

Nyanaponika: Selected Readings

Venerable Nyanaponika Maha Thera, [based in the Forest Hermitage in Sri Lanka], was the focal point of the distribution of translations and publications of Theravada Buddha Dhamma teachings and texts into English and German, from before the middle, to almost the end of the twentieth century.

He had the vision and mission of bringing to completion the dream of his own inspiring teacher, Venerable Nyanatiloka Maha Thera, which was to edit and disseminate translated Theravada teachings and texts to the rest of the wider world. Venerable Nyanaponika continued doing what had to be done until their mission was completed. ▲

This document will give you a taste of Nyanaponika's broad vision and wide learning.

The Three Basic Facts of Existence

I. Impermanence (Anicca)

with a preface by

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Preface

If we contemplate even a minute sector of the vast range of life, we are faced with such a tremendous variety of life's manifestations that it defeats description. And yet three basic statements can be made that are valid for all animate existence, from the microbe up to the creative mind of a human genius.

These three features common to all life were first found and formulated over 2500 years ago by the Buddha, who was rightly called "Knower of the Worlds" (loka-vidu).

They are the Three Characteristics (ti-lakkha.na) of all that is conditioned, i.e., dependently arisen. In English renderings, they are also sometimes called Signs, Signata, or Marks.

These three basic facts of all existence are:

- I. Impermanence or Change (anicca)*
- II. Suffering or Unsatisfactoriness (dukkha)*
- III. Not-self or Insubstantiality (anatta).*

Impermanence and Not-self apply to inanimate existence as well, while the Suffering is, of course, only an experience of the animate.

The inanimate, however, can be, and very often is, a cause of suffering for living beings: for instance, a falling stone may cause injury or

loss of property may cause mental pain. In that sense, the three are common to all that is conditioned, even to what is below or beyond the normal range of human perception.

Existence can be understood only if these three basic facts are comprehended, and this not only logically, but in confrontation with one's own experience.

Insight-wisdom (vipassanaa-pa~n~naa) which is the ultimate liberating factor in Buddhism, consists just of this experience of the three characteristics applied to one's own bodily and mental processes, and upon deepened and matured in meditation.

To "see things as they really are" means seeing them consistently in the light of the three characteristics. Ignorance of these three, or self-deception about them, is by itself a potent cause for suffering — by knitting, as it were, the net of false hopes, of unrealistic and harmful

desires, of false ideologies, false values and aims of life, in which man is caught.

Ignoring or distorting these three basic facts can only lead to frustration, disappointment, and despair.

Hence, from a positive as well as a negative angle, this teaching on the Three Basic Facts of Existence is of such vital importance that it was thought desirable to add, here, more material to those brief expositions that had already appeared in this BPS Wheel Series

Beginning with the present volume on Impermanence, each one of the Three Characteristics will receive separate treatment by different authors, from different angles, with a great variety of approaches.

Each of these three publications will be concluded by an essay of the late Venerable Ñānamoli Thera, in which all important

canonical source material on the respective Characteristic is collected, systematized, and discussed.

These tersely written articles merit close study and will be found very helpful in the analytical as well as meditative approach to the subject. Regrettably, the premature death of the venerable author prevented him from writing a fourth article planned by him, which was meant to deal with the interrelation of the Three Characteristics.

These three articles of the Venerable Ñānamoli were originally written for the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, and the first one, on Anicca, appeared in Volume I, p. 657ff., of that work. For kind permission to reproduce these articles, the Buddhist Publication Society is much obliged to the Editor-in-Chief of the Encyclopaedia, Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, and to the publishers, the Department of Cultural Affairs, Colombo.

— *Nyanaponika.*

*

Motto

Whatever *IS* will be *WAS*.

— Bhikkhu Ñanamoli

*

The decisively characteristic thing about this world is its *transience*. In this sense, centuries have no advantage over the present moment. Thus the continuity of transience cannot give any consolation; the fact that life blossoms among ruins proves not so much the tenacity of life as that of death.

— Franz Kafka

Words of the Buddha

The perceiving of impermanence, bhikkhus, developed and frequently practiced, removes all sensual passion, removes all passion for material existence, removes all passion for becoming, removes all ignorance, removes and abolishes all conceit of "I am."

Just as in the autumn a farmer, plowing with a large plow, cuts through all the spreading rootlets as he plows; in the same way, bhikkhus, the perceiving of impermanence, developed and frequently practiced, removes all sensual passion... removes and abolishes all conceit of "I am."

— SN 22.102

It would be better, bhikkhus, if an uninstructed ordinary person regarded this body, made of the four great elements, as himself rather than the mind. For what reason? This body is seen to continue for a year, for two years, five years, ten years, twenty years, fifty years, a hundred years, and even more. But of that which is called mind, is called thought, is called consciousness, one moment arises and ceases as another continually both day and night.

— SN 12.61

The Fact of Impermanence by Piyadassi Thera

"Impermanent, subject to change, are component things. Strive on with heedfulness!" This was the final admonition of the Buddha Gotama to his disciples.

And when the Buddha had passed away, Sakka, the chief of the deities, uttered the following:

Impermanent are all component things,
They arise and cease, that is their nature:
They come into being and pass away,
Release from them is bliss supreme.

*Anicca vata sa'nkhaaraa — uppaada vaya
dhammino*

*Uppajjitvaa nirujjhanti — tesa.m vuupasamo
sukho.*

— Mahaa-Parinibbaana Sutta (DN 16)1

Even up to present times, at every Buddhist funeral in Theravada countries, this very Pali verse is recited by the Buddhist monks who perform the obsequies, thus reminding the congregation of the evanescent nature of life.

It is a common sight in Buddhist lands to see the devotees offer flowers and light oil lamps before a Buddha image. They are not praying to the Buddha or to any "supernatural being." The flowers that fade and the flames that die down, speak to them of the impermanency of all conditioned things.

It is this single and simple word **Impermanence** (*anicca*) which is the very core of the Buddha's teaching, being also the basis for the other two characteristics of existence, Suffering and No-self. The fact of Impermanence means that reality is never static but is dynamic throughout, and this the modern scientists are realizing to be

the basic nature of the world without any exception.

In his teaching of dynamic reality, the Buddha gave us the master key to open any door we wish. The modern world is using the same master key, but only for material achievements, and is opening door after door with amazing success.

Change or impermanence is the essential characteristic of all phenomenal existence. We cannot say of anything, animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic, "this is lasting"; for even while we are saying this, it would be undergoing change. All is fleeting; the beauty of flowers, the bird's melody, the bee's hum, and a sunset's glory.

Suppose yourself gazing on a gorgeous sunset. The whole western heavens are glowing with roseate hues; but you are aware that within half an hour all these glorious tints will have faded

away into a dull ashen gray. You see them even now melting away before your eyes, although your eyes cannot place before you the conclusion which your reason draws. And what conclusion is that?

That conclusion is that you never, even for the shortest time that can be named or conceived, see any abiding color, any color which truly is. Within the millionth part of a second the whole glory of the painted heavens has undergone an incalculable series of mutations. One shade is supplanted by another with a rapidity which sets all measurements at defiance, but because the process is one to which no measurements apply,... reason refuses to lay an arrestment on any period of the passing scene, or to declare that it is, because in the very act of being it is not; it has given place to something else. It is a series of fleeting colors, no one of which is, because each of them continually vanishes in another.

— *Ferrier's Lectures and Remains* Vol. I, p.
119, quoted in *Sarva-dorsana-Sangraha*,
London, p. 15

All component things — that is, all things which arise as the effect of causes, and which in turn give rise to effects — can be crystallized in the single word *anicca*, impermanence. All tones, therefore, are just variations struck on the chord which is made up of impermanence, suffering (unsatisfactoriness), and no-self nor soul — *anicca, dukkha, and anatta*.

Camouflaged, these three characteristics of life prevail in this world until a supremely Enlightened One reveals their true nature. It is to proclaim these three characteristics — and how through complete realization of them, one attains to deliverance of mind — that a Buddha appears. This is the quintessence, the sum total of the Buddha's teaching.

Although the concept of *anicca* applies to all compounded and conditioned things, the Buddha is more concerned with the so-called being; for the problem is with man and not with dead things.

Like an anatomist who resolves a limb into tissues and tissues into cells, the Buddha, the Analyzer (*Vibhajjavaadi*), analyzed the so-called being, the *sankhaara pu~nja*, the heap of processes, into five ever-changing aggregates, and made it clear that there is nothing abiding, nothing eternally conserved, in this conflux of aggregates (*khandhaa santati*). They are: — — material form or body; feeling or sensation; perception; mental formations; consciousness.

The Enlightened One explains:

The five aggregates, monks, are *anicca*, impermanent; whatever is impermanent, that is *dukkha*, unsatisfactory; whatever is

dukkha, that is without *attaa*, self. What is without self, that is not mine, that I am not, that is not my self. Thus should it be seen by perfect wisdom (*sammappa~n~naaya*) as it really is. Who sees by perfect wisdom, as it really is, his mind, not grasping, is detached from taints; he is liberated.

— SN 22.45

Naagarjuna only echoes the words of the Buddha when he says: When the notion of an Aatman, Self or Soul cease, the notion of 'mine' also ceases and one becomes free from the idea of I and mine (Maadhyamika-Kaarikaa, xviii.2)

The Buddha gives five very striking similes to illustrate the ephemeral nature of the five aggregates. He compares material form to a (i) lump of foam, (ii) feeling to a bubble, (iii) perception to a mirage, (iv) mental formations to a plantain trunk (which is pithless, without

heartwood), and (v) consciousness to an illusion, and asks:

"What essence, monks, could there be in a lump of foam, in a bubble, in a mirage, in a plantain trunk, in an illusion?"

Continuing, the Buddha says:

Whatever material form there be: whether past, future, or present; internal or external; gross or subtle; low or lofty; far or near; that material form the monk sees, meditates upon, examines with systematic attention, he thus seeing, meditating upon, and examining with systematic attention, would find it empty, he would find it insubstantial and without essence. What essence, monks, could there be in material form?

The Buddha speaks in the same manner of the remaining aggregates and asks:

What essence, monks, could there be in feeling, in perception, in mental formations and in consciousness?

— SN 22.95

Thus we see that a more advanced range of thought comes with the analysis of the five aggregates. It is at this stage that right understanding known as insight (*vipassanaa*) begins to work.

It is through this insight that the true nature of the aggregates is grasped and seen in the light of the three characteristics (*ti-lakkhana*), namely: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and no-self.

It is not only the five aggregates that are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without self, but the causes and conditions that produce the aggregates are also impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without self. This point the Buddha makes very clear:

Material form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, monks, are impermanent (*anicca*). Whatever causes and conditions there are for the arising of these aggregates, they, too, are impermanent. How, monks, could aggregates arise from what is impermanent, be permanent?

Material form... and consciousness, monks, are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*); whatever causes and conditions there are for the arising of these aggregates, they too are unsatisfactory. How, monks, could aggregates arise from what is unsatisfactory be pleasant or pleasurable?

Material form... and consciousness, monks, are without a self (*anatta*); whatever causes and conditions there are for the arising of these aggregates, they, too are without self. How, monks, could aggregates arise from what is without self be self (*atta*)?

The instructed noble disciple (*sutavaa ariyasaavako*), monks, seeing thus becomes dispassionate towards material form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness: Through dispassion he is detached; through detachment he is liberated; in liberation the knowledge comes to be that he is liberated, and he understands: Destroyed is birth, lived is the life of purity, done is what was to be done, there is no more of this to come [meaning that there is no more continuity of the aggregates, that is, no more becoming or rebirth].

— SN 22.7-9, abridged

It is always when we fail to see the true nature of things that our views become clouded; because of our preconceived notions, our greed and aversion, our likes and dislikes, we fail to see the sense organs and sense objects in their right respectives and objective natures,

(*aayatanaana.m aayatana.t.ta.m*) and go after mirages and deceptions. The sense organs delude and mislead us and, then, we fail to see things in their true light, so that our way of seeing things becomes perverted (*vipariita dassana*).

The Buddha speaks of three kinds of illusion or perversions (*vipallaasa*, Skt. *viparyaasa*) that grip man's mind, namely: the illusions of perception, thought, and view (*sa~n~naa vipallaasa; citta vipallaasa; di.t.thi vipallaasa*).² Now when a man is caught up in these illusions he perceives, thinks, and views incorrectly.

He perceives permanence in the impermanent; satisfactoriness in the unsatisfactory (ease and happiness in suffering); self in what is not self (a soul in the soulless); beauty in the repulsive.

He thinks and views in the same erroneous manner. Thus, each illusion works in four ways

(AN 4.49), and leads man astray, clouds his vision, and confuses him. This is due to unwise reflections, to unsystematic attention (*ayoniso manasikaara*).

Right understanding (or insight meditation — *vipassanaa*) alone removes these illusions and helps man to cognize the real nature that underlies all appearance. It is only when man comes out of this cloud of illusions and perversions that he shines with true wisdom like the full moon that emerges brilliant from behind a black cloud.

The aggregates of mind and body, being ever subject to cause and effect, as we saw above, pass through the inconceivably rapid moments of arising, presently existing, and ceasing (*uppaada, .thiti, bha'nga*), just as the unending waves of the sea or as a river in flood sweeps to a climax and subsides. Indeed, human life is compared to a mountain stream that flows and

rushes on, changing incessantly (AN 7.70) "*nadisoto viya*," like a flowing stream.

Heraclitus, that renowned Greek philosopher, was the first Western writer to speak about the fluid nature of things. He taught the *Panta Rhei* doctrine, the flux theory, at Athens, and one wonders if that teaching was transmitted to him from India.

"There is no static being," says Heraclitus, "no unchanging substratum. Change, movement, is Lord of the Universe. Everything is in a state of becoming, of continual flux (Panta Rhei)."

He continues: *"You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you."* Nevertheless one who understands the root of the Dhamma would go a step further and say: *The same man cannot step twice into the same river; for the so called man who is only a conflux of mind and body, never remains the same for two consecutive moments."*³

It should now be clear that the being whom for all practical purposes we call a man, woman, or individual, is not something static, but kinetic, being in a state of constant and continuous change.

Now when a person views life and all that pertains to life in this light, and understands analytically this so-called being as a mere succession of mental and the bodily aggregates, he then sees things as they really are (*yathaabhuutam*).

He does not hold the wrong view of "personality belief," belief in a soul or self (*sakkaaya di.t.thi*), because he knows through right understanding that all phenomenal existence is causally dependent (*pa.ticca-samuppanna*), that each is conditioned by something else, and that its existence is relative to that condition.

He knows that as a result there is no "I," no persisting psychic entity, no ego principle, no

self or anything pertaining to a self in this life process. He is, therefore, free from the notion of any sort of microcosmic soul (*jiivaatma*) or a macrocosmic soul (*paramaatma*).

It is said that through insight meditation (*vipassanaa*) one sees things as they really are (*yathaabhuutam*) and not as they appear to be.

Viewing things as they really are implies, as we discussed above, *seeing the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and no-self nature of all conditioned and component things*. To such a meditative disciple of the Buddha the "world" is not the external or the empirical world, but the human body with its consciousness.

It is the world of the five aggregates of clinging (*pa~nca upaadaanakkhandaa*). It is this that he tries to understand as being impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without self or soul. It is to this world of body and mind that the Buddha referred to when he said to Mogharaaja,

"Ever mindful, Mogharaaja, see the world as void (*su~n~na*); having given up the notion of a self [underlying it] — so may one overcome death (Maara); The King of Death sees not one who thus knows the world" (Sutta Nipaata).

The sum total of the philosophy of change taught in Buddhism is that all component things that have conditioned existence are a process and not a group of abiding entities, but the changes occur in such rapid succession that people regard mind and body as static entities. They do not see their arising and their breaking up (*udaya-vaya*), but regard them unitarily; they see them as a lump or whole (*ghana sa~n~naa*).

It is very hard, indeed, for people who are accustomed to continually think of their own mind and body and the external world with mental projections as wholes, as inseparable

units, to get rid of the false appearance of "wholeness."

So long as man fails to see things as processes, as movements, he will never understand the anatta (no-soul) doctrine of the Buddha. That is why people impertinently and impatiently put the question:

"If there is no persisting entity, no unchanging principle, like self or soul what is it that experiences the results of deeds here and hereafter?"

Two different discourses (MN 109; SN 22.82) deal with this burning question. The Buddha was explaining in detail to his disciples the impermanent nature of the five aggregates, how they are devoid of self, and how the latent conceits "I am" and "mine" cease to exist. Then there arose a thought in the mind of a certain monk thus:

"Material body is not self, feeling is not self, perception is not self, mental formations are not self, consciousness is not self. Then what self do selfless deeds affect?"

The Buddha, reading the thought of the monk's mind, said, "The question was beside the point," and then made the monk understand the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self nature of the aggregates.

"It is wrong to say that the doer of the deed is the same as the one who experiences its results. It is equally wrong to say that the doer of the deed and the one who experiences its results are two different persons,"⁴ for the simple reason that what we call life is a flow of psychic and physical processes or energies, arising and ceasing constantly; it is not possible to say that the doer himself experiences results because he is changing now, every moment of his life; but at

the same time you must not forget the fact that the continuity of life that is the continuance of experience, the procession of events is not lost; it continues without a gap.

The child is not the same as an adolescent, the adolescent is not the same as the adult, they are neither the same nor totally different persons (*na ca so na ca a~n~no*, — Milinda Pa~nho). There is only a flow of bodily and mental processes.

There are three types of teachers, the first one teaches that the ego or the self is real now as well as in the future (here and hereafter); the second one teaches that the ego is real only in this life, not in the future; the third one teaches that the concept of an ego is an illusion: it is not real either in this life or in the hereafter.

The first one is the eternalist (*sassatavaadi*); and the second one is the annihilationist (*ucchedavaadi*); and the third one is the Buddha

who teaches the middle way of avoiding the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism.

(Here the middle way is the doctrine of dependent arising, or causal conditioning — *Paticca Samuppaada*).

All theistic religions teach that the ego survives after death in some way or other, and is not annihilated. The materialist's concept is that the ego is annihilated at death. The Buddhist view is that there is no ego, or anything substantial, or lasting, but *all things conditioned are subject to change*, and they change not remaining the same for two consecutive moments, and that there is a continuity but no identity.

So long as man cherishes the idea of the lasting self or ego, it will not be possible for him to conceive the idea that all things are impermanent, that there is, in reality, an arising and a ceasing of things (*samudaya dhamma, vaya dhamma*, — Satipa.t.thaana sutta).

The understanding of the anatta doctrine, which is exclusively Buddhist, is indispensable in the understanding of the four noble truths and the other principal tenets of Buddhism.

The people of the world today mark the changing nature of life. Although they see it, they do not keep it in mind and act with dispassionate discernment.

Though change again and again speaks to them and makes them unhappy, they pursue their mad career of whirling round the wheel of existence and are twisted and torn between the spokes of agony.

They cherish the belief that it is possible to discover a way of happiness in this very change, to find a center of security in this circle of impermanence.

They imagine that although the world is uncertain they can make it certain and give it a solid basis, and so the unrelenting struggle for worldly improvement goes on with persevering effort and futile enthusiasm.

History has proved again and again and will continue to prove that nothing in this world is lasting. All things when clung to fail.

Nations and civilizations rise, flourish, and die away as waves upon the ocean, yielding place to new, and thus the scrolls of time record the passing pageant, the baseless vision, and the fading flow that is human history.

Notes

1.

In the Mahaa-Sudassana *Suttanta* (Diigha-Nikaaya), this verse is ascribed to the Buddha himself; in the Mahaa Sudassana *Jaataka* (No. 95), it is ascribed to the Bodhisatta, in his rebirth as King Mahaa-Sudassana. In the

Theragaatha (v. 1159), Mahaa Moggallaana Arahant recites it, after mentioning (in v. 1158) the passing away of Saariputta Arahant that preceded his own only by two weeks.

2.

AN 4.49 — see *Anguttara Nikaaya: An Anthology, Part I* (The Wheel No. 155-158), p. 86.

3.

A.K. Rogers, *A Student's History of Philosophy*, London, 1920, p. 15.

4.

In the ms. this quote is followed by the parenthetical citation "(*Anguttara, ii. 70*)."
Perhaps this is a typo? PTS page A ii 70 (AN 4.62-63) does not contain this passage. A better reference may be SN 12.46. — ATI ed.

**Aniccama: The Buddhist Theory of
Impermanence
An Approach from the Standpoint of
Modern Philosophy¹**

by Bhikkhu Ñānajivako

"Is the eye... the shape... visual consciousness, permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, reverend sir."

"But is what is impermanent, anguish or happiness?"

"Anguish, reverend sir."

"Is it right to regard that which is impermanent anguish, and liable to alteration as 'This is mine, this am I, this is my self'?"

"No, reverend sir."2

Insights and discoveries revealed to human minds 2500 years ago, at the time of the Buddha (or even several centuries before that time), may have caused deep and revolutionary effects in the evolution of existing world views, no less important than the discoveries of Galileo and Copernicus have been for the eventual collapse

of the world-view of medieval Christian civilization.

These latter discoveries, which mark the outset of modern civilization, have become so much a part of commonplace or general information that they can be imparted to children in the lowest grades of elementary education, and are normally absorbed by them without difficulty.

The idea of impermanence and of ceaseless change, due to the never-ending "chain" of causes and effects (the subject which we are attempting to approach in its Buddhist version of *aniccam*) has, in its broad meaning, become one of our stereotyped and oversimplified truisms, reduced, both in its formal and substantial significance, to a mere rudiment of conventional word-meaning.

As such, it may still have impressed us on the level of nursery rhymes and even of some grammar-school classics in the history of

literature. (If I had to choose a deeper adequation³³ founded on a modern poet's more complex philosophical intuition, I would not hesitate to select the lines from T.S. Eliot's *Quartets*;

Ash on an old man's sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave

...

Water and fire succeed
The town, the pasture and the weed.)

We might hope to rediscover the original significance and historical purport of such truisms only if we were to look for them purposively, guided by some subjective impressions of individual or particular cases, and by the consequences of their concrete application in actual scientific or philosophical theories. This is what I am about to hint at in a few examples.

One: As a young teacher, when for the first time I tried to explain to children of about twelve years of age the biological process of growing cabbages and potatoes, my emphasis on the importance of dung (I did not use the technical term "fertilizer") happened to be so impressive that the next day a mother came to complain against my "direct method" and "drastic naturalism" in visual teaching. Her child had been so affected by my discourse as to develop an acute loathing against food.

Thus I was impressed how easily our most commonplace truisms about the laws of nature — whose discovery, once upon a time, may have been treated and even punished as revolutionary by respectable and authoritative social institutions — can still reveal themselves unexpectedly in their full overpowering force to the fresh and innocent minds of new generations.

Two: In my own generation of teenagers, between the two wars in Europe, the deadlock between science and religion was so complete that secondary school curricula were bound to provoke in our minds an unavoidable crisis of conscience. Teachers on the whole were totally involved in this struggle of convictions, keen to win us over to one side or the other. The side of science against religion was normally the stronger. Since that time religion, defeated in Europe, has become more and more a prohibited fruit, and has, therefore, acquired a new attractive force for juvenile minds.

This is true not only in the eastern parts of Europe, since science is far from being a privilege of Communism. An anti-scientific tendency in European "continental" philosophy has even become predominant, on account of the moral catastrophe which still preoccupies the minds of our generation beyond any other problem of "man's position in the universe."

The central issue in this conflict between science and religion, at least from our youthful bias at that time, was of course the problem of *anatta* ("no-soul"), to express it by the corresponding Buddhist term.

