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Escape to Reality
Buddhist Essays

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by

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Life or Death?

By his own deeds the fool is consumed, as by a fire.

—Dhammapada

In an address delivered at Oslo, when he was awarded the Noble Prize for Peace, that great humanitarian, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, spoke for all humanity when he said: “Let us face the facts. Man has become a superman. Not only has he innate physical forces at his command but, thanks to science and to technical advancement, he controls the latent forces of nature. But this superman suffers from a fatal imperfection. He has not raised himself to that superhuman level of reason which should correspond to the possession of superhuman strength.” This is the Great Show-down. The latent forces of nature, which man now controls, will destroy man as readily as they will serve him. They are mindless and efficient, like a razor: It is for man to decide whether to shave—or cut his throat. The razor does not care. It waits, supremely indifferent. Can we raise ourselves to that superhuman level of reason necessary for our survival on this planet? Are we mature enough to realise that we cannot destroy each other any longer without destroying ourselves? A lot depends on the answers to these questions.

They will make all the difference between a common home and a common cemetery.

We cannot help feeling that the scientists, with their technical advances, have thrust this problem on humanity too soon. The big decisions are not in the hands of the most mature, as they should be. Great wisdom, or what Dr. Schweitzer calls a "superhuman level," is not manifest in the public utterances of those who wield political power. At times the thinking man is aghast at the childish things the leaders say. Some of them still seem to think in terms of cavalry charges, fortresses, and waving banners when they speak of war. They still talk of war as a way of "making the world safe" for this, that or the other ideology. They seem to forget that if there is another war, on a big scale, such survivors as are left will not have time to bother with ideologies. It will be a big, dead, poisoned world, and men will have more pressing things to think about.

"All worldlings are mad," said the Buddha, and we may well accept this as the simple truth. If we ever doubt it, we need only open a newspaper or switch on the radio. In whatever country the newspaper is printed, from whatever country the broadcast comes, the proof is as convincing. Nice bold type, nice clear voices, telling us in unmistakable terms that we human beings are doing everything except think. But now we *must* think. It is easy to turn away from this problem, of the survival of humanity, and seek refuge in some mental or physical dope. But this is no solution. We *must* face the facts. Humanity must grow up or perish. It

must grow up fast, or perish fast. There is not much time. We must scrap all ideologies that call for the liquidation of those who do not agree with us. We must abandon the sort of nationalism that regards with distrust and hatred the people of other nations. We must think of ourselves henceforth as human beings, sharing one world. We must begin *now* or it will be too late.

How can we attain this maturity of mind? The Buddha taught the way, more than 2500 years ago. He spoke to individuals, to thinking individuals, but his message holds good for all humanity. He said, "All things are subject to change. Do not grasp. Let go-and be free."

There has never been a war but arose from greed for land, greed for trade, greed for power, greed for all the transient phenomena of life, leading inevitably to strife. Let go, and strife ceases. Think of the other fellow as a human being, with nothing to gain except your common weal, and strife ceases. Help him, and you help yourself. It does not matter what language he speaks, what political opinions he holds. You share the same planet, breathe the same air, need the same food. You cannot destroy him and survive. Your fate is linked with his.

Are You Grown-up?

If, by renouncing some slight happiness,
one may behold a larger one,
Let the wise man renounce the smaller,
considering the greater.

—Dhammapada

The capacity to renounce a small, immediate happiness in order to secure some greater, more distant happiness is a mark of maturity. Few children have it, and those who do are really more mature than many adults. It means clear vision, sound judgment, and self-control, all of which are signs of a truly adult mind.

Many people go through life without ever growing up. They find it impossible to resist the temptation of immediate pleasures. Under the wise guidance and control of some mentally older person, they may forego such pleasures and pursue a line of action which yields greater happiness in the long run. But it is not of their own independent choice. Given the necessary opportunity and freedom to decide for themselves, they will fritter away their time and energy in the pursuit of the moment's

pleasures, letting the future look after itself.

For such people, a theistic religion is a great help. It serves as a steadying and guiding influence. They are like children who need a wise parent, a parent who rewards virtue and punishes vice, who encourages honest endeavour and discourages laziness.

But, as Ingersoll once said, in nature are no rewards or punishments. There are only consequences. A man who plants a fruit tree, tends it carefully, and waits patiently, is not “rewarded” when at last it bears fruit. He may die before that happens, or the fruit may be indigestible for him because of some change in his personal chemistry. But the fruit appears all the same, not in order to reward him but because that is the way of nature. It is the same when a man trains a puppy badly and it grows up into a surly dog. The dog may or may not bite him, and if it does happen, it will not be a “punishment.” It will merely be a consequence of bad training.

To the Buddhist, *all* phenomena are consequences, including all personal phenomena. However pleasant or painful they may be, he does not regard them as the rewards or punishments dispensed by some Supreme Being. He accepts them as the results of his own kamma, his own past actions and thoughts. He stands on his own feet and moulds his own destiny, in this and in future lives. It is a religion for adults. For this very reason, it does not appeal to those who lack mental maturity. It is too free, too unsheltered, but, to

the mature, it is the only reasonable and acceptable way of life.

Accepting this doctrine of personal responsibility, the Buddhist faces life fairly and squarely. He can pursue the slight happiness offered by the world of the senses, or, if he has clear vision, sound judgment, and self-control, he can forego such happiness and seek something infinitely higher. What is this "something"? It is mental progress, clearer and ever clearer vision, sounder and ever sounder judgment, greater and ever greater mastery over self, until at last, as an Arahāt, he reaches the very zenith of mental evolution and attains Nibbāna. *This* is the Way taught by all the Buddhas.

It is not an easy road or a short one. Most of us have far to go. But we must all go on that road sometime, and the sooner we start, the sooner we will reach the Goal. Let us not wait for many more lifetimes before we start. Let us not fool ourselves that if we wait patiently, trusting in some Supreme Being, our reward will be eternal bliss. Let us not hang about, like grubby children, expecting a parent or governess to wash us, undress us, and tuck us safely into bed. If we do, we shall wait indefinitely.

The Ready Ones

You yourselves must make an effort,
The Tathāgatas are only teachers.
The meditative ones who enter the Way
Are delivered from the bonds of Māra.

—Dhammapada

In our last essay we said that Buddhism is a religion for mental adults. It does not sugar-coat the bitter pills of life or pretend that death is the gateway to everlasting happiness. It does not promise easy salvation in exchange for unquestioning faith in some supreme deity. It teaches self-reliance and a sense of personal responsibility.

