

Live Now

Buddhist Essays

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BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Kandy Sri Lanka

SL. ISBN 955-24-0028-7

First Impression 1960

Second Impression 1973

Third Impression 1987

THE WHEEL PUBLICATION No. 24 / 25

*There's no tomorrow,
No yesterday.
No reason for sorrow
Or need to say,
This thing I remember;
For that I pray.'
There's only today.*

Aananda Pereira

FOREWORD

to the Third Edition

The essays collected here appeared first in the years 1951–1952, as editorials in the fortnightly paper, *The Buddhist World* (Colombo), edited by the late U Tun Hla Oung, whose service to the cause of Buddhism we remember with appreciation.

The author of these essays passed away on 19th September 1967, having been Deputy Solicitor General at the time of his death. He was the son of the late Venerable Kassapa Thera (formerly Dr. Cassius A. Pereira), whose poems precede some of the essays in this volume.

A second selection of his essays appears under the title *Escape to Reality* as No. 45/46 of 'The Wheel' series

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Live Now

*Look to this day.
In its brief course
Lie all the verities of existence—
Action, love, transience.
Yesterday is but a dream,
and tomorrow veiled.
Live now!*

(Adapted from a poem by Kalidasa)

Kassapa Thera

The secret of happy, successful living lies in doing what needs to be done *now*, and not worrying about the past and the future. We cannot go back into the past and reshape it; nor can we anticipate everything that may happen in the future.

There is but one moment of time over which we have some conscious control—the present.

This truth has been recognized not only by the Buddha but also by all the great thinkers of the world. They saw that it is futile to live in memories of the past and in dreams of the future, neglecting the present moment and its opportunities. Time moves on. Let us not stand idly by and see our hopes for success turn into memories of failure. It lies in our power to build today something that will endure through many tomorrows, something more solid than castles in the air. The Buddha has shown us the way. The time is now and the choice is ours.

Indomitability

*We are battalions of Him who said,
"Confidence have I, and understanding,
Power to wrest freedom for myself, and all
This can I do, and will. Let blood dry up
And let my flesh shrink up and waste to naught,
Till bones and skin remain: yet will I not
From this seat rise till victory be won.
A Munja-crest I wear in this last fight!
What boots this living on in endless ill?
Rather will I die in battle, ardent
Than miss high Aim and like a craven live."
Such was our leader: and beneath His flag,
Shall we, who know the road we have to tread,
The road by Him revealed, who mapless went,
And dauntless won the Goal for us: shall we
Who bear His name not fight on, happily,
For all, our leader stood?—For Justice, Truth,
And Peace for all, and Love, and Final Bliss?
We shall—or die; that truth may thereby live.*

Kassapa Thera

The Buddha did not preach fatalism, nor is the doctrine of kamma a doctrine of predetermination. The past influences the present but does not dominate it, for kamma is action, both past and present.

The past *and present* influence the future. The past is a background against which life goes on from moment to moment. The future is yet to be. Only the present moment exists and the responsibility of using the present moment for good or for ill lies with each individual. No living being can avoid this responsibility and no intelligent being will seek to do so.

Right through the Buddha's teaching, repeated stress is laid on such attributes as self-reliance, mindfulness, resolution and energy. If there was one thing that he did *not* teach, it was fatalism. He taught that all conditioned things (*sa"nkhaara*) are impermanent (*anicca*). Character also is a conditioned thing, and in this very quality of impermanence, of changeableness, lies the secret of ultimate deliverance. That which is impure can be purified. That which is weak can be strengthened. That which is immature can be developed into maturity.

The heights are not reached by a sudden leap but by quiet, persistent endeavour. "A journey of a thousand miles starts with one step." There is a quality of mind, which literally makes any attainment possible. It pushes on, steadily, and doggedly, refusing to be discouraged by handicaps and disappointments, refusing to be discouraged by obstacles, refusing to admit defeat, whatever happens. It fights on in spite of all.

This is the sort of mind the Buddha wanted his followers to cultivate—
The Indomitable Mind.

It is more glorious than the sun, more dependable than the stars, more potent than any other force in the world.

It is invincible.

Action

*For good or ill, three doors of action open
To lead the actor up, or down to woe.
Speech-door is lowest, body-door comes next,
Mind is most potent of the fateful three.
Low is all action that the wise will scorn,
Vain are fine words that lag unbacked by deeds,*

*Ill are the deeds unguided by wise mind,
Baneful are thoughts of foolish hate and lust.
Noble is action that the wise will prize.
Grand are fine words that leap to life in deeds.
High are the deeds directed by wise mind,
Lofty are thoughts of selfless sympathy.*

Kassapa Thera

"Having slain mother (craving), father (conceit), two warrior kings (views of Eternalism and Nihilism), and having destroyed a country (senses and sense objects) together with its treasure (clinging), ungrieving goes the Arahāt."

Dhammapada stanza 294

The Buddha Dhamma is a virile teaching. It has no use for sickly sentimentality. It appeals to the practical minded, those who face facts and are prepared to exert themselves. The facts are Greed, Hatred and Ignorance. Everywhere we see them, in the palaces of the rich and the hovels of the poor, in hospitals, at holiday resorts and in the courts of law. Wherever we see them, we must recognize them, because one cannot fight an enemy that one does not recognize.

Greed, Hatred and Ignorance—the ugly trio—these are our true enemies, and have always been so from the beginning of time. Against each of these enemies there is a weapon, sure and deadly, in the hand of him who is strong enough to wield it.

The weapon that destroys greed is liberality (*daana*). That is simple enough to think about, and beautiful enough to admire. But it is a heavy weapon and only the strong can wield it. Let us be strong in giving, as the Bodhisatta was strong, giving wealth, giving limbs, eyes, blood, life itself. There was no limit to His giving, as there is no limit to the courage of a hero.

The weapon that destroys hatred is love (*mettaa*). This is not the selfish, clinging love that novelists and film producers exploit to such advantage.

Such love is a puny thing compared with the Buddha's mettaa, because mettaa has nothing of self in it and nothing of clinging. It is limitless, extending to all beings as friends, making no distinction between this person and that. It is not easy to love in this way, but it is worth trying, and the time is *now*. It may yet save humanity from self-destruction.

The weapon that destroys ignorance is meditation (*bhaavanaa*). Buddhist meditation is not day-dreaming, musing, or the building of castles in the air. It is the systematic training of the mind in concentrated thought and the focussing of that trained mind on the nature of life itself. Seen clearly, it is seen as impermanent, unsatisfactory and devoid of any core of reality. This weapon, meditation, is the most difficult of all to wield and master. It calls for training in self-discipline, a training that we all need. The beginning of this training lies in the strict observance of the five precepts. These precepts strictly observed, build a character strong enough to wield the weapon of *bhaavanaa*. Let us strengthen ourselves, arm ourselves, arm ourselves with these three mighty weapons and attack the three enemies, like happy warriors.

