without the weakness of tears.

The simplicity in his way of teaching and in his way of living is truly awe-inspiring, and as a religious founder he stands as a reproach to the sophisticated dogmatists, as a perfect example of truth which shines in its simplicity and needs no brilliant

setting of supernatural adornment. Without submissive devotion to some deity, without the offensive arrogance of materialism, he points out the way which he had walked himself. In his life and in his teaching there is no complication of mystery and faith, of grace and predilection. The oneness of his aim and thought has given clearness to his words. Over and over again has he warned us against speculation: life is not an argument, it is a process of action. And thus, Buddhism remains up to this date a living religion, where deep philosophic thoughts mingle with the actions of daily life. It is the simple way, the normal life, which he taught us for 45 years, till he himself no exception to the universal law of impermanence, passed away from this world, leaving us his "norm" (*dhamma*) as our teacher to venerate and to follow, till we would attain that same deliverance of heart and mind in the realisation of non-self.

Thus we must view the Buddha not as a saviour, but as a teacher who identifies himself with his teaching: "He who sees the teaching, sees me". His teaching, however, will be of no avail to us, unless we are prepared to put it into practice. For the truth is realisation, and that has to be done by each one for himself (*paccattam veditabba*).

The Four Noble Truths

The first discourse of the Buddha was delivered to the five ascetics who had been his companions in the days of his asceticism as a Bodhisatta. It is to them that he first expounded those noble truths discovered by him. There was no supernatural revelation of a divine, eternal truth, but a clear statement which nobody needs to believe, which everyone can test for himself.

No truth about the beginning in the past or an infinite future, but a simple statement about the present, daily life of everyone, yet a statement so deep that it required the enlightenment of a Buddha to discover it, a truth which cannot be fully understood, unless it is experienced. It is the truth of disharmony, of sorrow, of suffering, of dissatisfaction, of conflict.

Everybody knows that there is sorrow and suffering in the world; even a hungry street-dog knows that. That is not a truth, but a truism. The Buddha, and he alone of all thinkers of all times, however, points out that everything is sorrow-fraught. He shows not only that death is sorrow, but even birth as the necessary condition from which all sorrow springs, and life itself which is but a process of change. For it is in change that lies the disharmony, which is the root of sorrow and conflict. The very fact of striving for better, for rest, for satisfaction, proves the existence of evil, of unrest, of dissatisfaction. And that is found in everything which is composed, because by its very composition it tends towards decomposition. In the impermanent nature of a

process of change is found the reason of sorrow, disharmony and conflict.

But why should impermanence always result in sorrow? The sorrow of one is not always the sorrow of all. One does not experience change as sorrow or as conflict, unless it is linked with oneself. I feel sorrow over the loss of my relations, not for their parting, but for my loss, because they are my relations. And if that same loss happens to someone else, not known to me, it leaves me unmoved. Thus, the cause of the feeling of sorrow is selfishness. This is the second noble truth: the source of all conflict (*dukkhasamudaya*) is attachment, craving, clinging. Owing to desires there is discontentment. Trying to satisfy desires is like pouring oil in a lamp.

The only way to remove that discontentment and disharmony, which is conflict within oneself, is by means of the removal of its cause: craving. This is the third noble truth: the cessation of craving will produce the end of conflict (*dukkhanirodha*). It is the diagnosis of a disease and the advice of an operation. It may seem very pessimistic thus to put conflict in the centre around which to build up a system of philosophic thought and of moral living, but Buddhism is not pessimistic, for at the same time when craving is shown as the cause of all sorrow and conflict, is also given the means of deliverance from both craving and conflict. Buddhism does not strive to replace sorrow with happiness, or impermanence by eternity, or a process of change by an everlasting soul. One cannot say either that Buddhism is optimistic. An eternity without change would be so boring as to become unbearable, and an impermanent process of change would be preferable, even if that would involve dissatisfaction. Buddhism is not out for happy feelings and emotions, because they are not lasting. The end of the teaching of the Buddha is just the removal of conflict; and that is bliss! that is actuality.

The means of deliverance is the fourth noble truth. Which is the path for the removal of conflict. It is called the noble eightfold path (*ariya atthangika magga*), because it is composed

of eight sections which have to be trodden simultaneously and not successively. It is a middle path avoiding all extremes of self-indulgent materialism and self-mortifying idealism. It is a path of understanding and practice, a culture of intellect and will, in which right understanding (*samma-dit̥ṭhi*) forms the basis of any further development, for it is lack of understanding which is the chief cause of evil. All wrong is misunderstanding of what is the real good. If everything is understood as a mere process of change, which, if one tries to lay hold of, must necessarily produce suffering and conflict, there will be no more craving for a delusion. It is this understanding of the real nature of things, of the cause of sorrow and of its cessation, which constitutes the beginning of deliverance. Understanding of right and wrong, as skilful and unskilful in action and effect, will produce the essential self-control. It is the light by which one is able to see the road on which to travel.

Right intention (*samma saṅkappa*) gives the proper guidance to the mind; it gives direction to actions which are neutral in themselves, but become good through good intention which is pure, and bad through an evil intention with an impure motive. Without the guidance of this right intention all understanding might remain mere speculative knowledge. But through a correct view the understanding of abstract truths will be focussed on the proper object, through which a theoretical truth can become of practical value.

Right speech (*samma vācā*) is the control of language by which will be avoided all lies, slander, harsh or abusive language and even frivolous talk. The tongue has been compared to the rudder of a ship, He who can control his language will have his whole person under control. But right speech requires also the utterance of the proper word at the proper time, words of admonition and correction, if this is one's duty, words of encouragement in any good work, words of loving kindness, compassion or sympathy, as the case might require.

Right action (*samma kammanta*) is the perfection and comple-

tion of right speech. It constitutes the actual deed, contemplated by the mind, advised by the mouth, and finally performed by the body. It is repeated action which makes a habit; and it is habit which forms a character. Thus, man is finally what he has made himself. It is here that man's responsibility can be understood even in the performance of insignificant actions, for they all help to produce good or evil tendencies which will further influence subsequent actions.