Laws governing *processes* of causes and effects were, however, scientifically explained — or at least so understood by our unripe minds, under the impression of the open dispute between science and (Christian) religion. The explanations were not yet in terms of the scientific equivalent to a pure *annica-vaado* (theory of impermanence), which would imply a denial of the underlying material substantiality of the world. Instead of that, explanations given to us at that time still followed the classical Greek pattern of mechanistic materialism or static atomism, which was the closest to the Buddhist understanding of the *uccheda-vaado* (theory of destruction), whose believers are described in Pali texts in the following terms:

..He then hears the Perfect One expounding the teaching for the removal of all grounds for "views," of all prejudices, obsessions, dogmas, and biases, for the stilling of all processes, for the relinquishment of all substrata of existence, for the extirpation of craving, for dispassion, cessation, extinction. He then thinks, "I shall be annihilated, I shall be destroyed! No longer shall I exist!" Hence, he grieves, is depressed and laments; beating his breast, he weeps, and dejection befalls him. Thus, bhikkhus, is there anxiety about realities.

— MN 22

To this, the only authentic answer is:

Since in this very life a *tathaagata* (in this case generally understood as a human being in the widest sense) is not to be regarded as existing in truth, in reality, is it proper for

you to assert: "as I understand the doctrine taught by the Exalted One, insofar as a bhikkhu has destroyed the *aasavas* [life's "intoxicants" or passions] he is broken up and perishes when body is broken up, he exists not after death."?

— SN 22.85

The logical possibility of such an answer is excluded by the premise. The same premise, however, excludes also the opposite, affirmative, possibility. (We shall return to this problem, as understood by contemporary philosophy, in section *Five*.)

Is important to underline here that, on the same premise, *uccheda-vaado*, or simply the *materialistic belief* in a substantial "destruction" of any form of being, is the extreme opposite of any authentic *nihilism* in ontology and epistemology (theory of being and theory of knowledge). Only an explicitly idealistic

philosophy, "*looking upon the world as a bubble, as a mirage*" (Dhp 170) can be nihilistic in some respect, while *uccheda-vaado* as a "*theory of destruction*" necessarily presupposes an existentially rooted belief in material substance.

It was just in this sense, in the midst of the battle-ground between science and religion, and on the eve of a world war, that the children of the first half of the 20th century had to face the fatality of a physical and moral destruction, scientifically and infallibly pre-calculated, as experience was about to prove. Yet just over the edge of our intellectual horizon was dawning a time, for science at least, of acquiring a completely different position *vis-a-vis* the problem of impermanence and relativity as affecting the deepest subatomic structure of the world — a position considerably closer to the Buddhist idea of *aniccam*.

Three: Since 1927, Bertrand Russell's book, *An Outline of Philosophy*, has been widely quoted as one of the best popular presentations of the radical change in the scientific world-view stemming from Einstein's theory of relativity and of the resulting development of nuclear physics. I shall try to elicit from Russell's statements, as far as the present draft of pointers to our essential problem may permit, the rejection of the *substance-view* by modern science, because it is the rejection of the *substance-view* that constitutes the core of the Buddhist *anicca-vaado* as a foundation (at least in the *ti-lakkha.nam* scheme) of both *dukkham* and *anatta*.

To start with, let us define the idea of physical "substance" by means of its basic description and philosophical implication as stated in the *Sutta-pi.takam* sources. The problem of substance, as defined by scientific (*lokaa-yatam*) theories at the time of the Buddha, finds its classical formulation, categorial delimitation

and solution in concise terms in his concluding answer to Kevaddho:

Where do earth, water, fire, and wind; long and short; fine and coarse; pure and impure, no footing find?

Where is it that both name and form die out, leaving no trace behind?

When intellection (*vi~n~naanam*) ceases they all cease, too.

DN 11

For the categorical relation of mind and matter (or "name and form," *naamaa ruupam*, as implied in the foregoing formulation), the following statement of the Buddha is the most adequate and also the best-known in connection with our subject:

It would be better, bhikkhus, for the unlearned worldling to regard this body, built up of the four elements, as his self rather than the mind. For it is evident that

this body may last for a year, for two years, for three, four, five or ten years... or even for a hundred years and more. But that which is called thought, or mind, or consciousness, continuously, during day and night, arises as one thing, and passes away as another thing.
— SN 12.61

Now, let us get a few quotations from Bertrand Russell.⁴ First, as regards substance-matter, he says:

In former days, you could believe it on a philosophical ground that the soul is a substance and all substances are indestructible... But the notion of substance, in the sense of a permanent entity with changing states, is no longer applicable to the world.

A wave in the sea persists for a longer or shorter time: the waves that I see dashing themselves to pieces on the Cornish coast may have come all

the way from Brazil, but that does not mean that a "thing" has traveled across the Atlantic; it means only that a certain *process of change* has traveled.

[Einstein's theory of relativity] has philosophical consequences which are, if possible, even more important. The substitution of space-time for space and time has made the category of substance less applicable than formerly, since the essence of substance was persistent through time, and there is now no one cosmic time.

We found that matter, in modern science, has lost its solidity and substantiality; it has become a mere ghost haunting the scenes of its former splendor... The notion of matter, in modern physics, has become absorbed into the notion of energy.

We cannot say that "matter is the cause of our sensations."... In a word, "matter" has become

no more than a conventional shorthand for stating *causal laws concerning events*.

Thus, we are committed to causation as an *a priori* belief without which we should have no reason for supposing that there is a "real" chair (or any 'thing') at all.

Next, as regards the *theory of events*, we note that the idea of fixed and static elements of "matter" has been replaced by that of undeterminable "events" corresponding to the quantum electro-dynamic field theory in nuclear physics, which comes very close to the conception of a non-physical but purely phenomenological idea of *dhammaa*, implied in its primitive significance by *kha.nika-vaado*, or theory of momentariness, of the *Abhidhamma-pi.takam*. (This latter aspect, explicitly philosophical, will be sketched in *Five*, below.)

Of this Russell writes:

Everything in the world is composed of "events."... An "event" is something occupying a small finite amount of space-time... Events are not impenetrable, as matter is supposed to be; on the contrary, every event in space-time is overlapped by other events.

I assume that every event is contemporaneous with events that are not contemporaneous with each other; this is what is meant by saying that every event lasts for a finite time... Time is wholly relational.

Space-time order, as well as space-time points, results from the relations between events.

Compare this last statement, and with those that follow, the assertion of Buddhaghosa in *Atthasaalini*:

"By time the sage described the mind, and by mind described the time."

Lastly, Russell says of *mental events*:

An important group of events, namely percepts, may be called "mental."

Mentality is an affair of causal laws, not of the quality of single events, and also, mentality is a matter of degree.

What is mind?... Mind must be a group of mental events, since we have rejected the view that it is a single simple entity such as the *ego* was formerly supposed to be... Its constitution corresponds however to "the unity of one 'experience.'"

As a result of these considerations, Russell concludes that "first of all, you must cut out the word 'I': the person who believes is an inference, not a part of what you know immediately."

Finally, the logical possibility of an *uccheda-vaado* (theory of destruction) "heresy" is explicitly eliminated even on this level of

merely scientific considerations: "Is a mind a structure of material units? I think it is clear that the answer to this question is in the negative."

We can conclude this survey by accepting without any further reserve Russell's statement: *"The problems we have been raising are none of them new, but they suffice to show that our everyday views of the world and of our relations to it are unsatisfactory."*

Four: Recently, field theory, as a replacement for the abandoned substance theory in physics, has found increasing application — at least as a hypothetical analogy — in other spheres of scientific thought, and even more in philosophical speculations limited to possible (and sometimes to impossible) extensions of "special sciences." Its application to parapsychology is of particular interest, for the extension of the subject in which we are interested is beyond the strictly physical sphere of being.

It is Gardner Murphy who has given us the most consequent and exclusive elaboration of a parapsychological analogy of field theory, as far as I know. A summarized recapitulation of his thesis is as follows:

The action of living matter on living matter is never a case of single cell acting only on single cell. The structural whole or field is always involved. The field principle may hold in psychics as well as in physics, and a psychic field may extend backwards and forwards in time as well as onwards in space. The question, "Does personality survive death?" is therefore in Murphy's view not a reasonable question to ask. If any psychical *activity* survives, it will become an aspect of different fields and will thus take on new qualities and new structural relationships. It is evident that for him "all personal activities are constantly changing context and interacting with those of others, and it may be that each one becomes part of the cosmic process."⁵

Another worker in the field of parapsychology, C. G. Broad, investigating *The Mind and Its Place in Nature* from the standpoint of a possible "survival" of the "PSI component," draws the conclusion, from the same basic analogy with physics, that "we need no longer suppose that, although a surviving *PSI* component may be bodiless, it is necessarily unextended and un-localized, for we are nowadays well accustomed to such phenomena as electromagnetic fields which cannot be called bodies in the ordinary sense but which still have structure and definite properties and dispositions. We must not think of it (i.e., of the surviving *PSI*-component) as something on which an experience makes an impression as a seal does on a ball of wax. On the contrary, such a substance-less theory implies a greater degree of survival than the mere persistence of an inactive *PSI* component."⁶

Exponents of the same para-psychological theory also maintain that their hypothesis might offer a more adequate basis for explanation of subconscious phenomena investigated by psychoanalysis, particularly Jung's archetypes, than the initial Freudian attempts, which have been characterized since the first as a scientifically untenable Platonic analogy with "pigeon holes" as the basic structure of the soul.

All these more or less *ad hoc* analogies with the field theory in physics can be brought down as well to an earlier metaphysical hypothesis, formulated on a broader philosophical basis already by William James, in his *Pluralistic Universe* (1909).⁷ Speaking of the structure of "our inner life," James says:

Every bit of us at every moment is part and parcel of a wider self... May not you and I be confluent in a higher consciousness, and confluently active there, though we now know it not?... The analogies with... facts of psychical

research, so called, and with those of religious experience, establish... a decidedly formidable probability in favor [of the following pluralistic hypothesis:]

Why should we envelop our many with the "one" that brings so many poisons in its train?... [instead of accepting] along with the superhuman consciousness the notion that it is not all-embracing; the notion, in other words, that there is a God, but that he is finite, either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once.

This is exactly the basic distinction between the Vedaantic and the Buddhist conception of God, or gods, implying also the reason why James, in some respects, was in favor of a polytheistic conception, as a "result of our criticism of the absolute," in the same context.

Five: Such adaptation of hypotheses borrowed *ad hoc* from heterogenous fields of science could and should be ultimately verified and

explained only by proper philosophical investigation, using autonomous methods and established on its own, purely anthropological ground.

Since the beginning of the 20th century this has indeed been done, always more clearly and explicitly. The results have been considerable, at least as far as the problem of our primordial concern is involved: the human value aspect of *aniccam*, its fundamental significance in connection with both *dukkham* and *anattaa*.

The proper philosophical attitude was defined, not as pertaining to the physical but rather to the *historical* world-view, as early as the end of the 19th century, by Wilhelm Dilthey, founder of the modern philosophy of culture:

The final pronouncement of the historical world-view is that human accomplishment of every sort is relative, that *everything is moving in process and nothing is stable*.

And yet this historical orientation has not maintained any sort of position of predominant importance in 20th century European philosophy.

The most prominent philosopher of culture in the middle of this [20th] century, Karl Jaspers, in discussing the priority of the question "What is man?" (As formulated by Kant) points out that this priority "does not mean that the knowledge of being is to be replaced by the knowledge of man. Being still remains the essential, but man can approach it only through his existence as a man," i.e., through his historicity.⁸

Following Edmund Husserl, who established the most frequently adopted logical and epistemological platform for European or continental philosophy in his century, the problem of *being* acquired and sustained a role of central importance.

In order to avoid its gross misunderstanding it is necessary, especially from our Buddhist standpoint, to note that Husserl's basic postulate, "Back to the things themselves," does not in any way imply a substantialist meaning of "things" in the classical, physically oriented ontology or theory of being, which has been rejected by modern physics.

The significance of "being" has been radically changed with the achievement of a deeper insight into both its physical and historical structure. This is revealed very clearly in the analysis of being by Nicolai Hartmann who, more than Husserl and his closer followers, concentrated on implications of the ontological problem in the natural sciences.

In this respect the standpoint of A.N. Whitehead in Anglo-American philosophy comes closest to that of N. Hartmann. Russell's theory of infinitesimal "space-time events" was not much more than an attempt to reduce to a pale

rationalized scheme Whitehead's metaphysical conception of "actual occasions" and "throbbing actualities," understood as "pulsation of experience" whose "drops" or "puffs of existence" guided by an internal teleology in their "concrecence" (analogous to the Buddhist *sa'nkaaraa* in karmic formations) join the "stream of existence" (*bhava'nga-soto*).

The core of the *abhidhammo* conception of the "stream of existence" consists in its "theory of momentariness" *kha.nika-vaado*. Its modern analogy has found its first and best formulation in plain terms in the philosophy of William James, especially in his essay "Does 'Consciousness' Exist?," where the "stream of consciousness" or "stream of thinking" (which, "when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing") is elicited from his basic theory of "pure experience," defined as "the instant field of the present... this succession of an emptiness and fullness that have reference to each other and

are of one flesh" — succession "in small enough pulses," which "is the essence of the phenomenon."

In the same connection, as "the result of our criticism of the absolute," the metaphysical and metapsychical idea of a "central self" is reduced by James to "the conscious self of the moment."⁹

The well-known Buddhist thesis of "no-self" (*anatta*), or of a soul-less psychology, is based on the same background of the "theory of momentariness."

This is also one of the points — and the most significant one — on which the philosophical conception of James coincides with Bergson. Terminologically at least, Bergson's designation of the same "stream" as "*flux du vecu*," the word "*vecu*" ("lived") seems to come closest to the meaning of the Pali *bhava*"*ngo*, suggesting the "articulated" (*a*"*ngo*) texture of life-experience.

In Husserl's interpretation, "things" are simply taken to mean "whatever is given," that which we "see" in consciousness, and this "given" is called phenomenal in the sense that it "appears" to our consciousness. The Greek word "phenomenon" does *not* necessarily indicate that there is an unknown thing behind phenomena (as in Kant's philosophy or in the Vedaanta), or a "back-stage" being, as Nietzsche ironically exposed it. From our standpoint, it is important to emphasize that Husserl's phenomenological method "is neither deductive nor empirical, but consists in *pointing to* what is given and *elucidating* it."¹⁰ It claims, in other words, to be *yathaa-bhuutam*, or "adequate to [actual] being."

The analysis of the original meaning of the Greek term "phenomenon" has been performed in masterly fashion by Martin Heidegger.¹¹ The word "phenomenon" (from the verb *phainesthai*, "let see," which is similar to the Pali *ehi-*

passiko) has two meanings relevant for philosophy.

The first is "to show itself," the second, "to seem as." Contemporary phenomenological philosophy uses it in the first sense, as "merely letting something be seen, letting entities be perceived." The secondary meaning, indicating something which seems to "remain hidden, or which relapses or gets covered again, or shows itself only 'in disguise,'" points to the *historical process* of constructing theories and "views" (Greek *doxa*, Sanskrit *dristi*, Pali *di.t.thi*) by which the primordially "uncovered" phenomena are rather concealed again, or kept in disguise.

The same basic idea is adopted by Nicolai Hartmann: "That a being is 'in it-self' means to say that it exists actually and not only for us... Being-in-itself does not need to be proved, it is given as the world itself is given."¹²

Hartmann's most valuable contribution, however, is his entrance into the profound analysis of what was above called the secondary meaning of the philosophical term "phenomenon." His analysis distinguishes "spheres" and "levels" of being: Broadly, there are two primary spheres, designated as real and ideal being. In the sphere of the real, four structural levels are distinguished: matter, life, consciousness, and mind.

In contexts eliciting such statements, it appears more and more obvious, from a Buddhist standpoint, how closely the meaning of the term phenomenon, as used in contemporary philosophy, approximates the basic meaning of *dhamma* in the *abhidhamma* theory. (The last instance quoted from Hartmann may remind us even more specifically of the *khandhaa structures*.)

However, beyond the possibility of extending this analogy of phenomenon as disclosure of

"being-in-itself" understood as a process, it is felt more and more by several contemporary European philosophers (just as was the case in the original Buddhist counterpart) that the ontological purport of being, thus understood as phenomenon or *dhammo*, must still be limited by a critical principle of essentially deeper significance.

This principle has found its first — and until now its clearest — logical formulation in the *caatu-ko.tikam* (tetralemma) rule by the Buddha, as he regularly applies it to the *avyaakataani* or "not-designated" problems, or "dialectical antinomies"¹³ of speculative thought: "Neither being, nor non-being, nor both being-and-non-being, nor neither-being-nor-non-being" can express the existential purport and content of human reality. The word "being," or any other derivate from the verb "to be," cannot adequately express the immediate intuition (*vipassanaa*) of existence, or the essence of actuality (as *paramattho*).

This deficiency of the basic ontological term "being" has been subtly analyzed by Heidegger in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Yet with him the philosophy of existence (or human actuality) has taken a prevalently ontological direction (as a phenomenological analysis of being). It has become a philosophy of our human being-in-the-world, and consequently a philosophy of "anguish" or *dukkham*, even though it was soon felt that this ontological turning does not, and cannot, adequately reflect either the primordial motives or the ultimate scope of existential thinking.

Without entering into the historical background of such inner divergences in contemporary philosophy, I should like to point out a few symptomatic objections which can be compared in their radically anti-ontological attitude with the principle of the Buddha as formulated above.

According to the Buddha, the person reaping the fruits of good and bad actions (in a future life) is neither the same one who has committed these actions nor a different one. The same principle applies to the structural identification of a person in any other respect and circumstance, in the stream of one single physical life.

The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, discussing the problem of the structural unity of human personality, comes (at least on the basic level) to the conclusion that "the relation between my body and myself cannot be described as either 'being' or 'having': I *am* my body and yet I cannot identify myself with it."¹⁴ "Existing" does not mean being an object.

On this supposition, Marcel develops his critical analysis of the two inadequate extreme terms of existence in his main work, *Being and Having*. Another representative of the same trend in French philosophy, Jean Wahl, seems to approximate more nearly the actual meaning of

the Buddha's *avyaakataani* (specified above), not from formal logical or even linguistic considerations, but rather out of an essentially congenial understanding of the deeper problem:

"We are concerned with questions which, strictly speaking, belong to solitary meditation and cannot be subjects of discourse."¹⁵

Nicolas Berdyaev, an explicitly religious philosopher close to the same group, has given one of the clearest formulations of the point under discussion:

"The problem which faces us is: Is *being* a product of objectification? Is not the concept of being concerned with being *qua* concept, does being possess existence at all?... Why is ontology impossible? Because it is always a knowledge of objectifying existence. In an ontology, the idea of being is objectified and an objectification is already an existence which is alienated in the objectification. So that in

ontology — in every ontology — existence vanishes... It is only in subjectivity that one may know existence, not in objectivity. In my opinion, the central idea has vanished in the ontology of Heidegger and Sartre."16

In agreement with Dilthey's principle, quoted above, establishing the historical world-view of the cultural sciences independently from the scientific investigation of essentially objective physical nature, Heidegger has limited his inquiry on "time as the horizon for all understanding of being." Against that background, he has criticized and abandoned the old substantialist ontology.

For him, "temporality is the very being of human reality." The relation time-mind, as quoted above from Buddhaghosa's *Atthasaalini*, is for Heidegger also exhaustive for both terms. And yet Berdyaev, like the other anti-ontologist philosophers mentioned here, criticizes even this basic essential turning in contemporary

"anthropological ontology," as at least a partial failure to understand authentic existential experience:

"As a man Heidegger is deeply troubled by this world of care, fear, death, and daily dullness." Despite this, and beyond that sincerity, his philosophy "is not existential philosophy, and the depth of existence does not make itself felt in it."¹⁷

The reason for this was stated clearly and explicitly by Karl Jaspers, who was the first to criticize and abandon the ontological position in contemporary European philosophy, at the same time that Heidegger undertook his essential reform of its fundamental conception. In the view of Jaspers, "the ideal followed by ontologies is the perfectioning of the rational structure of the objectified world. Technical sciences have to help us bring about engineered existences."

Jaspers was, from the very beginning of his philosophical critique (about 1930), extremely aware of the danger of such scientific technicalization of human existence: "As an attempt to bind us to objectified being, ontology sublates freedom." In his view, it is only "as potential existence that I am able to lift myself up from bondage. My chains will thus become the material of being..." The opposite way of an "engineered" civilization will transform me into a slave of that "material" and this actually is the typical form of suffering, of *dukkham*, by which "man in the modern age" is oppressed.¹⁸

In his advanced years, Jaspers has discovered the Buddhist philosopher Naagaarjuna as one of the most congenial minds,¹⁹ while Heidegger, when reading D.T. Suzuki's *Essays on Zen Buddhism*, confessed that this was exactly what he had tried to express all his life long.

Six: It was doubt of the material substance of the world which, to a considerable extent, provoked

the problem of verifying the very idea of being, of the "selfhood" of the world, both in its exterior aspect and in that which is interior to the human being-in-the-world.

What "doubt" was at the outset of critical philosophy in the period of its substantialist and objectifying orientation (following Descartes), *disappointment*, the "unsatisfactoriness" of the world, has become for the actual, subjectively oriented or introverted, humanistic philosophy of existence.

One of the best expressions of this turning can be found in some of the statements of Gabriel Marcel, who, by the way, defines his religious philosophy as a "doctrine of hope." Its basic postulate is that philosophy must be "transobjective, personal, dramatic, indeed tragic. 'I am not witnessing a spectacle'; we should remind ourselves of this every day."²⁰

The Buddhist implication of this basic attitude may be pursued still further in the earlier formulation by Kierkegaard: "Life is a masquerade... Your occupation consists in preserving your hiding place... In fact you are nothing; *you are merely a relation to others*, and what you are, you are by virtue of this relation... When the enchantment of illusion is broken, when existence begins to totter, then too does despair manifest itself as that which was at the bottom. Despair itself is a negativity, [and] unconsciousness of it is a new negativity... This is the sickness unto death."²¹

It is only by abandoning the attitude of fascination for the "spectacle" of the statically staged "Being" of the world that man becomes sufficiently movable that he is fit to plunge into the stream of existence, no longer attached to some stage-prop or "remainder." Is only then that he can really start swimming along that stream of *sa.msara*, realizing that it is pure and simple *aniccam* or impermanent flux, and that

he can eventually become aware of the advantage of "crossing" it.

This is the point which contemporary European philosophy seems to be about to realize. It is essential for this realization that the principles of *aniccam* and *dukkham* be inseparably reconnected through the intuition of their immediate interaction.

In the actual situation, it will no longer even be necessary to deduce explicitly the idea of *anattaa* as the dynamic resultant of the confrontation of the first two principles. Just like *aniccam*, *anattaa* has already become a truism for most Europeans, whom a standardized mental training, both scientific and philosophical has carried beyond the God and Soul dogma.²²

The phantom of the Western version of a materialistic *uccheda-vaado* is likewise about to be dispelled. The critical missing link has only

been between impermanence (*aniccam*) and suffering (*dukkham*). Due to the objectifying nature of scientific thinking, this link could never be revealed by a philosophy of nature subservient to science, not even of the type of Russell's popular literary criticism quoted above. It is obvious that only an existential experience of *dukkham*, suffering or "anguish," could bring about this realization.

Today we have to thank, for this realization, the catastrophic results and further consequences, still being suffered, of two world wars in the 20th century. That is why a new philosophy, already nascent on the eve of the Second World War, has emerged in Europe explicitly as a philosophy of *conscience* rather than of mere *consciousness*. It should appear equally obvious that in such a philosophy there is no longer any place for the stubborn false dilemma: philosophy *or* religion.

This last problem, which concerns "philosophical faith," is more important for Buddhism than for any other religion. It has found its best diagnostical expression in several essays of Karl Jaspers, from which we extract a few hints:

It is questionable whether *faith* is possible *without religion*. Philosophy originates in this question... Man deprived of his faith by the loss of his religion is devoting more decisive thought to the nature of his own being... No longer does the revealed Deity upon whom all is dependent come first, and no longer the world that exists around us; what comes first is man, who, however, cannot make terms with himself as being, but strives to transcend himself... The unsheltered individual gives our epoch its physiognomy... [Formerly] the authority of the church sheltered him and sustained him, gave him peace and happiness... Today philosophy is the only refuge for those who, in full awareness, are not sheltered by religion.²³

Obviously, "faith" is here no longer understood as a belief in any revelation, but as reasonable trust in a qualified spiritual guide whose moral and intellectual capacities have to be carefully tested in each single case by a sound and mature criterion (*apa.n.nako dhammo*) such as was established by the Buddha in his critical discourses on religion, *Apa.n.naka-suttam* and *Ca.nki-suttam* (MN 60 and 95), in order to exclude empty and blind transmission of religious traditions "as a basket handed over from one to the other," or in "a string of blind men."