Ideals and Ideologies

*I seek the Highest, for myself
And those who trusted me.
I shall not bend down to my will
The folk who seek poor clods
Of earthy compromise.
What boots it if one dies
Or if the way be dark and grim!
I'll light it with a smile of love
And keep on searching still—
I seek the highest.*

Kassapa Thera

History, with an abundance of instances, proves that whenever a group of people formulates an ideology and sets out to create a Utopia in accordance with its principles, there is trouble ahead for other people. The original reformists may be idealists, well-meaning and intelligent. Indeed, they usually are. But the misery they bring about appears to be in almost direct proportion to the goodness of their intentions.

Sooner or later, consciously or unconsciously, these men of destiny come to accept the principle that the end justifies the means; and once that is conceded, unpleasant things begin to happen very quickly. Emotion deliberately excited, usurps reason; slogans take the place of argument, and people find themselves at one another's throats without knowing exactly why.

No Buddhist, however simple he may be, should ever let himself be duped into such stupid and unseemly behaviour. The Truth he seeks admits of no half-truths and lesser loyalties. It is to be sought and found by each individual for himself and within himself. Nobody, not even a Buddha, can confer Enlightenment upon another. With the example of the Buddha and the

Arahants to inspire him, every Buddhist must strive for himself.

It is for this reason that Buddhists have no need for ideologies and no need to pretend that the end justifies the means. We do not seek to impose our way of life upon others. Our history is not written in the blood of prospective converts; nor do we believe that people can be dragged to Nibbaana in chains. In proclaiming the Buddha Dhamma, we speak as free men to free men.

The Buddha Dhamma points to ultimate and final truth as the end. It teaches self-control, mental culture and clear thinking as the means to that end. The end merely directs the means and does not need to justify them. Self-control, mental culture and clear thinking justify themselves and are a blessing at every stage of a being's progress to Enlightenment.

Skilful Giving

*To give, compassion-moved,
To give to one who needs,
With a heart of love:
These are the precious seeds
That stand above
All barren show of splendour.
To give with selfless love,
To give from deep respect
To teacher, parent, holy man,
Wisdom's elect,
Is even grander.
To give to help good cause,
To spread the Truth
And knowledge of the Way
To Virtue, Mindfulness,
To dawn of Wisdom's Day,
Skilful is such giving.*

Kassapa Thera

Giving is an art; and like any other art, it can be cultivated by practice. The miser, the man who thinks only of himself, finds it very difficult indeed to give. For him, it is very difficult to give even to those who are near and dear to him, not because he does not love them, but because he loves himself too much and is too dominated by clinging, to part with anything.

Higher on the scale come those who give, and can take pleasure in giving to those who are near and dear to them, but to no one else. They give to their parents and children and to a limited circle of relatives and friends; but beyond that their generosity does not extend. It is like a lamp that is shut up within a little box. The inside is illuminated, but not a single ray penetrates the box to brighten the outside world. Such people too are

dominated by selfish clinging; but in their case “self” does not mean only “I” but extends a little further to whom they call “mine.”

Most of us worldlings belong to this class of giver. The differences between us are only differences of degree. Those of us who have a large circle of friends, to whom we give freely and gladly, are known as generous. Those of us who have a small circle of friends to whom we give are known as stingy. But we keep our giving within this circle, whether it be large or small.

Highest on the scale are those few great ones whose giving knows no bounds. Their generosity extends without limit, to all beings, blazing forth like the light of the sun. Our Buddha was one such, not only in his final birth but in previous existences also, when he was perfecting *daana paarami*. In previous existences, he gave his wealth, his eyes, his limbs, his life; and in his final existence he gave the greatest of all gifts—the peerless Buddha Dhamma. He gave it freely to those who had ears to hear and minds to understand.

With such a noble example to guide us, it is the business of each of us to practice the art of giving. We should constantly widen the circle of those to whom we give, and every now and then, ever more frequently, we should strive to break the circle and let our generosity shine out to someone beyond. So, in time, it will become limitless.

Confidence

*The floods of Lust, of endless Birth,
Of tangled Views, of Ignorance—
One crosses these, not staying still,
Nor yet by fool precipitance.
Quenchless the courage on that quest
And absolute the confidence*

Kassapa Thera

What is the essential difference between a swimmer and a non-swimmer? Both may be elderly, not particularly healthy, and in poor physical condition due to lack of exercise. Yet, if they happen to fall into deep water, the swimmer will survive while the non-swimmer, unless somebody else saves him, will drown. Why?

Because the swimmer, through knowledge gained from previous experience, has confidence that the water will support him. He does not struggle and fight the water and try to climb right out of it. He trusts it and relaxes, knowing full well that he will not sink, and all he needs do is to keep his nose and mouth above the surface. The non-swimmer has no such confidence. He does not trust the water and his ability to float in it. He does not relax. He fights for his life when no fight is necessary, and he loses the fight.

This is only one example of the importance of confidence—confidence born of knowledge. It is an essential quality for success in any activity and endeavour—from the threading of a needle to the practice of bhaavanaa. It makes all the difference between efficiency and inefficiency, success and failure. Sometimes it means the difference between life and death.

Some people call it faith. That is as good a word as any other; but it has certain connotations that do not appeal to those of independent mind, to

people who wish to see and know for themselves. Unfortunately there are some things we cannot experience for ourselves with any hope of survival—the taste of cyanide for instance. There is an old saying “Experience is a comb that a man gets when he has lost his hair.” It is a wise man who profits by the experience of others.

Confidence born of knowledge need not necessarily be confidence born of one’s own personal experience. That is why people pay big fees to instructors, to people who have specialized in the various sciences. They have made it their business to acquire the necessary experience and knowledge to be competent to advise others. People who are wise heed such advice and act on it with confidence. Is this mere blind faith, or is it confidence born of knowledge?

To the Buddhist, the Buddha is the greatest instructor of all time. Yet there are those who call themselves Buddhists but who do not act on his advice with confidence. They act with confidence, and with no sense of incongruity, on the advice of the family doctor and the golf coach. They adopt an attitude of scepticism towards a mental giant but humbly acknowledge the wisdom of a host of contemporary pygmies.

The Power Of Mind

*A lone seer from a tropic land
Sent forth rays of radiant love,
Intense and immeasurable,
Below, around, above.
And far away where snowflakes fell
Death knocked, and round a bed, folk sighed.
He past hope, starts, and whispers—“Look!
Look! Love’s rose-light!”—and smiling died.*

Kassapa Thera

Mind is power, just as electricity is power. Nobody will deny the power of electricity, but people tend to doubt the power of mind because as yet there is no instrument whereby it can be measured. But to those who have had some actual experience of its operation, the power of mind is a very real thing. Sometimes it can be a startling thing.

Since time immemorial the East has recognized the power of mind. While the West has progressed far in studying and exploiting the power of matter, the East has progressed far in studying and exploiting this subtler power. Phenomena such as telepathy, hypnotism, clairvoyance and clairaudience, have, for ages past, been regarded as almost commonplace in the East, whereas in the countries of the West they are still excitingly new.