No teacher, however wise and kind, can help those who refuse to learn. By fulfilling the ten *pāramī*, or perfections, a being who aspires to be a Buddha develops the qualities necessary to become an unrivalled teacher of gods and men. He is not “atoning” thereby for the wickedness and folly of others, although he sacrifices life itself, again and again, during this period of preparation. Nobody, however noble-minded, can atone for the faults of others. One can only improve oneself. In the case of a being striving for

Buddhahood, this process of self-improvement goes far beyond the level sufficient for purely personal salvation. He wishes to help others as well. But he can only do so by teaching them how to help themselves. There is no salvation by proxy.

This may sound a hard teaching, but it is a reasonable one and it fits into the pattern of life as we know it. One cannot eat for another or learn swimming for another or keep healthy for another. Nor can one “atone” for the wickedness and folly of another. Each must pay his own debts and shape his own destiny. Even Buddhas can only show the way.

A Buddha, also called a Tathāgata, is a teacher in the truest and highest sense of the word. One cannot place a limit to the value of such a teacher. Life after life, through countless aeons, beings live in darkness. They cling to this false belief and to that. They live, die and live again, on and on, now in states of pleasure, now in states of pain. But they *do not* know how to win freedom from it all. Then, like the dawning of a glorious day, a Buddha appears. He teaches the Way of Freedom. Some leap to this Teaching and profit by it immediately. They are the ready ones, like the great Arahants of the Buddha’s day. For them, a single stanza, a phrase, a word, may sufficient. Others take longer to learn. Still others do not learn at all. They are as unprepared for the Buddha Dhamma as a kindergarten child is unprepared for the Theory of Relativity.

Who are those ready ones who profit immediately by the appearance of a Buddha? According to the Buddha Himself, they are those who are meditative. Already, on their own, perhaps in many past lives they have trained themselves to think clearly. They have developed their minds. To them, the “effort” of following the Buddha’s Teaching is a glad one. They do not yearn after the so-called prizes of life, the wealth, the power, the worldly advancement that others find so alluring. They see much greater worth in such things as peace of mind, contentment, and freedom. They take easily to the Way and are delivered from the bonds of Māra, the bonds of desire, ill-will, and ignorance. They win freedom.

Greatness

Higher than lordship over all earth,
Higher than sojourning in heavens supreme,
Higher than empire over all the worlds,
Is Fruit of Entrance to the Dhamma Stream.

—Dhammapada

We worldlings see greatness in worldly success. To us a reigning sovereign is great, a millionaire is great, a famous actor, surgeon, lawyer, or painter is great. We measure greatness by the yardstick of worldly power or fame.

To the Buddha, greatness was something entirely different. He saw beings dying and getting reborn according to their kamma. He knew that an emperor can be reborn as a termite. He saw that, in this world of everlasting change, there is no security in worldly power, no stability in worldly fame. Death comes to the powerful and the famous just as surely as it comes to the weak and unknown. And with death there is a shedding of worldly power, wealth, and fame. Again and again it happens.

Seen against the background of eternal change, there is nothing real in worldly greatness. Even we worldlings can

see things in this way if we take the Buddha's Teaching to heart and use our intelligence. But few of us do so. That is why the Buddha said, "Blind is this world. Few are they who truly see."

If, seeing things as they truly are, we refuse to grant that greatness is an attribute of worldly power, fame or success, must we conclude, that there is no such thing as greatness? The Buddha's answer was to point to the Stream-winner, the *sotāpanna*, the being who has attained the first stage of Sainthood, as that term is understood in Buddhism. "There" said the Buddha, "is one who is greater than any reigning sovereign, than any celestial being, be he even a Brahmā." And, be it remembered, there are three higher stages of Sainthood, culminating in the attainment of Final Emancipation as an Arahant.

Why is this? A Sotāpanna may well be a poor man, unhonoured and unknown. By worldly standards he may be a person of no account at all. In what lies his greatness?

His greatness lies in the security of having taken a step upward from which there can be no falling back. Never again will he have the "soul" delusion. Never again will he have doubts as to the true road. Never again will he believe in mere rites and ceremonies. Never again will he break a single one of the five cardinal precepts of Virtue. Never again will he be born in a plane lower than the human. He can be reborn, at most, only seven times more before he attains Nibbāna. He is like one who, having traversed a

terrible desert, sees before him the end of the journey: The sand still burns his feet, the sun still blazes down on his head, he is tired and thirsty, but there, within sight, lie the shady trees, the cool ponds of crystal-clear water. He presses on gladly, knowing that soon he will reach his journey's end. Not for anything in the world would such a man change places with one who is wandering, hopelessly lost in the desert. That other may be a wealthy man, richly-dressed, with a large following. But he is to be pitied. He is a long, long way off from "Journey's End."

Power and Freedom

Higher than lordship over all the earth,
Higher than sojourning in heavens supreme.
Higher than empire over all the world
Is Fruit of Entrance to the Dhamma Stream.

—Dhammapada

Time and time again in the beginningless succession of existences which is our life in saṃsāra we worldlings have sought power for its own sake. There is something terribly fascinating about the idea of power. We wish to be “big” men. We wish to do “big” things. We wish to exercise control over our environment. Hardly any of us wishes, or attempts, to exercise control over himself.

If a wise man were asked, “What would you do if you were offered dictatorship over all the earth?” he would answer, “Refuse it of course.” For the wise do not seek power, nor are they impressed by it. And yet, how many of us are wise? We seek power, imagining that it is the key to happiness. We strive for power, and if we happen to get it, we generally abuse it.

The wise seek dominance only over themselves, realising

that therein lies the key to freedom. "Fruit of Entrance to the Dhamma Stream" is the first stage of sanctity, as taught by the Buddha. It is the threshold of freedom. The Stream-winner (*sotāpanna*) is beyond the reach of worldly ambition. He has done, once and for all, with the desire for worldly power.

Politicians, every one of whom is at heart a power seeker, sometimes talk of "freedom" as though it were a commodity that can be bought with votes or won in the bloody gamble of a revolution. But there is no such thing as mass-deliverance into freedom, and there never will be, whatever politicians may tell us. Humanity in the mass is fit only for what it already has, and just at present that looks like the brink of hell. Humanity in the mass may, and very likely will, plunge over the brink and suffer consequences, for a while. It has happened before and can happen again, for that is the endless story of human stupidity.

But, for the individual, there is always the opportunity to seek freedom. That was the glorious truth taught by the Buddha, and it still holds good. Freedom is not the fruit of worldly power. It is the fruit of virtue and concentration, leading to insight.

On this road of deliverance, power too comes as a by-product, a strange new power such as worldlings never dream of. But that is not the goal. It is merely a sign of progress made, an encouragement to further effort. Freedom is the one and only goal. The Buddha had such

power in incalculable measure, and so too did many of the arahants. They used it wisely and kindly, to help others, never to exercise dominance over them.

Generosity

They are not perished among the dead who,
Like good comrades travelling on
The jungle roads, share scanty store.
Lo! here's an ancient truth.