"One oneself is the guardian of oneself; what other guardian could there be?" (Dhp 160)

Jean-Paul Sartre is another philosopher who, though himself not religious, realizes the tremendous importance of the religious problem from the bias of our critical age, and still more specifically from the bias of the deepest

metaphysical implications of the idea of *aniccam*, as non-substantiality, undermining the scientific foundation of 19th century materialism: The tragic situation of human reality in the world consists in the fact that due to his karmic "freedom" man "is not what he is, man is what he is not."

This statement, whose implications have scandalized many conservative Christian minds, nevertheless corresponds to the gist of St. Augustine's thought as rendered by Jaspers out of a different deeply religious concern with the undeniable facticity of the same existential situation: "I am myself, but I can fail myself. I must put my trust in myself, but I cannot rely on myself."²⁴

As for Sartre, his first deduction from this basic realization of *anicca-anattaa* is that as such "man is a useless passion." "Human reality is the pure effort to become God without there being any given substratum for that effort... Desire expresses this endeavor... Fundamentally

man is the desire to be." As such, he is always only a "project" — ceaselessly "catapulted" from the past to the future (as Ortega y Gasset has formulated it), without a natural possibility of finding poise in his own present. This is the tragedy of his "temporalization," whose ultimate meaning is *aniccam*.

This is how "the existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that human reality is a lack." How, then, is a possibility of ultimate escape or "liberation" conceivable? It is because human reality "is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in the form of a project of being." On this basis only, "We can ascertain more exactly what is the being of the self: it is value."²⁵

He who wants to delve deeper into such possibilities, it would seem, should follow the advice of Gabriel Marcel or of Berdyaev, and try to cross beyond the possibilities expressed in any philosophy of being. The Buddhist fitting,

or "raft," though considerably larger in its basic frame, is readily adaptable to their explicit requirements: "Neither being, nor non-being, nor both being-and-non-being, nor neither-being-nor-non-being."

Notes

1.

This essay is a reprint from "Main Currents in Modern Thought," Vol. 27, No. 5, 1971, revised and enlarged by the author.

2.

MN 146 and several other texts. Quotations from Pali *suttas* are adapted mainly from the Pali Text Society's editions of the Translation Series. References in the text are to the *Majjhima-nikaayo* (MN), *Diigha-nikaayo* (DN), *Sa.myutta-nikaayo* (SN), *Dhammapadam* (Dhp).

3.

Adequation: (*obsolete*) The act of equalizing or making equal or commensurate [OED, 2nd ed.] — ATI ed.

4.

Quotations from *An Outline of Philosophy*, 3rd impression. London, Allen and Unwin, 1941, pp. 309, 290, 304, 294, 290, 5, 287, 288, 289, 291, 292, 296, 297, 11, 300, 14.

5.

Quoted according to R. Heywood, *The Sixth Sense, an Inquiry into Extra-Sensory Perception*, London, Pan-books, 1959, pp. 205-210.

6.

See also his book, *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychical Research*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, and R. Heywood, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-222.

7.

The following quotations are from *Classic American Philosophers*, General Editor M.H. Fisch, New York, Applenton-Century-Crofts, 1951, pp. 163, 164.

8.

K. Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers*, ed. By R. Hart-Davis, London, 1962, p. 320.

9.

Quotations come from *Classic American Philosophers, op. cit.*, pp. 160, 155, 161, 163 n. 10.

Cf. I.M. Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, Univ. of California Press, 1961, p. 136 (also for bibliography).

11.

The English translation of his main work, *Being and Time*, was published by Harper, New York, 1962. My references are from the 7th German ed., Tübingen, M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1953, pp. 28 ff.

12.

Cf. Bochenski, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

13.

An astonishingly close analogy between the formulation of the four antinomies of the dialectical reason by Kant and the same basic structure of the four groups of "views" (*di.t.thi*) in the *Brahma-jaala-suttam* (DN 1) has been singled out in my papers, "Dependence of *punar-bhava* on karma in Buddhist philosophy," and "My Approach to Indian Philosophy," in

Indian Philosophical Annuals, vols. I and II, 1965, 1966, under my lay name Chedomil Velyachich.

14.

Cf. Bochenski, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

15.

Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, N.Y., The Philosophical Library, 1949, p. 2.

16.

N. Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, Harper Torchbooks, 1957, p. 92. See also discussion contained in J. Wahl's book (note 15, above).

17.

Op. cit., pp. 116 f.

18.

K. Jaspers, *Philosophie*, 2nd ed. Berlin, Springer, 1948, pp. 814, 813. *Man in the Modern Age* is the title of one of Jaspers' books in English translation (London, 1959).

19.

In his history of *The Great Philosophers*, the chapter on Naagaarjuna is not included in the

selection quoted above (note 8) in English translation.

20.

Cf. Bochenski, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

21.

Cf. *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, edited by R. Bretall, Princeton Univ. Press, 1951, p. 99 (from *Either-Or*) and p. 346 (from *The Sickness Unto Death*).

22.

Cf. Julian Huxley, *Religion without Revelation*, London, Watts, 1967, an analysis characteristic for the necessary elimination of elements which an up-to-date definition of religion should not any longer postulate as essential.

23.

Man in the Modern Age, p. 142 ff., and *The Great Philosophers*, p. 221.

24.

Cf. *The Great Philosophers*, p. 200.

25.

J.-P. Sartre. *Being and Nothingness*, London, Methuen, 1966, pp. 615, 576, 565, 87, 92.

A Walk in the Woods **by Phra Khantipalo**

Come with me for a walk in the woods. It is hot, silent, and nearly midday but there are patches of shade here and there where we may sit. Around us trees of forty years are only twenty feet high, so great is the struggle to survive. Many die young and never mature. You can see their young skeletons being relentlessly devoured by the termites. Taller trees are scattered here and there, battered survivors of a continuous fight for life. Many of their limbs have been torn off in sudden monsoon squalls, or else they have rotted away by fungus and disease and finally fallen off. You see that "sawdust" about this tree? Its top will soon fall as some grub is eating away its heartwood. Look over there at that young tree all askew —

its roots have been attacked by some predator and so it has been blown over. And there, do you see that large tree, its bark covered with mud-plaster? The termites are under that gnawing away its green wood and when they succeed in ringing it all round then, in a single day, all its leaves will turn yellow and sixty years of growth comes to an end.

Above us, young leaves of translucent green match their brilliance against the startling blue sky. Even these young tender leaves are full of holes, delicacies for the great beetles that bumble about in the evening air. Lower down these trees, the more mature leaves are ragged and lend to the forest a threadbare look. Though they must be tough, still it seems they are the food of some insect. Here and there you can see at the base of branches and round the lower parts of the trees yellow leaves hanging, stiffly awaiting, as it were, the executioner who will come as a breath of wind and bring them down. Parted, they are disjoined forever — one changing process from another changing

process. They fall with a crash among the undergrowth. There they join hundreds of thousands which fell before them and litter all the ground with a crackly layer of decay. But they do not just decay slowly at their own speed. Their decay is quickened by a myriad of ants, termites, worms, and funguses, all ready for food and fighting to get it, a fearsome underground jungle in miniature.

A bird calls and is still. Far away the bells on the necks of the water-buffalo at work in the rice-fields jingle. Insects drone by. You see, insects are always either looking for food or avoiding becoming the food of others. A breeze sways the trees and a huge round wasps' nest at the top of a slender sapling looks most insecure. Danger! Flies hum and buzz, perching on a bamboo swinging in constant motion. Cicadas tick, click, and whir far and near as though they were counting the seconds of their own — and everyone else's — lives. Seconds and minutes fly into days and months towards death. A ground lizard darts for its prey, catches it and

chews the living insect with great relish. Another death in this round where death goes unremarked because it is everywhere.

Ants swarm everywhere in lines, parties or armies, in all shapes and sizes, according to their species. They play a great part in the change of this forest for they are the scavengers. They have only to scent death and they will be there ready to undertake the dismemberment of the corpse. Sometimes it is still alive. No decay is uninteresting to them, it is their livelihood and they are always busy, for beings never cease decaying and dying.

Spiders too are found in great variety, all of them ready to pounce on and bite to death unwary small creatures that become entangled in their shimmering webs. They hang them, iridescent in the sunlight everywhere and it is a wonder that anything can fly and yet escape them. But even spiders do not escape death, usually from the stings of their enemies, the hunting wasps. Though the swaying bough of bamboo is most graceful it has been marked as

part of this menacing world by a spider's web hung among its leaves. And bamboos are cut down by men for their usefulness. Everything, the beautiful and the ugly is subject to impermanence.

Clouds pass across the sky bringing coolness to us here below. Their shapes change from minute to minute. Not even one second the same. They look very solid yet we know how insubstantial they are. They are just like this present time... changing... changing...

Look over here in the forest, a pile of ashes and a few burnt-out logs rotting away, and look: here is another older heap nearly dispersed. And other piles are around about with occasional carved wooden posts set in the ground, all smoldering. What are they? These mark the ends of men and women. This forest at the back of the Wat1 is used for cremation. Some days, if you go in the late afternoon you will find a group of villagers, and a very simple open-topped coffin. Everyone can see the body there clothed as he or she died and looking, as corpses

do, unless interfered with, quite repulsive. The day of cremation is the day on which the person died, or the very next day at the latest. Change sets in fast and hideously in a body kept in the hot countries. A big pile of logs has been made and without ceremony and with no pretentious solemnity the coffin is hoisted on top. Bhikkhus having viewed the corpse are then asked to chant and some gifts are given and dedicated for the good of the dead man. Then without more ado paraffin is splashed over the pile and it is set alight. Some stay to see it burn. You can soon see the body roasting through the flames when the thin-walled coffin has burnt out... until, amidst the embers, there are only some charred pieces of bone... "*Anicca vata sankaraa...*"

Now the sun, "the eye of the day," has changed his position, or we have changed ours and our short walk in the woods is nearly over. What have we seen that does not pass away? Even though I may say that I look out of the windows of my hut every day and see the same trees, how near to truth is this? How can the trees be the

same? They are steadily changing they are unstable and certain to come to an end in one way or another. They have had a beginning and they must have an end.

And what about this "I" who sees these trees, the forest, the burning ground and so on? Permanent or impermanent?

Everyone can answer this question, for we have seen the answer in the forest. When "I" feel depressed and look at the trees they seem stark, ugly moth-eaten specimens. But when "I" am glad and look upon them, see, how beautiful they are! If, while on our walk, we looked only at the impermanence "out there," now is the time to bring the lesson home to the heart. Everything that I am is impermanent, unstable, sure to change and deteriorate.

If impermanence meant change all the time towards better and happier states how excellent our world would be! But impermanence is allied with deterioration. All compounds break down, all made things fall to pieces, all conditioned things pass away with the passing of those

conditions. Everything and everybody — that includes you and me — deteriorates, ages, decays, breaks up, and passes away. And we, living in the forest of desires, are entirely composed of the impermanent. Yet our desire impels us not to see this, though impermanence stares us in the face from every single thing around. And it confronts us when we look within — mind and body, arising and passing away.

So don't turn on the TV, go to the pictures, read a book, seize some food, or a hundred other distractions just to avoid seeing this. This is the one thing really worth seeing, for one who fully sees it in himself is *Free*.

— The Jewel Forest Monastery
Sakhon Nakorn, Siam

Notes

1.

Wat is the Thai word for a Buddhist monastery.

The Buddhist Doctrine of Anicca (Impermanence)

by Y. Karunadasa, Ph.D. (London)

The Buddhist doctrine of *anicca*, the transitoriness of all phenomena, finds classical expression in the oft-recurrent formula: *Sabbe sankhaaraa aniccaa*, and in the more popular statement: *Aniccaa vata sankhaaraa*. Both these formulas amount to saying that all conditioned things or phenomenal processes, mental as well as material, that go to make up the sa.msaaaric plane of existence are transient or impermanent. This law of impermanence is not the result of any kind of metaphysical inquiry or of any mystical intuition. It is a straightforward judgment arrived at by investigation and analysis, and as such its basis is entirely empirical.

It is in fact for the purpose of showing the insubstantiality and impermanence of the world

of experience that Buddhism analyzes it into a multiplicity of basic factors. The earliest attempts at explaining this situation are represented in the analysis into five khandas, twelve aayatana, and eighteen dhaatus. In the Abhidhamma we get the most detailed analysis into eighty one basic elements, which are introduced by the technical term, dhamma. These are the basic factors into which the empiric individuality in relation to the external world is ultimately analyzed. They purport to show that there does not exist a "unity," "substance," "atta," or "jiiva." In the ultimate analysis the so-called unity is a complex of factors, "one" is really "many." This applies to both mind and matter equally. In the case of living beings there is no soul or self which is immortal, while in the case of things in general there is no essence which is ever-perduring.

These basic factors, according to Buddhism, do not imply an absolute unity (*ekatta*). They are not fractions of a whole, but a number of co-

ordinate ultimates. Although real, they are not permanent. Nor are they mutually unconnected. As such they do not imply a theory of absolute separateness (puthutta) either. A good example of this kind of world-view is that of Pakudha Kaccaayana, who seeks to explain the composition of the world with reference to seven eternally existing and mutually unconnected substances. This reduces the world to a concatenation of separate and discrete entities, with no inter-connection, with no inter-dependence.

The Buddhist view of existence does not amount to such an extreme, for according to Buddhism the basic factors are inter-connected with laws of causation and conditionality. Thus the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence is based both on analysis and synthesis. It is through analysis that the empirical world is reduced to a multiplicity of basic factors, and it is through causality that they are again synthesized.

That existence does not consist of an eternal substance, mental or material, but is composed of a variety of constantly changing factors is the conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis into khandhas, aayatana, dhaatus, and dhammas. On the impermanence of the five khandhas that make up the empiric individuality, we find this statement in the Sa.myuttanikaaya:

"There is no materiality whatever, O monks, no feeling, no perception, no formations, no consciousness whatever that is permanent, ever-lasting, eternal, changeless, identically abiding forever." Then the Blessed One took a bit of cow-dung in his hand and he spoke to the monks: "Monks, if even that much of permanent, ever-lasting, eternal, changeless individual selfhood [*attabhaava*], identically abiding forever, could be found, then this living of a life of purity [*brahmacariya*] for the complete eradication of Ill

[*dukkhakkhaya*] would not be feasible" (SN 22.96).

What is revolutionary about the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence is that it is extended to include everything, including consciousness, which is usually taken to be permanent, as the soul or as one of its qualities. The Majjhima Nikaaya records how Bhikkhu Saati misunderstood Buddha's teaching to mean that consciousness is a permanent entity, which passes from one existence to another, like the *niraasraya vi~n~naana* of the Upanisads. This led the Buddha to formulate the well-known principle: *A~n~natra paccayaa natthi vi~n~naanassa sambhavo* — There is no arising of consciousness without reference to a condition. This is further explained to mean that consciousness comes into being (*sambhoti*) in dependence on a duality.

What is that duality? It is eye, which is impermanent, changing, becoming-other,

and visible objects, which are impermanent, changing, and becoming-other: such is the transient, fugitive duality [of eye-cum-visible objects], which is impermanent, changing, and becoming-other. Eye-consciousness too is impermanent. For how could eye-consciousness arise by depending on an impermanent condition be permanent? The coincidence, concurrence, and confluence of these three factors which is called contact and those other mental phenomena arising as a result are also impermanent. (The same formula is applied to the other sense-organs and the consciousnesses named after them.)

— SN 35.93

It is in view of the impermanence and insubstantiality of consciousness that Buddha has declared:

Better were it bhikkhus that the uneducated many-folk should conceive this four-element-made body, rather than *citta*, to be a [so-called] soul. And why? The body is seen to persist for a year, for two, three, four, five, ten or twenty years, for a generation, even for a hundred years or even for longer, while that which is called consciousness, that is mind, that is intelligence, arises as one thing, ceases as another, both by day and night.

— SN 12.61

Because of its acceptance of this law of universal impermanence, Buddhism stands in direct opposition to *sassatavaada* or eternalism, which usually goes hand in hand with *aatmavaada*, i.e., belief in some kind of immortal soul. The Brahmajaala Sutta of the Diighanikaaya alone refers to more than ten varieties of eternalism, only to refute them as misconceptions of the true nature of the

empirical world. But this refutation of eternalism does not lead to the acceptance, on the part of Buddhism, of the other extreme, namely *ucchedavaada* or annihilationism, which usually goes hand in hand with materialism. The Buddhist refutation of both these extremes finds classical expression in the following words of the Buddha:

This world, O Kaccaayana, generally proceeds on a duality, of the "it is" and the "it is not." But, O Kaccaayana, whoever perceives in truth and wisdom how things originate in the world, for him there is no "it is not" in this world. Whoever, Kaccaayana, perceives in truth and wisdom how things pass away in the world, for him there is no "it is" in this world.

— SN 12.15

This statement of the Buddha refers to the duality (*dvayataa*) of existence (*atthitaa*) and

non-existence (*natthitaa*). These are the two theories of eternalism and annihilationism which find expression in many forms in various types of religion and philosophy. The former implies belief in a permanent and changeless substance or entity, whether it is conceived as a plurality of individual souls as in Jainism, or as a monistic world-soul as in Vedaanta, or as a deity of some kind as in most of the theistic religions. The latter, on the other hand, implies a belief in the temporary existence of separate souls or personalities which are entirely destroyed or dissolved after death. A good example of this kind of philosophy is the one advocated by Ajita Kesakambali which finds mention in the Saama~n~naphala Sutta.

In contrast, according to Buddhism, everything is the product of antecedent causes and, therefore, of dependent origination (*pa.ticca-samuppanna*). These causes themselves are not ever-lasting and static, but simply antecedent aspects of the same ceaseless becoming. Every

event is the result of a concatenation of dynamic processes (*sankhaara*). Neither Being nor non-Being is the truth. There is only Becoming, happening by way of cause, continuity without identity, persistence without a persistent substance. "He who discerns origin by way of cause, he discerns the Dhamma, he who discerns the Dhamma he discerns origin by way of cause."

Thus by accepting the theory of causation and conditionality, Buddhism avoids the two extremes of *sabba.m atthi* (everything is) and *sabba.m natthi* (everything is not) and advocates *sabba.m bhavati*, "everything becomes," i.e., happens by way of cause and effect. It is also because of this theory that Buddhism could avoid the two extremes of *niyataivaada* (determinism) and *ahetu-appaccaya-vaada* (indeterminism). According to the former, everything is absolutely pre-determined, according to the latter everything happens without reference to any cause or condition.

According to both there is no room for free will and as such moral responsibility gets completely ruled out. By its theory of causation Buddhism avoids both extremes and establishes free will and moral responsibility.

The second basic characteristic of the world of experience, namely *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness) is but a logical corollary arising from this law of universal impermanence. For the impermanent nature of everything can but lead to one inescapable conclusion: As everything is impermanent, they cannot be made the basis of permanent happiness. Whatever is transient is by that very fact unsatisfactory — *yad anicca.m ta.m dukkha.m*. Since every form of sa.msaaric existence is impermanent, it is also characterized by unsatisfactoriness. Thus, the premise: "*sabbe sankhaaraa aniccaa*" leads to the conclusion: "*sabbe sankhaaraa dukkhaa*."

As indicative of a general characteristic of phenomena, the term *dukkha* should not be understood in a narrower sense to mean only

pain, suffering, misery, or sorrow. As a philosophical term it has a wider connotation, as wide as that of the term *anicca*. In this wider sense, it includes deeper ideas such as imperfection, unrest, conflict, in short, unsatisfactoriness. This is precisely why even the states of *jhaana*, resulting from the practice of higher meditation and which free from suffering as ordinarily understood, are also included in *dukkha*. This is also why the characterization *dukkha* is extended even to matter (*ruupa*).

The Visuddhi-magga compiled by Buddhaghosa recognizes these wider implications of the term when it explains it as three-fold, namely *dukkha-dukkha* (dukkha as suffering), *vipari.naama-dukkha* (dukkha as change), and *sankhaara-dukkha* (dukkha as conditioned state).

As a direct and necessary corollary of this fact of *dukkha*, we come to the third basic

characteristic of all phenomena, namely *anatta*, which finds expression in the well-known statement: *Sabbe dhammaa anattaa*. For the unsatisfactory nature of everything should lead to this important conclusion: If everything is characterized by unsatisfactoriness, nothing can be identified as the self or as a permanent soul (*attaa*).

What is *dukkha* (by that very fact) is also *anatta*. What is not the self cannot be considered as I am (*ahan ti*), as mine (*maman ti*), or as I am that (*asmii ti*).

According to Buddhism the idea of self or soul is not only a false and imaginary belief, with no corresponding objective reality, but is also harmful from an ethical point of view. For it produces such harmful thoughts of I, me, and mine, selfish desires, attachments, and all other unwholesome states of mind (*akusala dhammaa*). It could also be a misery in disguise to one who accepts it as true:

"Do you see, O bhikkhus, such a soul-theory in the acceptance of which, there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, and tribulation?"

"Certainly not, Sir."

"Good, O bhikkhus, I too, O bhikkhus, do not see a soul-theory, in the acceptance of which there would not arise grief, lamentation, suffering, distress, and tribulation."

— MN 22

This brings into relief the close connection between the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence and Buddhist ethics: If the world of experience is impermanent, by that very fact, it cannot be made the basis of permanent happiness. What is not permanent (*anicca*) and, therefore, what is characterized by unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) cannot be considered as the self (*anatta*). And

what is not the self (*atta*) cannot be considered as one's own (*saka*) or as a haven of security (*taa.na*). For the things that one gets attached to are constantly changing. Hence attachment to them would only lead to unrest and sorrow.

But when one knows things as they truly are (*yathaabhuuta.m*), i.e., as *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*, one ceases to get agitated by them, one ceases to take refuge in them. Just as attachment to things is to get fettered by them, even so detachment from them is to get freed from them. Thus, in the context of Buddhist ethics, the perception of impermanence is only a preliminary step to the eradication of all cravings, which in turn has the attainment of *Nibbaana* as its final goal.

It will thus be seen that the Buddhist doctrine of *anicca*, on which is also based the doctrine of *dukkha* and *anatta*, can rightly be called the very foundation of the whole edifice of Buddhist philosophy and ethics.

This explains why the Buddha has declared that the very perception of this fact, namely that whatever comes into existence is also subject to dissolution (*ya.m ki~nci samudaya-dhamma.m sabba.m ta.m nirodhadhamma.m*) is indeed the very arising of the stainless Eye of the Doctrine (*dhamma-cakkhu*).

The Theory of Momentariness

The Buddhist doctrine of impermanence, as explained in the canonical texts, does really amount to a theory of momentariness, in the sense that everything is in a state of constant flux. This becomes clear from a passage in the Anguttara Nikaaya (AN 3.47), where the three *sankhata-lakkhanas* (the characteristics of that which is compounded) are explained. Here it is said that that which is *sankhata* (compounded) has three fundamental characteristics, namely *uppaada* (origination), *vaya* (dissolution), and *.thitassa a~n~nathatta* (otherwiseness of that which is existing). From this it follows that the

Buddhist doctrine of change should not be understood in the ordinary sense that something arises, exists for some time in a more or less static form, and dissolves. On the contrary, the third characteristic, i.e., *.thitassa a~n~nathatta* shows that between its arising and cessation, a thing is all the time changing, with no static phase in between. Thus the Buddhist doctrine of change does really amount to a theory of universal flux.