Mind power, like all forces, is neither good nor evil in itself. It can kill as well as cure, destroy as well as create. And again like all forces, it operates in accordance with certain natural laws. Many have been those who studied these laws, in order that they might use this silent, unseen force. Some used it for evil and reaped the deadly harvest that it yielded. Others used it for good and their names are yet remembered with reverence.

Greatest of all teachers of mental culture was the Buddha. Understanding fully the rational laws in accordance with which mind power operates, He taught His followers how to develop and use it for the highest good, the attainment of final deliverance. The first step on the road to mental culture, according to the Buddha Dhamma, is Siila or virtue. The man who would control his mind must first learn to control his speech and deed.

The next step is bhaavanaa, the practice of concentration and the cultivation thereby a calm, steady, “one-pointed” mind. It is not easy. The Buddha has prescribed 40 subjects of meditation for the cultivation of this “one-pointed” mind. In the absence of an experienced guru, the aspirant to mental culture must analyse his own nature (always a difficult feat) and choose a subject that suits him.

One of the subjects of meditation that may with benefit be chosen by anybody is mettaa, selfless love, sympathetic kindness towards all beings. It may be practiced with safety, and indeed with definite advantage, even by those whose siila is yet imperfect. It is wholesome and good, bringing bodily health, mental calm and rapid attainment of concentration.

To the hurrying multitude, a person seated quietly in the practice of mettaa bhaavanaa may appear to be doing nothing. But those who are aware of the nature of mind power would know better, for such a person is a human dynamo, generating thoughts of love in a world that has forgotten how to love. Were there many such, their united power might yet save the world from self-destruction:

*For not by hatred are hatreds ever quenched here in this world,
By love rather are they quenched. This is an eternal law.*

Virtue

*Who stainless lives
Both calmness gives
And power gains.
Their fear departs
Where virtue reigns
In righteous hearts.*

Kassapa Thera

In the last essay, we mentioned *siila* or virtue as the first step on the road to mental culture as taught by the Buddha. By *bhaavanaa* or the cultivation of a “one-pointed” mind, a person learns to concentrate mind power. But it is obvious that one can only concentrate the power that is available.

If you stand in the bright sunlight at noon on a clear day, and using a convex lens, concentrate the sun’s rays on the back of your hand, you will almost immediately feel the sting of the concentrated radiant heat. If however you do the same thing at night, using the same lens, but substituting a 40-candle power electric bulb in place of the sun, you will not even notice the increased temperature caused by the concentrated, radiant heat unless your skin is exceptionally sensitive.

The same principle applies to the concentration of mind power. The power that can be developed by concentration is in direct proportion to the innate power of the mind, and this power varies in different individuals; what is more important, it varies in the same individual at different times. Even strong characters have their moments of weakness, and weak characters their moments of strength.

The first step then on the road to mind power is to develop a consistently firm and purposeful mind as the source of power to be concentrated. In other

words, one must first develop a strong will, as that term is commonly understood. This can most readily and surely be achieved by the constant practice of self-control. Virtue, *siila*, is the best form of self-control. It ranges from the five precepts of a lay Buddhist to the innumerable precepts of the *Upasampadaa Bhikkhu*. Of course self-control can be practised in other ways as well. One can balance for hours on one's head, or go without food for days on end or hold an arm up until it withers. But such practices will not tend to purify the mind while strengthening it, as the practice of *siila* does.

Hasty and unthinking critics have said of Buddhist virtue that it is negative, in that it lies in abstention from evil and not in doing good. But this criticism is based on a misunderstanding of the purpose of *siila* in Buddhism. It is a means to an end and not an end in itself. There is but one end towards which every Buddhist strives, the attainment of Nibbaana or final deliverance from the toils of *sa.msaara*, from the recurrent, painful and entirely disgusting round of birth, decay and death.

It behoves every lay Buddhist to observe the five precepts, *Pañca Siila*. These are the abstentions from five kinds of wrong action—killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying or slanderous speech and the taking of intoxicants. He who observes these five precepts consistently and scrupulously develops strong will, a mind that can be concentrated to some effect. He becomes a very considerable source of power.

Concentration

*Wouldst thou wield cosmic power?
Then, virtue-based
Seek thou to centre mind
In one clean focus.
Success yields god-like ken;
'Yea, more than gods';
For even they know not
The Hypercosmic.*

Kassapa Thera

In bhaavanaa or concentration, we come to the very heart of the system of mental culture taught by the Buddha. It is the key to the highest mental powers and the performance of feats of *iddhi* (supernormal power). Such feats and such powers are not the ultimate end to which the Buddhist aims. They are but by-products of mental culture and they too are transient. The true follower of the Fully Awakened One has just one aim—the attainment of final deliverance. All else is shoddy, subject to the law of impermanence, devoid of any core of reality.

But let us be frank. Although such powers as clairvoyance and clairaudience and the capacity to perform such feats as levitation do not constitute the ultimate aim of the Buddhist, though they have their appeal. And like all things, they do have their uses. Imagine the influence of a reformer who could make his audience actually see the states of suffering and the states of bliss of which he speaks.

Those of us who are Buddhists in little more than name spend so much of time and energy in the unblushing pursuit of purely material ends that it would be hypocritical for us to pretend that we do not work for mental powers only because we realize that they are not the final goal. The true reasons lie much closer to hand. We feel that we cannot spare the necessary time and energy. Also we are somewhat skeptical about such things. They are

so foreign to the normal course of our lives. In short, we are full-time worldlings.

But what is the normal course of our lives? A tread-mill. We are so preoccupied with the business of earning a living that we have no time to live. We strive to keep up appearances. We work hard for this pathetic little prize and that, and try to feel important when we succeed. When we fail, as most of us must, we pretend that we do not care. And presently death comes to each of us and the sorry little tale is told only to begin again in the next existence. And so on interminably, life after life, like an endless serial story told in countless squalid installments.

Is it escapism to turn away from such futility? Is it escapism to outgrow one's swaddling clothes, and cast aside one's rattle? The practice of bhaavanaa offers as mere by-products, prizes, which far surpass anything attainable by material means. These prizes can be one and have been won. They are not figments of the imagination. And ultimately the practice of bhaavanaa leads to final deliverance.

The mind, grown calm and powerful, at last sees things as they actually are. With this clear sight there is a flinging away of existence and all that it implies, just as a man would fling away a rotting corpse that he has long carried on his shoulders, imagining it to be a load of sweet-smelling sandalwood. With this act of revulsion there comes the intuition of Nibbaana.

Insight

*To see things as they are,
To shed all taints, --
To win security,
--The goal of saints!*

Kassapa Thera

Having purified and strengthened his mind by the practice of siila, virtue, and bhaavanaa, concentration, the follower of the Buddha turns this pure, steady, clear-seeing mind to the contemplation of life itself. Vipassanaa bhaavanaa, concentration for insight, is usually undertaken in some quiet place, such as a forest hermitage or lonely mountain cave, because quietness of surroundings promotes quietness of mind.