—Saṃyutta Nikāya

Generosity is something more than giving. It is in the heart that one is generous. It springs from a feeling of comradeship, and it manifests itself in countless different ways. It is bigness of mind.

Patronage is not generosity. In generosity there is no condescension on the part of the giver or servility on the part of the receiver. It is clean and wholesome, and it leaves both parties free.

Springing as it does from a feeling of comradeship generosity goes hand in hand with sympathy. The generous person is tactful. When he hears someone tell a good story in convivial company, he does not try to cap it with a better one immediately and thereby rob the other fellow of his due share of attention. Even in giving, he is tactful. If a poor friend gives his son a cheap camera, he does not

immediately buy the boy an expensive camera which will probably eclipse the earlier gift.

It is not only with material possessions that we can be generous. We can be generous with our knowledge, our skill, our energy, our time. We can also be generous in the things we think and say about others: It is easy enough to be generous in the opinions we express about those whose interests do not clash with ours and who are not in competition with us. Thus, a lawyer will readily praise a good architect or doctor or sculptor, but, as a rule, he will be much more cautious and reserved in his praise of another lawyer.

We can be generous also in our attitude towards malicious gossip. There are people who count themselves generous but who are ready to believe all the nasty things they hear about others, even their friends. They pounce eagerly on every bit of malicious gossip and pass it on, adding to it in the process. Such people cannot be truly generous. Deep down in their hearts they are mean and small. Their acts of so-called generosity are nothing more than investments, to secure the goodwill and help of others in this life and rich dividends in future lives.

When a truly generous person gives something to another, be it material help or time or information, there are no strings attached to the gift. He does *not* even expect gratitude in return. He has given, and that is the end of the matter so far as he is concerned. So he is never bitter when

people, as sometimes happens, take his gifts for granted. He goes on giving. People may think that this sort of thing is unfair to the giver, but that would be a wrong view. The giver is going his own road, growing stronger and freer with each gift. If others selfishly exploit his generosity, they too are going their own road, growing weaker and less free with each act of exploitation. It is because of past deeds of one sort or the other that some people are born to wealth and freedom while others are born to poverty and slavery. We lose nothing by being generous. We gain nothing by selfishly exploiting the generosity of others.

The world would be a dark and bleak place indeed if nobody were generous. There would be no Buddha-Dhamma, for the Buddha-Dhamma is the highest manifestation of generosity, the Buddha's gift to all humanity, the gift of truth, of light, of freedom.

Praise and Blame

As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind;
Even so the wise are not ruffled by praise or blame.

—Dhammapada

These words apply in their fullest sense to Arahants, but to a certain extent they are true of all wise people. Such people are not easily influenced by the praise or blame of the world. They think for themselves and go their own road.

It may be laid down as a general rule that one is seldom praised or blamed by the world for the intrinsic nature of one's actions. Take the case of a lawyer. The world at large is unable to form any opinion of his ability except by the results he produces. He may be intelligent and industrious, but, if he is unlucky enough to lose a few cases in succession, the world is apt to take a poor view of his capacity. On the other hand, if he wins a few cases that catch the public eye, his stock rises appreciably. It is the same in most fields of human endeavour.

Those with a weak character tend to accept this state of affairs without question, and to act accordingly. They crave worldly success and they work to achieve it. They know

that the world cares little for genuine worth. So they buy their success with counterfeit currency as it were. They pretend to be interested in what the world at large finds interesting. They pretend to like people who can help them. They are seen at the right places, wearing the right clothes, doing the right things. And it works. The counterfeit currency is seldom examined closely or challenged. But such people never rise to be leaders, even in the sphere of worldly activities. They do not have what it takes. To be a leader, one must have the strength to walk alone at times. One must have a mind of one's own.

Of course, obstinacy is not strength. One can prevent an obstinate person from doing almost anything by commanding him not to do it. The strong do not respond to such tactics. They do not care whether others think them strong and independent or weak and docile, so they always do exactly as they choose, even when curtly ordered to do it! There is freedom in such strength.

Most of us are influenced far too much by what we think other people will think of us. We judge others by our own standards. If we are impressed by certain qualities, such as smartness, a sense of humour, or courage, we assume that others too are impressed by those qualities. So we pretend to have them. Pretence means strain, because we dare not relax and be natural for fear of being exposed for what we really are. We strain to resemble some ideal, instead of admitting frankly that it is an ideal and that we are far below it, and that we are working towards it.

The wise have a basic honesty which scorns all pretence. Therein lies their strength, and their ability to remain comparatively unmoved by praise or blame. They have ideals too, but instead of pretending to be the personification of those ideals, they work towards them with faith and patience. If the world happens to praise them, they are not unduly elated. If the world happens to blame them, they are not unduly depressed. They assess such praise or blame calmly and intelligently, questioning the competence of those who pass judgment, accepting nothing at face value. Having so assessed and questioned, they see their way clearly. Sometimes praise or blame is well-deserved and can be a useful guide. But this is not always the case. If praise or blame is undeserved, it should be ignored, just as a sane man ignores the compliments or insults of a lunatic.

Anger

Whoso, his anger, arisen like an uncontrolled chariot,
checks,
Him indeed I call a charioteer. Rein-holders are other
folk.

—Dhammapada

All of us can recall occasions when we were angry. It is an emotion which we share with the rest of the animal kingdom, except perhaps animals like jelly-fish, slugs and worms, and for all we know even they may be furious on occasion. The world we live in is far from perfect. Things happen which, we feel, would not happen if others only were a little more intelligent and considerate, a little less greedy and selfish. When such things happen, the horse of anger takes charge of the chariot of personality, and we are well set for a period of sub-human behaviour.

It is easy to give one's anger a loose rein and let it gallop. It is easy to make it gallop faster and faster with flicks from the whip of self-righteousness. If the mad career does not end in a smash, the runaway horse tires and slows down after a while, the chariot resumes its normal rate of

progress, and the charioteer feels a bit foolish. There has been, perhaps, nothing worse than an exhibition of bad manners.

But all too often such mad careers do end in smashes. In Lanka, land of the Buddha Dhamma, a depressingly large number of people are killed in quarrels every year. A striking feature of these offences is that in most cases the motive seems ridiculously inadequate. A fancied slight at a wedding party, a delay in the repayment of a small debt, a dispute over the ownership of a tree or even a fruit—such things as these have sufficed as the motive for brutal murders. Why is this?

Clearly, it is not the gravity of the motive that matters, but the character of the person concerned. If a man is childish, if he lacks a sense of humour and sense of proportion, which are really the same thing, any minor annoyance can send him along the road that ends on the gallows. The Buddha Dhamma offers people a peerless method for the building of a strong, wise, kindly character. Why is it that so many people in Buddhist lands do not have that sort of character? It must be that they have not understood the Buddha's Teaching. They call themselves Buddhists. They take part in religious ceremonies. They listen to the Dhamma upon occasion. But that Dhamma has not soaked into them and permeated them with its coolness and sanity. They are like children, happy, generous, and truly lovable at times, but horrible little brutes whenever something sends them into a tantrum. In such black moments they behave as though the

Buddha had never lived, never given to humanity His message of love and understanding.