As far as the application of this theory of change is concerned, there is nothing to suggest that early Buddhism had made any distinction between mind and matter. However, some schools of Buddhism, notably the Mahaasaanghikas, Vaatsiiputriyas, and Sammitiiyas, while recognizing the momentary duration of mental elements, assigned a relative permanence to matter. Others, such as the Sarvaastivaadins, Mahiisaasakas, and Sautraantikas objected to introducing any such distinction and declared that all elements of

existence, mental as well as material, are of momentary duration, of instantaneous being.

The Theory of Moment (*ksa.na-vaada*)

In the various schools of Buddhism the early Buddhist doctrine of change came to be explained on the basis of a formulated theory of moments. This theory is based on the three *sankhata-lakkha.nas* which we referred to earlier. It is in fact on the interpretation of the third *sankhata-lakkha.na*, namely *.thitassa a~n~nathatta* that the different schools of Buddhism differ widely, as if to justify the very meaning conveyed by these two words.

The Vaibhaasika School of Buddhism interpret *sthityanyathaatva* (= *.thitassa a~n~nathatta*) as *jarataa*, postulate another characteristic called *sthiti*, and thus increase the number of *sankhata-lakkha.nas* to four: (i) *jaati* (origination), (ii) *sthitii* (existence), (iii) *jarataa* (decay), (iv) *anityataa* (extinction). All elements, mental as well as material, characterised by them are

sa.mskrta (= *sankhata*). Only *aakaasa* (space) and Nirvaana escape from their inexorable sway. At every moment (*ksa.na*) all mental and material elements are affected by them. A moment is defined as the time during which the four characteristics accomplish their operation. The Vaibhaasikas also maintain that these characteristics are not only distinct from, but also as real as the things which they characterize — showing thereby a strong predilection to naive realism. And in keeping with this theory, it is also claimed that they are in turn characterized by secondary characteristics (*anulaksana*s).

The Sautraantika School of Buddhism does not agree at all with this interpretation of the Vaibhaasikas. In their view, the four characteristics apply not to one but to a series of momentary elements: "The series itself is called *sthiti* (subsistence), its origin is called *jaati*, its cessation is *vyaya*, and the difference in its preceding and succeeding moments is called

sthityanyathaatva" (Abhidharmakosa, III, 78). A momentary element, so they argue, cannot have a phase called *sthiti* or *jarataa*, for whatever that originates has no time to subsist or decay but to perish. They also point-out that these four characteristics are mere designations with no objective reality. They criticize the recognition of secondary characteristics on the ground that this would lead to the fallacy of infinite regress (*anavasthaa*). For if the four characteristics require a set of secondary characteristics to account for their origination, etc., then these secondary characteristics will in turn require another set of secondary characteristics to account for their origination, etc., and in this manner the process could be stretched indefinitely. This problem does not arise — so runs the argument — if the characteristics are not recognized as real as the things they characterize.

How the Theravaadins developed the doctrine of impermanence, and how they interpreted the

sankhata-lakkha.nas could be understood clearly when the subject is unfolded against this background.

The most striking feature of the Theravada theory is that the fact of momentariness is explained in quite a different way: Each dhamma (element of existence) has three moments, namely *uppaadakkha.na*, the moment of origination; *.thitikkha.na*, the moment of subsistence; and *bhangakkha.na*, the moment of cessation. These three moments do not correspond to three different dhammas. On the contrary, they represent three phases — the nascent, the static, and cessant — of one "momentary" dhamma. Hence, the statement that dhammas are momentary means that a given dhamma has three momentary phases or stages. It arises in the first moment, subsists in the second moment, and perishes in the third moment.

Like the Sautraantikas, the Theravaadins too accept the fact that a momentary dhamma has no phase called *jarataa* or decay. According to the argument of both schools, the attribution of *jarataa*, which implies some kind of change or transformation, to a momentary dhamma is to accept *pari.naamavaada*, according to which the essence, the substance remains the same while its modes undergo change. Change, as it came to be finally defined in the schools of Buddhist logic, is not the transformation of one and the same dhamma from one stage to another, but the replacement of one momentary dhamma by another. The following argument in the Abhidharmakosa, which is directed against the Vaibhaasikas who admit *jarataa* of one momentary dhamma, clarifies this situation: "But how can you speak of *jarataa* or change in respect of one momentary dhamma? What is called *jarataa* or change is the transformation or dissimilarity between two stages. Is it possible to say that a dharma becomes different from itself. If it remains unchanged it cannot be

another. If it is transformed it is not the same. Therefore the transformation of one dhamma is not possible" (Abhidharmakosa, III, 56).

Hence the Sautraantikas and the Theravaadins apply the characteristic of jarataa only to a series of momentary dhammas. In their opinion what is called jarataa is the difference between the preceding and the succeeding moments of a series. There is, however, this difference to be noted: Unlike the Sautraantikas, the Theravaadins do not deny the static phase (*.thiti*) of a momentary dhamma. The Theravada argument in support of their accepting the static phase is as follows: It is true that a dhamma that originates should also cease to exist. But before it could cease to exist, there should be at least a moment when it turns towards its own cessation (*nirodhaabhimukhaavatthaa*). It is this moment when a dhamma is facing its own cessation that we call the static phase. The logic of this argument is that a dhamma that arises cannot cease to exist at the same time, for otherwise

existence and non-existence would become co-existent!

One logical development of this theory of moments is the denial of motion. For, if all the elements of existence are of momentary duration, they have no time to move. In the case of momentary elements, wherever appearance takes place there itself takes place disappearance (*yatraivotpattih tatraiva vinaasah*). In keeping with this theory, motion is given a new definition. According to this definition, motion has to be understood, not as the movement of one material element from one locus in space to another (*desaantara-sa.mkraant*), but as the appearance of momentary elements in adjacent locations (*desaantarotpatti*), creating a false picture of movement. The best example given in this case is the light of the lamp. The so-called light of the lamp, it is argued, is nothing but a common designation given to an uninterrupted production of a series of flashing points. When the production changes place one says that the

light has changed. But in reality other flames have appeared in another place.

**Anicca (Impermanence)
According to Theravada
by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli**

According to the Theravada, *anicca* is the first of what are often called in Buddhist literature the "Three Characteristics" (*ti-lakkha.na*) or the "General Characteristics" (*saama~n~na-lakkha.na*). *Anicca* is usually treated as the basis for the other two, though *anatta*, the third, is sometimes founded on *dukkha* alone.

The normal English equivalent for *anicca* is "impermanent."

Derivations

The adjective *anicca* (impermanent) is derived in modern etymology from the negative prefix

a- plus *nicca* (permanent: cf. Vedic Sanskrit *nitya* from prefix *ni-* meaning "onward, downward"). The *Paramatthama~njuusaa* (commentary to the *Visuddhimagga*) and also the *Poraana-Tiikaa* (one of the three commentaries to the *Abhidhammatthasa"ngaha*) agree that "Because it denies everlastingness, it is not permanent, thus it is impermanent" (*na niccan ti anicca.m: VisA. 125*). The *Vibhaavinii-Tikaa* and *Sankhepava.n.nanaa* (the other two commentaries to the *Abhs.*) prefer a derivation from the negative prefix *an-* plus root *i* to go: "Cannot be gone to, is un-approachable, as a permanent, everlasting state, thus it is impermanent" (... *na iccam, anupagantabban ti aniccam*).

Definitions

Principal definitions given in the Sutta Pi.taka are as follows. "Impermanent, impermanent' it is said, Lord. What is impermanent?" — "Materiality [*ruupa*] is impermanent, Raadha, and so are feeling [*vedanaa*] and perception

[*sa~n~naa*] and formations [*sankhaara*] and consciousness [*vi~n~naa.na*]" (SN 23.1). This statement is summarized by a Canonical commentary thus: "What is impermanent? The five categories [*khandha*] are impermanent. In what sense impermanent? Impermanent in the sense of rise and fall [*udaya-vaya*]" (Ps. *Aanaapaanakathaa*/vol. i, 230). Again,

"All is impermanent. And what is the all that is impermanent? The eye is impermanent, visual objects [*ruupaa*]... eye-consciousness... eye contact [*cakku-samphassa*]... whatever is felt [*vedayita*] as pleasant or unpleasant or neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant, born of eye-contact is impermanent. [Likewise with the ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind]" (SN 35.43/vol. iv, 28) or, quite succinctly, "All formations are impermanent" (MN 35/vol. i, 230) and

"Whatever is subject to origination [*samudaya*] is subject to cessation [*nirodha*]" (MN 56/vol. i, 380). The Canonical commentary adds "Materiality [etc.] is impermanent in the sense of exhaustion [*khaya*]" (Ps. ~*Naa.nakathaa*/vol. i, 37).

For reasons given below, impermanence in strict Abhidhamma treatment appears, along with continuity (*santati*), etc., only as one of the secondary (derivative) constituents of the materiality category (see e.g., Dhs. & 645), of which the commentary says "Impermanence of materiality has the characteristic of complete break-up. Its nature is to make instances of materiality subside. It is manifested as their exhaustion and fall. Its footing is materiality that is completely breaking up" (Vis. Ch. XIV/p.450).

A section of the Vibha"nga, however, which does not follow the strict Abhidhamma method, extends impermanence to the highest kinds of heavenly existence, beyond those with fine-materiality (*ruupa*) to the immaterial (*aruupa*) where there is perception only of infinity of space, infinity of consciousness, nothingness, or of reduced perception of nothingness (*Dhammahadaya-Vibha"nga*).

The commentaries of Acariya Buddhaghosa elaborate the Sutta definitions further, distinguishing between "the impermanent and the characteristic of impermanence. The five categories are the impermanent. Why? Because their essence is to rise and fall and change, and because, after having been, they are not. But the characteristic of impermanence is their state of rise and fall and alternation, or it is their mode-transformation [*aakaara-vikaara*] called non-being after having been" (Vis. Ch. XXI/p. 640); again "The eye [etc.,] can be known as impermanent in the sense of its non-being after

having been; and it is impermanent for four reasons as well; because it has rise and fall, because it changes, because it is temporary, and because it denies permanence" (VbhA. 41; cf. MA. *ad*, MN 22/vol. ii, 113), and "Since its destiny is non-being and since it abandons its natural essence because of the transmission [of personal continuity] to a new state of being [on rebirth], it is 'subject to change,' which is simply synonymous with its impermanence" (VbhA. 49).

Treatment in the Suttas And Commentaries

Having dealt with derivations and definitions, we can now turn to the Suttas and commentaries again in order to see how this subject is handled there; for in this article we shall be mainly concerned with quotations, leaving discussion to other articles.

But at this point, it is convenient to approach the doctrine of impermanence first from the point of

view of it as a description of what actually is (*yathaa-bhuuta*), leaving till later the point of view of it as a basis for evaluation and judgment, which is the reason and justification for the description.

Impermanence is observable empirically and is objectively and publicly evident, always if looked for, and from time to time forcing itself upon our notice. Externally it is found in the inconstancy of "things," which extends even to the periodical description of world-systems (see e.g., MN 28; SN 15.20; AN 7.62); and in one self it can be observed, for instance, in the body's inadequacy (*aadiinava*) because it ages, is prone to sickness, dies, and gradually decays after death (see MN 13); life is short (AN 7.70).
But:

"It would be better for an untaught ordinary man to treat as self [*attaa*] this body, which is constructed upon the four great entities [*mahaa-bhuuta*], then cognizance [*citta*].

Why? Because this body can last one year, two years,... even a hundred years; but what is called 'cognizance' and 'mind' [*mano*] and 'consciousness' [*vi~n~naa.na*] rises and ceases differently through night and day, just as a monkey ranging through a forest seizes a branch, and, letting that go, seizes another" (SN 12.61/vol. ii, 94.5).

Nevertheless an observance of empirical impermanence might not alone suffice for the radical position accorded by the Buddha to this characteristic. This is established, however, by discovery, through reasoned attention, of a regular structure in the subjective-objective process of its occurrence: "This body [for example] is impermanent, it is formed [*sa.nkhata*], and it is dependently-arisen [*pa.ticca-samuppanna*]" (SN 36.7/vol. iv, 211; cf. SN 22.21/vol. iii, 24).

Here, in fact, three aspects are distinguished, three necessary and interlocking constituents of impermanence, namely (1) change, (2) formation (as "this, not that," without which no change could be perceived), and (3) a recognizable pattern in a changing process (also called "specific conditionality" (*idapaccayataa*), which pattern is set out in the formula of dependent origination (*pa.ticca-samuppaada*). We shall take these three aspects in order.

(1)

There is no single treatise on the characteristic of impermanence either in the *Tipi.taka* or its commentaries, and so we shall have to bring together passages from a number of sources. *We may also bear in mind that the Buddha does not confine descriptions of a general nature such as this to the observed alone, but extends them to include the observer, regarded as actively committed in the world he observes and acting on it as it acts on him, so long as craving and ignorance remain un-abolished. "That in the world by which one perceives the world [loka-*

sa~n~nii] and conceives concepts about the world [*loka-maanii*] is called 'the world' in the Ariyas's Discipline. And what is it in the world with which one does that? It is with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind" (SN 35.116/vol. iv, 95). That same world "is being worn away [*lujjhati*], that is why it is called 'world' [*loka*]" (SN 35.82/vol. iv, 52). That impermanence is not only appropriate to all of any arisen situation but also to the totality of all arisen situations:

"Bhikkhu, there is no materiality whatever... no feeling... no perception... no formations... no consciousness whatever that is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, that will last as long as eternity."

Then the Blessed One took a small piece of cow-dung in his hand he told the bhikkhu: "Bhikkhu, if even that much of permanent, everlasting, eternal individual selfhood [*attabhaava*], not subject to change could be found, then this living of a life of purity

[*brahmacariya*] could not be described as for the complete exhaustion of suffering [*dukkhakkhaya*]."

— SN 22.96/vol. iii, 144

And again:

"Bhikkhus, I do not dispute with the world [the 'world' in the sense of other people], the world disputes with me: no one who proclaims the True Idea [*dhamma*] disputes with anyone in the world. What wise men in the world say there is not [*natthi*], that I too say there is not; and what wise men in the world say there is [*atthi*], that I too say there is... Wise men in the world say there is no permanent, everlasting, eternal materiality not subject to change, and I too say there is none. [And likewise with the other four categories.] Wise men in the world say that there is impermanent materiality that is

unpleasant and the subject to change, and I too say there is that."

— SN 22.94/vol. iii, 138-9

Impermanence, as it is pointed out in the commentaries, is not always evident unless looked for.

The characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent because, when rise and fall are not given attention to, it is concealed by continuity... However, when continuity is disrupted by discerning rise and fall, the characteristic of impermanence becomes apparent in its true nature."

— Vis. Ch. xxi/p. 640

"When continuity is disrupted" means when continuity is exposed by observation of the perpetual alteration of dhammas as they go on occurring in succession. For it is not

through dhammas' connectedness that the characteristic of impermanence becomes apparent to one who rightly observes rise and fall, but rather the characteristic becomes properly evident through their disconnectedness, [regarded] as if they were iron darts."

— VisA. 824

(2)

This leads us to the second of the three aspects, that of the formation mentioned above; for to be impermanent is to have a beginning and an end, to have rise and fall.

"Bhikkhus, there are three formed characteristics of the formed: arising is evident and fall is evident and the alteration of what is present [*.thitassa a~n~nathattam*] is evident" (AN 3.47/vol. i, 152).

And one who possesses the Five Factors of Endeavor [*padhaaniya"nga*] "has

understanding, possesses understanding
[pa~n~naa] extending to rise and
disappearance" (DN 33/ vol. iii, 237).

Acariya Buddhaghosa makes use of the
empirically observable in order to arrive at the
radical concept of rise and fall.

A cup gets broken (VbhA. 49); the asoka
tree's shoot can be seen to change in the
course of a few days from pale to dark red
and then through brown to green leaves,
which eventually turn yellow, wither, and
fall to the ground (Vis. Ch. xx/p. 625). The
illustration of a lighted lamp is also used;
where it goes to when its oil and wick are
used up no one knows... But that is crudely
put; for the flame in each third portion of the
wick as it gradually burns away ceases there
without reaching the other parts... That is
crudely put too; for the flame in each inch,
in each half-inch, in each thread, in each

strand, will cease without reaching the other strands; but no flame can appear without a strand (Vis. Ch. xx/p. 622).

By regarding seeming stability in ever shorter periods and ever more minute detail, a momentary view is arrived at. Anything whatever, first analyzed into a five-category situation, is then regarded as arising anew in each moment (*kha.na*) and immediately dissolving,

"like sesamum seeds crackling when put into a hot pan" (Vis. Ch. xx/pp. 622, 626).

This is further developed in the commentary to the *Visuddhimagga*:

Formed [*sa"nkhata*] dhammas' arising by means of cause and condition, their coming to be after not being, their acquisition of individuality [*attabhaava*], is their rise.

Their instantaneous cessation and exhaustion when arisen is their fall. Their other state through aging is their alteration. For just as when the occasion [*avatthaa*] of arising dissolves and the occasion of dissolution [*bha"nga*] succeeds it, there is no break in the basis [*vatthu*] on the occasion facing dissolution, in other words, presence [*.thiti*], which is what the term of common usage 'aging' refers to, so too it is necessary that the aging of a single dhamma is meant, which is what is called 'momentary [instantaneous] aging.' And there must, without reservation, be no break in the basis between the occasions of arising and dissolution; otherwise, it follows that one [thing] arises and another dissolves.

— VisA. 280

Acariya Buddhaghosa, though not identifying being with being-perceived rejects the notion of

any underlying substance — any hypostasis, personal or impersonal — thus:

[One contemplating rise and fall] understands]: that there is no heap or store of unarisen mentality-materiality [*naama-ruupa*] [existing] prior to its arising. When it arises, it does not come from any heap or store; and when it ceases, it does not go in any direction. There is nowhere any depository in the way of a heap or store, prior to its arising, of the sound that arises when a lute is played, nor does it come from any store when it arises, nor does it go in any direction when it has ceased [cf. SN 35.205/vol. iv, 197], but on the contrary, not having been, it is brought into being by depending on the lute, the lute's soundboard, and a man's appropriate effort, and immaterial [*aruupa*] dhammas come to be

[with the aid of specific conditions], and having been, they vanish.

— Vis. Ch. xx/p. 630

The transience and perpetual renewal of dhammas is compared in the same work

(Ch. xx/p. 633) to dewdrops at sunrise, a bubble on water, a line drawn on water (AN 4.37), a mustard seed on an awl's point, and a lightning flash (*Mahaa Niddesa* p. 42), and they are as coreless (*nissaara*) as a conjuring trick (SN 22.95/vol. iii, 142), a mirage (Dhp 46), a dream (Sn 4.6/v. 807), a whirling firebrand's circle (*alaata cakka*), a goblin city (*gandhabba-nagara*), froth (Dhp 46), a plantain trunk (SN 22.95/vol. iii, 141), and so on.

Before leaving the aspect of rise and fall, the question of the extent, (*addhaana*), of the moment, (*kha.na*), as conceived in the

commentaries, must be examined (The Abhidhamma mentions the *kha.na* without specifying any duration). A Sutta cited above gave "arising, fall, and alteration of what is present" as three characteristics of anything formed. In the commentaries this is restated as "rise, presence, and dissolution" (*uppaada-.thiti-bha"nga*; see e.g., Vis. Ch. xx/p. 615), which are each also called "[sub-] moments" (*kha.na*). These sub-moments are discussed in the *Vibha"nga* commentary:

To what extent does materiality last, and to what extent the [mental] immaterial? Materiality is heavy to change and slow to cease; the immaterial is light to change and quick to cease. Sixteen cognizances arise and cease while [one instance of] materiality lasts; but that ceases with the seventeenth cognizance. It is like when a man wanting to knock down some fruit hits a branch with a mallet, and when fruits and leaves are loosed from their stems simultaneously; and of those the fruits fall

first to the ground because they are heavier, the leaves later because they are lighter. So too, just as the leaves and fruits are loosed simultaneously from their stems with the blow of the mallet, there is simultaneous manifestation of materiality and immaterial dhammas at the moment of relinking [*pa.tisandhi*] at rebirth... And although there is this difference between them, materiality cannot occur without the immaterial nor can the immaterial without materiality: they are commensurate.

Here is a simile: there is a man with short legs and a man with long legs; as they journey along together, while long-legs takes one step short-legs takes sixteen steps; when short-legs is making his sixteenth step, long-legs lifts his foot, draws it forward and makes a single step; so neither out-distances the other, and they are commensurate.

— *Khandha-Vibha"nga A/Vbh. 25-6*

Elsewhere it is stated that the sub-moments of arising and dissolution are equal for both materiality and cognizance, only the presence sub-moment of materiality being longer. The *Muula-Tiikaa*, however, puts the mental presence sub-moment in question, commenting as follows on the passage just quoted:

"Now it needs investigating whether there is what is here called 'presence sub-moment' of a cognizance or not."

It cites the *Citta Yamaka* as follows

"Is it, when arisen, arising? At the dissolution sub-moment it is arisen but it is not not arising" and "Is it, when not arising, not arisen? At the dissolution sub-moment it is not arising, but it is not unarisen" (Y. ii, 13)

And two similar passages from the same source:

(Y. ii, 14), pointing out that only the dissolution sub-moment is mentioned instead of both, that and the presence sub-moment, as might be expected, had the Yamaka regarded the presence sub-moment as having valid application to cognizance. For that reason, the *Muula-Tiikaa* concludes:

[The] non-existence of a presence sub-moment of cognizance is indicated. For although it is said in the Suttas "The alteration of what is present is evident" [AN 3.47/vol. i, 152], that does not mean either that a continuity alteration which is evident cannot be called "presence" [*.thiti*] because of absence of any alteration of what is one only, or that what is existent [*vijjamaana*] by possessing the pair of sub-moments [of arising and dissolution] cannot be called "present" [*.thita*].

— VbhA. 21-2

(3)

The third aspect of impermanence, that of the pattern or structure of specific conditionality, still remains. It is briefly stated thus:

"That comes to be when there is this; that arises with the arising of this, That does not come to be when this is not; that ceases with the cessation of this" (MN 38/vol. i, 262-4),

Or in the words that first awakened the two Chief Disciples:

"A *Tathaagata* has told the cause of dhammas that have come into being due to a cause, and that which brings their cessation too: such is the doctrine preached by the Great *Sama.na*" (Mv. Kh. 1).

In more detail we find:

"Consciousness acquires being [*sambhoti*] by dependence on a duality. What is that duality? It is eye, which is impermanent, changing, becoming-other, and visible objects, which are impermanent, changing, and becoming-other: such is the transient, fugitive duality [of eye-cum-visible objects], which is impermanent, changing, and becoming-other. Eye-consciousness is impermanent, changing, and becoming-other; for this cause and condition [namely, eye-cum-visible objects] for the arising of eye-consciousness being impermanent, changing, and becoming-other, how could eye-consciousness, arisen by depending on an impermanent condition be permanent?

Then the coincidence, concurrence and confluence of these three impermanent dhammas is called contact [*phassa*]; but eye-contact too is impermanent, changing, and

becoming-other; for how could eye-contact, arisen by depending on an impermanent condition, be permanent?

It is one touched by contact who feels [*vedeti*], likewise who chooses [*ceteti*], likewise who perceives [*sa~njaanaati*]; so these transient, fugitive dhammas too [namely, feeling, choice, and perception] are impermanent, changing, and becoming-other." (The same treatment is accorded to ear-cum-sounds, nose-cum-odors, tongue-cum-flavors, body-cum-tangibles, and mind-cum-ideas: SN 35.93/vol. iv, 67-8).

By further development we then come to the formula of dependent origination (*pa.ticca-samuppaada*); but that is beyond the scope of this article.

Impermanence as a Subject for Contemplation and Basis for Judgment

The Buddha's last words were:

*Handa daani bhikkhave aamantayaami vo:
vayadhammaa sa"nkhaaraa, appamaadena
sampaadetha —*

Indeed, bhikkhus, I declare to you: All formations are subject to dissolution; attain perfection through diligence.