Right livelihood (*samma ājīva*) requires a mode of living which involves no intentional harm to any living being, man or animal, directly or indirectly, by the use of weapons or the sale thereof, poison, intoxicants, by fraud or dishonesty. It will be seen how extremely difficult it is to live rightly in the world, where almost everyone tries to profit himself at the cost of someone else.

Right effort (*samma vāyāma*) avoids the two extremes of excessive zeal which brings only exhaustion and discouragement, and of laxity which never attains the goal. It is the effort to put away the evil that may have arisen, the effort to prevent the arising of evil which has not arisen yet, the effort to bring about the good which has not been performed yet, and the effort to increase the good which has been brought about already. Though the two extremes should be avoided, yet an unfaltering determination will be necessary, if one wishes to make progress on the path.

Right mindfulness (*samma sati*) is the penetrative application of the mind to the conditions, postures and actions of the body, the analysis of feelings as soon as they arise, awareness of the arising of thoughts, reflection on the different mental states. Thus, right mindfulness is mind-control and self-control in the highest sense and is pre-eminently fit for assisting in making progress on the path of mind-control and purification of the mind.

Right concentration (*samma samādhi*) is the developed state arising from the practice of objective delimitation or one-pointedness of mind. It is known in different degrees as preliminary-, access- and full concentration. In the highest de-

gree it will develop into mental absorption which, however, is not essential for the attainment of even the highest path and fruit of arahantship with the perfection of insight.

Analysis of the Mind

Mind is the fact and the act of thinking, and is not a substance, a soul, or a principle which is the cause of thinking. As there is no walk apart from walking, so there is no thought apart from thinking. Thus, the mind is a process of thinking. This can only be realised by analysis of the mind, i.e. analysis of the process of thinking. This process is shown in Buddhism in four stages of which only the last one produces a full-grown thought with responsibility of action (*kamma*). When the process of thinking is very weak (*atiparitta*) and ceases before attaining to any strength, it will not even emerge from the subconscious stream. Such is the logical sequence of thought, undisturbed by any influence, the “logic” of dreams, when motives do not interfere and even non-sense makes sense. A disturbance may be caused by the introduction of a new object or event, a new thought or i.e. introducing itself, and causing a vibration (*calana*). If this vibration increases, the disturbance might even become an obstruction in the subconscious flow, trying to force it into new lines of thinking. This moment is called the interrupting of the sub-consciousness (*bhavang’upaccheda*). But a very weak thought process will not be able to arrest the stream. There might have been a reception by the senses, but not enough impression was made to cause a perception. Then there was a sensation (*vedanā*) which did not grow up to become a recognised perception (*saññā*).

It is the faculty of attention (*avajjana*) by which the objects are perceived. This, however, does not happen all of a sudden. First,

there is a simple awareness of a disturbance at one of the sense-doors, without perceiving as yet the cause of the disturbance. It is the first step towards cognition, emerging from the subconscious. But the object itself is not yet perceived. This takes place, though only in an imperfect way, when the disturbance is specified as a visible shape, or an audible sound, etc. This is followed by a mental reaction, when the sensuous impression is being accepted actively by recipient or presentative cognition (*sampaṭicchana*) without being assimilated. Investigation of the object (*santīraṇa*) is a mere examination without the passing of a judgement. It is analysis pure and simple.

Only now comes in the determining or deciding factor (*voṭṭhapaṇa*) which establishes the received object (*vedanā*) which has now become perceived (*saññā*), by placing it in some class or definition, thereby differentiating it from others. This is the proper work of the mental formations (*saṅkhāra*). Yet, even this synthesis, following the analysis of the previous thought-moment, does not constitute full intellectual knowledge. The object is known in reception (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) and conception (*saṅkhāra*), but still wants the aggression in the full conscious mind (*viññāna*). Certain reactions occur even if the object does not penetrate deeper into consciousness. For, if objects with a weak constitution (*paritta*) present themselves, they might elicit some reaction, but their impression does not survive this stage of determination, it will sink back again in the stream of the subconscious (*bhavaṅga-sota*).

The Buddhist conception of the sub-conscious is not exactly the same as the view taken on this point by modern psychologists. Buddhism is essentially the teaching of becoming without an ego-entity (*anattavada*), while other systems of psychology are at least “subconsciously” based on the soul-theory, so fundamental to all theistic religions, where modern psychology understands the subconscious or the unconscious as a lower level of consciousness, subsisting together with, although below, the conscious mind, thus postulating as it were a dual plane of thought which

may take parallel or even opposite directions—the Buddhist conception of subconsciousness is not that, for it does not subsist together with consciousness, but is cut off (*bhavang'upaccheda*), as soon as an adverting thought-moment (*avajjana*) arises by which the attention is turned to the sense-doors. The arresting of the subconscious stream, therefore, must be understood as an interference with the thought-current by an external object or internal reflection, without which the stream of thought would have continued its logical, normal process of thinking. The difference between subconsciousness (*bhavaṅga*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) is that the first has no relationship to external objects in this world, but only to mental reflections thereof, while the latter is the full apperception (*javana*) of both.

When perception itself is cognized, mental conception in the full sense of apperception (*javana*) arises, and together with it the reflection on the resultants, thus constituting *kamma*. All previous thought-moments constituted more knowledge in different degrees, but here sets in the knowledge of that knowledge, the willed interpretation of the perceived impression to oneself. Only a thought-process of strong intensity (*mahanta*) will produce active consciousness in which intentional grasping of the object (*cetana*) is the essential factor which constitutes *kamma*. If a thought-unit, owing to weakness, does not mature into this stage, no *kamma* is formed and thus no result (*vipāka*) will follow. But if the intensity was very great (*atimahanta*) there will follow two more resultant moments of identification and registration. With this a thought-unit has run its full course and sinks again below the stream of the subconscious from where it emerged, which it arrested for the infinitesimal small period of its vibrations, and which can now again resume its flow, enriched with the new experience.

