



The Search for Security

By Bhikkhu Bodhi

It may be a truism of psychology that the desire for happiness is the most fundamental human drive, but it is important to note that this desire generally operates within the bounds set by another drive just as deep and pervasive. This other drive is the need for security. However insistent the raw itch for pleasure and gain may be, it is usually held in check by a cautious concern for our personal safety. We only feel at ease when we are sealed off from manifest danger, comfortably at home with ourselves and with our world, snugly tucked into familiar territory where everything seems friendly and dependable.

When we come across the Buddha's teaching and begin to take that teaching seriously, we often find that it provokes in us disturbing waves of disquietude. This feeling arises from a clash—a sensed incompatibility—between the picture of the world that we hold to as the essential basis for our normal sense of security and the new perspectives on existence opened up to us by the Dhamma. We may try to shun the vistas that trouble us; we may pick and choose from the Dhamma what we like; but to the extent that we are prepared to take the teaching in earnest—on its own terms rather than on ours—we may discover that the insights which the Buddha wants to impart to us can be quite unsettling in their impact.

The first noble truth was never intended to be a comfortable truth; indeed, it is the discomfiting quality of this truth that makes it noble. It tells us frankly that the routinely placid and predictable surface of our everyday lives is extremely fragile—a shared delusion with which we lull ourselves and each other into a false sense of security. Just beneath the surface, hidden from view, turbulent currents are stirring which at any time can break the surface calm. From the moment we are born we are sliding towards old age and death, susceptible to various diseases and accidents that may hasten our arrival at the appointed end. Driven by our desires we wander from life to life across the sand dunes of samsāra, elated by our rises, shaken by our falls. The very stuff of our lives consists of nothing more than a conglomeration of five "heaps" of psychophysical processes, without any permanence or substance. Perhaps the Buddha's most poignant statement on the human condition is his image of a man being swept along by a mountain torrent: he grasps for safety at the grasses along the banks only to find that they break off just as he takes hold of them. However, though the Buddha begins by drawing our attention to the uncertainty that encompasses us even in the midst of comfort and enjoyment, he by no means ends there. The discourse on suffering is expounded, not to lead us to despair, but to awaken us from our complacent slumbers and to set us moving in the direction where our ultimate welfare can be found. Far from undercutting our need to feel secure, the Buddha's teaching unfolds from that very same need, turning it into a sustained inquiry into what genuine security actually means. Ordinarily, our benighted attempts to achieve security are governed by a myopic but imperious self-interest oriented around the standpoint of self. We assume that we possess a solid core of individual being, an inherently existent ego, and thus our varied plans and projects take shape as so many manoeuvres to ward off threats to the self and promote its dominance in the overall scheme of things. The Buddha turns this whole point of

view on its head by pointing out that anxiety is the dark twin of ego. He declares that all attempts to secure the interests of the ego necessarily arise out of clinging, and that the very act of clinging paves the way for our downfall when the object to which we hold perishes, as it must by its very nature. The Buddha maintains that the way to true security lies precisely in the abolition of clinging. When all clinging has been uprooted, when all notions of “I” and “mine” have lost their obsessive sting, we will have no more fear, no more worry, no more anxious concern. Touched by the fluctuations of worldly events the mind remains stable, “sorrowless, stainless and secure” (Sn. 268). While ultimate security lies only in the unconditioned, in Nibbāna “the supreme security from bondage” (*anuttara yogakkhema*), as we wend our way through the rough terrain of our mundane lives we have available a provisional source of security that will help us deal effectively with the dangers and difficulties that beset us. This provisional security lies in firmly committing ourselves to the Dhamma as our source of solace and guidance, as our incomparable refuge. The word “dhamma” itself means that which upholds and supports. The Buddha’s teaching is called the Dhamma because it upholds those who live by it: it wards off the dangers to which we would be exposed if we were to flout it; it sustains us in our endeavour for the final good if we revere it and make it the foundation of our lives.

The Dhamma provides protection, not by any mystical blessing or downpour of saving grace, but by indicating the sure and certain guidelines that enable us to protect ourselves. Beneath the apparent randomness of visible events there runs an invisible but indomitable law which ensures that all goodness finds its due recompense. To act counter to this law is to invite disaster. To act in harmony with it is to tap its reserves of energy, to yoke them to one’s spiritual growth, and to make oneself a channel of help for others who likewise roam in search of a refuge.

The essential counsel that the Buddha gives us to secure our self-protection is to shun all evil, to practise the good, and to purify our minds. By the pursuit of non-violence, honesty, righteousness and truth we weave around ourselves an impenetrable net of virtue that ensures our well-being even in the midst of violence and commotion. By cultivating the good we sow the seeds of wholesome qualities that will come to maturity as we continue on our path throughout the saṃsāric journey. And by purifying our minds of greed, hatred and delusion by mindfulness and diligent effort, we will find for ourselves an island that no flood can overwhelm—the island of the Deathless.