— DN 16/vol. ii, 156

A little earlier he had said:

Has it not already been repeatedly said by me that there is separation, division, and parting from all that is dear and beloved? How could it be that what is born, come to being, formed and is liable to fall, should not fall? That is not possible.

— DN 16/vol. ii, 144

There are, besides these, countless passages where this exhortation is variously developed, from which only a few can be chosen:

Bhikkhus, when a man sees as impermanent the eye [and the rest], which is impermanent, then he has right view.

— SN 35.155/vol. iv, 142

Bhikkhus, formations are impermanent, they are not lasting, they provide no real comfort; so much so that that is enough for a man to become dispassionate, for his lust to fade out, and for him to be liberated.

— AN 7.62/vol. iv, 100

What is perception of impermanence? Here, Aananda, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to a room that is void, considers thus: "Materiality is impermanent, feeling... perception... formations..."

consciousness is impermanent." He abides contemplating in this way impermanence in the five "categories affected by clinging."

AN 10.60/vol. v, 109

What is perception of impermanence in the world of all [all the world]? Here, Aananda, a bhikkhu is humiliated, ashamed, and disgusted with respect to all formations.

— AN 10.60/vol v, 111

Perception of impermanence should be maintained in being for the elimination of the conceit "I am," since perception of not-self becomes established in one who perceives impermanence, and it is perception of not-self that arrives at the elimination of the conceit "I am," which is extinction [*nibbaana*] here and now.

— Ud. Iv, 1/p.37

And how is perception of impermanence maintained in being and developed so that all lust for sensual desires [*kaama*], for materiality [*ruupa*], and for being [*bhava*], and also all ignorance are ended and so that all kinds of the conceit "I am" are abolished? "Such is materiality, such its origin, such its disappearance; and such is feeling,..., perception,... formations,... consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance."

— SN 22.102/vol. iii, 156-7

Here, bhikkhus, feelings... perceptions... thoughts [*vitakka*] are known to him as they arise, known as they appear present, known as they disappear. Maintenance of this kind of concentration in being conduces to mindfulness and full awareness... Here a bhikkhu abides contemplating rise and fall in the five categories affected by clinging thus: "Such is materiality, such its origin,

such its disappearance, [and so with the other four]." Maintenance of this kind of concentration conduces to the exhaustion of taints [*aasava*].

— DN 33/vol. iii, 223

When a man abides thus mindful and fully aware, diligent, ardent, and self-controlled, then if a pleasant feeling arises in him, he understands "This pleasant feeling has arisen in me; but that is dependent not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on this body. But this body is impermanent, formed, and dependently originated. Now how could pleasant feeling, arisen dependent on an impermanent, formed, dependently arisen body, be permanent? In the body and in feeling, he abides, contemplating impermanence and fall and fading and cessation and relinquishment. As he does so,

his underlying tendency to lust for the body and for pleasant feeling is abandoned."

Similarly, when he contemplates unpleasant feeling, his underlying tendency to resistance [*pa.tigha*] to the body and unpleasant feeling is abandoned; and when he contemplates neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling his underlying tendency to ignorance of the body and of that feeling is abandoned.

— SN 36.7/vol. iv, 211-2

When a bhikkhu abides much with his mind fortified by perception of impermanence, his mind retreats, retracts, and recoils from gain, honor, and renown, and does not reach out to it, just as a cock's feather or strip of sinew thrown on a fire retreats, retracts, and recoils and does not reach out to it.

— AN 7.46/vol. iv, 51

When a bhikkhu sees six rewards it should be enough for him to establish unlimitedly perception of impermanence in all formations. What six? "All formations will seem to me insubstantial; and my mind will find no relish in the world of all [all the world]; and my mind will emerge from the world of all [from all the world]; and my mind will incline towards extinction; and my fetters will come to be abandoned; and I shall be endowed with the supreme state of a recluse."

— AN 6.102/vol. iii, 443

When a man abides contemplating impermanence in the bases for contact [the eye and the rest], the outcome is that awareness of repulsiveness in contact is established in him; and when he abides contemplating rise and fall in the five

categories affected by clinging, the outcome is that awareness of repulsiveness in clinging is established in him.

— AN 5.30/vol. iii, 32

Fruitful as the act of giving is... yet it is still more fruitful to go with confident heart for refuge to the Buddha, the Dhamma and of the Sa'ngha and undertake the five precepts of virtue... Fruitful as that is... yet it is still more fruitful to maintain loving-kindness in being for only as long as the milking of a cow... Fruitful as that is... yet it is still more fruitful to maintain perception of impermanence in being for only as long as the snapping of a finger.

— AN 9.20/vol. 392-6 abbr.

Better a single day of life perceiving how things rise and fall than to live out a century yet not perceive their rise and fall.

— Dhp 113

It is impossible that a person with right view should see any formation as permanent.

— MN 115/vol. iii, 64

The *Visuddhimagga* (Chs. xx and xxi) relies principally on the canonical commentary, the *Pa.tisambhidaamagga*, in its handling of the contemplation of impermanence. There that contemplation introduces the first of what are called the "Eight Knowledges" (a classification peculiar to the *Visuddhimagga*), namely, the knowledge of contemplation of rise and fall (*udayabbayaanupassanaa-~naa.na*).

Also perception of impermanence heads the "18 Principal Insights" (*mahaa-vipassanaa*), which make their initial appearance is a group in the *Pa.tisambhidaamagga* (the first seven being also called the "seven perceptions" (*satta-sa~n~naa*: see *Ps. ~Naa.nakathaa* i, 20). In this connection it is stated as follows:

One, who maintains in being, the contemplation of impermanence abandons perception of permanence...

And the contemplation of impermanence and contemplation of the signless [*animittaanupassanaa*] are one in meaning and different only in the letter.

Since one who maintains in being the contemplation of the signless abandons the sign [of permanence, etc.].

— Vis. Ch. xx p. 628

The contemplation of what is impermanent, or the contemplation as being "impermanent," is "contemplation of impermanence"; this is insight (*vipassanaa*) that occurs in apprehending impermanence in the three planes (*bhuumi*) (Vis. A. 67).

The *Visuddhimagga* adds:

Having purified knowledge in this way by abandoning perception of permanence, etc., which oppose the contemplation of impermanence, etc., he passes on... and begins... contemplation of rise and fall.

— Vis. Ch. xx/pp. 629-30

The following passage is then quoted:

How is it, that understanding of contemplating the change of presently-arisen dhammas is knowledge of rise and fall? Presently-arisen materiality is born; the characteristic of its generation is rise, the characteristic of its change is fall, the contemplation is knowledge. Presently-arisen feeling... etc.

— Ps. ~*Naa.nakathaa/i*, 54

And

He sees the rise of the materiality category in the sense of conditioned arising thus: (1) With the arising of ignorance... (2) with the arising of craving... (3)... action... (4) with the arising of nutriment [*aahaara*] there is the arising of materiality; (5) one who sees the characteristic of generation sees the rise of the materiality Category. One who sees the rise of the materiality category, sees these five characteristics.

— Ps. i, 55

Cessation and fall are treated in parallel manner, and this treatment is applied to the four remaining categories but substituting contact for nutriment in the cases of feeling, perception, and formations, and mentality-materiality (*naama-ruupa*) for nutriment in the case of consciousness.

Lastly, a Sutta passage emphasizes a special relation with faith (*saddhaa*).

Materiality [and the rest] is impermanent, changing, becoming other. Whoever decides about, places his faith in, these dhammas in this way is called mature in faith [*saddhaanusari*]. He has alighted upon the certainty of rightness... Whoever has a liking to meditate by test of experiment with understanding upon these dhammas is called mature in the true idea [*dhammaanusaari*]. He has alighted upon the certainty of rightness... Whoever has a liking to meditate by test of experiment with understanding upon these dhammas is called mature in the true idea [*dhammaanusaari*]. He has alighted upon the certainty of rightness...

— SN 25.1-10/vol. iii, 225 f.

This connection between faith and impermanence is then taken up by the *Visuddhimagga*,

in thus quoting the *Pa.tisambhidaamagga*:

"When one gives attention to impermanence, the faith faculty is outstanding" and in the cases of attention to the unpleasant and not-self the faculties of concentration and understanding are respectively outstanding. These three are called the "Three [alternative] gateways to liberation [*vimokkha-mukha*], which lead to the outlet from the world."

— Vis. Ch. xxi/pp. 657 ff., quoting Ps. *Vimokkhakathaa*/vol. ii, 58

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&
The Discourse on Effacement

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The Simile of the Cloth

Introduction

This discourse of the Buddha — the seventh in the Collection of Middle Length Texts (Majjhima Nikaya) — deals, first, with a set of sixteen defilements of the human mind; and in its second part, with the disciple's progress to the highest goal of Arahantship, which can be achieved if — and only if — these impurities are gradually reduced and finally eliminated. While there are also defilements of *insight*

which must be removed for the attainment of the goal, the sixteen defilements dealt with here are all of an *ethical* nature and are concerned with man's *social behavior*. Only the last of these sixteen — *negligence* — may also refer to purely personal concerns as well as to one's relations with others.

A glance through the list (see Note 2) will show that all these sixteen defilements derive from greediness and selfishness, from aversion, self-assertion and conceit, or their combinations. If we take, for instance, contempt, being a weaker nuance of (5) denigration, we see that aversion and conceit contribute to it; (7) envy is fed by greediness and aversion.

The pairs of contributive factors, here exemplified, do not, of course, occur at the same moment of consciousness; but their repeated, separate presence favors the arising of such derivatives as contempt and envy. On the other hand, if those secondary defilements such as

contempt and envy (and all the others) appear frequently, they will bring about a close serial association of their "feeders," as for instance hate motivated by conceit, or hate motivated by greed; and these may easily become habitual sequences, automatic chain reactions in our impulsive life.

Interlocked in such a manner, the negative forces in our mind — the defilements, roots of evil, and fetters — will become more powerful and much more difficult to dislodge. They will form "closed systems" hard to penetrate, covering ever larger areas of our mind.

What may first have been isolated occurrences of unwholesome thoughts and acts, will grow into hardened traits of character productive of an unhappy destiny in future lives (see Discourse Sec. 2). And in all these grave consequences, the secondary or derivative defilements have a great share.

Hence, it is of vital importance that we do not fall victim to the last in the list of those defilements — negligence — and are not negligent in watchfulness and self-control.

"Out of regard for your own good, it is proper to strive with heedfulness; out of regard for others' good, it is proper to strive with heedfulness; out of regard for your own and others' good, it is proper to strive with heedfulness."

— Nidana Samy. No. 22

As to "others' good," how much more pleasant and harmonious will be human relations, individual and communal, if there is less pettiness and peevishness, fewer vanities and jealousies, and less self-assertiveness in words and deeds!

As already remarked, if these minor blemishes are reduced, the larger and more serious defilements will have fewer opportunities. How often do deadly conflicts and deep involvement

in guilt arise from petty but unresolved resentments!

The composition of our list of defilements alone makes it clear that the Buddha was well aware of the social impact of these impurities; and the structure of the discourse shows that he regarded the removal of these defilements as an integral part of the mental training aiming at deliverance. Hence, we may summarize this part of the discourse by saying that *our social conduct strongly affects the chances of our spiritual progress.*

The nature of that influence is illustrated by the simile of the cloth.

If the texture of our mind is tarnished by blemishes in our social behavior, "the new coloring" of *higher mentality (adhicitta)* and *higher wisdom (adhipañña)* cannot penetrate. The stains that soil the single strands of thought will show through the superficial coloring; and

besides, the impure matter will reduce the porosity of the tissue, i.e., the receptivity of our mind, and, thus, prevent full absorption of any results gained in meditation or understanding.

Through the accumulating "waste products" of uninhibited defilements, a mental atmosphere is created that resists any depth penetration of spiritual forces and values.

First, in accordance with the method of Satipatthana, right mindfulness, the presence of the defilements in one's behavior has to be clearly noticed and honestly acknowledged, without attempts at evasion, at minimizing or self-justification, for instance, by giving them more respectable names.

This is what is implied in the words of the discourse: "*Knowing* (the respective blemish) to be a defilement of the mind... " Such knowledge by itself may often discourage the recurrence of

the defilements or weaken the strength of their manifestations.

According to the Buddhist Teachers of Old (see Note 4, paragraph 1), this knowledge should be extended to the nature of the defilements, the causes and circumstances of their arising, their cessation, and the means of effecting their cessation.

This is an example of how to apply to an actual situation the formula of the Four Noble Truths as embodied in the contemplation of mind-objects (*dhammanupassana*) of the Satipatthana Sutta. Another example is the application of the four truths to higher states of mind, the Divine Abidings, for the purpose of developing insight (Sec. 13 and notes 13, 14).

When the Noble Disciple, on attaining to one of the higher paths, sees himself freed from the defilements, deep joy will arise in him, enthusiasm for the goal and the way, and an

unshakable confidence in the Triple Gem. So says our text (Sec. 6-10).

But a foretaste of all these fruits and blessings can already be gained by him who has succeeded in noticeably weakening and reducing the defilements. Such enthusiasm and strengthened confidence, being derived from his personal experience, will be of great value to him, adding wings to his further progress. To the extent of his experience, he will have verified for himself the virtues of the Dhamma:

"Well proclaimed by the Blessed One is the Dhamma, realizable here and now, possessed of immediate result, bidding you come and see, accessible, and knowable individually by the wise."

For rendering this discourse, use has been made chiefly of the translation by the Venerable Ñanamoli Thera (from an unpublished

manuscript), and also of the translations by the Venerable Soma Thera and I. B. Horner. Grateful acknowledgement is offered to these able translators. For some key passages, however, the Editor decided to use his own version, partly for the reason of conformity with the commentarial explanations. The Notes have been supplied by the Editor. In these Notes, it was thought desirable to furnish the commentarial references supporting the renderings chosen, and in these cases the inclusion of Pali words was unavoidable. But an effort has been made to make these notes intelligible and helpful to readers who are not familiar with the Pali language as well.

The Simile of the Cloth (Vatthupama Sutta)

1. Thus have I heard: Once the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery.

There he addressed the monks thus: "Monks." — "Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this:

2. "Monks, suppose a cloth were stained and dirty, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink, it would take the dye badly and be impure in color. And why is that? Because the cloth was not clean. So too, monks, when the mind is defiled,¹ an unhappy destination [in a future existence] may be expected.

"Monks, suppose a cloth were clean and bright, and a dyer dipped it in some dye or other, whether blue or yellow or red or pink, it would take the dye well and be pure in color. And why is that? Because the cloth was clean. So too, monks, when the mind is undefiled, a happy destination [in a future existence] may be expected.

3. "And what, monks, are the defilements of the mind?2

(1) Covetousness and unrighteous greed are a defilement of the mind;

(2) ill will is a defilement of the mind;

(3) anger is a defilement of the mind;

(4) hostility...

(5) denigration...

(6) domineering...

(7) envy...

(8) jealousy...

(9) hypocrisy...

(10) fraud...

(11) obstinacy...

(12) presumption...

(13) conceit...

(14) arrogance...

(15) vanity...

(16) negligence is a defilement of the mind.3

4. "Knowing, monks, covetousness and unrighteous greed to be a defilement of the mind, the monk abandons them.⁴ Knowing ill will to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing anger to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing hostility to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing denigration to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing domineering to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing envy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing jealousy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing hypocrisy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing fraud to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing obstinacy to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing presumption to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing conceit to be a defilement of the

mind, he abandons it. Knowing arrogance to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing vanity to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it. Knowing negligence to be a defilement of the mind, he abandons it.

5. "When in the monk who, thus, knows that covetousness and unrighteous greed are a defilement of the mind, this covetousness and unrighteous greed have been abandoned; when in him who thus knows that ill will is a defilement of the mind, this ill will has been abandoned;... when in him who thus knows that negligence is a defilement of the mind, this negligence has been abandoned — 5

6. — he thereupon gains unwavering confidence in the Buddha⁶ thus:

'Thus indeed is the Blessed One: he is accomplished, fully enlightened, endowed with [clear] vision and [virtuous] conduct, sublime, knower of the worlds, the incomparable guide of men who are tractable, the teacher of gods and men, enlightened and blessed.'

7. — he gains unwavering confidence in the Dhamma thus: 'Well proclaimed by the Blessed One is the Dhamma, realizable here and now, possessed of immediate result, bidding you come and see, accessible and knowable individually by the wise.'

8. — he gains unwavering confidence in the Sangha thus: 'The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples has entered on the good way, has entered on the straight-way, has entered on the true way, has entered on the proper way; that is to say, the four pairs of men, the

eight types of persons; this Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutation, the incomparable field of merit for the world.'

9. "When he has given up, renounced, let go, abandoned and relinquished [the defilements] in part,⁷ he knows: 'I am endowed with unwavering confidence in the Buddha... in the Dhamma... in the Sangha; and he gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dhamma,⁸ gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is gladdened, joy is born in him; being joyous in mind, his body becomes tranquil; his body being tranquil, he feels happiness; and the mind of him who is happy becomes concentrated.⁹

10. "He knows: 'I have given up, renounced, let go, abandoned and relinquished [the defilements] in part'; and he gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dhamma, gains gladness connected with the Dhamma. When he is gladdened, joy is born in him; being joyous in mind, his body becomes tranquil; when his body is tranquil, he feels happiness; and the mind of him who is happy becomes concentrated.

11. "If, monks, a monk of such virtue, such concentration and such wisdom¹⁰ eats almsfood consisting of choice hill-rice together with various sauces and curries, even that will be no obstacle for him.¹¹

"Just as cloth that is stained and dirty becomes clean and bright with the help of pure water, or just as gold becomes clean and bright with the help of a furnace, so too, if a monk of such virtue, such concentration

and such wisdom eats almsfood consisting of choice hill-rice together with various sauces and curries, even that will be no obstacle for him.

12. "He abides, having suffused with a mind of loving-kindness¹² one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with loving-kindness, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

"He abides, having suffused with a mind of compassion... of sympathetic joy... of equanimity one direction of the world, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, and so above, below, around and everywhere, and to all as to

himself; he abides suffusing the entire universe with equanimity, with a mind grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

13. "He understands what exists, what is low, what is excellent,¹³ and what escape there is from this [whole] field of perception.¹⁴

14. "When he knows and sees¹⁵ in this way, his mind becomes liberated from the canker of sensual desire, liberated from the canker of becoming, liberated from the canker of ignorance.¹⁶ When liberated, there is knowledge: 'It is liberated'; and he knows: 'Birth is exhausted, the life of purity has been lived, the task is done, [and] there is no more of this to come.' Such a monk is called 'one bathed with the inner bathing.'¹⁷

15. Now at that time the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja¹⁸ was seated not far from the Blessed One, and he spoke to the Blessed One thus: "But does Master Gotama go to the Bahuka River to bathe?"

"What good, brahman, is the Bahuka River? What can the Bahuka River do?"

"Truly, Master Gotama, many people believe that the Bahuka River gives purification, many people believe that the Bahuka River gives merit. For in the Bahuka River many people wash away the evil deeds they have done."

16. Then the Blessed One addressed the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja in these stanzas:¹⁹

Bahuka and Adhikakka,²⁰

Gaya and Sundarika,

Payaga and Sarassati,

And the stream Bahumati —

A fool may there forever bathe,
Yet will not purify his black deeds.

What can Sundarika bring to pass?
What can the Payaga and the Bahuka?
They cannot purify an evil-doer,
A man performing brutal and cruel acts.

One pure in heart has evermore
The Feast of Cleansing²¹
and the Holy Day;²²
One pure in heart who does good deeds
Has his observances perfect for all times.

It is here, O brahman, that you should
bathe²³
To make yourself a safe refuge for all
beings.
And if you speak no untruth,
Nor work any harm for breathing things,

Nor take what is not offered,
With faith and with no avarice,
To Gaya gone, what would it do for you?
Let any well your Gaya be!

17. When this was said, the brahman
Sundarika Bharadvaja spoke thus:

"Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent,
Master Gotama! The Dhamma has been
made clear in many ways by Master
Gotama, as though he were righting the
overthrown, revealing the hidden, showing
the way to one who is lost, or holding up a
lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to
see forms.

18. "I go to Master Gotama for refuge, and
to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha. May I
receive the [first ordination of] going forth

under Master Gotama, may I receive the full admission!

19. And the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja received the [first ordination of] going forth under the Blessed One, and he received the full admission. And not long after his full admission, dwelling alone, secluded, diligent, ardent and resolute, the venerable Bharadvaja by his own realization understood and attained in this very life that supreme goal of the pure life, for which men of good family go forth from home life into homelessness. And he had direct knowledge thus: "Birth is exhausted, the pure life has been lived, the task is done, there is no more of this to come."

And the venerable Bharadvaja became one of the Arahats.

Notes

1.

"So too, monks, if the mind is defiled..." Comy:
"It may be asked why the Buddha had given this simile of the soiled cloth. He did so to show that effort brings great results. A cloth soiled by dirt that is adventitious (i.e., comes from outside; *agantukehi malehi*), if it is washed can again become clean because of the cloth's natural purity. But in the case of what is naturally black, as for instance (black) goat's fur, any effort (of washing it) will be in vain. Similarly, the mind too is soiled by adventitious defilements (*agantukehi kilesehi*). But originally, at the phases of rebirth(-consciousness) and the (sub-conscious) life-continuum, it is pure throughout (*pakatiya pana sakale pi patisandhi-bhavangavare pandaram eva*). As it was said (by the Enlightened One): 'This mind, monks, is luminous, but it becomes soiled by adventitious defilements' (AN 1.49). But by cleansing it one can make it more luminous, and effort therein is not in vain."

2.

"Defilements of the mind" (cittassa upakkilesa).
Comy.: "When explaining the mental defilements, why did the Blessed One mention greed first? Because it arises first. For with all beings wherever they arise, up to the level of the (Brahma heaven of the) Pure Abodes, it is first greed that arises by way of lust for existence (*bhava-nikanti*). Then the other defilements will appear, being produced according to circumstances. The defilements of mind, however, are not limited to the sixteen mentioned in this discourse. But one should understand that, by indicating here the method, all defilements are included." Sub.Comy. mentions the following additional defilements: fear, cowardice, shamelessness and lack of scruples, insatiability, evil ambitions, etc.

3.

The Sixteen Defilements of Mind:

abhijjha-visama-lobha, covetousness and
unrighteous greed

byapada, ill will

kodha, anger

upanaha, hostility or malice

makkha, denigration or detraction; contempt

palasa, domineering or presumption

issa, envy

macchhariya, jealousy, or avarice; selfishness

mayā, hypocrisy or deceit

sathēyya, fraud

thambha, obstinacy, obduracy

sarambha, presumption or rivalry; impetuosity

mana, conceit

atimana, arrogance, haughtiness

mada, vanity or pride

pamada, negligence or heedlessness; in social behavior, this leads to lack of consideration.

The defilements (3) to (16) appear frequently as a group in the discourses, e.g., in Majjh. 3; while in Majjh. 8 (reproduced in this publication) No. 15 is omitted. A list of seventeen defilements appears regularly in each last discourse of Books 3 to 11 of the Anguttara Nikaya, which carry the title *Ragapeyyala*, the Repetitive Text on Greed (etc.). In these texts of the Anguttara Nikaya, the first two defilements

in the above list are called greed (*lobha*) and hate (*dosa*), to which delusion (*moha*) is added; all the fourteen other defilements are identical with the above list.

4.

"Knowing covetousness and unrighteous greed to be a defilement of the mind, the monk abandons them."

Knowing (viditva). Sub.Comy.: "Having known it either through the incipient wisdom (*pubbabhaga-pañña* of the worldling, i.e., before attaining to stream-entry) or through the wisdom of the two lower paths (stream-entry and once-returning). He knows the defilements as to their nature, cause, cessation and means of effecting cessation." This application of the formula of the Four Noble Truths to the defilements deserves close attention.