Unthinking people with worldly minds are apt to regard such seclusion as a form of escapism, a running away from life. But it is just the opposite. It is the most direct approach to life humanly possible. The busy worldling it is who constantly runs away from life, dodging from this activity to that and never pausing long enough to see things as they actually are. It takes strength to be quiet.

Seven qualities, when combined, lead to the gaining of insight. They are known as the seven *Bojjhanga* or factors of enlightenment. They are: 1. *sati*, mindfulness, 2. *Dhamma-vicaya*, investigation of truth, 3. *viriyā*, effort, 4. *pīti*, joy, 5. *passaddhi*, tranquility, 6. *samaadhi*, concentration, and 7. *upekkha*, equanimity. An examination of these seven qualities gives one some idea of the sort of individual who is mature enough in character and intellect for the practice of this contemplation, vipassanaa bhaavanaa. One gets an impression of the true ascetic, alert, keen-minded, dauntless, cheerful, calm, concentrated and poised. He is no weakling, running away from life. He is a hero, facing life as lesser beings dare not face it. His mind does not

play about any longer with the surfaces of things, but seeks deeply.

In the steadfast practice of such contemplation, a time comes when, in a flash of insight, the true nature of life is realized. It is seen as transitory, pain-laden, devoid of soul.

Insight is not achieved by a process of reasoning. It is a direct experience, profound and shattering in its effect. At the first flash of insight the seer becomes a *Sotaapanna*, a Stream-Winner. No longer can he be called a worldling, no longer is he common clay. The process of transmutation thus begun, proceeds as surely as day succeeds night. In succeeding flashes of insight, the seer attains the stages of *Sakadagaami* and *Anaagaami*, until finally, full enlightenment is won and he is an *Arahat*. Of beings such as these the Blessed One has said:

“They whose minds are well perfected in the factors of enlightenment, they who, without craving, delight in the renunciation of attachment, they, the corruption-free shining ones, have attained Nibbaana even in this world.”

Dhammapada 89

The Six Aspirations

1. Renunciation, Part I

*He who, in this world, giving up craving,
would renounce and become a homeless one,
he who has destroyed craving and becoming—
him, I call a Braahmana.*

Dhammapada 413

Renunciation, *nekkhamma*, is the first of the six aspirations (*ajjhasayas*) of a Bodhisatta. A Bodhisatta, in the strict sense, is one who has received assurance from a Buddha that one day, in the distant future, he too will become a Buddha. Gotama Buddha had received such an assurance from Dipankara Buddha. In that existence our Buddha was an ascetic, Sumedha by name, so highly evolved that he could have become an *Arahanta*, a Saint. But his was a heroic spirit. With a heart of love for all beings, he chose the immeasurably harder road of the aspirant to Supreme Buddhahood, so that countless others too might benefit.

This, in itself, was renunciation of the highest order. Thereafter, through incalculably long periods of time, he who was to be Gotama Buddha battled on, building his character to that towering stature, which Buddhas alone attain. His main aspiration when he could remember it was Buddhahood. To this end, he performed the ten *paaramis* (perfections) times without number, sacrificing life itself. But there were existences in the long gulf of time that pass between the appearances of Buddhas when this supreme aim was temporarily obscured.

A Bodhisatta is necessarily a powerful character, and power can lead to great evil as well as great good. The driving force that is a Bodhisatta, wrongly directed, can take a downward plunge, deeper and more appalling than anything lesser beings can even imagine. What is it then that keeps a Bodhisatta on a steady course, life after life, for millions

and millions of lives, even when he has lost sight of his supreme aim? It can be only one thing—the inherent quality of his character.

For this reason alone, if for no other, the six aspirations of the Bodhisatta, *every* Bodhisatta, are of interest to us Buddhists. From a man's aspirations one can get a glimpse of his character. A Bodhisatta, life after life, has a deep, natural, inevitable leaning towards six things. They are: *nekkhamma*, *paviveka*, *alobha*, *adosa*, *amoha*, and *nissarana* (renunciation, seclusion, non-craving, non-hating, non-ignorance and freedom).

There is good reason for the negative form in which the third, fourth, and fifth aspirations are couched. We will deal with that in due course. For the present, we confine ourselves to the first aspiration—renunciation. To the average worldling, the word “Enough!” signifies only one thing—satiety. He is by instinct a gobbler and cries "Enough!" only when, for the time being, he can gobble no more. It happens, recurrently, in the context of the grosser physical appetites. Hunger is a good example. But in certain other contexts it is so rare as to be virtually non-existent. Take the appetite for money for instance. The average worldling can never have enough of it, for the simple reason that his greed is insatiable. However much he may have, he goes on wanting more and doing all he can to grab it. To say "Enough!" would seem to him like madness.

The story is quite different in the case of one who, like a Bodhisatta, has an instinctive leaning towards renunciation. Whatever his immediate heredity or environment, however alluring the immediate prospect of wealth, power, worldly position or influence, he has a deep, natural, inevitable leaning towards renunciation. He says "Enough," not because he is temporarily gorged, but because *renunciation* itself appeals to him as something positively good.

It is not difficult to see the significance of such a trait in the case of a powerful character such as a Bodhisatta. Life after life, it guides him away from the pursuit of ignoble worldly ends. Life after life, he sheds his worldly shackles and goes free, as a homeless ascetic, even though it be for a period when the word "Buddha" is unknown. It is a rudder holding him steady on

his way towards the Final Goal.

Renunciation, Part II

*Who outgrows all life's toys,
His childhood's o'er;
He no more cares to reap,
He's not a sower.*

Kassapa Thera

Renunciation in Buddhism, *nekkhamma*, is not so much a giving up as a growing up. We may give up things that we possess, or think we possess, for various different reasons. We may do so in order to please somebody, whose goodwill we wish to secure. We may do so in order that other people may think highly of us. We may do so from a number of different motives, some good and some bad. But the motive which inspires the true act of renunciation is as simple as it is lofty—a wish to, let go.

To take a simple illustration, let us consider the case of a child with a number of toys. He may give up some of them because he is generous, or because he wishes to make friends with another child, or because he is a self-conscious little prig who wishes to appear noble. But he still loves his toys and really wants to have them and play with them. Such acts of giving up are not true acts of renunciation. But this child grows older. His outlook widens, and a time comes when he feels that the toys are a burden to him. He has to look after them, clean them, keep them in working order, but they yield him no pleasure now. Then he thinks, "Why should I hang on to these things any longer? Let anybody take them who wishes to have them." With this thought he lets go of those toys, and does not care who takes them or what happens to them thereafter. He has outgrown them. That is true renunciation.

All through life, we perform acts of true renunciation in the process of growing up. We leave things behind as we progress towards a greater and

greater maturity. Possessions that we once valued and clung to begin to appear as burdens, and we let go of them, not caring who takes them. But, with all worldlings, there comes a stage of stagnation, of arrested development. And so it is that there are certain things to which all worldlings cling until death comes to them and says, "Leave everything and come with me." Then there is a wrench, a clinging to valued possessions, to loved ones, to life itself, and with this clinging the seed is sown for continued existence, fresh possessions, further suffering.