Exploring the Wheels

Touching the Essence: Six Lectures on Buddhism. Bhikkhu Dhammapala (Henry van Zeyst)
(Wheel No. 132/134)

Touching the Essence evolved from a popular series of lectures into this present set of essays on the most essential teachings of the Buddha. This book has proven to be as popular as the lectures for it has had several printings. Here is Han van Zeyst’s writing at its best, with his lively and inquiring mind, his witty word-play, and his use of shifting points of emphasis. While each of the essays can stand on its own, they were written to be read together, for in each essay there are echoes of previous ideas, but restated so that the ideas become variation on a theme. Perhaps the best way to explore this Wheel is to draw out some nuggets from the mine and let the reader assay their value for himself.

On happiness: “The very fact that we are all striving for greater happiness shows that the degree of happiness in our possession is not satisfactory, that that degree of happiness is not

even considered as good. We do not strive for what is better, but for the best. The best, however, is not better than the good, but it is the good which we have recognised as such. And after having recognised it, all the rest cannot even compete; it becomes simply evil, and as such it is rejected, whatever other name we may give to it" (p.37).

On modern life: "Life has become unnatural because it has become mechanised; man is reduced to the position of a cogwheel in a machine. As a cogwheel is moved on and on by other, sometimes smaller wheels, and thus by turning round and round merely passes on that movement to the next—thus man, to find his place in society, must move on with society and in his whirling round gets hold of others whom he drags along with him in the vortex of materialism" (p.3).

On craving; "Craving is the real turning point, the crank which sets the wheel of rebirth, the machinery of life and death, working. Craving imparts selfishness, that is the I-concept, to mere sensation, thus fertilising the seeds produced by previous action. Here with craving the problem of rebirth is given anew, and with the cessation of craving this problem is solved.... If craving is dissolved, the whole world becomes a mere play of the senses, where the self is no longer an actor. Where the self does not act, there is no kamma and no more rebirth, so that with the ending of craving the turning of the wheel of saṃsāra will have come to a stop" (p.71–72).

On suffering: "To see that there is suffering in the world is not such an extraordinary discovery. The greatness of the Buddha's insight, however, lies in the fact that he realised that everything is suffering; in other words, he saw not merely that there was suffering in life, but he realised that life itself is suffering" (p.38). "To experience suffering surely can be done by any being endowed with feeling; that, however, does not prevent a possible return. Understanding therefore is necessary of the real nature of the evil and of its cause. When properly understood, suffering will be seen as an effect of action which must have been evil to produce such a bad effect. When thus understood in connection with action, it becomes living like actuality itself. No longer passive fate, but active 'kamma' which means self-responsibility" (p.7).

On action: "Action is not finished with action and it is just that which makes life so terribly actual. At every moment I am reaping the fruit of the past; and at every moment I am sowing the seed for the future" (p.7).

On self: "It is in ignorance that the I-concept is formed, it is in craving that the I-concept is maintained. Ignorance creates a delusion, and craving clings to it" (p.75). "But as a man given over to the excessive use of drugs will always take more, preferring to dream on rather than to face actuality—so the world clings to the delusion of self and considers deliverance there from as undesirable" (p.79–80).

On renunciation: "In letting go we shall arrive. In giving up we shall obtain. For that which we abandon is the burden of sorrow; that which we discard is the fetter of self. And thus renunciation becomes freedom, relief, deliverance, a foretaste of Nibbāna" (p.9). "Renunciation ... as a natural result of insight through which craving and clinging become impossible, is the way by which deliverance from the passions can be attained. As a lamp must give up its oil so that light may shine, similarly renunciation is an indispensable factor to enlightenment: renunciation not only of the world but of the self" (p.86).

Ayya Nyanasiri

Book Reviews

Heritage of Buddhism. D.C. Ahir. B.R. Publishing Corp., 29/9, Nangia Park, Shaktinagar, Delhi 110007. 1989. 319 pp. Indian Rs. 195.

This book presents a comprehensive study of the heritage of Buddhism in India, beginning with its origins in the time of the Buddha. The author provides biographical sketches of the chief Buddhist kings, saints, scholars and missionaries; and attempts to throw new light on the perplexing question of why Buddhism disappeared from the land of its birth. He surveys Buddhist literature in Pali and Sanskrit, traces the contribution of Buddhism to Indian language and literature, and offers a study of Buddhist art that is supplemented by twenty-two photographic plates. Separate chapters examine the relations between Buddhism and the other major Indian religions—Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism. The book concludes with a brief inquiry into the present status of Buddhism and Buddhists in modern India.