Abandons them (pajahati). Comy.:

"He abandons the respective defilement through (his attainment of) the noble path where there is 'abandoning by eradication'

(*samucchedappahana-vasena ariya-maggena*),"

which according to Sub.Comy. is the "final abandoning" (*accantappahana*). Before the attainment of the noble paths, all "abandoning" of defilements is of a temporary nature. See Nyanatiloka Thera, *Buddhist Dictionary*, s.v. *pahana*.

According to the Comy., the sixteen defilements are finally abandoned by the noble paths (or stages of sanctity) in the following order:

"By the *path of stream-entry (sotapatti-magga)* are abandoned: (5) denigration, (6) domineering, (7) envy, (8) jealousy, (9) hypocrisy, (10) fraud.

"By the *path of non-returning (anagami-magga)*: (2) ill will, (3) anger, (4) malice, (16) negligence.

"By the *path of Arahathship (arahatta-magga)*: (1) covetousness and unrighteous greed, (11) obstinacy, (12) presumption, (13) conceit, (14) arrogance, (15) vanity."

If, in the last group of terms, covetousness is taken in a restricted sense as referring only to

the craving for the five sense objects, it is finally abandoned by the path of non-returning; and this is according to Comy. the meaning intended here. All greed, however, including the hankering after fine material and immaterial existence, is eradicated only on the path of Arahatsip; hence the classification under the latter in the list above.

Comy. repeatedly stresses that wherever in our text "abandoning" is mentioned, reference is to the non-returner (*anagami*); for also in the case of defilements overcome on stream-entry (see above), the states of mind which produce those defilements are eliminated only by the path of non-returning.

5.

Comy. emphasizes the connection of this paragraph with the following, saying that the statements on each of the sixteen defilements should be connected with the next' paragraphs, e.g., "when in him... ill will has been abandoned, he, thereupon, gains unwavering confidence..." Hence, the grammatical

construction of the original Pali passage — though rather awkward in English — has been retained in this translation.

The disciple's direct experience of being freed of this or that defilement becomes for him a living test of his former still imperfectly proven trust in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Now this trust has become a firm conviction, an unshakable confidence, based on experience.

6.

"Unwavering confidence" (aveccappasada).
Comy.: "unshakable and immutable trust." Confidence of that nature is not attained before stream-entry because only at that stage is the fetter of skeptical doubt (*vicikiccha-samyojana*) finally eliminated. Unwavering confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are three of four characteristic qualities of a stream-winner (*sotapaññassa angani*); the fourth is unbroken morality, which may be taken to be implied in Sec. 9 of our discourse referring to the relinquishment of the defilements.

7.

"When he has given up...(the defilements) in part" (*yatodhi*): that is, to the extent to which the respective defilements are eliminated by the paths of sanctitude (see Note 4). *Odhi*: limit, limitation. *yatodhi* = *yato odhi*; another reading: *yathodhi* = *yatha-odhi*.

Bhikkhu Ñānamoli translates this paragraph thus: "And whatever (from among those imperfections) has, according to the limitation (set by whichever of the first three paths he has attained), been given up, has been (forever) dropped, let go, abandoned, relinquished. "

In the *Vibhanga* of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, we read in the chapter *Jhana-vibhanga*: "He is a bhikkhu because he has abandoned defilements limitedly; or because he has abandoned defilements without limitation"

(*odhiso kilesanam pahana bhikkhu; anodhiso kilesanam pahana bhikkhu*).

8.

"Gains enthusiasm for the goal, gains enthusiasm for the Dhamma" (*labhati atthavedam labhati dhammavedam*).

Comy.: "When reviewing (*paccavekkhato*)* the abandonment of the defilements and his unwavering confidence, strong joy arises in the non-returner in the thought: 'Such and such defilements are now abandoned by me.' It is like the joy of a king who learns that a rebellion in the frontier region has been quelled."

*["Reviewing" (*paccavekkhana*) is a commentarial term, but is derived, apart from actual meditative experience, from close scrutiny of sutta passages like our present one. "Reviewing" may occur immediately after attainment of the jhanas or the paths and fruitions (e.g., the last sentence of Sec. 14), or as a reviewing of the defilements abandoned (as in Sec. 10) or those remaining. See *Visuddhimagga*, transl. by Ñānamoli, p. 789.]

Enthusiasm (*veda*). According to Comy., the word *veda* occurs in the Pali texts with three connotations: 1. (Vedic) scripture (*gantha*), 2. joy (*somanassa*), 3. knowledge (*ñāna*). "Here it signifies joy and the knowledge connected with that joy."

Attha (rendered here as "goal") and *dhamma* are a frequently occurring pair of terms obviously intended to supplement each other. Often, they mean letter (*dhamma*) and spirit (or meaning: *attha*) of the doctrine; but this hardly fits here.

These two terms occur also among the four kinds of analytic knowledge (*patisambhida-ñāna*; or knowledge of doctrinal discrimination). *Attha-patisambhida* is explained as the discriminative knowledge of "the result of a cause"; while *dhamma-patisambhida* is concerned with the cause or condition.

The Comy. applies now the same interpretation to our present textual passage, saying: "*Attha-veda* is the enthusiasm arisen in him who reviews his unwavering confidence; *dhamma-veda* is the enthusiasm arisen in him who reviews 'the abandonment of the defilement in part,' which is the cause of that unwavering confidence..." Hence, the two terms refer to "the joy that has as its object the unwavering

confidence in the Buddha, and so forth; and the joy inherent in the knowledge (of the abandonment; *somanassa-maya ñana*)."

Our rendering of *attha* (Skt.:*artha*) b; "goal" is supported by Comy.: "The unwavering confidence is called *attha* because it has to be reached (*araniyato*), i.e., to be approached (*upagantabbato*)," in the sense of a limited goal, or resultant blessing.

Cf. Ang 5:10: *tasmim dhamme atthapatisamvedi ca hoti dhammapatisamvedi ca; tassa atthapatisamvedino dhammapatisamvedino pamojjam jayati...*

This text continues, as our present discourse does, with the arising of joy (or rapture; *piti*) from gladness (*pamojja*). *Attha* and *dhamma* refer here to the meaning and text of the Buddha word.

9.

The Pali equivalents for this series of terms* are: 1. *pamojja* (gladness), 2. *piti* (joy or rapture), 3. *passaddhi* (tranquillity), 4. *sukha*

(happiness), 5. *samadhi* (concentration). Nos. 2, 3, 5 are factors of enlightenment (*bojjhanga*). The function of tranquillity is here the calming of any slight bodily and mental unrest resulting from rapturous joy, and so transforming the latter into serene happiness followed by meditative absorption. This frequently occurring passage illustrates the importance given in the Buddha's Teaching to happiness as a necessary condition for the attainment of concentration and of spiritual progress in general.

* [Here the noun forms are given, while the original has, in some cases, the verbal forms.]

10.

"Of such virtue, such concentration, such wisdom" (evam-silo evam-dhammo evam-pañño). Comy.:

"This refers to the (three) parts (of the Noble Eightfold Path), namely, virtue, concentration and wisdom (*sila-, samadhi-, pañña-kkhandha*), associated (here) with the path of non-returning."

Comy. merely refers dhammo to the path-category of concentration (*samadhi-kkhandha*). Sub.Comy. quotes a parallel passage "*evam-dhamma ti Bhagavanto ahesum*," found in the Mahapadana Sutta (Digha 14), the Acchariya-abbhutadhamma Sutta (Majjh. 123), and the Nalanda Sutta of the Satipatthana Samyutta. The Digha Comy. explains *samadhi-pakkhadhamma* as "mental states belonging to concentration."

11.

"*No obstacle*," i.e., for the attainment of the path and fruition (of Arahatsip), says Comy. For a non-returner who has eliminated the fetter of sense-desire, there is no attachment to tasty food.

12.

"*With a mind of Loving-kindness*" (*metta-sahagatena cetasa*). This, and the following, refer to the four Divine Abidings (*brahmvihara*). On these see Wheel Nos. 6 and 7.

13.

"He understands what exists, what is low, what is excellent" (so 'atthi idam atthi hinam atthi panitam...' pajanati).

Comy.: "Having shown the non-returner's meditation on the Divine Abidings, the Blessed One now shows his practice of insight (*vipassana*), aiming at Arahatsip; and he indicates his attainment of it by the words: 'He understands what exists,' etc. This non-returner, having arisen from the meditation on any of the four Divine Abidings, defines as 'mind' (*nama*) those very states of the Divine Abidings and the mental factors associated with them. He, then, defines as 'matter' (*rupa*) the heart base (*hadaya-vatthu*) being the physical support (of mind) and the four elements which, on their part, are the support of the heart base. In that way he defines as 'matter' the elements and corporeal phenomena derived from them (*bhutupadayadhamma*). When defining 'mind and matter' in this manner, *'he understands what exists'* (*atthi idan'ti*; lit. 'There is this'). Hereby a

definition of the truth of suffering has been given."

"Then, in comprehending the origin of that suffering, he understands '*what is low.*' Thereby the truth of the origin of suffering has been defined. Further, by investigating the means of giving it up, he understands '*what is excellent.*' Hereby the truth of the path has been defined."

14.

"... and what escape there is from this (whole) field of perception" (*atthi uttari imassa saññaga-tassa nissaranam*). Comy.: "He knows: 'There is Nibbana as an escape beyond that perception of the Divine Abidings attained by me.' Hereby the truth of cessation has been defined."

15.

Comy.: "When, by insight-wisdom (*vipassana*), he thus knows the Four Noble Truths in these four ways (i.e., 'what exists,' etc.); and when he thus *sees* them by path-wisdom (*maggapañña*).

16.

Kamasava bhavasava avijjasava. The mention of liberation from the cankers (*asava*) indicates the monk's attainment of Arahatsip which is also called "exhaustion of the cankers" (*asavakkhaya*).

17.

"*Bathed with the inner bathing*" (*sinato antarena sinanena*). According to the Comy., the Buddha used this phrase to rouse the attention of the brahman Sundarika Bharadvaja, who was in the assembly and who believed in purification by ritual bathing. The Buddha foresaw that if he were to speak in praise of "purification by bathing," the brahman would feel inspired to take ordination under him and finally attain to Arahatsip.

18.

Bharadvaja was the clan name of the brahman. *Sundarika* was the name of the river to which that brahman ascribed purifying power. See also the Sundarika-Bharadvaja Sutta in the *Sutta Nipata*.

19.

Based on Bhikkhu Ñānamoli's version, with a few alterations.

20.

Three are fords; the other four are rivers.

21.

The text has *Phaggu* which is a day of brahmanic purification in the month of Phagguna (February-March). Ñānamoli translates it as "Feast of Spring."

22.

Uposatha.

23.

"It is here, O brahman, that you should bathe."

Comy.: i.e., in the Buddha's Dispensation, in the waters of the Noble Eightfold Path.

In the *Psalms of the Sisters (Therigatha)*, the nun Punnika speaks to a brahman as follows:

Nay now, who, ignorant to the ignorant,
Hath told thee this: that water-baptism
From evil kamma can avail to free?
Why then the fishes and the tortoises,
The frogs, the water-snake, the crocodiles
And all that haunt the water straight to heaven

Will go. Yea, all who evil kamma work —
Butchers of sheep and swine,
Fishers, hunters of game,
Thieves, murderers — so they but splash themselves
With water, are from evil kamma free!

— Transl. by C. A. F. Rhys Davids,
From *Early Buddhist Poetry*,
ed. I. B. Horner Publ.
by Ananda Semage,
Colombo 11.

The Discourse on Effacement

Introduction

The Buddha's Discourse on Effacement (Sallekha Sutta; quoted as M. 8) is the eighth of the Collection of Middle Length Texts (Majjhima Nikaya). Its subject matter is closely connected with that of preceding text, The Simile of the Cloth (M. 7); these two discourses supplement each other in several ways.

The Simile of the Cloth speaks of sixteen defilements of social conduct as impeding the progress on higher stages of the path to deliverance. The present Discourse on Effacement widens the range to forty-four detrimental qualities of mind which must be effaced. These include thirteen of the sixteen defilements in M. 7 (items 1-11 and 16 of list in Sec. 3 of M. 7), but they go beyond the realm of social ethics, extending also to the hindrances, the path factors, etc.; and special attention is given to the effacement of wrong views (Sec. 12, No. 44). This discourse supplements M. 7 also by dealing with the practical methods of effacement, from the very beginning with thought-arising (Sec. 13), on to avoidance (Sec. 14), etc.; and these methods apply as well to the purification from the sixteen defilements given in M. 7. On the other hand, the 7th discourse gives more details about the higher stages of progress that follow after the initial and partial purification.

(Sec. 12) *"Effacement" means the radical removal of detrimental qualities of mind.* The forty-four Modes of Effacement (as we may call them) are enumerated in this discourse no less than five times, and the first formulation (in Sec. 12) is very significant: "Others will be harmful, we shall not be harmful here," and so forth through all the other items. This bespeaks of the Buddha's realistic outlook as befitting a world which cannot be improved by mere wishing nor by "preaching at it." There is no use nor hope in waiting for our neighbor to change his ways. *"Cleanup campaigns" should start at our own door, and then the neighbors may well be more responsive to our own example than to our preaching.* Besides, if the aim is the radical effacement of mental defilements, we cannot afford to waste time and be deviated from our task by side-long glances at the behavior of others. Here lurks, in addition, the danger of pride. Hence, the *Sutta Nipata* (v. 918) warns that "though possessing many a virtue one

should not compare oneself with others by deeming oneself better or equal or inferior." It is a "virtue that squints" (Chungtze) that will deprive the progress on the path of the element of self-forgetting joyous spontaneity.

There is yet another reason for the injunction not to look to others' behavior or misbehavior, and this applies particularly to the defilements of social conduct mentioned in the Simile of the Cloth. It is quite human to feel disappointed if one's selflessness, kindness, modesty, and so on, do not find much response in the behavior of others.

Such disappointment may well discourage a person not only from continuing to live according to his moral standard, but also from advancing further on the road to selflessness towards higher states of mental development.

Such a person, after an initial disappointment, may easily be led to retire into the role of the "disgruntled moralist" as a respectable cloak for

an egocentric life. Here we meet the limitations and risks of a morality solely motivated by the social response to it. To avoid such a blind alley on one's road of progress, it is important to make from the very beginning that "declaration of moral independence," which we may summarize thus: "Others may act, speak and think wrongly, but we shall act, speak and think rightly - thus effacement can be done."

(Sec. 13) But the Buddha, as a knower of the human heart, was well aware that such a single or even repeated resolve will not always be strong enough to stir people into action. Hence, as an encouragement to those who might feel disheartened by their failures, he speaks now of the importance of the "arising of thoughts" aiming at carrying out those acts of effacement.

But again, these thoughts will not be effective unless they are regularly and systematically cultivated and are not allowed to lapse into oblivion. Then, gradually, they will be absorbed

by our mind and heart, and we shall fully identify ourselves with those values.

In that way these thoughts and aspirations will grow stronger and will be able to overcome the resistance of inertia and antagonistic forces, from within and without.

The Master said:

"To whatsoever one frequently gives attention and repeatedly reflects on, to that the mind will turn" (M. 19).

The great German mystic of the Middle Ages, Meister Eckhart, goes even a step further by saying: "If you do not have the longing, have at least a longing for the longing."

(Sec. 14) Next to cultivating "the heart's resolve," the first direct step towards effacing the defilements is to know them, that is, *the clear and honest confrontation with them in one's own mind*, as we pointed out when

considering the Simile of the Cloth (see the Introduction to it, p. 3). This will surely help in preventing their re-arising.

But for strengthening and extending that effect, it is necessary to cultivate also the positive counterparts of those forty-four negative qualities, as taught in the instruction on avoidance. The Buddha's formulation in this section conveys the encouraging word that *there actually exists such a road for avoiding or circumventing the wrong path.*

The Buddha said:

"If it were not possible to give up what is evil, I would not tell you to give it up; if it were not possible to develop what is good, I would not tell you to develop it" (Ang. 2:2).

In the field of insight (*vipassana*), this method is called "abandoning by the opposite" (*tadangapahana*), but by extension we may

apply this term also to the wider range of our present context.

(Sec. 15) Apart from its highest purpose, the cultivation of positive qualities of mind is, on any level, a road of progress, a "way that leads upwards." It brings results here and now, and leads to a favorable and happy rebirth. *It will preserve and unfold what is best in us and prevent it from deterioration.*

Considering the fearful possibilities in man's own nature and in the realms of existence, this is no mean benefit of training the mind for the final effacement of defilements, even if the results remain modest for a long time.

(Sec. 16) For him who has advanced so far, there is now the warning in the text that he should not set himself up as a savior of others while "there is still more to do" for him. At this stage, the disciple may have effected some partial effacement, but still the fires of greed,

hatred and delusion are not quenched in him; or, to express it with the other metaphor here used, he is still immersed in the mire. Though his chances for freeing himself from that bog of samsara have improved, any wrong step, or just his negligence and lack of persevering effort, may cause a setback. Hence, a determined effort should now be made for the final "quenching," for radical effacement.

(Secs. 1-11) This warning against an overestimation of one's position links up with the first sections of our text, which we have still to consider. They, likewise, deal with the overrating of one's achievements, here in the fields of insight and meditative absorptions.

Even initial steps in these fields may result in experiences having such a strong impact on the mind that it is psychologically understandable if they lead to overestimation. This does not necessarily mean overrating oneself through

pride, but overrating the position of one's achievements on the path of progress.

One may believe them to be complete in their field while they are only partial or to be final while they are only temporary suppressions.

(Sec. 3) If confronted with "wrong views on self and world," one will, at first sight, be inclined to believe that any trace of them in oneself can be eliminated by intellectual refutation, that is, by proving to one's own satisfaction that they are untenable. And if one has a firm conviction in the truth of the Dhamma, it will be easy to assume that one has discarded wrong views for good.

In that overestimation one may even go as far as to believe that one has entirely overcome the first of the ten fetters, personality-belief, and, hence, is on the way to stream-entry, or has even reached it. But this can never be achieved on the intellectual level alone, nor even on the

first stages of insight-meditation, which in themselves are no mean achievement.

Misconceptions of self and world, which may be quite instinctive and un-philosophical, are deeply anchored in man's nature. They are rooted not only in his intellectual opinions (*ditthi*), but also in his cravings (*tanha*) and in his pride and self-assertion (*mana*). All these three roots of wrong attitudes identify the alleged self or ego with the five aggregates (*khandha*) as comprising personality-and-environment.

These wrong attitudes towards self and world may manifest themselves on various levels: as casual thought-arising, as a habitual bias, and in words and deeds (see Note 8). Only if the self-identification with the actual "objects of wrong views," i.e., the five aggregates, is radically dissolved on the stage of stream-entry, can it be said that wrong views of self and world

have been totally eliminated, together with the bias towards them.

As also craving and pride are involved in the formation of wrong views, efforts for their effacement have to be undertaken also on the level of ethical behavior. Hence, the ethical part of the forty-four Modes of Effacement has validity also for the removal of wrong views.

(Secs. 4-11) The eight meditative attainments lift the human consciousness to sublime heights of refinement; yet, in the case of each, the Buddha emphatically says that they are not states of effacement, as he understands them.

They can effect only temporary subsidence of defilements, and, if unsupported by mature virtue and insight, they cannot penetrate deep enough into the recesses of the mind for a radical removal of moral and intellectual defilements.

It comes as a kind of anti-climax that after mentioning those sublime meditative attainments, the Buddha now speaks (in Sec. 12) of such quite "ordinary and earth-bound" ethical qualities as harmlessness, and ascribes to them, and not to the meditative absorptions, the capacity of leading to effacement. This juxtaposition implies, indeed, a very strong emphasis on the necessity of a sound ethical foundation for any spiritual progress.

Often, we find that mystic thought, in India and elsewhere, evolving a monastic system, from wrongly interpreted unificatory meditative experience, has either ignored ethics or found it difficult to give it a convincing place and motivation in its system. The exultation of mystic experience also often leads the meditator to a premature feeling of having gone "beyond good and evil." Such developments illustrate the wisdom of the Buddha in insisting on a sound ethical basis instead of an exclusive reliance on mystic experience.

When examining closely the structure of this discourse, we find in it a repeated balancing of contrasting attitudes of mind and of complementary qualities required for progress on the path.

Just now we have observed that meditative achievements have to be balanced with deeply rooted ethical virtues, which will also provide a link between the "lone meditator" and "common humanity."

With the last of the forty-four Modes of Effacement the effacing of wrong views is taken up again, linking up with the beginning of the discourse and balancing the stress on ethical values in most of the other modes. In the phrasing of that last mode we note the stress laid on the overcoming of opinionatedness and tenacity.

This also points to the fact that, for the initial "loosening up" and final overcoming of wrong views, the following ethical modes are of decisive importance: *amenability (34) and an increasing freedom from a domineering attitude (27), obstinacy (32) and arrogance (33).*

The entire discourse seems to be designed to meet, in a very thorough manner, two opposite psychological obstacles found on the path: discouragement in the face of its difficulties, and overrating of partial results.

The first part of the discourse (Secs. 1-11) deals with the latter extreme, by stressing the limitations of initial and partial progress. But for meeting any discouragement caused by these warnings, the Compassionate Master speaks of the value of seemingly simple ethical virtues and stresses the importance of the heart's earnest resolve (Sec. 13) as the first step which anyone can take who is serious about treading the path of actual effacement.

These features of the discourse, without being stated explicitly, are inherent in its very structure. They will reveal themselves by a close scrutiny as here attempted, and particularly by the actual practice of the teachings concerned.

The Buddha appears here as the great Teacher of the Middle Path and the incomparable guide of men's hearts, deeply concerned that those who tread the path may avoid the pitfalls of extreme emotional reactions and of one-sided emphasis on any single aspect of the threefold totality of training: in virtue, concentration and insight.

As in the preceding discourse, the rendering of the present one also has been chiefly based on Ñānamoli Thera's manuscript translation. To a lesser extent use has been made of phrasings by Soma Thera and I. B. Horner; and for some passages the Editor's own version has been included.

The Discourse on Effacement (Sallekha Sutta)

1. Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery.

2. Then one evening the venerable Mahacunda rose from meditative seclusion and went to the Blessed One. Having paid homage to him, he sat down at one side and spoke thus to the Blessed One:

3. "Venerable sir, there are these various views that arise in the world concerning self-doctrines or world-doctrines.² Does the abandoning and discarding of such views come about in a monk who is only at the beginning of his [meditative] reflections?"³

"Cunda, as to those several views that arise in the world concerning self-doctrines and

world-doctrines, if [the object] in which⁴ these views arise, in which they underlie and become active,⁵ is seen with right wisdom⁶ as it actually is,⁷ thus: 'This is not mine,⁸ this I am not,⁹ this is not my self'¹⁰ — then the abandoning of these views, their discarding,¹¹ takes place in him [who thus sees].

The Eight Attainments

4. "It may be, Cunda, that some monk, detached from sense-objects, detached from unsalutary ideas, enters into the first absorption that is born of detachment, accompanied by thought-conception and discursive thinking, and filled with rapture and joy, and he then might think: 'I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble One's discipline it is not these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble

One's discipline they are called 'abidings in ease here and now.'¹²

5. "It may be that after the stilling of thought conception and discursive thinking, he gains the inner tranquillity and harmony of the second absorption that is free of thought-conception and discursive thinking, born of concentration and filled with rapture and joy; and he then might think: 'I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble One's discipline it is not these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble One's discipline they are called 'abidings in ease here and now.'

6. "It may be that after the fading away of rapture, the monk dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly aware, and he experiences a happiness in his body of which the Noble Ones say: 'Happily lives he

who dwells in equanimity and is mindful!' — that third absorption he wins; and he then might think: 'I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble One's discipline it is not these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble One's discipline they are called 'abidings in ease here and now.'

7. "It may be that with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, he enters upon and abides in the fourth absorption, which is beyond pleasure and pain and has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity; and he then might think: 'I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble One's discipline it is not these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble One's discipline they are called 'abidings in ease here and now.'