And so life goes on and, as a being develops in maturity, a time comes when even the valued possessions of the adult worldling appear to him as toys that have lost their appeal. He realizes that he does not even possess them in any real sense of the word, his hold on them being subject to certain happenings such as death, over which he has no control. He sees himself as nothing more than a part-time custodian of a heap of trash.

This is how worldly possessions appear to those who renounce the world. Is it surprising that they let go? Rid of all such burdens, they are progressing on the road to greater maturity. Some day they will attain the ultimate maturity, when every single burden is shed and deliverance is won.

The Six Aspirations

2. Seclusion

*He who sits alone, rests alone, walks alone, he
who is strenuous and who alone subdues self:
such a man finds delight in the forest depths.*

Dhammapada 305

Seclusion, *paviveka*, is the second aspiration of every Bodhisatta. He seeks it naturally, not because he dislikes other people but because he finds something positively good and wholesome in seclusion. Life after life he leaves the crowd and walks alone, taking easily and instinctively to the ascetic life.

The herd instinct is strong in most of us. We like to be with others, all the time. We feel a sense of security in doing what they do, saying what they say, thinking what they think. When circumstances compel us to leave the herd even for a short time, we feel uneasy. We yearn to return as fast as possible.

Today, in many parts of the world, there seems to be an upsurge of childish behaviour among adults. People subscribe to all sorts of dogmas without knowing, or bothering to ask, the reason why. The violence with which Communism for instance is advocated by some is as unreasoning as the violence with which it is opposed by others. People are willing to do literally anything rather than think for themselves. They are willing to fight and die for ideologies that they do not understand. They hold “convictions” that they have acquired as involuntarily as they catch measles.

Seclusion is really a quality of aloofness, mental rather than mechanical. As Lord Horder has put it, seclusion is "a withdrawing of mind at times from the busy-ness of life." Most of us are too busy with trifles. We need to look at life at times, ourselves included, from a distance as it were.

Only thus can we preserve a sense of proportion and a sense of humour. We need to ask "Why?" and we can do this only if we hold aloof.

A Bodhisatta is ever a truth-seeker. When a questing mind goes in search of truth it owes allegiance to truth alone. It is ruthless in its integrity. It cuts through the rough shell of dogma and examines the heart, and if that heart is rotten it rejects the dogma without hesitation or regret. If a Bodhisatta finds himself agreeing with the crowd, it is because he has thought things out for himself. He never agrees through cowardice or laziness or lack of integrity.

But, unfortunately, it is in the nature of crowds to be wrong about most things, most of the time. Even when they are right, it usually is for the wrong reasons. So it is inevitable that truth-seekers generally prefer to walk alone. With mind unfettered by prejudice, uncluttered with other people's opinions, the Bodhisatta goes his own road. Whenever it lies in his power to help others, he does so, gladly. But, being wise, he knows that interference in other people's affairs can lead to more harm than good. So, as a rule, he is content to be a witness.

In an environment of seclusion, he finds peace and strength. While others find a sense of security in being members of a herd, he feels safest when he is alone. The forest depths hold no terrors for him. The tremendous trifles of existence cease to worry him. His mind grows calm and concentrated. It bursts the fetters of sensual existence. It soars, clean, clear and serene—seeking, ever seeking. Where truth beckons the Bodhisatta goes.

The Six Aspirations

3. Non-Craving

*Whoso in the world controls
this stupid unruly craving,
from him sorrows fall away,
like water-drops from a lotus-leaf.*

Dhammapada 336

Non-craving, *alobha*, is the third aspiration of every Bodhisatta, existence after existence on his long journey to final deliverance.

We said in a bove that there is good reason for the negative form in which this lofty aspiration is expressed. There are some who imagine that *alobha* means generosity or munificence, but they are wrong, and there is a real difference between the two ideas. The man who is generous wishes to accumulate, so that he may give to others. The man who cultivates the quality of non-craving does not wish to accumulate for *any* reason. The generous man crossing a desert and coming upon a bag of gold would pick it up and take it with him, thinking of the others to whom he might give the money. The man who has cultivated non-craving to a high degree would leave the gold where it lies and go his way, not wishing to burden himself with it for any reason whatsoever.

Most of us have excellent reasons for accumulating possessions of all sorts. We pride ourselves on our altruism, while grabbing as much as we can, as quickly as we can. Each of us feels oneself a wiser, more worthy custodian of wealth than most other people. We intend to be generous, of course, and give to those who deserve our charity. But in order to give, we must first have. And so we spend most of our time in the process of acquisition. When it comes to giving away, we are very, very cautious and discriminating.

An aspiration to non-craving goes directly to the root of the matter. To accumulate wealth in order that one might help others is something like eating a vast quantity of food in order that one might vomit. Certain animals do it to feed their young. It is mixed up with the idea of "me and mine." It is an essentially selfish operation. The generous father accumulates wealth in order that he might leave it to *his* children. But it is an eternal truth that *every* act of acquisition means a corresponding deprivation of others. To one who loves all beings equally, without distinction or reserve, this business of grabbing from the world in general in order to give to particular individuals seems utterly stupid.

It is more than stupid. It is dangerous. It can lead to every kind of wickedness and meanness. That is why the quality of non-craving is so important for a Bodhisatta. It keeps him on a clean straight road. He goes with safety past the traps, which ensnare lesser beings. His is a powerful character, and the pursuit of possessions, however altruistic the motive, can lead such a character into great evil. Even Hitler and Mussolini had good motives. So has a tigress, when she carries away your child in order to feed her children.

A Bodhisatta will not let himself be dominated by craving. He lives like a master, ruling his desires with wisdom. His road is long and steep. But his load is light, and he goes forward happily.

The Six Aspirations

4. Non-Hating

*‘Whoever, by causing pain to others,
seeks to win happiness for himself,
becomes entangled in the bonds of hate.
Such a man is not freed from hatred.’*

Dhammapada 291

Non-hating, *adosa*, is the fourth characteristic aspiration of every Bodhisatta. Here too, there is good reason for the negative form in which the aspiration is expressed. A Bodhisatta, in his successive existences, may not always be one who is set on good works. He may not be a social reformer or a member of the local anti-crime association. He may be a man who minds his own business and goes his own way. But he does not wish to be a slave, and no bondage is more foolish than that which we impose on ourselves by hating others.

No man can hate another without losing some measure of freedom. Time and energy are two of our most precious assets, whatever we are striving for. But, if we are stupid, we squander them on our enemies as recklessly as an infatuated lover squanders them on his beloved. And hatred is a destructive emotion. It is like a gun whose recoil is more dangerous than the bullet, which it discharges. The damage done in front is as nothing compared to the damage done behind.