We who are mere worldlings cannot pretend to that mastery over self which was characteristic of the Buddha and the Arahants. To us, anger is a problem. But there are things we can do. There are ways of thinking which make the control of anger less difficult. To begin with, we should understand that the failure to control anger is always a sign of weakness, never a *sign of strength*. We all like to be considered strong and masterful. Anger, when it takes charge of us, does make us feel stronger and more masterful than we do normally. But this is a mere delusion, misleading and dangerous. In truth, we are, at such times, weaker and less efficient than normal. A clever boxer, if he knows that his opponent has a quick temper, will do his best to provoke a fit of temper, *because it makes his opponent more vulnerable*. Whenever we get angry we should realize that the strength we feel is not the strength of the charioteer in us. It is the strength of the runaway horse. We should immediately try to put the charioteer back in control. If we can do this, we are masters. If we cannot, we are slaves.

It is also important to reflect that nothing ever matters half so much as we think it does. There are people who take themselves so seriously that they seem to be in a state of *rigor mortis* while still alive. Such people should realize that their occasional exhibitions of bad temper are not nearly as impressive as they imagine. A man in a temper looks ugly and may even be dangerous, but he is too funny to be

impressive. The wise man learns to laugh at himself at times. If he cannot, others will.

Eating

What is the one?

All beings are dependent on food.

—Khuddakapāṭha

This is the first of the ten sets of questions and answers which every *sāmaṇera* (novice monk) has to learn. It is the basic truth about all living beings. From the greatest to the smallest, the highest to the lowest, all beings depend on nourishment. Stripped to its bare, essence, life is a process of eating and of avoiding being eaten.

If a drop of water from any wayside ditch is examined under a powerful microscope, the truth becomes evident. One sees beings, amazingly tiny beings, each an individual, each preoccupied and actively engaged in the business of keeping alive. And what is that business? Eating and avoiding being eaten. In such an examination one may see a fight as fierce and as startling as between a shark and an octopus. One of these infinitesimally tiny beings seizes another. The other struggles to escape. There is a furious commotion, a wriggling and squirling, pauses for rest and resumptions of violence until, inevitably, the weaker is

overcome and eaten by the stronger.

This process goes on continually, in every drop of water that is not sterile, in every cubic millimetre of soil that harbours animal life. Higher up the scale of life, in the visible world, the struggle goes on with unabated violence. On the land, in the water, in the air, living beings are eating and being eaten every minute, every second.

In this picture such things as kindness and gentleness are so rare as to be virtually non-existent. When the business of living, of keeping alive, lies entirely in eating and avoiding being eaten, kindness, and gentleness are suicidal qualities. A gentle amoeba will not survive very long, except as the pleasant memory of a less gentle amoeba. The same thing is true of a tiger or a shark. *Tanḥā* (craving) is the dominant quality of all living beings. It means, basically, a good appetite. The greedy ones eat more and grow bigger and stronger than the poor eaters. As the risk of being eaten diminishes with the individual's size and strength, the hearty eaters stand a better chance of surviving and breeding, than the poor eaters.

This is true of human life as well, though in human life the phenomenon is more complex. In primitive society a big eater has to hunt for his food. He thus has a strong incentive to be a good hunter, and more often than not becomes one. He is generally a good fighter as well and is likely to acquire more wives and breed more children than his weaker brethren. But as society evolves and grows more complex,

other qualities come into the picture. Thus a poor eater may have some specialized skill, such as the ability to make things, which gives him a greater earning capacity than a hunter. But in him too the same law operates, and he stands a better chance of survival and reproduction than less capable folk

In human life as lived in highly organized societies, the big eater is replaced by the go-getter, the man who knows what he wants and is smart enough to get it. This too is a sort of eating. Power and fame take the place of food. Such people grow powerful and are held in respect by their fellows. The game of "eat and avoid being eaten" still goes on, but in a wider sense. Instead of food, men crave power, position, wealth, and what are called "good things of life." They fight for these things.

In direct contrast to all this comes the Buddha's Teaching of a process of *letting go* that leads to freedom. He taught the basic truth about all life that is dependent on food, on eating, and avoiding being eaten. But he also taught people the way to win freedom from this obscene activity, this horrible round of birth, decay, old age and death and the recurrent struggle to grab what one needs and hold what one has grabbed. Put very simply, his Teaching is one that stresses *freedom* as the one goal to which the intelligent people should aspire. *All things*, he said, are impermanent, undesirable, certain to pass away utterly, to be got rid of. Cling to nothing whatsoever in this world.

Ritual

Not in mere rites and ceremonies, nor in much learning, nor in the gain of concentration, nor in lonely abode, nor in thinking, “I enjoy the bliss of renunciation resorted to by the non-worldling,” should you, O bhikkhu, rest content, without accomplishing the annihilation of ferments.

—Dhammapada

Those who do not understand the Buddha Dhamma are sometimes misled by the religious practices of the Buddhist worldling. The offering of flowers at Buddhist shrines, the recurrent “taking” of the Five Precepts by the Buddhist layman, the chanting of *paritta* (recitations of protection), and the salutation of bhikkhus (monks) these and many other practices are pointed to as evidence of a highly ritualistic content in Buddhism.

This is due to lack of understanding. The Buddha has said that, just as there is one taste which permeates every drop of water in the sea, the taste of salt, so there is but one taste which permeates the entirety of his teaching—the taste of deliverance. In the stanza quoted above the Buddha has

expressly pointed out that rites and ceremonies do not constitute the be-all and end-all of the way of life taught by him. The “ferments” to be annihilated are the four āsavas—longing for sense pleasures, longing for continual existence, false views, and ignorance. When these are annihilated a being wins free from the round of rebirth. On this road, when a being attains the very first stage of Sainthood, he loses all faith in rites and ceremonies. So it will be seen that by no stretch of imagination can Buddhism be called a religion which values ritual for its own sake.

But there is no doubt that for one who is still a worldling, one who has not attained the first stage of Sainthood, rites and ceremonies have a value. Religious ritual is a means to an end. In time of stress it can be an anchor. In time of grief it can be a solace. In time of temptation it can be a reminder that there are higher things in life than the physical appetites.