8. "It may be that, with the entire transcending of the perceptions of corporeality,¹³ with the disappearance of perceptions of sense-response,¹⁴ with non-attention to perceptions of variety,¹⁵ thinking: 'Space is infinite,' some monk enters upon and abides in the sphere of infinite space; and he, then, might think: 'I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble One's discipline it is not these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble One's discipline they are called 'peaceful abidings.'

9. "It may be that by entirely transcending the sphere of infinite space, thinking: 'Consciousness is infinite,' some monk enters and abides in the sphere of infinite consciousness; and he then might think: 'I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble

One's discipline it is not these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble One's discipline they are called 'peaceful abidings.'

10. "It may be that by entirely transcending the sphere of infinite consciousness, some monk enters and abides in the sphere of nothingness; and he then might think: I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble One's discipline it is not these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble One's discipline they are called 'peaceful abidings.'

11. "It may be that, by entirely transcending the sphere of nothingness, some monk enters and abides in the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception; and he then might think: 'I am abiding in effacement.' But in the Noble One's discipline it is not

these [attainments] that are called 'effacement'; in the Noble one's discipline they are called 'peaceful abidings.'

Effacement

12. "But herein, Cunda, effacement should be practiced by you:16

(1) Others will be harmful; we shall not be harmful here — thus effacement can be done.17

(2) Others will kill living beings; we shall abstain from killing living beings here — thus effacement can be done.

(3) Others will take what is not given; we shall abstain from taking what is not given here — thus effacement can be done.

(4) Others will be unchaste; we shall be chaste here — thus effacement can be done.

(5) Others will speak falsehood; we shall abstain from false speech here — thus effacement can be done.

(6) Others will speak maliciously; we shall abstain from malicious speech here — thus effacement can be done.

(7) Others will speak harshly; we shall abstain from harsh speech here — thus effacement can be done.

(8) Others will gossip; we shall abstain from gossip here — thus effacement can be done.

(9) Others will be covetous; we shall not be covetous here — thus effacement can be done.

(10) Others will have thoughts of ill will; we shall not have thoughts of ill will here — thus effacement can be done.

(11) Others will have wrong views; we shall have right view here — thus effacement can be done.

(12) Others will have wrong intention; we shall have right intention here — thus effacement can be done.

(13) Others will use wrong speech; we shall use right speech here — thus effacement can be done.

(14) Others will commit wrong actions; we shall do right actions here — thus effacement can be done.

(15) Others will have wrong livelihood; we shall have right livelihood here — thus effacement can be done.

(16) Others will make wrong effort; we shall make right effort here — thus effacement can be done.

(17) Others will have wrong mindfulness; we shall have right mindfulness here — thus effacement can be done.

(18) Others will have wrong concentration; we shall have right concentration here — thus effacement can be done.

(19) Others will have wrong knowledge; we shall have right knowledge here — thus effacement can be done.

(20) Others will have wrong deliverance; we shall have right deliverance here — thus effacement can be done.

(21) Others will be overcome by sloth and torpor; we shall be free from sloth and torpor here — thus effacement can be done.

(22) Others will be agitated; we shall be unagitated here — thus effacement can be done.

(23) Others will be doubting; we shall be free from doubt here — thus effacement can be done.

(24) Others will be angry; we shall not be angry here — thus effacement can be done.

(25) Others will be hostile; we shall not be hostile here — thus effacement can be done.

(26) Others will denigrate; we shall not denigrate here — thus effacement can be done.

(27) Others will be domineering; we shall not be domineering here — thus effacement can be done.

(28) Others will be envious; we shall not be envious here — thus effacement can be done.

(29) Others will be jealous; we shall not be jealous here — thus effacement can be done.

(30) Others will be fraudulent; we shall not be fraudulent here — thus effacement can be done.

(31) Others will be hypocrites; we shall not be hypocrites here — thus effacement can be done.

(32) Others will be obstinate; we shall not be obstinate here — thus effacement can be done.

(33) Others will be arrogant; we shall not be arrogant here — thus effacement can be done.

(34) Others will be difficult to admonish; we shall be easy to admonish here — thus effacement can be done.

(35) Others will have bad friends; we shall have noble friends here — thus effacement can be done.

(36) Others will be negligent; we shall be heedful here — thus effacement can be done.

(37) Others will be faithless; we shall be faithful here — thus effacement can be done.

(38) Others will be shameless; we shall be shameful here — thus effacement can be done.

(39) Others will be without conscience; we shall have conscience here — thus effacement can be done.

(40) Others will have no learning; we shall be learned here — thus effacement can be done.

(41) Others will be idle; we shall be energetic here — thus effacement can be done.

(42) Others will be lacking in mindfulness; we shall be established in mindfulness here — thus effacement can be done.

(43) Others will be without wisdom; we shall be endowed with wisdom — thus effacement can be done.

(44) Others will misapprehend according to their individual views, hold on to them tenaciously and not easily discard them;¹⁸ we shall not misapprehend according to individual views nor hold on to them tenaciously, but shall discard them with ease — thus effacement can be done.

The Arising Of Thought

13. "Cunda, I say that even the arising of a thought concerned with salutary things [and ideas]¹⁹ is of great importance, not to speak

of bodily acts and words conforming [to such thought].²⁰ Therefore, Cunda:

(1) The thought should be produced: 'Others will be harmful; we shall not be harmful here.'

(2) The thought should be produced: 'Others will kill living beings; we shall abstain from killing living beings here.'

(3)-(43)...

(44) The thought should be produced: 'Others will misapprehend according to their individual views, hold on to them tenaciously and not easily discard them; we shall not misapprehend according to individual views nor hold on to them tenaciously, but shall discard them with ease.'

Avoidance

14. "Suppose, Cunda, there were an uneven road and another even road by which to

avoid it; and suppose there were an uneven ford and another even ford by which to avoid it.²¹ So too:

(1) A person given to harmfulness has non-harming by which to avoid it.

(2) A person given to killing living beings has abstention from killing by which to avoid it.

(3) A person given to taking what is not given has abstention from taking what is not given by which to avoid it.

(4) A person given to unchastity has chastity by which to avoid it.

(5) A person given to false speech has abstention from false speech by which to avoid it.

(6) A person given to malicious speech has abstention from malicious speech by which to avoid it.

(7) A person given to harsh speech has abstention from harsh speech by which to avoid it.

(8) A person given to gossip has abstention from gossip by which to avoid it.

(9) A person given to covetousness has non-covetousness by which to avoid it.

(10) A person given to thoughts of ill will has non-ill will by which to avoid it.

(11) A person given to wrong view has right view by which to avoid it.

(12) A person given to wrong intention has right intention by which to avoid it.

(13) A person given to wrong speech has right speech by which to avoid it.

(14) A person given to wrong action has right action by which to avoid it.

(15) A person given to wrong livelihood has right livelihood by which to avoid it.

(16) A person given to wrong effort has right effort by which to avoid it.

(17) A person given to wrong mindfulness has right mindfulness by which to avoid it.

(18) A person given to wrong concentration has right concentration by which to avoid it.

(19) A person given to wrong knowledge has right knowledge by which to avoid it.

(20) A person given to wrong deliverance has right deliverance by which to avoid it.

(21) A person overcome by sloth and torpor has freedom from sloth and torpor by which to avoid it.

(22) A person given to agitation has non-agitation by which to avoid it.

(23) A person given to doubting has freedom from doubt by which to avoid it.

(24) A person given to anger has freedom from anger by which to avoid it.

(25) A person given to hostility has freedom from hostility by which to avoid it.

(26) A person given to denigrating has non-denigrating by which to avoid it.

(27) A person given to domineering has non-domineering by which to avoid it.

(28) A person given to envy has non-envy by which to avoid it.

(29) A person given to jealousy has non-jealousy by which to avoid it.

(30) A person given to fraud has non-fraud by which to avoid it.

(31) A person given to hypocrisy has non-hypocrisy by which to avoid it.

(32) A person given to obstinacy has non-obstinacy by which to avoid it.

(33) A person given to arrogance has non-arrogance by which to avoid it.

(34) A person difficult to admonish has amenability by which to avoid it.

(35) A person given to making bad friends has making good friends by which to avoid it.

(36) A person given to negligence has heedfulness by which to avoid it.

(37) A person given to faithlessness has faith by which to avoid it.

(38) A person given to shamelessness has shame by which to avoid it.

(39) A person without conscience has conscience by which to avoid it.

(40) A person without learning has acquisition of great learning by which to avoid it.

(41) A person given to idleness has energetic endeavor by which to avoid it.

(42) A person without mindfulness has the establishment of mindfulness by which to avoid it.

(43) A person without wisdom has wisdom by which to avoid it.

(44) A person given to misapprehending according to his individual views, to holding on to them tenaciously and not discarding them easily, has non-misapprehension of individual views, non-holding on

tenaciously and ease in discarding by which to avoid it.

The Way Upward

15. "Cunda, as all unsalutary states lead downward and all salutary states lead upward, even so, Cunda:

(1) A person given to harmfulness has harmlessness to lead him upward.²²

(2) A person given to killing living beings has abstention from killing to lead him upwards.

(3)-(43)...

(44) A person given to misapprehending according to his individual views, to holding on to them tenaciously and not discarding them easily, has non-misapprehension of individual views, non-holding on tenaciously and ease in discarding to lead him upward.

Quenching

16. "Cunda, it is impossible that one who is himself sunk in the mire²³ should pull out another who is sunk in the mire. But it is possible, Cunda, that one not sunk in the mire himself should pull out another who is sunk in the mire.

"It is not possible, Cunda, that one who is himself not restrained, not disciplined and not quenched [as to his passions],²⁴ should make others restrained and disciplined, should make them attain to the full quenching [of passions].²⁵ But it is possible, Cunda, that one who is himself restrained, disciplined and fully quenched [as to his passions] should make others restrained and disciplined, should make them attain to the full quenching [of passions]. Even so, Cunda:²⁶

(1) A person given to harmfulness has harmlessness by which to attain to the full quenching [of it].

(2) A person given to killing living beings has abstention from killing by which to attain to the full quenching [of it].

(3)-(43)...

(44) A person given to misapprehending according to his individual views, to holding on to them tenaciously and not discarding them easily, has non-misapprehension of individual views, non-holding on tenaciously and ease in discarding by which to attain the quenching [of them].

Conclusion

17. "Thus, Cunda, I have shown to you the instruction on effacement, I have shown to you the instruction on thought's arising, I have shown to you the instruction on avoidance, I have shown to you the

instruction on the way upward, I have shown to you the instruction on quenching.

18. "What can be done for his disciples by a Master who seeks their welfare and has compassion and pity on them, that I have done for you, Cunda.²⁷ There are these roots of trees, there are empty places. Meditate, Cunda, do not delay, lest you later regret it. 'This is my message to you.'

Thus spoke the Blessed One. Satisfied, the venerable Cunda rejoiced in the Blessed One's words.

[The concluding verse added by the 'Theras of the First Council:]

Deep like the ocean is this Suttanta on
Effacement,
Dealing with forty-four items,
showing them in five sections.

Notes

1.

Maha-Cunda Thera was the brother of the venerable Sariputta Thera.

2.

Self-doctrines or world-doctrines (atta-vada, lokavada). According to Comy., this refers: (a) to the twenty types of personality-belief (*sakkaya-ditthi*), i.e., four for each of the five aggregates (*khandha*); (b) to eight wrong views about self and world, as being eternal, not eternal, both eternal and not eternal, neither eternal nor not eternal, and the same four alternatives concerning finite and infinite.

3.

In a monk who is only at the beginning of his (meditative) reflections (adim-eva manasikaroto).

Comy.: "This refers to one who is at the beginning of his insight-meditation (*vipassana-bhavana*) and has not yet attained to stream-entry," when the fetter of personality-belief is finally eliminated. The beginner's insight-practice extends from the "discernment of mentality and corporeality" (*namarupa-*

pariccheda) up to the "knowledge of rise and fall" (*udayabbaya-ñāna*), on which see *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Chs. XVIII, XX, XXI.

According to the Comy., the Thera's question concerns those who overrate the degree of their achievement, i.e., those who believe that, in their meditative practice, they have achieved this or that result while actually they have not.

Overestimation (*abhimana*), in that sense, "does not arise in ignorant common people (*balaputhujjana*) who are entirely engrossed in worldly life, nor does it arise in Noble Disciples (*ariya-savaka*); because in a stream-winner the overestimation does not arise that he is a once-returner, etc.

Self-overestimation can occur only in one who actually practices (meditation) and has temporarily subdued the defilements by way of tranquillity or insight. Maha-Cunda Thera, being an arahant, was no self-overrater himself,

but in formulating his question, he put himself in the place of one who is; or, as others say, there may have been such "self-overraters" among his pupils, and for conveying to them the Buddha's reply, he put his question.

4.

(The object) in which (yattha). Comy.: *yattha* (where) = *yasmim arammane*. The object, or basis, the five aggregates, because all false views on self and world can refer only to the five aggregates or to one of them. See *Discourse on the Snake Simile* (Wheel No. 47/48), p. 8, and *Anatta and Nibbana*, by Nyanaponika Thera (Wheel No. 11), p. 18 (quotation).

5.

In which these views arise (yattha uppajjanti), i.e., arise for the first time, without having occurred earlier (Comy.).

Underlie (anusenti), i.e., habitually occur (cf. *anusaya*, "tendency," which may be latent or active). Comy.: "This refers to views which, having been indulged in repeatedly, have become strong and have not been removed."

Sub.Comy.: "By ultimate elimination (*samuccheda-vinaya-vasena*)."

Become active (samudacaranti). Comy.: "Wrong views have arrived at the (action-) doors of body and speech," i.e., which have found expression in words and deeds.

6.

With right wisdom (sammappaññaya). Comy.: "With insight-wisdom, ending with the knowledge pertaining to the path of stream-entry."

7.

As it actually is (yatha-bhutam). Comy.: "Because the five aggregates exist only in that manner (i.e., as something 'that is not mine,' etc.). But if conceived in the way 'It is mine,' etc., it simply does not exist (*n'ev'atthi*)."

8.

This is not mine: hereby craving (tanha) is rejected.

9.

This I am not: this refers to the rejection of conceit (mana).

10.

This is not my self: this refers to the rejection of false views (*ditthi*).

11.

Abandoning... discarding (pahanam... patinissaggo). Comy.: "Both terms are synonymous with the ultimate eradication of wrong views, taking place at stream-entry when the fetter of personality belief is destroyed."

12.

Now the Buddha speaks, on his own, of another type of "self-overrater," i.e., of those who have realized any of the eight meditative attainments (*samapatti*) and believe that this signifies true "effacement" (*sallekha*).

The common meaning of *sallekha** is austere practice or asceticism; but in the Buddha's usage it is the radical "effacing" or removal of the defilements.

*[*Sallekha* (= *sam-lekha*) is derived from the verbal root *likh*, to scratch; hence *likhati* (a) to scratch in, to write; (b) to scratch off, to remove: *samlikhati*, "to remove fully." An interesting

parallel is "*ascesis*," derived from the Greek *askeuein*, to scratch. The rendering by "effacement" is Ñānamoli Thera's; Soma Thera has "cancelling"; I. B. Horner, "expunging."]

The eight stages of meditation given here in the discourse, consist of the four fine-material absorptions (*rupajjhana*) and the four immaterial absorptions (*arupajjhana*). Comy. says that these meditative attainments "are in common with the ascetics outside (the Buddha's Dispensation)."

Comy.: "The overrater's meditative absorption is neither 'effacement' nor is it the 'path of practice for effacement' (*sallekha-patipada*). And why not? Because that jhana is not used by him as a basis for insight; that is, after rising from jhana he does not scrutinize the (physical and mental) formations" (see *Visuddhimagga* transl. by Ñānamoli, Ch. XVIII, 3). His jhana produces only one-pointedness of mind, and is, as our text says, an "abiding in ease here and now."

13.

"By '*perceptions of corporeality*' (*rupasañña*) are meant the absorptions of the fine-material sphere (*rupajjhana*) as well as those things that are their objects" (*Visuddhimagga*).

14.

Perceptions of sense-response (lit. resistance, *patigha-sañña*) are perceptions arisen through the impact of the physical sense bases (eye, etc.) and their objects.

15.

Perceptions of variety (*ñānatta-sañña*) are perceptions that arise in a variety of fields, or various perceptions in various fields. This refers to all perceptions belonging to the sense sphere (*kamavacara*).

16.

Comy.: "Now, the Blessed One shows in forty-four ways where effacement should be practiced. But why are harmlessness and the other states regarded as effacement, unlike the eight meditative attainments? Because they are a basis for the supramundane (*lokuttara-padaka*), while, for outsiders, the eight attainments are

merely a basis for (continuing) the round of existence (*vatta-padaka*), (because by non-Buddhists they are practiced for the sake of rebirth in higher worlds). But in the Buddha's Dispensation, even the Going for Refuge is a basis for the supramundane.

Sub.Comy.: "If one, wishing to overcome the suffering of samsara, goes with joyful confidence for refuge to the Triple Gem, then this Refuge will be for him a supporting condition for higher virtue, etc. (i.e., higher mentality and higher wisdom), and it may gradually lead him to the attainment of the path of understanding (*dassana-magga*; i.e., stream-entry)."

The Forty-four Ways of Effacement

(1) *Harmful and harmless* are not attached to a group of standard doctrinal categories as most of the other qualities are. On "harmlessness" see Note 17.

(2)-(11) are the courses of action (*kammapatha*), unsalutary (*akusala*) and salutary (*kusala*),

referring to body (2-4), speech (5-8) and mind (9-11).

(12)-(18) are the last seven factors of the eightfold path (wrong and right), also called the eight states of wrongness or rightness (*micchatta, sammatta*). The first path factor, right (or wrong) view, is not separately mentioned, being identical with (11).

(19)-(20) are often added to the eightfold path.

(21)-(23) are the last three of the five hindrances (*nivarana*); the first two are identical with (9) and (10), and therefore not repeated here.

(24)-(33) are ten of the sixteen defilements (*upakkilesa*) mentioned in MN 7 (Simile of the Cloth).

(34)-(36) are called in the Commentary the miscellaneous factors (*pakinnaka*).

(37)-(43) are the seven "good qualities" (*saddhamma*), mentioned in MN 53 Comy.: "In this connection they are mentioned as forming the complete equipment required for insight (*vipassana-sambharo paripuro*)."

(44) is unattached to any group of terms. (See Note 18).

17.

Comy.: "Harmlessness is called 'effacement,' because it effaces harmfulness, i.e., it cuts it off (*chindati*). This method of explanation applies to all other terms."

Sub.Comy.: "But why is harmlessness (or nonviolence, *ahimsa*) mentioned at the very beginning? Because it is the root of all virtues; harmlessness, namely, is a synonym of compassion. Especially, it is the root-cause of morality, because it makes one refrain from immorality which has as its characteristic mark the harming of others. Just as the killing of living beings has the harming of others as its mark, so also the taking away of others' property; for 'robbing a man's wealth is worse than stabbing him.'* Similarly, chastity removes the cause for the pains of child bearing, etc., and there is hardly a need to mention the harm done by adultery.

*[This is given in Pali as direct speech or quote; perhaps it was a common adage.]

"Obvious is also the harm done to others by deception, by causing dissension and by backbiting. The mark of harming others is also attached to gossip because it takes away what is beneficial and causes to arise what is not beneficial; to covetousness, as it causes one to take what is not given; to ill will, as it causes killing, etc.; to wrong views, as they are the cause of all that is un-beneficial. One who holds wrong views may, in the conviction of acting righteously, kill living beings and incite others to do likewise. There is nothing to say about other (and lesser immoral acts induced by false views).

"Harmlessness (i.e., the principle of non-violence) has the characteristic mark of making one refrain from immorality which, on its part, has the mark of harming. Hence, harmlessness is an especially strong productive cause of morality; and morality, again, is the basis for concentration of mind, while concentration is

the basis for wisdom. In that way harmlessness (non-violence) is the root of all virtues.

"Furthermore, in the case of the highest type of men (*uttamapurisa*) who have noble aspirations, who act considerately and wisely, also their mental concentration and their wisdom, just as their morality, is conducive to the weal and happiness of others. In that way, too, compassion is the root of all virtues, and therefore it has been mentioned at the beginning.

"Now, (after harmlessness), the salutary courses of action (*kusala-kamma*patha; 2-11) are to show that these states are produced by harmlessness. Then follow the eight states of rightness (11-18) to show that they must be brought about by basing them on morality, which is the root of these virtues. Now the separation from the hindrances (21-23, and 16, 17) is included to indicate that this is the primary task for one intent on purifying (his practice of) the eightfold path. Then, follows the cleansing from the defilements (24-33), to

indicate that effacement is accomplished by giving up anger (24), etc. And the cleansing from the defilements will be successful when aided by amenability to advice, noble friendship and heedful diligence (34-36).

"Now the seven noble qualities (37-43) are included to show that they will come to perfection in him who is endowed with amenability and the other (two factors); and that they, on their part, after having strengthened insight, will lead to the paths of sanctitude. (See end of Note 16.)

"Finally, the passage on 'misapprehending according to one's individual views,' etc. (44) is meant to indicate that for such a one (i.e., for one bent on effacement) that wrong attitude is an obstacle to the attainment of the supramundane virtues and is, therefore, to be avoided totally. This passage on misapprehending (about which see Note 18) is also meant to show that one who, by the right conduct here described, is in the process of attaining one of the paths of sanctitude, will be

led to the acme of effacement (by this last-mentioned threefold way of effacement).

"In this manner should be understood the purpose of stating these forty-four modes of effacement as well as the order in which they appear in the discourse."

18.

Comy.: "A single wrong view (or wrong attitude), which is an obstacle for the supramundane qualities and, hence, does not lead to emancipation, is here described in three aspects:

(a) *Others will misapprehend according to their own individual views (sanditthi-paramasi).*

Sub.Comy.: *sa(m) = attano*, one's own. *Paramasi* means setting aside the actual nature of a thing, one conceives it differently (*sabhavam atikkamitva parato amasana*).

(b) Hold on tenaciously (*adhanaggahi*). Sub. Comy.: *adhana = dalha*, tight, firm.

(c) Discards not easily. Comy.:

"There are those who can discard their views on seeing a convincing reason. But others, even if

shown many reasons, cannot give up their views; and of them it is said that they 'do not discard easily.' It refers to those who cling firmly to a subjective view that has occurred to them, believing 'only this is the truth.' Even if the Buddhas or others show them reasons, they do not relinquish their views. Such people, whatever idea they conceive, be it in accordance with Dhamma or not, will say: 'So it has been told by our teacher. So we have learned it'; and they will withdraw into themselves like a turtle drawing its limbs into its shell. They hold on to their views with the tight grip of a crocodile and do not let go."

19.

Salutary: kusala, also translated by wholesome, profitable, skillful. These salutary things, says Sub. Comy., are the modes of effacement mentioned.

20.

Sub.Comy.: "For those who cannot take up, by actual application, the practice of effacement,

even the arising of a thought (*cittuppado*), i.e., an inclination for it, is of great importance.

Comy. says that a salutary thought is of great importance as it leads entirely to weal and happiness, and as it is the cause for the subsequent actions conforming to it. Examples are given beginning with the intention to give almsfood to monks, up to the aspiration for Buddhahood. The Sub.Comy., however, says that in some cases the importance is not in the thought itself but only in the actual execution of it. This certainly applies to the intention to give alms, etc. But in the efforts for effacing the defilements, the formation of a mental attitude directed towards it, in other words, the heart's resolve, is certainly an important factor.

This section of the discourse has been condensed in the present translation. But he who has chosen the path of effacement as his way of practice (*patipada*) is well advised to repeat all forty-four items, linking them with his heart's earnest resolve. Also, the last two sections of the discourse have been condensed.

21.

Comy.: "*Parikkamana* (lit. going around, circumventing) has the meaning of 'avoiding' (*parivajjana*). For the avoiding of harmfulness there is the ready road of harmlessness, walking on which one may easily experience felicity among humans or deities, or one may cross over (by that ford) from this world (to the other shore, Nibbana). The same method of explanation applies to the other sentences."