Each thought differs from the previous one in its composition by the concomitants of its mental factors (*cetasikā*). There is no thought without mental factors, and there is no consciousness without thought, which is but a unit of consciousness in the pro-

cess of thinking. It is the composition of these mental factors, their combination with good or with evil factors which make a thought good or evil. It is not the mind possessing different faculties, just as a river does not contain the water, but is itself the water and the bed and the banks and the source and the bends and the mouth; and above all, the flow. Mental perception is not a perception by the mind, as ink is absorbed by blotting paper. Sensations, perceptions, investigation, determination, registration, are not really parts of, but form the thought when they become conscious. Even the main division of mind (*nāma*) into sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations, (*sankhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), does not imply that mental sensations can be found somewhere separately, because we can only recognise a sensation when we are aware of its presence; but then it has passed already through the whole thought-process. Thus, apperception will always be a sensation, as it would not be perceived unless sensed. When we turn inward, we find only phenomena; and there is no ground to accept a spirit or soul behind them to receive our impressions. Thus the analysis of the mind-process leads us to the understanding of soullessness (*anatta*).

Soullessness

Even though all are aware of the constant change which is characteristic especially to the process of thought, yet many have the conviction and the inner assurance that there is something in their personality which is the unchanging bearer of all those changing phenomena, a permanent entity which makes them realise all those impermanent sensations and perceptions as theirs, and nobody else's. It is the individuality of the process which is misunderstood as an unchanging "ego"; and thus the delusion is created of an immortal, spiritual, permanent soul.

Just as colour, taste and any other sensation cannot exist purely as such, but can only be experienced and even thought of as inherent in an object; and as an object cannot be thought of without any of those inherent qualities without which no sensation, no cognition could be obtained, so that we must say that the object does not *have* those phenomena as additional qualities, but *is* the composition of those changing phenomena—so in the same way the sensations and perceptions are not changing experiences of an unchanging mind or soul, but the mind is, as a process of thinking, composed of those mental phenomena, apart from which there is no mind at all.

Thus actions cannot be separated from the doer, for the actions make the actor. Apart from action, no actor can even be thought of. But actions, owing to their very nature of acting, are a constant process of change. And therefore, whom we call conveniently the doer or actor, he too is nothing but a constant process of change;

for, if there would be no change, there would be no action either. A permanent entity, however, ought to be always the same, because a process of change cannot be called a permanent entity. Thus, to speak of a permanent soul as the performer of changing actions is a gross contradiction. That which is considered as the individual "self", that means, that which is entirely "mine" and not another's, is always identified with action. The process of nutrition which is designated when it is said: "I eat", is totally distinct from the process which is indicated by saying: "he eats". But the distinction between individual processes does not make of those individuals anything else but processes. And thus Buddhism does not deny individuality in the some of a process, but only individuality in the sense of a permanent entity or soul.

Those who maintain to the contrary that the changing mind is supported by an unchanging soul, would have to prove their point. And that can be easily disposed of. If a soul, or a substance, or an entity is permanent, it cannot be material, because whatever is of matter is composed and hence liable to decomposition, which would make it impermanent. Thus, what is permanent must also be immaterial, and therefore in its action and working be independent from matter. Hence, there is the necessity to prove (by the upholders of the soul-theory) that the actions of will and mind, which are supposed by them to be faculties of the soul, are activities which are not dependent on matter, in order to conclude therefrom the spiritual and permanent nature of the soul. Such are called proofs from internal evidence.

Now, general ideas are considered by them to be independent of matter. General ideas are abstract ideas. But their actual existence must be challenged. General ideas, arising in a thought-process are not general at all, for they can only be thought of as particular ideas. Thus, the word "colour" seems to convey a general idea, but actually, colour must be a particular colour, red, green, blue, etc., and without such particular qualifications the very i.e. of colour is unthinkable. General ideas are mere words but not ideas. Things can only be thought of in relation

to manifold conditions, all of which limit and particularise them. Immaterial concepts such as ideals of virtue, strength, love, truth, beauty, justice, are not actually immaterial, as they have been derived from material experiences, "general" ideas from particular sensations. Ideals are never found *in abstracto* not even in the mind. For, abstract ideas are simply concepts, compared and classified after removing from them some individual characteristics. But the stripping of matter of some or even all its material qualities does not change matter into spirit; it merely destroys the original, leaving a delusion. That the so-called immaterial concepts are mere delusions is proved by the fact that they have no absolute value: concepts of virtue, beauty, justice, etc. have changed very much in the course of time and they vary greatly with different stages of civilisation. But that which has no absolute, stable value and is subject to change, can therefore not be the work of a permanent entity, as the soul is supposed to be.

Not only the working of the mind is bound up with matter, but even more so the working of the will. Because the will is a blind faculty, which can only will that which is proposed by the intellect. If a wrong choice is made, it is due to a faulty intelligence. If, therefore, the mind has already been proved to be material, the same must be said about the will which depends on information from the intellect. The object of the will, therefore, is always some particular good and that is always material. Moreover, the will does not choose at all; it is merely attracted by different motives proposed by the intellect, and it will invariably follow the greatest attraction. When there are no objects to choose from, there can be no will. And if there are objects to choose from, they will influence the mind, which thereby becomes dependent, so that the will is never free. What is not free cannot be immaterial, cannot be the working of an immaterial and permanent entity.