So the Buddhist offers flowers at the foot of a sacred Bodhi tree or before an image of the Buddha. While doing so he reflects on the perfections of the Incomparable One. He reflects, too, on the impermanence of the flowers he offers. With such thought, his mind grows calm and steadfast. He “takes” the five precepts recurrently, day after day, because he wishes to remind himself of these voluntary observances. He chants, and listens to *paritta* chanting because it is the truth, enshrined in the words of the Buddha himself. He salutes bhikkhus because they and the yellow robe they wear represent the highest way of life possible for a human

being. Those are rituals, if one chooses to call them that. But they are not meaningless rituals. They are very definitely a means to an end. Only a superficial and unthinking observer would see a man sharpening an axe and conclude that he does so because he believes there is some ultimate good in the process.

Of course, as with many other helpful things, ritual can assume an undue importance in foolish minds. This must be guarded, or else one will be mistaking the means for the end. But, as indicated by the Buddha, this observation applies not only to ritual but also to vast learning, the attainment of concentration, the solitary life, and the bliss of renunciation. None of these is the end. All these are like rafts that carry one across a river. They are like the timbers of one single raft. When the river is crossed the raft is left behind.

Fear

Beings who see fear in the non-fearsome,
And no fear in the fearsome,
Embrace false views and go to a woeful state.

—Dhammapada

According to the Buddha, there is only one thing of which we need to be afraid and of this, unfortunately, most worldlings are not afraid. It is the doing of evil. Unskilful action (*akusala kamma*), of any kind is fearsome. By unskilful action the Buddha meant such action as tends to increase greed, hatred, and ignorance, because it is by such action that we prolong and intensify our suffering, life after life, in this treacherous sea of *saṃsāra*. The wise fear such action and do their best to avoid it, but, to the foolish, such action often seems harmless, pleasurable, and even praiseworthy. Thus do foolish parents teach their children to “get on in the world” at all costs, ignorant of the dreadful price those children will have to pay for that temporary and utterly meaningless advance.

On the other hand, worldlings are afraid of a number of things which, to a Buddha, are non-fearsome. They fear

physical danger, financial loss, sickness, unpopularity and a host of other ills which are merely part of the environment in which life is lived. According to the Buddha, such fears are stupid. "Wherever fear arises," He said, "it arises in the fool, not in the wise." He was speaking here of those beings who see fear in the non-fearsome.

A certain Brahmin once asked the Buddha whether those who resort to the lonely depths of the forest for meditation, while yet unattained to concentration, are not seized with fear. The Buddha's reply was illuminating. He said, "You have said it, Brahmin, you have said it!" He then went on to explain that those ascetics who, for one reason or another, are unprepared for the lonely forest life, *are* seized with fear. Before he attained Enlightenment, the Bodhisatta deliberately sought those "places of horror and affright" and spent lonely vigils there in order to experience and overcome that very fear. Being already a yogi of perfect purity and high mental attainment, he met and mastered the fear, soaring at last to those heights which only Buddhas attain. But he recognized the fear, saw its basis, and saw too that to the average worldling, of frail virtue and irresolute mind, it can be a very real thing.

It is true, as the Buddha said, that fear arises only in the fool. But then it is equally true that we worldlings are fools. That is why we are still worldlings. We crave for things, cling to things, hate each other for these very qualities, and are steeped in ignorance. So we experience fear. If, on occasion, we are brave, it almost invariably is for the wrong reason.

For instance, the “brave” hunter, armed with the latest thing in sporting rifles, does not fear the elephant. In arming himself against a meaningless fear in the non-fearsome, he sees no fear in the truly fearsome, that is, the doing of evil. His folly is doubled.

There is only one way to get rid of fear, the way shown by the Buddha. Until that end is achieved, and Final Deliverance won, we will experience fear. But let us at least have the intelligence to recognize it for what it is—the unpleasant fruit of our own greed, our own ill-will, our own delusion.

Freedom from Fear

All tremble at punishment,
All fear death.
Comparing others with oneself,
One should neither kill nor cause to kill.

—Dhammapada

The virtuous person, by reason of his virtue, gives peace of mind to those about him. He is not a menace. He will not kill others, or rob them, or corrupt them, or slander them, or get drunk and make a nuisance of himself. A person who observes the Five Precepts of Virtue is a wholesome and pleasant neighbour.

There are those who seek to belittle these Precepts by calling them negative.” They take no thought of the positive good the virtuous precept-observer does by making his environment a happy and peaceful one for others. We sometimes forget that what most people want is not active assistance but freedom from interference. They can get along quite well on their own, and only ask to be left alone. Some overenthusiastic social workers would do well to remember this. A happy, calm environment is a precious

thing in this world of strife and worry. Those who, by their lives, help create and maintain such an environment do a great service to humanity.

Ascetics carry no weapons when they retire to lonely places to meditate. And yet one rarely, if ever, hears of an ascetic being harmed by wild beasts. It is because wild beasts too are sensitive to a good environment. They sense and react favourably to an atmosphere of peace and goodwill. Indeed, there is reason to think that wild beasts are better than humans in this respect. It is not likely that wild beasts would have harmed Jesus, or Giardano Bruno.

To the Buddhists it is axiomatic that no good is ever achieved by harming one's fellow-beings. That is why the pages of Buddhist history do not stink with the blood of innocent victims, killed or tortured in the name of religion. The Buddha-Dhamma is a free and noble way of life, appealing only to the best in human nature. We do not seek to force this way of life upon others, for compulsion is the very antithesis of freedom. Nor do we claim, as certain other religionists do, that immediate conversion to Buddhism is necessary for Final Deliverance. There is time, plenty of time. There is all eternity. Those who do not accept this teaching now will do so some day. We need not worry about them, or see ourselves in the heroic role of Saviours. Those others will save themselves, though not with the speed, nor by the means, that they now believe in.

The Buddhist might well ask what his attitude should be

towards the follower of some other religion who tries to convert *him*. The Buddhist attitude should be one of understanding, kindness and long-suffering patience. After all, the attempt is motivated by a friendly impulse, however misguided. And the Buddhist might well return kindness for kindness by telling the would-be converter something of Buddhism.

Nationalism

Neither in the sky, nor in the mid-ocean,
nor by entering a mountain cave,
is found that place on earth,
where abiding, one will not be overcome by death.

—Dhammapada

The Buddha spoke to all men and for all time. He was born a Sakyan, in Northern India. But it is not as a Sakyan, nor as an Indian, that one thinks of him. He was too big for that.

To a follower of the Buddha, there can be no meaning in nationalism." How can one sing "Rule Britannia" with any degree of fervour or conviction when, according to the Buddha, one will presently die, and may be reborn as a Chinaman? Nationalism is good enough for those unenlightened and short-sighted folk who cannot see the possibilities of rebirth. What is more, it is rooted in mistaken ideas of "me" and "mine."