We, as Buddhists, should realize that the road of hatred is the road of slavery and suffering. It is not a matter of forgiving our enemies. If we see things as they really are, which few of us do, we will know that we *cannot* harm our enemies. Whatever pain they may suffer at our hands is merely the result of their own bad kamma, the paying-off of their own debts. In the meantime, by making ourselves the agency through which

they pay off their debts, we incur new debts, which we in our turn will have to pay. And so it will go on, life after life for countless lives, unless we see the folly of it all and put a stop to this meaningless self-torture. It is in the ultimate analysis, a matter of forgiving ourselves, of excusing ourselves from further participation in a painful and utterly stupid activity. Only a masochist would see things in this light and yet persist in hatred.

Just as the road of hatred is the road of suffering and bondage, so the road of non-hatred is the road of happiness and freedom. This is the road of all Bodhisattas, life after life, in their long striving for Supreme Buddhahood. They are not willing to be the tools of other peoples' bad kamma. They seek no worldly advance or seeming success that entails suffering to others. They are content to live and let live. They are not to be drawn into crusades and holy wars.

It is well for us Buddhists to remember this always. Hatred is an ugly word, but it can easily be disguised under the name of "righteous indignation" and held up as something worthwhile. We should be on our guard always.

5. Non-Ignorance

*The fool who knows that he is a fool
is at least to that extent a wise man.
The fool who thinks he is wise is a fool indeed.*

Dhammapada 63

Non-ignorance, *amoha*, is the fifth aspiration of every Bodhisatta. Once again, there is reason for the negative form in which the aspiration is put. A Bodhisatta may not, in every birth, be a student of the current arts or sciences. He may not even be an educated man in the worldly sense. But he is always one who strives to see things as they really are. He has a basic integrity of mind, which stubbornly refuses to be misled by appearances. He has no pretences, and he is not beguiled by the pretences of others.

Most of us go through life with certain mental reservations, which do not permit us to ask ourselves the questions that really matter. We are like children, obedient children, who take a lot of things on trust, accepting without question the voice of authority. Thus, authority tells us that patriotism is a good quality, that worldly success is praiseworthy, that the scout-movement helps to build character and that the "public school spirit" is the very essence of manly virtue. So we fight for our respective countries in time of war, try hard to make money in times of peace, send our children to scout camps and, if we can afford it, to public schools. If anybody presumes to question the wisdom of our actions, we "know" that he is either a fool or a knave.

A Bodhisatta must be one who does not mind being considered a fool or a knave. If it is foolish not to think that one's own country is always in the right, then he is a fool. If it is knavish not to make money when the

opportunity offers, then he is a knave. If it is ignoble to think for oneself and try to see things as they really are, then he is content to be the meanest of men. He asks his own questions, finds his own answers, and is strong enough to abide by them.

One of the questions he asks, life after life, is whether any phenomenon whatsoever is eternal. Life after life, he sees that all phenomena are transient. He sees, too, that in transient phenomena there can be no real happiness or contentment. And so he seeks something beyond everything that he knows, something that does not change, something real. His is necessarily a long quest, for the answer comes only with attainment of Buddhahood. But it is always a quest, never an assumption of having found the final answer until that answer has really been found.

How many of us are wise enough to admit that we are fools? We say, as Buddhists, that all things are transient. But to judge by our actions, our plans, our hopes, that statement does not carry much conviction to our own minds. Why? Because *moha*, ignorance, dominates our minds.

6. Freedom

*He who, discarding human bonds
and transcending celestial ties,
is completely delivered of all bonds—
him I call a Brahmana.*

Dhammapada 417

Freedom, *nissara.na* is the last of the six distinctive aspirations of every Bodhisatta. It is, perhaps, the strongest of them all. It is because he loves freedom that a Bodhisatta seeks to win it, and to teach others the way to win it. He seeks leadership in the true sense, not to dominate others but to liberate them.

It takes vision to see the bonds that bind us. Few have that kind of vision. We would heartily agree that income tax is a bond, but we find it hard to regard in this light the income on which the tax is levied. Debts, of course, are bonds, but what of the desires, which make us borrow money? We see that a man undergoing a jail sentence for some crime he has committed is in bondage, but most of us are inclined to regard the successful swindler as a free man.

Even before he attains final Enlightenment, a Bodhisatta has clarity of vision, and this vision helps him to see bonds where others see only blessings. Thus, wealth, children, sovereignty over others, and a host of other things which most worldlings regard as desirable, he sees as bonds. These so-called blessings, while they last, may bring a fleeting moment of pleasure. But a Bodhisatta gladly renounces such pleasure, just as any sane man would refrain from licking a drop of honey off the nose of a hungry python, whose coils would instantly flash around him.

It is precisely for this reason that the Bodhisatta as Prince Themiya, underwent all manner of hardships in order to avoid becoming a king. He had

been a king in a previous existence, which he remembered. And he remembered also the state of suffering into which his kamma took him, as a direct result of the exercise of kingly authority. The zest with which election campaigns are conducted, even in Buddhist lands, bears witness to the fact that the spirit of Themiya is absent in most politicians. Of course, every politician has noble reasons for wanting to be elected. He wishes to 'serve his country.' But thinking men might find it a little difficult to understand how the spirit of service and the spirit of Themiya could be so different in their manifestation.

We can always find excellent reasons for doing what our desires prompt us to do. In pandering to our desires, we may be honest and admit the truth, or we may be cunning rogues and seek to conceal it, or we may even be so foolish as not to see it. But one thing we definitely cannot be, while dominated by desire: we cannot be free. Freedom means letting go.

A Bodhisatta, loving freedom, is not willing to trade it in exchange for the prize, which the world has to offer. He, above all others, is imbued with the spirit of service, but a sure instinct tells him that no service can be worthwhile which is performed at the sacrifice of personal freedom. He avoids fresh bonds, and strives to break any that he already has. He seeks to help others neither as a master, nor as a slave, but as a friend.

Escapism

*Neither in the sky, nor in mid-ocean,
nor in entering a mountain cave is found
that place, where abiding, one may escape
the consequences of an evil deed.*

Dhammapada 127

There are people who seek to find fault with the Buddha Dhamma on the ground that it teaches escapism. They do not know what they are talking about. Escapism may be broadly defined as the attempt to avoid facing disagreeable facts. It is a very different thing from the action of any sensible person who actually escapes, or tries to escape, from danger or suffering. For instance, if you find yourself in a burning house, it would be escapism to take a large dose of whisky and go to bed, assuring yourself that everything will be all right by the time you wake up. It would not be escapism to leave the house before it is too late.

Buddhism teaches people to face facts. It does not try to pretend that everything is for the best, either in this life or in the next. It does not seek to delude people into the belief that a benevolent, all-powerful deity presides over their destinies, or that salvation can be attained by unquestioning faith in such a deity. It does not deal in dope, telling people, "Swallow this pill, and when death comes, it will bring you life, everlastingly beautiful and glorious."