The Principles of Buddhist Psychology. David J. Kalupahana. State University of New York Press, Albany, N.Y., 1987. 236 pp. \$39.50 (HB), \$12.95 (PB).

Through its emphasis on the human mind as the source of bondage and the key to liberation, Buddhism has spawned a complex and sophisticated body of psychological teachings, a fact of much current interest. In *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* David Kalupahana, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hawaii, attempts a comprehensive study of this subject, which he approaches with the tools of philosophical analysis. In fact, his book might be viewed as being more an overview of the philosophical principles embedded in Buddhist psychology than as an internal “clinical” examination of the field.

The author’s understanding of Buddhist philosophy has been laid bare in his previous books and looms large in the background of this work as well. He stresses the empirical, anti-metaphysical and non-substantialist character of the original Buddhist teachings, a character, he holds, that was compromised as Buddhism evolved and had to be repeatedly rediscovered and resurrected. The present book applies the same historical pattern to Buddhist psychology. The first part offers a study of the psychological principles of early Buddhism based entirely on the Nikāyas. Here Kalupahana deals with such topics as the Buddha’s conception of the person, the stream of consciousness, perception, the emotions, conceptualisation, meditation, suffering and freedom. He elicits interesting parallels between Buddhist psychology and the thought of the great American psychologist William James, who also hold a non-substantialist, process-oriented conception of the mind. The second part of the book outlines the high points in the later history of Buddhist psychology, from the Abhidhamma period through the Yogacara school. Two appendices include translations of the Yogacara works, Maitreya’s *Madhyanta Vibhaga* (Chapter 1) and Vasubandhu’s *Vijñaptimatratā Siddhi*.

Limitations of space preclude a detailed scrutiny of this book. I can only state here that along with my appreciation for the rigour and consistency of Kalupahana’s thought, I also hold reservations about a fair number of his interpretations and conclusions. At a fundamental level I find that his particular interests as a philosopher induce him to focus upon issues of philosophical significance in a way that deflects attention away from important aspects of Buddhist psychology that should certainly have been dealt with in a book devoted to that topic. He also seems to treat Buddhist philosophy almost as a self-sufficient search for clarity of understanding instead of stressing its primary aim as deliverance from suffering, the aim to which all else is subordinate. Though a chapter deals with the subject of suffering, it soon turns into a defence against the old charge of pessimism, a defence that seems to soften the sharp thrust of the Buddha’s teaching and also weakens his account of the “psychology of freedom.”

The second part of the book offers a critique of the psychology of the Buddhist scholastics, who the author claims reasserted the metaphysical substantialism rejected by the Buddha. Here I think his criticisms, though valid against some developments in the schools, in places go too far. For example, while the *bhavana* is certainly a hypothetical explanatory concept, it is far from being an “extremely metaphysical notion.” Kalupahana also attempts to demonstrate that the psychological reflections of Nagarjuna and the Yogacarins are not the revolutionary innovations they are usually held to be, but viable endeavours to restore the original perceptions of the Buddha’s psychology after they had been lost by the scholastics. Whether Kalupahana’s interpretation of these thinkers can stand up under examination is a question that would have to be judged by specialists in this field, but his thesis is bound to arouse interest.

Though Kalupahana’s book offers ample scope for disagreement, it is a thoughtful and well argued work that should prove to be both stimulating and informative.

—Bhikkhu Bodhi

Office News

The law of impermanence holds sway over the BPS just as it does over everything formed and composite. Thus we have undergone some changes in recent months, both losses and gains, of which we wish to keep our members informed.

First, a pair of long-term officers of the Society have retired. In October 1989 Mr. P.B. Mudannayake, who had held the post of treasurer, retired after a spell of service for the BPS that began as far back as 1962. Then, in December, Mr. Albert Witanachchi retired from the post of general secretary, owing to poor health. Albert had joined the BPS staff in 1980 and for the past four years had served as general secretary. His affable personality, easy manner, and sense of humour had provided a warm welcome to the many visitors to the BPS both from home and abroad. Both staff members will be greatly missed. We extend to them our great appreciation for their years of dedicated service and we wish them good health and a fruitful life in retirement.

On the positive side, we are glad to welcome to the BPS staff Mr. Rohan Jayatilleke, who joined our office team as office assistant. A former postal inspector and a freelance journalist and Dhamma school teacher, Mr. Jayatilleke brings to his job a care, speed and efficiency that have so far been a great asset to our service. Under his direction we now see to it that all small orders are filled the same day they arrive and big orders from book dealers in at most three days.