The Buddha taught that there is nothing permanent or stable in any living being. There is nothing of which one can say, "This am I. This is mine." How then can a sincere Buddhist say "This is my country," or, "These are my

people"? If we really accept the Buddha's Teaching, we cannot think of ourselves as the nationals of any particular country. We cannot, strictly speaking, think of ourselves even as human beings, because even that state of affairs is transitory. We can only regard ourselves as beings, that is, as mind and body fluxes, ever changing, subject to birth, decay and death.

In many parts of the world today, the spirit of narrow nationalism seems to be growing stronger. People tend more and more to think of themselves as members of some nation rather than as intelligent living beings. Like a dreadful cancer, this spirit of nationalism is eating into everything that is noble and generous in human nature, replacing reason, love and honesty with its own evil substance. There are some feeble-minded people who regard this as a wholesome change. But no genuine follower of the Buddha can be misled by them.

While we live this life, as humans, let us at least have the bigness of mind to see ourselves as human beings rather than as Sinhalese, Americans, Burmese, Russians, and so on, as the case may be. Let us not be so petty about our own particular national language, national dress, national customs, rites, ceremonies, and background.

The Buddha was like the sun, and, like sunlight. His Dhamma is for all men, whatever language they speak, whatever clothes they wear, whatever country they call "home." The Buddha's language was truth. He was clothed

in truth, and the whole world was his home. For truth is everywhere and for all time.

Words

Better than a discourse of thousand words, imbued with worthlessness, is one significant sentence which, being heard, calms one.

—Dhammapada

They pour in upon us, every time we open a newspaper, every time we switch on the radio: words, words, words. Who speaks them? Who writes them? All too often we do not even bother to find out. We have no time. But quietly, subtly, insidiously, the words we read and hear are influencing us all the time. That is why people pay so highly for advertisement space in the newspapers and time on radio commercial programmes. They know that words matter a great deal, cunningly selected words, skilfully strung together so as to work on the imagination. They know that suggestive words, repeated again and again, come to be accepted as true.

And who are these people who exploit words with such care and persistence? Invariably they are people who want to sell something, be it a patent medicine or an insurance policy or a political ideology. They are all trying to put

something across, and they do it in words—frightening words, inflammatory words, words that appeal to the appetites and the emotions. Rarely, if ever, do they appeal to reason and intelligence.

By appealing to reason and intelligence one encourages people to think for themselves, and that is a very dangerous thing if one has something to sell. One is on much safer ground with the emotions and appetites, and they are so many and varied that there is plenty of scope. A critical study of newspaper advertisements can be both instructive and entertaining. One is informed that So-and-so's shirts are worn by the "Best people." One is not told why, nor is one encouraged to ask. The mere information that some nebulous class of people called the "Best" habitually wear So-and-so's shirt is considered sufficient inducement for other people to wear them. And the funniest part of the business is that So-and-so is absolutely right in his estimate of human nature. His sales prove it very satisfactorily.

Then there is the appeal to fear. Insurance companies exploit it shamelessly. One is urged to insure against all sorts of calamities. One is not told why the insurance company is so willing to give such insurance, and the question is not encouraged. The share-holders know the answer, because it appears regularly in the dividends. The majority of people who insure themselves do not need insurance. If they did, the insurance companies would be ruined.

It is the same in the realm of politics. Here too, it is a question of selling something by an appeal to appetite and emotion rather than intelligence. Words are used, thousands and thousands of suggestive words that tend to deaden the critical faculty. They are repeated again and again, on public platforms, in print and over the radio, and men come to accept them as true. It is done deliberately. It is difficult to think clearly and coherently under a barrage of propaganda, and politicians know this. It is *not* their business to encourage clear, coherent thought.

But, as individuals, it is our business to think thus. It is our duty, if we value our sanity. In all the thousands of words poured on us by the sellers of things, there is not one that brings peace of mind. They are words which tend to make us want things, to want the things that are for sale.

But peace of mind is not for sale. It is a gift which we give ourselves—if we are wise. It is a gift which the wise have given themselves, since the beginning of time. If we can shut out from our minds the clamour of those who are trying to sell us worthless things, we may hear one significant sentence that brings calm, a sentence such as the Buddha spoke when He said: “Whoso in the world controls this stupid, unruly craving, from him sorrows fall away, like water-drops from a lotus-leaf.”

Ignorance—the Greatest Taint

Misconduct is a taint in a woman, niggardliness is a taint in a benefactor. All taints are evil indeed, in this world and the next. A worse taint than such as these is ignorance, the greatest taint. Abandoning this taint, be perfect, O bhikkhus.

—Dhammapada

A Buddhist is sometimes asked why the Buddha did not tell people about certain things that are known today but were not known to his contemporaries. If he was omniscient, they argue, he must surely have known all about the solar system, the galaxy and so on. Then why did he not correct false notions about these and other matters?

The question is reasonable enough, provided the questioner is rather smug about what we know today, and chooses to ignore the whole purpose of the Buddha's life. To underline the smugness first, can we really presume to be dogmatic about our present views, or are they subject to revision in the light of further data? For all we know, we may be as far from the truth today as were the men of the stone-age. A thousand years hence, if nuclear weapons have not made a

dead planet of this earth, people may consider our present ideas as more or less on a level with pre-Copernican views of the geocentric structure of the universe. And, to a Buddha-mind, the ideas that will be in vogue a thousand years hence may be as fantastically and obviously untenable.

But, more important than this is the question of what the Buddha *wanted* to tell people, because it was vitally necessary for their deliverance. Once, in a forest, he compared a few leaves in His hand with the foliage around him, as illustrative of what He had taught, when compared with what he knew. And yet, what He taught was sufficient for man's deliverance from suffering. Nothing that needed to be said was left unsaid by that Supreme Teacher.

It would surely be naive to assume that such a Being would bother to correct people's wrong ideas on such matters as the structure of the physical world. Just as a parent sees no harm in his child's happy belief in Santa Claus, so the Buddha saw no harm in existing ideas about the structure of the world. It did not matter to him whether people thought that the sun moved round the earth or the earth round the sun. Nor will it ever matter to anybody who values the world of mind rather than the material world as relevant to human progress. A man may be good and wise, though he believes that if one travels far enough one will come to the edge of the world. Many men, much better and wiser than we are, held that belief.

The Buddha was not concerned with knowledge as an end in itself. What then is that ignorance which he condemned as being the greatest taint? It is the ignorance that stands in the way of a being's progress to deliverance from suffering; the ignorance that feeds the fires of greed and hate; the ignorance that keeps us wandering, life after life, in saṃsāra.