It was only human egoism and craving for a permanent existence which created the delusion of a soul, where there is nothing but the uninterrupted process of change and impermanence. It is in Buddhism alone that actuality forms the basis of all further

thinking. Where the soul-i.e. is the result of emotional feeling, and is supported only by sentimental evidence, such as the opinion of many people, the doctrine of soullessness stands firmly supported by reason and experience. This doctrine of “*anatta*” forms the basis of Buddhist philosophy; for, all psychoanalysis leads only to the discovery of mental factors, mental phenomena, mental aggregates, mental states, but not discovering a permanent mind underneath as a substance or a soul. The understanding of soullessness cuts short all futile speculation about infinity and eternity, for in a process of change no beginning and no end can be pointed out; for, there every beginning, is also cessation. In a process of change nothing fixed can be pointed out, just because it is proceeding; and in making, it is also unmaking itself. Just as all composition means at the same time the decomposition of other conditions and factors, so the individual process has no beginning, but is beginning always; it has no end, but is ending always in impermanence and soullessness.

Morality

The doctrine of soullessness does not only form the one safe foundation for philosophic thought, but it is at the same time the only basis on which it is possible to build a system of true morality. Ethics is applied philosophy, and if pure philosophy has led us to the discovery that an individual is not an entity remaining unchanged under externally changing appearances, but a mere selfless process—then morality, based on such a philosophy, will be the purest and most actual; it will be a selfless morality. Ethical systems based on the need of salvation of an eternal soul, will necessarily be selfish. That kind of self-centred morality is actually immoral.

There are two ideas of morality: to be good and to do good. Only the first one is real morality. The second one may be a means: one can do good in order to become good, but this is rare. People do good actions, which appear entirely altruistic; yet fundamentally they are egoistic, motivated by acquisitiveness, desire for merit, bliss, heaven, reward, or even motivated by fear to avoid punishment, purgatory, hell. All those so-called good actions are inspired by selfishness. But if the doctrine of soullessness is well understood, all selfish motives will be absent. Then one will only be good, and be in harmony with all through the absence of selfish isolation. Then alone will love be pure and perfect by necessity; it will be without limitation, restriction and bondage, because it does not make a distinction between self and others. Love which loves some in preference to others is self-love,

because it is based on choice. Love which is limited is hatred, because it is exclusive and breeds opposition and conflict.

“Moral standards”, said Jawaharlal Nehru, “should not be based on a highly metaphysical doctrine of sin, but should be in relation to social needs”. Good in Buddhism stands for mental brightness (*sobhana*) and for skilfulness (*kusala*), while any wrong action is rooted in ignorance and delusion (*moha*). It is the not-understanding of the real value of things which makes man crave and cling to that which leads to harm. Sin involves the i.e. of offence. But, if nature is a mere process of evolution and change, which knows nothing of a supreme ruler who makes it go according to permanent laws, then a transgression of that law of nature cannot be a sin or an offence, though it will carry with it the undesirable effects which follow any unskilful action. To eat unripe fruit is not a sin, but it will produce indigestion. Evil effects, therefore, are not a punishment, but they are the logical consequences following an irrational act. Only in the ignorant an evil effect will produce that feeling of guilt and sin, which is at the bottom of most religious, emotions, a feeling which is fed by faith and fear.

A person with a well developed sense of responsibility will not feel himself burdened with the load of sin and guilt and punishment. For, if he knows his wrong, he has become a wiser man and will not repeat the same mistake. He will know that every deed contains a certain amount of energy which one day under favourable circumstances will produce a proportionate effect. On the desirability of that effect, seen in the light of pure understanding (*samma diṭṭhi*), depends the goodness or the evil of an action. Unskilfulness (*akusala*) is “indexterity of behaviour, contrary to the skill that ought to be exercised, or that behaviour which is soiled by the blameworthy effect of ill”⁸.

To a Buddhist, therefore, there are no commandments, as there is no law-giver. But there is an appeal to common sense

⁸Commentary to the *samma-diṭṭhi sutta*: Majjh. Nik. 9

and to social sense: Always act in such a way that, if all would act similarly, this life in this world would be a happier one. Thus there must be intellectual control over our actions, words and thoughts. For, it is only intellectual control which can avoid the extremes of the purely mechanical reaction of determinism, of the blind submission of fatalism and of the dangerous guidance of emotionalism. Ideas of right and wrong are not in-born, instinctive inclinations, but intellectual developments. It is this right understanding which must be the guide of morality. Hence a Buddhist, instead of blindly obeying commandments, freely undertakes to abstain from doing evil (*veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*) which would produce undesirable effects to others and to himself.

The unskilful act of killing requires five conditions: the fact and the presence of a living being, human or animal; subjective knowledge of that objective life; the intention to kill; the act of killing by appropriate means; and finally the consequent death. If one condition, e.g. the intention, would be absent, even if death would follow, it would not be killing, but an accident which would not entail any evil effect for the performer of that act. Similarly, five conditions are required to complete an act of theft: property held by another; knowledge of the same; intention to steal; the proper method; and consequent theft. Sensual, rather than sexual, misbehaviour is not only the intercourse with any woman under protection of her relations, clan or law, or with any woman bound by obligation to her husband or to others by contract, but any unnatural gratification of the senses, such as the use of intoxicants which bemuddle the mind and thus indirectly frustrate attainment and deliverance. Lying, slander, abusive language and frivolous talk are four kinds of wrong speech which affect adversely subject and object.

But even if the wicked action as deed or word is not successful owing to unforeseen circumstances, the mere intention to do evil is already unskilful, namely by creating an undesirable disposition in the mind. This may be a thought of craving (*abhijja*), of

aversion (*vyapada*) or of wrong opinions (*miccha ditthi*). Such unskilful thoughts have only two factors, namely the object and the desire. Ultimately, therefore, we may say that the criterion of evil is the amount of desire which produces the act of deed, sword or thought. Craving, aversion and wrong opinions are otherwise called greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*), the three roots of all evil.

Thus, in Buddhist morality good is not absolute; but an act becomes good if it is related to a good effect. As beauty, so goodness is subjective. Hence in Buddhism good and beautiful (*sobhana*) are synonymous. Just as there is a common standard of taste which decides beauty or ugliness, so morality is judged by the common sense of right and wrong, of usefulness and need. But ultimately all desire for good and bad alike is unskilful, because it leads to rebirth, the source of all sorrow, conflict, evil and selfishness.