The office facilities have also seen some changes. The sales section is now enlarged, with all of our publications on display in new book racks. We have provided tables and chairs, so you can relax, browse through the new catalogues, or thumb through our works. Our library, too, has been expanded. Now the many magazines and newsletters which come from around the world are on display on open shelves, inviting people to pick them up and read about what is happening elsewhere in the Buddhist world. A newly formed Women’s Volunteer Group mans the library, ready to assist you in locating books for a research project, or for your own needs. Why not develop the habit of setting aside a morning or afternoon for Dhamma-reading? Every Wednesday evening at 4:30 pm meditation classes are held by Ven. Kamalasiri and Mr. Godwin Samararatne in our large meeting hall. These classes have been very popular, but the hall is so large that anyone who is interested may join. Please bring your own cushion.

On Thursday afternoons at 4:30 p.m. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi has been conducting Sutta Study Classes. This is an excellent opportunity to study the Dhamma in depth, but with guidance. It is also your chance to ask the Dhamma questions you've been puzzling over.

We have a few more ideas that we're considering, but we would like to hear from you. What can we offer that would be helpful to the Buddhist community?

Credit where credit is due: due to an oversight, a credit line for the cover of the last Wheel (*Metta: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love*) was omitted. The beautiful cover is the work of Upul Jayaratne, a young Sri Lankan artist from Nugegoda, who also designed the cover of our Wheel *On the Eco-crisis* and of *Last Days of the Buddha*.

Guidelines to Sutta Study

By Bhikkhu Bodhi

While the Buddha was delivering his first discourse, the Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma; there arose in the venerable Kondañña "the spotless, immaculate, vision of the Dhamma" which transformed him into a stream-enterer, a disciple on the first stage of enlightenment. Over the following days the Buddha continued to explain the Dhamma to the other four monks in his first band of followers, and in due course they too arrived at the attainment of stream-entry. Then, perhaps a week or two later, when the Buddha was sure that their faculties had ripened through solitary meditation, he delivered to them his next major discourse, the Anattalakkhana Sutta, The Discourse on the Characteristic of Non-self (included in Wheel No. 17 and treated more fully in Wheel No. 268).

The theme of this sutta, as its title indicates, is the doctrine of *anatta*, non-self or egolessness. This doctrine is the distinctive mark of the Buddha's teaching, setting it off from all other religious and spiritual perspectives on human nature. The brunt of this teaching is the thesis that neither within the individual nor behind the external world can be found any permanent entity that can serve as a basis for an enduring identity. This means, in effect, that the person is without an individual soul or persisting self, just as the world is without an underlying substratum or a transcendent overlord.

For the Buddha this teaching of anatta serves as both the key to understanding human bondage and the door to liberation from suffering. What keeps us bound, tied to the round of rebirth with its heavy burden of suffering; is our compulsive need to establish for ourselves some basis of personal identity. We cling to our personalities—the body and mind—as "I" and "mine," assuming that within it or behind it is a truly existent self which remains the same despite outward change. Liberation from the cycle of becoming is achieved by seeing through such distorted notions of selfhood right down to the most fundamental misconception of the "I."

According to the suttas, notions of selfhood occur at three levels. The coarsest is the level of views, ranging from complex speculative theories about the self down to the spontaneous identification of "the five aggregates" as being in some way our self or the belongings of our self. The other two levels are connected with conceit and craving. Through conceit we think of ourselves in terms of "I" and compare ourselves favourably or unfavourably with others. Through craving we attach ourselves to our personalities as "mine" and seek to appropriate external objects as our personal possessions.

To arrive at the end of suffering, all such ideas infected by clinging to self must be cut off at the root. This happens through the development of insight (*vipassanā*). When insight issues in the first stage of enlightenment, the path of stream-entry, the essential truth of egolessness is directly perceived and the fetter of wrong view of self is eliminated.

The stream-enterer no longer regards himself as a self-subsistent ego and no longer holds to any view of self. However, even the stream-enterer—and those on the next two planes of enlightenment as well—can still give rise to thoughts governed by conceit and craving. It is only in the arahant, the fully liberated one, that the truth of non-self has been so thoroughly realised that conceit and craving are eradicated, along with the subtle delusions of “I” and “mine.” At the time the Anattalakkhana Sutta opens, the five disciples stood only at the level of stream-entry. They thus still needed further instructions to reach the final fruit of arahantship. Immediately following the First Sermon, they must have spent their time in deep meditation; developing the insights they had already achieved. When the Buddha saw that they needed only the help of another discourse to attain the goal, he gathered the monks around him and addressed them thus, “Bhikkhus!” And in this way the Discourse on Non-Self begins.

(to be continued)

The Buddhist Publication Society

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

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