Buddhism teaches us to use our own powers of observation and reasoning and *face the facts*. The truth of *anicca*, impermanence, is not an esoteric teaching, or something to be taken on trust. We can see it all about us, every day of our lives. Flowers bloom and fade. People grow up, then grow old, then die. Everything is in a process of change. Nothing is stable for two consecutive instants. If anything seems stable, it is only because the process of change is relatively slow. But it can be, and often is, speeded up, as when a healthy man gets infected with tuberculosis.

From this *truth of anicca*, the truth of *dukkha* follows necessarily. *Dukkha* means suffering, and suffering is inevitable when all life is associated with change. No sensitive adult can look upon the scenes of his childhood without a feeling of sadness. No sensitive person, even if he and all his present associates are healthy and prosperous, can think of the sick and the poor in this world without feeling sad. And health, even in the healthiest of us, is also subject to change. Sickness, old age and death are merely biding their time.

From these truths of *anicca* and *dukkha* emerges the truth of *anatta*. There is nothing in this process of which one can say, "This is mine. This am I. This is my soul." Seeking a soul in this process is like stripping away the sheaths of a plantain tree in order to find the heart-wood. There is no heart-wood. It is merely a compound of changing, unstable ingredients, giving an appearance of solidity and stability.

And Buddhism teaches us to face the fact of rebirth. It is easier to be a materialist, and to console oneself with the promise of deep, dreamless, eternal sleep at life's close. To many thinking people, the idea of total extinction at death is not in the least disagreeable. Indeed, it would be comforting, if it were true. But unfortunately, it is not true. The process goes on and on, life after life. We live again and again, interminably, reaping as we have sown, the present the result of the past, the future the result of the present and the past.

The Buddha teaches us to face these facts honestly. And yet He tells us not to despair, but to be of good courage, because there is a way of working out our deliverance—the way of *siila, samaadhi, pañña*, virtue, concentration of mind and wisdom. Is this escapism?

The God Idea

*The man who is not credulous,
who understands the Uncreated (Nibbaana),
who has cut off the link,
who has put an end to occasion (of good and evil),
who has vomited all desires—
he, indeed, is the noblest of men.*

Dhammapada 79

Buddhists are sometimes asked by non-Buddhists whether they believe in God, and if not, why not? If they reply, as they should, that the Buddha has denied the existence of a God, in the sense of a Supreme Being or Creator of all that is, Buddhists are sometimes confronted with the time-worn, repeatedly resurrected, “watchmaker” argument.

It goes like this. Even so small and relatively simple a piece of machinery as a watch must have a maker. It cannot come into existence automatically. So it follows that the universe, with all its complex balance of forces, all its stars and planets and other celestial bodies working in perfect co-ordination, must have had a creator.

The objections to the argument are threefold, and fatal:

1. No watchmaker ever came into existence automatically. If one is to be logical, this should apply to the universe-maker as well. He too must have had a maker, who in his turn must have had a maker, and so on in a receding vista of makers. The argument thus ends in futility, for where is one to stop?
2. No watchmaker ever made a watch out of sheer nothingness. How, then, can we postulate a universe-maker who achieved this impossible feat? Granted that he too, like the watchmaker, had materials how did the materials come into existence? Did they always exist?

3. If the argument is an argument at all, it leads inevitably to the conclusion that there is no one universe-maker but a number of them. Even so simple a mechanism as a watch or a motor car is the creation of several people, each a specialist. If the universe was created by a conscious and intelligent agency, that agency probably consisted of a syndicate, a team of makers, rather than one sole maker. We do not seek to maintain such a conclusion, but only point out that it is a logical conclusion, perfectly consistent with the data provided, and the reasoning sought to be applied thereto.

The Buddha spoke of gods: not one God, with a capital G, but many gods. He taught the hard truth that these gods too, like human beings, are subject to decay and death. The inexorable law of change applies to gods too, just as it applies to men. They may live long, much longer than humans, because of their own good kamma. They may be very powerful, again because of their good kamma. Such longevity and power may even lead them to the erroneous belief that they are eternal and all-powerful, but this is their greatest fallacy. In due time, when the good kamma which maintains them in their glory is expended, they too die as humans die, as cattle die, as butterflies die. And when they die, they too are reborn, for they have not won freedom from the round of birth and death.

All gods, however lofty, however powerful, are living beings in *sa.msara*. As such they are mind-body (and in the case of the *aruupaavacaradevaas*, pure mind) fluxes. Mind and body are ever changing. In this changing process, what is the creator? The Buddha said there is only one creator—desire. It is desire that keeps the process going, phoenix-like, life after life.

There is no exception to this rule. It is a basic truth. If there is a God, he too is constantly creating himself by reason of desire. That is all he creates. Is there then an Uncreated (*akata*)? According to the Buddha, yes. To us worldlings (*puthujjanas*) it is but a name—Nibbaana. It is a name that stands for happiness, final release from the round of rebirth. There is no God in this noble teaching, no supreme being to whom we must cringe. We stand on our own feet; we are our own creators, we are

our own masters, and in the fullness of time we will be our own saviours.

The Soul Idea

*“Soul-less is everything that is,”
When this with wisdom one discerns,
Disgusted then is one with ill,
This is the Path to Purity.*

Dhammapada 279

There are some who, despite repeated and authoritative assurances to the contrary, still entertain the false view that the Buddha adopted an equivocal attitude with regard to belief in soul. This is only natural, as all worldlings, however learned and intelligent they may be, do cherish a belief in a soul. Reason plays a relatively small part in what people believe or do not believe. Whatever reasons may be urged against the soul idea, the idea itself persists until a being attains the first stage of sainthood. When that stage is reached, *sakkaayadi.t.thi*, belief in a soul vanishes, never to return.

From this very phenomenon, as taught by the Buddha, the thinking person *must* deduce that the soul idea is false. One does not, surely, advance to the stage of *Sotaapanna* in order to rid oneself of a true belief! If the soul idea is correct, and a soul really does exist, then on the Buddha's own statement, the worldling is more enlightened in this respect than the *sotaapanna* or indeed, even the *arahat*. But this is absurd, for the Buddha taught a road of evolution to greater and greater understanding.

Such understanding is the fruit of growth, not of logic. We almost said spiritual growth, but did not, because the word "spiritual" has become somewhat debased through excessive use in other contexts. It now smacks of cheap emotionalism and spurious religiosity. The growth of the individual towards sainthood, in the Buddhist sense, is a very slow and gradual process, admitting of no short-cuts and pretences. It takes, literally, aeons.

Of course, this does not mean that Buddhism denies the possibility of sudden "reformation" and achievement of sanctity. The notorious robber,

Angulimaala, who became an *arahat*, is a case in point. But, as in his case, the suddenness of such advance is only apparent, and due to the inability of the average observer to relate the present phenomenon to its true background in past existences. The potential saint, in such a being as Angulimala is already there in his character, needing but a shift in the balance of personality to be transmuted from potential to reality. Such a shift can only be effected by a Buddha, and that is why a Buddha is called "*Anuttaro purisa damma saarathi*" (guide incomparable for the training of individuals).