Kamma and Rebirth

Actions good or bad lead to reactions good or bad. And inversely it must be true that good reactions must have been produced by good actions, just as evil effect is the result of an unskilful act. The force, the energy, the reproductive cause in an act which strives to express itself is called “*kamma*” (or karma). It is an action, not purely mechanical, but originated in the mind with its purposeful striving and intention. Thus the essence of karma is mental craving. That life is an effect of craving is shown by the different tendencies, which are not due to education and environment, for some of those tendencies are visible much earlier than environment could influence, and sometimes even develop contrary to the influences of education and environment. Where have they originated?

Birth shows not only different tendencies, but the very conditions at birth under which a new life starts its sorrowful course vary greatly. If those differences are ordered by a supreme creator, then who is responsible for the disorder? If those differences are present at the moment of conception—for the mother’s conditions are those of the unborn child—their causes must be found even before that. And this is how the doctrine of karma necessitates the doctrine of rebirth. A good rebirth is then dependent in its arising and origin on a previous life.

Not all good karma, not all evil karma, will produce its effects by necessity. If this were so, an escape from this repeated round of rebirths would indeed be impossible. If every individual action

were to produce a corresponding reaction, every present would produce a future in eternity. If every seed of every fruit would produce a new plant with its new fruits and seeds, very soon there would be not even standing room on this planet. Then, every single evil action, producing an evil effect, would be the cause of evil conditions under which only new evil actions could be performed, producing ever more evil effects and reactions, an infinite hell indeed.

The teaching of karma, however, is not one of absolute causality, but rather of conditional efficacy. The fact of the effectiveness of an action, whether it will produce fruits at all, is dependent on other actions performed previously, which by their continued influence may strengthen, modify or even nullify and prevent subsequent action; in their reproductive efforts—or on other actions performed afterwards, which with their next strength and reproductive efficacy may produce a change for better or for worse, or even totally inhibit the results of earlier action.

The reproductivity of an action (*janaka kamma*) is the inherent strength natural to any act to continue its process of action, passing on its strength and expressing itself in an effect (*vipāka*) according to its nature. Thus, a skilful action (*kusala kamma*) will have the natural tendency to produce a good result (*kusala vipāka*). But whether this effect will take place at all depends on other conditions. When some subsequent action is of the same kind, it will, of course, support its predecessor (*upatthambhaka kamma*) and thus make good action better and bad action worse. If subsequent action is not of the same kind, it will modify (*upapīdika kamma*) the previous results. The amount of change will here depend on the different strengths of the two competing courses, and the result will be a proportionate average-mean. Thus, good will become less good and evil will become less evil, as the supervening action tends to interfere with resultants of other actions. If this interference is so complete that it is not only counteraction, but destructive (*upaghataka kamma*), the previously obtained effects will be annihilated. And so, not only

can action change the course of karma, but even fully obliterate it, thus resulting in a perfect balance where no more striving needs to disturb the equilibrium.

The inherent strength is different for every action. An action's potential efficacy depends entirely on the intensity of thought and volition put into the act. The strongest type (*garuka kamma*) is such that no interference will suffice to prevent its efficacy. The consequences of such an act are fixed for good or for bad, not as destiny in fatalism, but because, being the strongest, no other action can be stronger to impede their working. Such acts, however, are extremely rare, and the greater majority of one's daily actions, we may say, all the actions of an average life, do not come under this category. In our present age only a parricide would not be able to avoid or bye-pass the evil results of his act.

The next in order of strength is that action of wilful thought, which happens to be the last one in a life-span, for it is this death-proximate action (*asanna-kamma*) which logically produces the next thought, which, being the first in a new life-span, decides the sphere and conditions of that rebirth. Even in an all-good life this last thought might be unskilful and hence produce an effect in which the good actions of that life cannot find the opportunity to express themselves. They will have to wait as accumulated action (*katatta kamma*) till better opportunity prevails. Most of a person's actions will be performed through sheer habit. It is, therefore, this habitual tendency for acting, speaking and thinking (*acinna kamma*) which should form the main concern in the shaping of one's future. Habits are usually so strong that even the greatest determination will be required to bring about a slight improvement. It is usually this habitual karma which will be the decisive factor in this and any subsequent life.

On the composition of these different kinds of resultant actions, on their superior or inferior strength and influence will also depend the time in which they will be able to reproduce themselves, in this very life itself (*dittha dhamma*), in the immediately following life (*upapajja*) or in some indefinite future (*aparapariya*).

If, on the other hand, circumstances or other powerful actions do not allow a certain karma to produce its natural effect, that action will remain ineffective or inoperative (*ahosi kamma*), which is another chance whereby an escape from saṃsāra is possible.

Karma is thus a process of action with reaction. As a process it is not stable, it is not an immutable law, but it makes itself and may unmake itself, just as any process of evolution and involution. It is in the evolution of rebirth that the results of karma unroll themselves, spend their energy and dissolve themselves. Hence, karma is man's help and support (*paṭisaraṇa*), as well as his fetter (*bandhu*) to rebirth.

Spheres of Rebirth

When there are so many different kinds of action (*kamma*) which tend to reproduce themselves, it is natural and a logical necessity that there will be as many different kinds of reaction (*vipāka*). But, as long as there is a reactionary effectiveness, there will be rebirth. Hence, in discussions on the spheres where rebirth takes place, this should form the basis, that, wherever the combination of matter and mind is possible, there rebirth can take place. If this statement is well considered, one will naturally avoid the two extremes which maintain either the traditional view that the heavens are “above” and the hells “below”, whatever interpretation may be given to this allocation—or the materialistic and sceptic view that all heavens and hells are only to be sought for in this world and in this life. It would be a matter of utter surprise, if life, i.e. the combination of psycho-physical elements (*nāma-rūpa*), would only be found on this little globe which is only a minor satellite in the solar system and which is thereby dependent on the sun, which is only a star, one of those countless millions, not of first brilliancy. That this spot of dust would be the only sphere where life—not necessarily human life—would be possible, is imaginable only in a human intellect, grossly over-estimating its own importance. But neither should it be said that the different spheres of rebirth must always be in places other than those where human forms are found.