We are all steeped in this ignorance, however smart and knowledgeable we may think we are. We have not realized that all phenomena are transient, not worth clinging to, ever passing to destruction, to be got rid of. So we cling and crave and hope and plan, sowing the seeds of further existence in this sorrow-laden world of fleeting shadows. Of what advantage, in this context, is the knowledge that the earth moves round the sun? All the discoveries of science have not helped humanity a hair's breadth forward on the road to happiness. Indeed, human folly is so great that the more we learn about the material world, the smaller and meaner we seem to become. Today humanity has become so mean that it finds difficulty in seeing any alternative to suicide, like a scorpion stinging itself to death with its own venom. If this is the result of knowledge, it is better to know less. Perhaps the Buddha foresaw this when he withheld from the world so much of what He knew. He came to teach Wisdom, not to impart useless and possibly dangerous knowledge.

The Power of Truth

In the world there surely is virtue, goodness, Truth,
cleansing, improvement—

By this fact I make a supreme Act (assertion) of
Truth.

—Jātaka

The East has long believed that there is power in the assertion of truth. There are many instances in the Buddhist Scriptures of the use of this truth-power for various purposes, such as healing the sick. It is effective when the assertion is made by one in whom the truth relied on is manifest, as when a virtuous and good person says or thinks, “By the power of the truth that there is virtue and goodness in the world may so-and-so be cured of his illness.” Such a person, quite understandably, would make the assertion with more confidence than would a person whose own virtue and goodness are questionable, and his mind therefore serves as a better conductor of the truth-power. There is no doubt that faith, or confidence, is necessary.

There was a time when it was considered fashionable and

“modern” to scoff at anything so intangible as thought-force. But today even the materialistic West is awakening to the fact that the mind has certain capacities which defy all attempts at explanation on modern scientific lines. Matter-itself has ceased to be the dependable thing it was a few years ago, and has betrayed the materialist by turning out to be nothing more than a manifestation of energy. What is energy? Nobody knows. One can only call it by various other names and cite examples of its manifestation, such as electricity, magnetism, gravitation, heat, and light.

Is it not reasonable to suppose that thought also is a form of energy, and that such energy can and does affect the so-called material world?

Of course, it is not everybody who can split rocks by thinking, or, for that matter, generate enough thought-force even to lift a feather off the ground. But then, how many people know how to generate enough electrical energy to split a rock or even lift a feather? In comparison with the world’s population, very few. And yet, nobody will deny that electricity is a real and potent force.

The vital difference between electricity and thought force is that whereas, in the modern world, the former has become the servant of any fool who knows how to pull a switch or press a button, the latter must still be generated and applied by each individual unaided by others, save for such advice as others may be able to give. Each individual must build his own mental dynamo and learn how to use it. Each must

he a skilled technician and operator.

In the East there has been no lack of teachers, and today the methods taught by many of them are to be found in books. Supreme among such teachers was the Buddha. He understood the nature of thought-force as nobody else has understood it, and He knew that one way, a *relatively easy way*, in which such force may be generated and applied it by the Act (or assertion) of Truth (*saccakiriya*). It must be understood, though, that the sole purpose of His life was to teach people how to win freedom from the suffering inherent in all existence, and not merely to teach them how to develop thought-force. That was incidental, and He did not value power for its own sake.

But there is no denying that we worldlings sometimes need the power to help our fellow beings in various ways. The Act of Truth, properly used, does give us this power. But we must be qualified to use it. We must, in our own conduct, manifest the truth we seek to use. The laws of nature do not permit a libertine to exploit the truth of virtue, nor a miser the truth of generosity. If we are qualified to use it, the Act of Truth is an unfailing source of power. With it we can draw our fellows from sickness towards health, from madness towards sanity, from despair towards hope, from hate towards love.

Today, from the point of view of any kind person who does not wish to see this earth turned into shambles, such power is *urgently* needed. This essay is written in the hope that all

such people, whatever their religion, will use it for the good of humanity.

The Happy Road

He who, discarding human bonds
And transcending celestial ties,
Is completely delivered of all bonds—
Him I call a Brāhmaṇa.

—Dhammapada

The Buddha taught the way to absolute freedom from all bonds, human and celestial. To the worldling, enmeshed in human bonds such as the desire to win fame and wealth here in this life, it is hardly necessary to speak of celestial ties. Such a man does not begin to know the meaning of freedom before death overtakes him. He lives shackled to his worldly ambitions and dies with them. If those ambitions are still unfulfilled at the moment of death, as usually happens, because there is no such thing as “enough” for such a man, the chances of a happy rebirth are very slim.

But there are people who have the understanding to renounce worldly ambition in this gross sense for something higher. They know that death must come, and that it will mean leaving behind all such things as wealth

and fame and worldly authority. So they live with one eye on the next life as it were, thinking of future rather than present success. Such people may get the reputation of being “unworldly,” but really, they are more far-seeing than unworlly, just as a shrewd fellow who invests his money is more far-seeing than the man who spends it as soon as he gets it, but may be just as worldly.

Such foresight has its rewards, both in this life and the next, and we have the Buddha’s word for it. Intelligence always pays, and the stupid have no cause to feel superior to the intelligent in that they have taken no thought for the morrow. And, when tomorrow comes, the stupid will have no justification to grumble at their bad luck, though they will certainly do so.

But, as we pointed out earlier, the intelligent person who invests in the next life is not really unworlly. He will reap the rewards of his foresight, but they will be worldly rewards, even if he is reborn in a celestial plane. He will still be in bondage for even celestial beings are mortal. In due course, after the lapse of a long, long time, such a person will die in that celestial plane and be reborn according to the balance of his kamma at that death moment. He may be reborn as a human once again, or as a being in some lower plane. And so the story of life goes on. It is never done until one attains Nibbāna. All living is in world, and all desire for happy and safe living is worldly, if it goes no further.

The great danger is that mind is unstable. The man who

lives wisely and well, storing up good kamma, may not live so wisely and well when, as a result of that very good kamma, he is reborn in a celestial plane. The steady, plodding human caterpillar of this life may turn into the light-headed celestial butterfly of the next. And, if such a man is reborn as a human, with no memory of the past, he will not even know why he is wealthy and fortunate. He may become a playboy and libertine.

So, the Buddha advised us to get rid of *all* bonds, human and celestial, and win final deliverance. Investment in future lives is good, but it is not enough. Such investment must be made only with a view to progress on the road to *Nibbāna*. Future happiness and security must be the means to an end, the end being freedom.

Aloofness

Seek no intimacy with the beloved,
and never with the unbeloved.
Not seeing the beloved,
and the sight of the unbeloved are both painful.

—Dhammapada

Thoughts of “me” and “mine” are at the root of all our loves and hates. We may think highly of one person for his good qualities, and think poorly of another for his bad qualities, but we cannot love the one or hate the other unless there has been some personal contact. When parted from those whom we love, we feel a sense of personal loss. When forced to associate with those whom we hate, we feel a personal irritation. Both feelings are painful.

The Buddha saw that these feelings spring from the delusion of self, and are stimulated by personal contacts. The notion of self is a constant factor, and will remain so until we see things as they really are. It would be useless to pretend that we have eliminated it at the very beginning of our search for Enlightenment. So we are obliged to tackle the problem on the level of personal contacts, by making

such contacts as light as possible.