People sometimes tend to forget the reason why an aspirant to Buddhahood strives through incalculable periods of time to achieve his final goal. It is not in order that he might found yet another "ism," to titillate men's intellects and provide absorbing topics of debate in cultured circles. It is only in order that he might help others to win release from the round of rebirth and all its attendant miseries.

The help a Buddha gives is His Teaching, for he teaches the eternal Dhamma, the way of release that other Buddhas have taught before Him. The doctrine of anatta, soul-lessness, is an integral part of this eternal Dhamma. It is not a thing to be savoured intellectually and played with. It is reality, something that we worldlings can only barely glimpse intellectually, but which the saint realizes with a certitude that is final.

Me and Mine

*"These sons are mine, this wealth I hold,"
The fool raves thus and comes to ruin;
When self itself owns not a "self,"
Who are thy sons, what is thy self!*

Dhammapada 62

In the previous essay, we endeavored to state the doctrine of anatta, soul-lessness, taught by the Buddha. It was, perforce a very bare statement and we therefore feel that some further thought should be devoted to the subject.

It should, first of all, be understood clearly that this doctrine is not a mere theory but a truth, propounded by one who saw things as they really are. The Buddha did not speak in the tentative and hypothetical terms adopted by lesser men for the simple reason that his Teaching was the result of *direct knowledge*, and not of logic.

It should be borne in mind that the anatta doctrine is of practical application in our everyday lives. It is not something of purely academic interest, to be stored away in some sealed compartment of our minds. The Buddha intended us to apply it to our own lives, to test it on the touchstone of personal experience and prove its truth for ourselves. It is true that ultimate realization can only come with the attainment of the four stages of sanctity; but short of that, we do have the ability to think things out and arrive at certain convictions based on personal experience.

Experience teaches us that a good deal of ill health, both physical and mental, is due to worry. Modern medical science is definitely of the view that such diseases as diabetes, high blood pressure and gastric ulcer are aggravated, if not actually brought about, by anxiety states. Doctors are inclining more and more to the opinion that, in the treatment of such diseases, and indeed most functional disorders, close attention should be paid to the mental condition of the patient.

Of all adverse mental states, the most obviously unhealthy and potentially dangerous is prolonged worry. Why, we naturally ask, do people worry? In the ultimate analysis there is only one answer. People worry because of thoughts of "me and mine." We yearn for security for ourselves and for those we love, in a changing world that offers no permanent security. He who builds sand castles on the beach is afraid of every wave. He who offers hostages to fortune becomes the plaything of fortune. He who identifies himself with any existing state of affairs and is anxious to preserve that state of affairs inviolate, knows no peace of mind. Thus we worry about our "selves," our health, our children, our friends, our possessions—yearning always to maintain stability in that which is inherently unstable.

The Buddha made no pretence of offering stability in the unstable. For this reason some foolish people call him a pessimist, just as a child who has built a sand castle will regard as pessimistic any prediction of its dissolution. But the Buddha did offer people something infinitely better than the stability they foolishly seek in unstable phenomena. He offered them a method to attain *ultimate stability, ultimate security, in that which is eternally stable and secure.*

He said, in effect, "Do not imagine there is a soul, a core of permanence in body or mind. That is a road of anxiety and suffering. See these merely as changing phenomena and work for that which does not change." If we remember this message in our daily lives, we will have taken a big step in the right direction. We may not attain Nibbaana here and now, but we will at least realize that there is no substitute for Nibbaana, and we will worry less about the unstable environment in which we live.

Travel

*Few indeed are they
Who go the Further Shore.
The rest of mankind only
Runs about on the hither bank.*

Dhammapada 83

This body of flesh and blood and bones is a passing thing. So too is the flickering phenomenon called personality which is associated with it. There is nothing permanent here, nothing that can be called "a soul." And yet the Buddha tells us this compound of linked processes, which is called a living being, does not begin with birth or end with death. It goes on from life to life, ever-changing.

We have come a long way, all of us. Nobody can see a beginning. Each one of us, as a changing process, is very, very old. We are older than the solar system and the stars and the nebulae, in their present form.

The Buddha has said that in this long journey, each of us has experienced everything there is to be experienced on the "hither bank," that is, in the world. We have loved and hated, 'joyed' and sorrowed, been everywhere, seen everything, done everything, many, many times. This business has been going on so long that if we could but remember the past, we would be heartily sick of the whole thing. But we do not

remember. That is why, life after life, we keep on doing the same old things again and again. We are still running about on the "hither bank" playing with the things that are there.

From the highest heavens to the lowest hells we run. If somebody like a Buddha tells us to quit fooling about and try to get across to the "Further Shore," we do not pay heed.

We can stay here as long as we wish. Indeed, we shall stay here for a long time even after it has dawned on us that we are making fools of ourselves. It is not easy to get to the "Further Shore" for the "Further Shore" is Nibbaana, which only Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas and Arahats attain. To cross over, we too must evolve as they evolved. That is the only journey we have not made, the only journey worth making.

People think that by going from one spot to another on the surface of the earth they are travelling. So they are like maggots crawling over a rotten orange. Other people, more ambitious and imaginative, dream of going from the earth to the moon, or to other planets. *That* they feel, will be *travelling!* So it will, like insects flying from one rotten orange to another. But the Buddha tells us that we have tried *all* the rotten oranges at one time or another. They are all on the "hither bank," and there is nothing new in them.

Out, far out in space, so far that the mind cannot imagine the distances, there are stars, many millions of them. It would be the height of egotism to deny that life must exist on some of the planets revolving

about those other stars, just as the earth revolves about the sun. If there is life, why not human life? It may well be. And so what? It only means that out there, just as here, there is greed, there is hatred, there is ignorance. Need we travel out to such planets? Need we go so far to see the same foolish faces, hear the same ugly noises, smell the same stinks that are all around us here on earth? Speaking for ourselves, we have no desire to go to all that trouble merely to renew our acquaintance with the unpleasant.

The distance by which we separate ourselves from the unpleasant is not measured in miles. A good book can do it, for a while. So can meditation, if one has practised meditation and is good at it. Quietness is necessary. One will not sit to meditate on a railway line, which is in use, nor in the middle of a busy street, nor on a shooting-range while target practice is going on. One will not turn on the radio, especially if a race commentary is on the air. With quietness and stillness come concentration and clear thought. *This*, at last, is the preparation for a real adventure, a journey utterly new. Its end? The "Further Shore." Good luck!

*Atiita.m naanusocanti, nappajappanti 'naagata.m
Paccuppanna yaapenti, tena va.n.n.o pasiidati.
Anaagatappajappaaya atiitassaanusocanaa
Etena baalaa sussanti, na.lo'va harito luto.*

Bewailing not the past,
Of the future incurious,
Living in the present—
By this health glows.

Anxious about the future

And bewailing the past,
Thus do fools wither away—
Like cut green reeds.

Translated by Kassapa Thera

From the Samyutta Nikaaya

Vol. 1: Saagaathaa Vagga, No. 10