The very names of the spheres of rebirth as traditionally found in Buddhist literature, indicate their characteristic qualities, all

of which are not excluded from this very life. The planes of utter misery (*niraya*), so vividly described in books of old and painted on old temple-walls, are really only a very pale reflection of the suffering which some people have to undergo here in this world: the suffering of cancer patients, of soldiers dying on the battle field with horrible wounds undressed, with feverish thirst, a living death and hell; the suffering of high ideals roughly broken, of purest love misunderstood, of self-sacrifice ungratefully scorned.

The planes of the animal kingdom (*tiracchana-yoni*) are those of sensuality, whereto so many humans lower their lives in beastly immorality. Many times the animals show more faithfulness than men; always they show less craving. For rarely one finds among the animals that impossibility of being content with desires and needs satisfied, which is the cause of man's struggle with nature, which makes him hoard and worry about needs which have not arisen yet and thus form the basis for his greed.

In the planes of unsatisfiable desire (*peta-yoni*) avarice reigns supreme. Those ghostly, i.e. unnatural beings, collecting and hoarding, cannot enjoy even their own possessions. So many misers in this world are miserable through their avarice; they too will have to eat their own vomit, when they are treated without compassion, as they used to treat others. Their old age is lonely and without love, their death looked forward to by their relations, for it will set free the money which they would not part with in life.

In the planes of antagonism (*asura-yoni*) the leading vice is hate. These are the spheres in this world, too, of men who find their delight in contradicting, quarrelling, litigating, prosecuting, opposing any kind of work in which they could not take a leading part; the planes of destructive criticism, of hating even the good.

In this human world (*manussa-loka*) not many beings are found with the real human characteristics of compassion with others' misfortunes, of the understanding of others' weaknesses, of forgiveness of others' faults, of sincerity in speech, of readiness

to sacrifice oneself in order to help others. Let us hope that there be somewhere else in this universe a more-human world.

Next come six spheres, collectively called “*deva-loka*”, the spheres of the gods. But even these super-human spheres betray plenty of human qualities; and they are in fact only a sub-division of the spheres of sense (*kama-loka*). There are the planes of authority (*catumaha-rajika*) with all the low joys derived from bossing over others, the heavens of politicians and dictators.

Further there are the planes of the few selected ones (*tāvatiṃsa* = 32) who derive joy from virtue and merit, only very few indeed! In the planes of restraint (*yama*) all else is subdued through self-control, which easily may pave the way to that feeling of superiority and self satisfaction. Purer than those are the planes of contentment (*tusita*) where happiness is satisfied and unmarred by dissatisfaction in the absence of worry, the result of a life of true renunciation. The planes of joy in one’s own work (*nimmāna-rati*) reflect the experience of an artist who is able to express his ideal in a material form, in colour, in music or in poetry; it is surely also the experience of a mother who after the pangs of child-birth enjoys the rapture of motherhood. And then there are finally the planes of joy in the work of others (*paranimmita-vasavatti*) which, though the highest “*deva-loka*” are still experiencing the joys of the senses, the gratification experienced by an exploiter, a capitalist, an imperialist, who as a parasite lives on the fruits of the work of others. Just as humanity makes one love the animal world, so the very heavens make one aspire for a truly human life!

Far beyond those worlds of sense (*kama-loka*) are the mental spheres of those who lead a life of holiness (*brahmacari*), where the bodily senses will not seek further satisfaction, but where all striving is for the attainment of truth. Those spheres of holiness (*brahma-loka*) correspond to the spheres of mental concentration (*bhāvanā*) and absorption (*jhāna*), which can be experienced here on earth. They are the mental states of ecstasy induced by material forms (*rūpa-jhāna*) in different degrees of mental ap-

plication (*vitakka-vicāra*), of delightful interest (*pīti*), of mental well-being (*sukha*) and full concentration or one-pointedness of mind (*ekaggatā*).

When even form is transcended, mental life will be purer still (*arūpa-brahma-loka*) in the states of formless concentration, where beauty gives way to abstraction (*arūpa-jhāna*) and where the spheres of rebirth correspond to the mental attainments here on earth: the sphere of infinite space (*akasananā-*), of infinite consciousness (*vinnanā-*) of nothingness (*ākāraññā-*) where nothing can retain its value, and of imperceptible perception (*n'eva-saññā-n'asanna*) so pure that there is no conscious awareness of experiencing.

If even the noble path (*ariya-magga*), transcending all, can be trodden here on earth, for it is exactly among humans that the realisation of arahantship can be attained, why then should the minor and impermanent bliss of heaven be excluded from this world? By our own good actions we make new already our own heaven, by our own evil actions we also make a hell here on earth for ourselves and others.

Pure and unsoiled happiness is not to be found in a continuance of personality through rebirth, but rather in losing it through unselfish self-sacrifice, in readiness to serve, in the development of insight. Fear of hell cannot make man moral, but rather "The slow subduing of fear by the gradual growth of intelligence"⁹. Virtue is its own reward, while virtue which is practised for a reward-to-come is vice. Unless we are able to make our heaven here on earth, there is no guarantee that we shall be more successful elsewhere. If we would try to make our lives here less divine, we might become more human.

⁹George Eliot

Dependent Origination

To approach the subject of the origination of things, starting from an ultimate beginning, cannot be done by scientific, logic or empiric investigation, for the ultimate beginning does not lie within the sphere of investigation. This is the domain of faith and revelation, which are the earliest forms of scientific fiction. But, for those who have no faith but in their own intellect, and who do not accept any revelation but that of facts, this subject of the origination of things must be approached intellectually and factually. Thus, the starting point must be the experimental event of this life in this world.