Intimate association with the beloved and the unbeloved are both potentially painful. Aloofness, on the other hand, tends to lessen the intensity of such emotions and the pain they can engender. Such is the teaching of the Buddha, clear and uncompromising. Each of us is free to choose his own way of life. There may be those who will call this teaching cold and inhuman. They may say, "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

They are at liberty to love and lose as many times as they please, in this life and in future lives, until they realise that they are making fools of themselves. There may be others who pride themselves on being good haters. They too are free to go their own road until repeated suffering teaches them that the hater harms himself far more than he harms the object of his hate.

There are a few people, extremely few, to whom the teaching of aloofness has a strong appeal. They are the mature ones, the old campaigners of saṃsāra, who have had their fill of loving and hating. They are beginning to feel instinctively that freedom lies in letting go. It is to such people really that the Buddha spoke. The rest merely happened to be present, and to hear with their ears but not with their hearts.

Can such a teaching be called selfish? Surely not, when it leads to the elimination of the concept of self. Intimate association with people is *not* unselfish behaviour. It as the

manure upon which the tree of Self grows and thrives, bearing in abundance its fruit of suffering. Aloofness is just the opposite of such behaviour. It is the nature upon which the tree of Wisdom grows and thrives, bearing at last the fruit of Insight.

Let us not delude ourselves. The world we live in is built upon the very notion of self which the Buddha sought to eradicate. All its activities, all its vested interests, are bound up with this basic idea. Any departure from the accepted standards of conduct will inevitably be branded as anti-social. Aloofness is such a departure, and is bound to be resented by those who love the world and its ways. Need that deter the wise?

Stillness

As in ocean mid-deeps
No wave arises, but all is still—
So be still, unmoved;
Pride let the bhikkhu nowhere entertain.

—Tuvaṭṭaka Sutta, Suttanipāta

Deep down in the sea, where the sea is really deep, half a mile, a mile, two miles below the surface, all is still. Here there are no tempests, no storms. There is none of the fuss and bother that beset surface waters and shallows.

So it is with people who have attained Ultimate Deliverance. So it was with the Buddha and the Arahants. They had reached the Final Peace. Never again, for them, the flurry and turmoil, the longing and anxiety, the feverish, meaningless activity of the worldling.

The Buddha, in the stanza quoted above, advised *all* bhikkhus to be like that. The advice holds good for lay folk as well. Although the worldling has not attained that Final Peace, he can, by sedulous cultivation of calm, experience as it were a shadow of that stillness.

Why should he cultivate calm? The answer is simple. When one is in motion, it is difficult to judge motion in one's environment. Travelling in a moving vehicle, another vehicle, moving at the same speed in the same direction, seems to be still. An object that is actually still, like a tree, seems to be moving. One's impressions of one's environment are conditioned by one's own movement. It is so with the mind. When the mind is restless and flurried, it is difficult to realize the deep eternal Truths. Things that are actually changing are accepted as constant. Things that are actually constant, such as the Truth of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* (impermanence, suffering and soullessness) are not perceived at all. The mind keeps rushing with changing phenomena, so busy and occupied that it is unable to see clearly or deeply or truly.

So the Buddha advised stillness. The whole system of *samatha-bhāvanā* (meditation for calm), as taught by the Buddha, has this one object in view. The mind, when purified of all sensual thoughts and concentrated on a *kammaṭṭhāna* (subject of concentration) becomes utterly still. It also grows very powerful, so powerful that such feats as levitation, clairvoyance, clairaudience, thought-reading, remembrance of past lives, and so on, become possible. But these are merely by-products of *samatha-bhāvanā*. The one and only object of such meditation is stillness—stillness which leads to clear, deep, true vision.

Lay people, in their daily lives, are badly handicapped when it comes to meditation. It is not so much the actual

duties of the layman that interfere, though these do take up a large proportion of the layman's life. But the worst handicap is worry. We tend to worry about what we have done, are doing, and intend to do; about what has happened, is happening, and is likely to happen. This worry, says the Buddha, is useless and foolish. How can one stop it? Illustrations help. In times of worry and flurry one can think of the Buddha's own illustration—the mid-deeps of the ocean, where all is still. So thinking, one can become less excited about the fussy little things that cause worry.

Zeal

Look now, O bhikkhus, I urge you:
Transient innately are all compounds,
With zeal work out your aim.

—Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta

These were the last words of the dying Buddha. They were plain, simple, direct words, going straight to the heart of things. For countless aeons he had perfected himself in order that he might teach living beings the way to end suffering, once and for all. In his final existence, as a Buddha, He bent all his tremendous power to that one end, never sparing Himself, never postponing for tomorrow that which could be done today. And at last, when that glorious life was at its end, these were the words he spoke. They crystalize the very essence, of His teaching, and may well serve as a motto for all Buddhists,

We Buddhists of today are feeble specimens indeed, in comparison with the Buddha and the mighty Arahants. We, most of us, regard life as desirable on the whole. We mouth the Buddha's words and profess to follow his teaching, but our actions are sadly lacking in that zeal, that wholehearted

endeavour that is necessary for success. We are like people who have queued up and are patiently waiting at a motor bus halting-place. The Gotama Buddha bus has not yet arrived. So we are waiting, kicking our heels and whiling away the time in silly gossip about motor buses and the service they do for the public. We are waiting to pay our few miserable cents for a ticket to Nibbāna and to be carried there in comfort by Metteyya Buddha, without the slightest exertion on our part. Nothing on earth will induce us to walk.

But, alas, the dispensation of a Buddha is not a motor bus or any other kind of conveyance in which people are carried to Nibbāna. Buddhas are only teachers, though in the highest sense of the word, they teach the Way of Deliverance. Gotama Buddha's teaching still exists in the world, and if we are unable to profit from it and begin to work for Deliverance now, it is futile to expect that we will achieve that end when we hear the identical teaching from Metteyya Buddha. The teaching is clear enough and cannot possibly be made clearer. If anything is lacking, it is lacking in ourselves.

What then should we do? First of all we must get rid of the halting-place mentality. We must realise that Nibbāna is to be attained by our own personal endeavour and that it is not a paradise to which we can be carried by a Buddha. Buddha's are powerful, more powerful by far than any other living beings. But this is something that even Buddhas cannot do. All beings must work out their own salvation.

Having once realized this, we must get going here and now, following the Buddha's teaching and making a sincere effort to live the sort of life that leads to Nibbāna. "With zeal work out your aim," said the Buddha. Let us take that to heart. With zeal let us observe the precepts of virtue. With zeal let us practise the perfections. With zeal let us endeavour to purify and calm our minds, following the methods that he taught. Let us use the opportunities we have here and now.

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