Life has been shown already as an illusion, because the continuity of its process of change is taken for the real, substantial existence of a self-entity. When life is not seen as a deluding process, it will be loved and clung to, it will be reproduced and so continued. Yet, the very need of reproduction shows life as a process which is changing, i.e. dissolving and decaying in, re-making itself. And thus, with this event of change as decay and dissolution (*jara-maraṇa*) a beginning can be made with the search for the origin. Why is decay possible? Because there was growth; for, growth and decay are only two different aspects of the one process of change. Seen as evolution and involution, growth is decay. And just as decay is possible because there is growth, so death is possible because there is birth. “Dependent on birth is old age, decay and death” (*jāti-paccaya jara-maranam*).

In the chapter on karma we have seen already that the differ-

ences in birth can only rationally be explained by the admission of corresponding actions before birth. It is karma in the past which produces life in the present (*bhava-paccaya jāti*). Skilful action in the past expresses itself as a favourable reaction in the present, and unskilful action will produce an undesirable effect. It is thus this process of action (*kamma-bhava*) which forms the transition of one life to the next. Not an individual soul is passing over, not even a force goes from here to there; but the continuation of the process of change makes this condition change into that effect.

But why should this process of change continue? Why should it not come to a stop? This question is indeed the really great question about the problem of life. The fact of life is simple, even though some want to make it complicated. But, why should there be life at all? The fact that things change will be doubted by none. But, why should there be change? There must be change because there is no entity which could remain the same and at the same time be in action, Action means change. And action is there owing to the intrinsic urge for better and more. It is craving which begets clinging (*taṇhā-paccaya-upadanam*) and it is clinging which urges on the action, which is becoming the process of change (*upādāna-paccaya bhavo*)

This craving is the new deluded action in the present which produces a reaction of a new life in the future. But this action requires instruments to act with; and they are found in the results of actions in the past. Craving in the past produced rebirth in the present; and with that present life craving will again produce similar effects in the future.

The causes in the past were not essentially different from the causes in the present; and so the effects in the present give an image of the nature of the effects in the future, craving, clinging and the formation of karma (*taṇhā, upādāna, bhava*) are the real causes which forever renew this process of life. They work with the instruments which came from the past: relinking consciousness (*viññāna*), individuality in mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) with the six senses (*saḷ-ayatana*) through which contact (*phassa*) is

established, resulting in sensation (*vedanā*). Not all sensation, however, will produce craving, but only if sensation grasps the object with ignorance. Thus, the action of mind and body with insight will lead to the freedom and emancipation of arahantship, while that same action with ignorance will produce craving which binds to rebirth.

Just as the effects of a future life are dependent on the actions of the present, which are craving, clinging and karma (*taṇhā, upādāna, bhava*), so the present effects of an individual life were originated by similar causes in the past. The becoming of an action (*bhava*) is the formation of karma (*saṅkhāra*). Craving and clinging (*taṇhā, upādāna*) are due to ignorance (*avijjā*). It is in ignorance that this whole process of life originates; not origination, however, as an ultimate beginning of which there can be none in a process, but an origination which begins at every moment, because a process is always beginning.

The knowledge of the dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*) of this whole process of life will not solve the problem yet. For, even if one knows that ultimately one's sorrow is due to ignorance, conflict will not be less for that. It might rather be felt more, because of the discovery of one's ignorance. The main question should always remain: what is the solution of this problem?

If conflict is seen, however, as the only true viewpoint on life, it will not only show us the origin, but also the end. What is needed is the complete understanding of the first noble truth that all things are sorrow-fraught. Only when life is seen as entirely unsatisfactory, not merely as sorrow in life occasionally, but life as conflict essentially, only then will one honestly begin to seek for a solution thereof, instead of for some patch to cover sorrow with pleasure. In this search one will turn with confidence (*saddhā*) to him who has found the path, as one who knows his illness will turn to a physician. Only the ignorant, who take illness for health and who delight in conflict, will never seek and will never find release, But confidence in the possibility of a cure gives

already that joyful disposition (*pamojja*) which is the beginning of that rapturous delight of anticipation (*pīti*). Increased assurance and joyfulness of heart produce that self-reliance which gives tranquillity of mind (*passaddhi*). In peace of mind is found a bliss (*sukha*) superior to the excitement of previous rapture, and which thus leads the way to concentration (*samādhi*). Only in deep concentration and analysis of things and mind, all will be known and seen according to their real nature (*yata-bhuta-ñāṇa-dassana*). This will not be pleasing to the senses, but at this stage the mind is not any more after joy, but after truth. Then the following disgust (*nibbida*) with the world and self will be welcomed and developed into dispassionateness (*viraga*). That alone can bring release (*vimutti*) together with the knowledge of the waning of the passion (*khaye-ñāṇa*), which finally will culminate in the destruction of the cankers (*āsavakkhaya*) which led to rebirth.

Thus it is sorrow as conflict, which as a signpost points to the origin as well as to the ultimate deliverance from *samsāra*, the repeated round of becoming and decay.

Nibbāna

All striving would be senseless, if one would not know the goal. While striving for happiness, one might be able to attain the goal of that particular ideal, but as all happy feelings and sensations, perceptions and experiences must necessarily be impermanent—because where there is origination, there must be cessation—they will not be able to give lasting satisfaction. If a war has to be fought all over again, as it did not bring a final victory, it was not worth fighting for. Our goal must be final, otherwise it is no goal at all. If happy feelings of body and mind are not lasting and therefore do not differ in kind but only in degree from pain and sorrow, the goal must be in the overcoming of them all.

Joy and sorrow have only subjective value, for they arise in an individual mind as a reflection of individual tendencies. As reflections have no real value in themselves, joy and sorrow are merely the reflection of a deluded “self”; and they can only be overcome by the dissolution of that hallucination. The extinction of that delusion is called Nibbāna. Once that delusion of “self” has been conquered, there can be no more subjection to the vicissitudes of joy and sorrow; and that is really happiness supreme: *Nibbamam paramam sukham*. It is not the happiness of a sensational nature, but happiness in the freedom from all sensation and from subjection to the delusion of the senses; freedom from the conflict caused by delusion.

As feeling is the condition, in dependence whereon craving arises (*vedanā-paccaya taṇhā*), Nibbāna is the extinction of all

craving, of all roots of evil, of greed, hate and delusion. And because craving and clinging lead only to rebirth, the cessation of clinging will also be the end of rebirth (*upādānanirodha bhava-nirodho*). Thus we arrive at the most concise and comprehensive definition of Nibbāna as “the end of becoming” (*bhava-nirodho Nibbānaṃ*).

Life means sorrow and conflict, hence Nibbāna is peace, Becoming means change, hence Nibbāna is the changeless (*dhuva*). Birth means death, hence Nibbāna is the deathless (*amata*). Change means impermanence, hence Nibbāna is permanent (*nicca*). The body is formed, hence Nibbāna is unformed (*akata*). The mind is complex, hence Nibbāna is void (*sunyata*). All things are composed, hence Nibbāna is uncomposed (*asaṅkhata*).

But, if Nibbāna is no-more-becoming, no-more-rebirth, no-more-change, no formation of body, no complexity of mind, no thing composed, is Nibbāna then the annihilation of all that is? The Buddha himself denies that his teaching implies the destruction and annihilation of a being, for the plain reason that his teaching is based on the truth of non-entity (*anatta*). How could he teach the annihilation of something, the very existence of which he denies?

Life is understood and taught by the Buddha as a process of craving and ignorance and hence of conflict. His teaching leads to the cessation of craving and ignorance and sorrow. And therefore, Nibbāna is the cessation of becoming. That this deathless state has been attained can be known from the absence of ignorance and craving, as seen in the absence of fear. As conflict arises wherever there is craving, thus wherever craving is absent there is no conflict; and that is Nibbāna. This realisation, however, cannot be communicated, as it is the cessation of an individual process.

According to the teaching of the Buddha, desire for realisation means desire for the preservation of a fictitious “self” and that is the first and perhaps the strongest fetter, the heresy of individuality (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), which will block even the entrance

to the path of holiness. Just because there is no self (*anatta*), Nibbāna can only be explained by negations, though the best explanation would be absolute silence, not only of words, but of thoughts and ideas. If Nibbāna could be felt or attained positively, it would be conditioned by and dependent on the aggregates of existence, which themselves are subject to impermanence and objects of conflict.

Yet, Nibbāna does not exclude those five aggregates of mind and body, for it is exactly in this human form that the best opportunities are found for the overcoming of the fetters which bind to rebirth. These ten fetters (*samyojana*) are gradually released when progress towards Nibbāna is made. To enter the stream, which unmistakably will flow to the ocean of deliverance, one must be free from the delusion of self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), for “self” is ignorance and craving, rebirth and sorrow. Yet this is only the beginning, the entering of the stream (*sotāpatti*). One must be free also of doubt (*vicikiccha*), for doubt about the possibility of release will always prevent one from seeing directly, while doubt about the conditionally generated mental states will make one careless of consequences. Dependency on rites and rituals (*silabbata-paramasa*) is the third fetter which must be broken to enter upon this path of holiness and insight. It is the wrong view that realisation can be attained by the observation of ceremonial rites or ascetic habits, the infatuation, the delusion that ritualistic observances suffice to attain deliverance.

The second stage is that of him who has weakened his lust for sense-pleasures (*kāmacchanda*) and his antipathetic feelings (*vya-pada*) to such an extent that he will be reborn in this world only once more. He is therefore called a “once-returner” (*sakadāgāmi*). When those two fetters of lust and hate have completely been removed, there will be no more coming back to this world of sense (*kama-loka*). He is called a “non-returner” (*anāgāmi*) to this world, but will attain deliverance in a higher and purer sphere, that is the third stage.

Only when the five last obstacles will have been removed,

desire for life in worlds of form (*rūparāga*) or in formless spheres (*arūparāga*), conceitful pride which says “I am” (*māna*), mental agitation (*uddhaca*) which is lack of balance and equanimity, and finally ignorance (*avijjā*), the root of all evil and of evil roots (*lobha, dosa*)—Arahantship will have been attained, which is the realisation of Nibbāna in this life itself with the remainder of the effects of past karma (*sa-upadisesa-nibbāna*), the extinction of the passions with the continuation of life. Of this state it may be said positively that it is mental enlightenment, insight, a state of happiness, calm, peace, self-mastery, steadfastness, victory, truth, perfection, bliss supreme, realisation.

But, when finally at the death of an arahant even the results of past karma have been outlived, when even the remnants of the aggregates of clinging will be broken up (*an-upadisesa-nibbāna*), then truly Nibbāna may be called freedom (*mokkha*), the great release (*vimutti*), deliverance.

About the Author

Henri van Zeyst was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, in 1905. Educated throughout in Catholic schools and colleges, he spent his final years of studies in philosophy and theology and the first year of his priestly ordination in an Italian monastery near Florence. At the age of 31 he was sent to London to be in charge of a new foundation of his Order, where he was also teaching Dogmatic Theology to the scholastics of Christus Rex Priory in North London. An intensive course of comparative religion brought him in contact with Buddhism. Within a year of his coming to Sri Lanka he was ordained a Buddhist monk there in 1938 under the name of Bhikkhu Dhammapāla. From 1956 to 1968 he worked at the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya of which he was in the final years of that period the Senior Assistant Editor and Administrative Officer. During the last stages of his life he was residing in a meditation centre at Nilambe, Kandy, giving instructions to those who came to him for guidance on meditation.

He died on September 15th in 1988.