22.

Comy.:

"The meaning is this: Any unsalutary states of mind, whether they produce rebirth or not, and whether, in a given rebirth, they produce kamma results or not — all, because of their type, i.e., by being unsalutary, lead downwards (to lower worlds). They are just like that because, on the occasion of their yielding a kamma result, that result will be undesirable and unpleasant.

"Any salutary states of mind, [whether they produce rebirth or not and whether, in a given rebirth, they produce kamma results or not —

all, because of their type], lead upwards. They are just like that because, on the occasion of their yielding a kamma result, that result will be desirable and pleasant.

"The connection (in the discourse, between the general principle stated first, and its specific application to the forty-four cases) is as follows: just as unsalutary states lead downwards, so it is with that one state of harmfulness for him who is harmful. Just as all salutary states lead upwards, so it is with that one state of harmlessness for him who is harmless."

23.

Comy.: "In the Noble One's discipline, the 'mire' is a name for the five sense desires."

24.

Not fully quenched (aparinibbuto) Comy.: "with defilements not extinguished (*anibbuta-kilesa*)."

25.

Comy.: "There may be those who object that this is not correct because some come to penetration of the Dhamma (*dhammabhisamaya*, i.e., stream-entry) after

listening to an exposition of the Teaching by monks or nuns, male or female lay followers, who are still worldlings (*puthujjana*; i.e., have not attained to any of the paths of sanctitude). Hence one who is still in the mire can pull out others. (Reply:) This should not be understood in that way. It is the Blessed One who here does the pulling out.

"Suppose there is a king who sends a letter to the border region, and the people there, unable to read it by themselves, have the letter read to them by another able to do it. Having learned of the contents, they respond with respect, knowing it as the king's order. But they do not think that it is the letter reader's order; he will receive praise only for his smooth and fluent reading of the letter. Similarly, even if preachers of the ability of Sariputta Thera expound the Dhamma, still they are just like readers of a letter written by another. Their sermon should truly be attributed to the Blessed One, like the decree to the king. The preachers, however, receive their limited praise, just because they

expound the Dhamma with a smooth and fluent diction. Hence that statement in the discourse is correct."

26.

Comy. gives two alternative explanations for the connection between the modes of effacement and the preceding simile:

(a) Just as one who is not sunk in the mire himself can pull others out of it, similarly he who is harmless himself can quench another's harmful volition.

(b) Just as only he who has quenched his own passions can help one who has not quenched them, similarly, only a volition of harmlessness can quench a harmful volition.

27.

Comy.: "So far goes a compassionate teacher's task namely, the correct exposition of his teaching; that, namely, the practice (according to the teaching; *patipatti*), is the task of the disciples."

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Buddhism and the God-idea

by

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Quite contradictory views have been expressed in Western literature on the attitude of Buddhism toward the concept of God and gods. From a study of the discourses of the Buddha preserved in the Pali canon, it will be seen that the idea of a *personal deity*, a creator god conceived to be eternal and omnipotent, is incompatible with the Buddha's teachings. On the other hand, conceptions of an *impersonal godhead* of any description, such as world-soul, etc., are excluded by the Buddha's teachings on Anatta, non-self or unsubstantiality.

In Buddhist literature, the belief in a creator god (*issara-nimmana-vada*) is frequently mentioned and rejected, along with other causes wrongly

adduced to explain the origin of the world; as, for instance, world-soul, time, nature, etc. God-belief, however, is placed in the same category as those morally destructive wrong views which deny the kammic results of action, assume a fortuitous origin of man and nature, or teach absolute determinism. These views are said to be altogether pernicious, having definite bad results due to their effect on ethical conduct.

Theism, however, is regarded as a kind of kamma-teaching in so far as it upholds the moral efficacy of actions. Hence a theist who leads a moral life may, like anyone else doing so, expect a favorable rebirth. He may possibly even be reborn in a heavenly world that resembles his own conception of it, though it will not be of eternal duration as he may have expected. If, however, fanaticism induces him to persecute those who do not share his beliefs, this will have grave consequences for his future destiny. For fanatical attitudes, intolerance, and violence against others create unwholesome

kamma leading to moral degeneration and to an unhappy rebirth.

Although belief in God does not exclude a favorable rebirth, it is a variety of eternalism, a false affirmation of permanence rooted in the craving for existence, and as such an obstacle to final deliverance.

Among the fetters (*samyojana*) that bind to existence, theism is particularly subject to those of personality-belief, attachment to rites and rituals, and desire for fine-material existence or for a "heaven of the sense sphere," as the case may be.

As an attempt at explaining the universe, its origin, and man's situation in his world, the God-idea was found entirely unconvincing by the Buddhist thinkers of old. Through the centuries, Buddhist philosophers have formulated detailed arguments refuting the doctrine of a creator god. It should be of interest

to compare these with the ways in which Western philosophers have refuted the theological proofs of the existence of God.

But for an earnest believer, the God-idea is more than a mere device for explaining external facts like the origin of the world. For him it is an object of faith that can bestow a strong feeling of certainty, not only as to God's existence "somewhere out there," but as to God's consoling presence and closeness to himself.

This feeling of certainty requires close scrutiny. Such scrutiny will reveal that in most cases the God-idea is only the devotee's projection of his ideal — generally a noble one — and of his fervent wish and deeply felt need to believe. These projections are largely conditioned by external influences, such as childhood impressions, education, tradition and social environment. Charged with a strong emotional emphasis, brought to life by man's powerful capacity for image-formation, visualization and

the creation of myth, they then come to be identified with the images and concepts of whatever religion the devotee follows. In the case of many of the most sincere believers, a searching analysis would show that their "God-experience" has no more specific content than this.

Yet the range and significance of God-belief and God-experience are not fully exhausted by the preceding remarks. The lives and writings of the mystics of all great religions bear witness to religious experiences of great intensity, in which considerable changes are effected in the quality of consciousness. Profound absorption in prayer or meditation can bring about a deepening and widening, a brightening and intensifying of consciousness, accompanied by a transporting feeling of rapture and bliss. The contrast between these states and normal conscious awareness is so great that the mystic believes his experience to be manifestations of the divine; and given the contrast, this assumption is quite

understandable. Mystical experiences are also characterized by a marked reduction or temporary exclusion of the multiplicity of sense-perceptions and restless thoughts, and this relative unification of mind is then interpreted as a union or communion with the One God.

All these deeply moving impressions and the first spontaneous interpretations the mystic subsequently identifies with his particular theology. It is interesting to note, however, that the attempts of most great Western mystics to relate their mystical experiences to the official dogmas of their respective churches often resulted in teachings which were often looked upon askance by the orthodox, if not considered downright heretical.

The psychological facts underlying those religious experiences are accepted by the Buddhist and well-known to him; but he carefully distinguishes the experiences themselves from the theological interpretations

imposed upon them. After rising from deep meditative absorption (*jhana*), the Buddhist meditator is advised to view the physical and mental factors constituting his experience in the light of the three characteristics of all conditioned existence: impermanency, liability to suffering, and absence of an abiding ego or eternal substance.

This is done primarily in order to utilize the meditative purity and strength of consciousness for the highest purpose: liberating insight. But this procedure also has a very important side-effect which concerns us here: the meditator will not be overwhelmed by any uncontrolled emotions and thoughts evoked by his singular experience, and will, thus, be able to avoid interpretations of that experience not warranted by the facts.

Hence, a Buddhist meditator, while benefiting by the refinement of consciousness he has achieved, will be able to see these meditative

experiences for what they are; and he will further know that they are without any abiding substance that could be attributed to a deity manifesting itself to the mind. Therefore, the Buddhist's conclusion must be that the highest mystic states do not provide evidence for the existence of a personal God or an impersonal godhead.

Buddhism has sometimes been called an atheistic teaching, either in an approving sense by freethinkers and rationalists or in a derogatory sense by people of theistic persuasion. Only in one way can Buddhism be described as atheistic, namely, in so far as it denies the existence of an eternal, omnipotent God or godhead who is the creator and ordainer of the world. The word "atheism," however, like the word "godless," frequently carries a number of disparaging overtones or implications, which in no way apply to the Buddha's teaching.

Those who use the word "atheism" often associate it with a materialistic doctrine that knows nothing higher than this world of the senses and the slight happiness it can bestow. Buddhism is nothing of that sort.

In this respect it agrees with the teachings of other religions, that true lasting happiness cannot be found in this world; nor, the Buddha adds, can it be found on any higher plane of existence, conceived as a heavenly or divine world, since all planes of existence are impermanent and, thus incapable of giving lasting bliss.

The spiritual values advocated by Buddhism are directed, not towards a new life in some higher world, but towards a state utterly transcending the world, namely, Nibbana. In making this statement, however, we must point out that Buddhist spiritual values do not draw an absolute separation between the beyond and the here and now. They have firm roots in the world

itself for they aim at the highest realization in this present existence. Along with such spiritual aspirations, Buddhism encourages earnest endeavor to make this world a better place to live in.

The materialistic philosophy of annihilationism (*ucchedavada*) is emphatically rejected by the Buddha as a false doctrine. The doctrine of kamma is sufficient to prove that Buddhism does not teach annihilation after death. It accepts survival, not of an eternal soul, but of a mental process subject to renewed becoming; thus it teaches rebirth without transmigration.

Again, the Buddha's teaching is not a nihilism that gives suffering humanity no better hope than a final cold nothingness. On the contrary, it is a teaching of salvation (*niyyanika-dhamma*) or deliverance (*vimutti*) which attributes to man the faculty to realize by his own efforts the highest goal, Nibbana, the ultimate cessation of

suffering and the final eradication of greed, hatred and delusion.

Nibbana is far from being the blank zero of annihilation; yet it also cannot be identified with any form of God-idea, as it is neither the origin nor the immanent ground or essence of the world.

Buddhism is not an enemy of religion as atheism is believed to be.

Buddhism, indeed, is the enemy of none.

A Buddhist will recognize and appreciate whatever ethical, spiritual and cultural values have been created by God-belief in its long and checkered history. We cannot, however, close our eyes to the fact that the God-concept has served, too often, as a cloak for man's will to power, and the reckless and cruel use of that power, thus adding considerably to the ample

measure of misery in this world supposed to be an all-loving God's creation.

For centuries, free thought, free research and the expression of dissident views were obstructed and stifled in the name of service to God. And alas, these and other negative consequences are not yet entirely things of the past.

The word "atheism" also carries the innuendo of an attitude countenancing moral laxity, or a belief that man-made ethics, having no divine sanction, rest on shaky foundations.

For Buddhism, however, the basic moral law is inherent in life itself. It is a special case of the law of cause and effect, needing neither a divine law-giver nor depending upon the fluctuating human conceptions of socially conditioned minor moralities and conventions.

For an increasing section of humanity, the belief in God is breaking down rapidly, as well as the

accustomed motivations for moral conduct. This shows the risk of basing moral postulates on divine commandments, when their alleged source rapidly loses credence and authority.

There is a need for an autonomous foundation for ethics, one that has deeper roots than a social contract and is capable of protecting the security of the individual and of human institutions. Buddhism offers such a foundation for ethics.

Buddhism does not deny that there are in the universe planes of existence and levels of consciousness which in some ways may be superior to our terrestrial world and to average human consciousness. To deny this would indeed be provincial in this age of space travel. Bertrand Russell rightly says: "It is improbable that the universe contains nothing better than ourselves."

Yet, according to Buddhist teachings, such higher planes of existence, like our familiar

world, are subject to the law of impermanence and change. The inhabitants of such worlds may well be, in different degrees, more powerful than human beings, happier and longer-lived.

Whether we call those superior beings gods, deities, devas, or angels is of little importance, since it is improbable that they call themselves by any of those names.

They are inhabitants of this universe, fellow-wanderers in this round of existence; and though more powerful, they need not be wiser than man. Further, it need not be denied that such worlds and such beings may have their lord and ruler. In all probability they do. But like any human ruler, a divine ruler too might be inclined to misjudge his own status and power, until a greater one comes along and points out to him his error, as our texts report of the Buddha.

These, however, are largely matters beyond the range and concern of average human experience.

They have been mentioned here chiefly for the purpose of defining the Buddhist position, and not to serve as a topic of speculation and argument. Such involvement can only divert attention and effort from what ought to be our principal object: the overcoming of greed, hatred and delusion where they are found in the here and now.

An ancient verse ascribed to the Buddha in the *Questions of King Milinda* says:

Not far from here do you need to look!
Highest existence — what can it avail?
Here in this present aggregate,
In your own body overcome the world!

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Courageous Faith
by
Nyanaponika Thera
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Faith involves not merely a belief in the existence of a thing or in the truth of a creedal formula, but also confidence in the power of its object.

Religious faith is the belief and confidence in the power of the Supreme Good and Buddhist faith, in particular, the belief in the incomparable power of the Noble Eightfold Path, the confidence in its purifying and liberating efficacy.

Among those calling themselves "believers" or "religious people" or, in our case, Buddhists, there are still too few who have that kind of genuine faith in the actual power of the Good to transform and elevate the life of the individual

and of society, to secure them against the resistance of the evil in themselves and in the world outside.

Too few dare to entrust themselves to the powerful current of the Good, too many secretly believe, in spite of a vague sort of "faith," that the power of the evil in themselves and the world is stronger — too strong to be contended with.

Many politicians everywhere in the world seem to believe the same, particularly those who call themselves "realists," obviously implying that only the evil is "real." They think that of necessity they have to submit to its greater power. If they are not willing to put it to the test, it is no wonder that they cannot achieve much good.

To be sure, in face of the great forces of evil and stupidity, this kind of genuine faith in the Good requires a certain amount of courage. But no

progress of any kind is possible without conviction and courage.

Progress means to overcome the natural inertia of present unsatisfactory conditions in the individual and in society. It certainly requires courage to take the first step in breaking through that resistance of the natural inertia and the self-preserving tendency of things and minds. But just that courage is the preliminary condition of success.

The ancient teachers of the Buddhist doctrine were well aware that courage is an essential feature of true faith. They, therefore, compared faith to a strong and courageous hero who plunges ahead into the turbulent waters of a stream to lead safely across the weaker people who timidly stop at the shore, or, excitedly and in vain, run up and down the bank engaged in useless arguments about the proper place to cross.

This simile can be applied to the social as well as to the inner life. In the case of social life, the "weaker people" are those who are willing to follow and support a leader but who cannot make a start by themselves. In the case of the inner life, these "weaker people" [lack] those qualities necessary for spiritual progress which are either undeveloped or isolated from their supplementary virtues.

Two factors of inner progress which supplement, support and balance each other are intellect (*pañña*) and faith (*saddha*). If intellect remains without the confidence, devotion and zeal of faith, it will stop short at a mere theoretical understanding and intellectual appreciation of teachings meant to be lived and not only thought or talked about.

In the words of our simile: intellect, if not helped by the hero of faith, will merely "run up and down the bank of the stream," an activity

with a very busy and important appearance but with few actual results.

Intellect separated from faith will lack the firm belief in its own power to be the guide on the path of life. Without this inner conviction it will hesitate to follow in earnest its own conclusions and commands; it will lack the courage to make an actual start on the task of "crossing over."

Faith (confidence) has a supplementary quality, supported by the vigor and endurance of energy (*viriyā*), will give wings to the intellect, enabling it to rise above the barrenness of unapplied knowledge and the futile wordy wars of conceptual thought.

In exchange, intellect will give to faith discriminative judgment and reliable guidance. It will prevent faith from becoming exhausted, from wasting its energies by ineffective emotional effusions and misdirected efforts.

Therefore, faith and intellect should always be harmonized. With right mindfulness keeping them balanced, the two together will prove to be ideal companions, able to meet by their combined efforts any dangers and difficulties on the road to liberation.

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Devotion in Buddhism
by
Nyanaponika Thera
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The Buddha repeatedly discouraged any excessive veneration paid to him personally. He knew that an excess of purely emotional devotion can obstruct or disturb the development of a balanced character, and, thus, may become a serious obstacle to progress on the path to deliverance. The history of religion has since proved him right, as illustrated by the extravagancies of emotional mysticism in East and West.

The suttas relate the story of the monk Vakkali, who full of devotion and love for the Buddha, was ever desirous to behold him bodily. To him the Buddha said: "What shall it profit you to see this impure body? He who sees the Dhamma, sees me."

Shortly before the Buddha passed away, he said: "If a monk or a nun, a devout man or a devout woman, lives in accordance with the Dhamma, is correct in his life, walks in conformity with the Dhamma — it is he who rightly honors, reverences, venerates, holds sacred and reveres the Perfect One (*tathagata*) with the worthiest homage."

A true and deep understanding of the Dhamma, together with a conduct that is in conformity with that understanding — these are vastly superior to any external homage or mere emotional devotion.

That is the instruction conveyed by these two teachings of the Master.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Buddha disparaged a reverential and devotional attitude of mind when it is the natural outflow of a true understanding and a deep admiration of what is great and noble. It would also be a grievous error to believe that the "seeing of the Dhamma" (spoken of in the first saying) is identical with a mere intellectual appreciation and purely conceptual grasp of the doctrine.

Such a one-sided abstract approach to the very concrete message of the Buddha all too often leads to intellectual smugness. In its barrenness it will certainly not be a substitute for the strong and enlivening impulse imparted by a deep-felt devotion to what is known as great, noble and exemplary. Devotion, being a facet and natural accompaniment of confidence (*saddha*), is a

necessary factor in the "balance of faculties" (*indriya-samata*) required for final deliverance.

Confidence, in all its aspects, including the devotional, is needed to resolve any stagnation and other shortcomings resulting from a one-sided development of the intellectual faculties. Such [intellectual] development often tends to turning around in circles endlessly, without being able to effect any break-through.

Here, devotion, confidence and faith — all aspects of the Pali term *saddha* — may be able to give quick and effective help.

Though the Buddha refused to be made the object of an emotional "personality cult," he also knew that "respect and homage paid to those who are worthy of it, is a great blessing."

The Buddha made this statement in the very first stanza of one of his principal ethical injunctions, the Discourse on Blessings (*Maha-Mangala*

Sutta 1). Mentioning the value of a respectful, reverential attitude together with the blessings "avoiding fools and associating with the wise," the Buddha obviously regarded such an attitude as fundamental for individual and social progress and for the acquisition of any further higher benefits.

One who is incapable of a reverential attitude will also be incapable of spiritual progress beyond the narrow limits of his present mental condition.

One who is so blind as not to see or recognize anything higher and better than the little mud-pool of his petty self and environment will suffer for a long time from retarded growth.

And one who, out of a demonstrative self-assertion, scorns a reverential attitude in himself and in others will remain imprisoned in his self-conceit — a most formidable bar to a true maturity of character and to spiritual growth.

It is by recognizing and honoring someone or something higher that one honors and enhances one's own inner potentialities.

When the high heart we magnify,
And the sure vision celebrate,
And worship greatness passing by,
Ourselves are great.

Since respect, reverence and devotion are partial aspects of the Buddhist concept of confidence, one will, now, understand why confidence has been called the seed of all other beneficial qualities.

The nobler the object of reverence or devotion, the higher is the blessing bestowed by it. "Those who have joyous confidence in the highest, the highest fruit will be theirs" (AN 4.34).

The supreme objects of a Buddhist's reverence and devotion are his Three Refuges, also called

the Three Jewels or Ideals: the Buddha, his Teaching (Dhamma) and the Community of saintly monks and nuns (Sangha). 2

Here, too, the Buddha is revered not as a personality of such a name, nor as a deity, but as the embodiment of Enlightenment.

A text often recurring in the Buddhist scriptures says that a devout lay disciple "has confidence, he believes in the Enlightenment of the Perfect One." This confidence, however, is not the outcome of blind faith based on hearsay, but is derived from the devotee's reasoned conviction based on his own understanding of the Buddha Word which speaks to him clearly with a voice of unmistakable Enlightenment.

This derivation of his assurance is emphasized by the fact that, along with confidence, wisdom also is mentioned among the qualities of an ideal lay follower.

We may now ask: Is it not quite natural that feelings of love, gratitude, reverence and devotion seek expression through the entire personality, through acts of body and speech as well as through our thoughts and unexpressed sentiments?

Will one, for instance, hide one's feelings towards parents and other loved ones? Will one not rather express them by loving words and deeds? Will one not cherish their memory in suitable ways, as for instance, by preserving their pictures in one's home, by placing flowers on their graves, by recalling their noble qualities? In such a way, one who has become critical of the devotional aspects of religion may seek to understand these outward acts of homage customary in Buddhist lands when, with reverential gesture, flowers and incense are placed before a Buddha image and devotional texts are recited not as prayers but as meditation.

Provided that such practice does not deteriorate into a thoughtless routine, a follower of the Dhamma will derive benefit if he takes up some form of a devotional practice, adapting it to his personal temperament and to the social customs of his environment.

Buddhism however, does not in the least impose upon its followers a *demand* to observe any outward form of devotion or worship. This is entirely left to the choice of individuals whose emotional, devotional and intellectual needs are bound to differ greatly.

No Buddhist should feel himself forced into an iron-cast mould, be it of a devotional or a rationalistic shape. As a follower of the middle way, he should, however, also avoid one-sided judgment of others, and try to appreciate that their individual needs and preferences may differ from his own.

More important and of greater general validity than outward forms of devotion is the basic capacity for respect and reverence discussed at the beginning of this essay, and also the practice of meditations or contemplations of a devotional character. Many benefits accrue from these and hence it was for good reasons that the Enlightened One strongly and repeatedly recommended the meditative recollection of the Buddha (*buddhanussati*), along with other kindred devotional recollections.³

Here again, the reference is to the embodied ideal; thus the Buddha, as a being [having been] freed from all traces of vanity and egotism, could venture to recommend to his disciples a meditation on the Buddha.

What, then, are the benefits of such devotional meditations?

Their first benefit is *mental purification*. They have been called by the Buddha "efficacious

procedures for purifying a defiled mind" (AN 3.71).

"When a noble disciple contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time his mind is not enwrapped in lust, nor in hatred, nor in delusion. At such a time his mind is rightly directed: it has got rid of lust, is aloof from it, [and] is freed from it. Lust is here a name for the five sense desires. By cultivating this contemplation, many beings become purified" (AN 6.25).

If, by practicing that devotional meditation, one endeavors to live, as it were, "in the Master's presence" (*sattha sammukhibhuta*), one will feel ashamed to do, speak or think anything unworthy; one will shrink back from evil; and as a positive reaction, one will feel inspired to high endeavor in emulation of the Master's great example.

Images, and not abstract concepts, are the language of the subconscious. If, therefore, the

image of the Enlightened One is often created within one's mind as the embodiment of man perfected, it will penetrate deeply into the subconscious, and if sufficiently strong, will act as an automatic brake against evil impulses.

In such a way the subconscious, normally so often the hidden enemy in gaining self-mastery, may become a powerful ally of such an endeavor.

For that purpose of *educating the subconscious*, it will be helpful to use a Buddha image or picture as an aid in visualization. In that way, concentration of mind may be attained fairly soon. For evoking and deeply absorbing some features of the Buddha's personality, his qualities should be contemplated, for instance in the way described in the *Visuddhimagga*.

The recollection of the Buddha, being productive of joy (*piti*), is an effective way of *invigorating the mind*, of lifting it up from the

states of listlessness, tension, fatigue, and frustration, which occur during meditation as well as in ordinary life.

The Buddha himself advised: "If (in the strenuous practice of meditation, for instance) in contemplation of the body, bodily agitation, including sense desires, or mental lassitude or distraction should arise, then, the meditator should turn his mind to a gladdening, elevating subject" (SN 47.10).

And here the teachers of old recommend especially the recollection of the Buddha. When those hindrances to concentration vanish under its influence, the meditator will be able to return to his original meditation subject.

For a beginner especially, attempts at gaining concentration are often frustrated by an uneasy self-consciousness; the meditator, as it were, squints back upon himself.

He becomes disturbingly aware of his body with its little discomforts, and of his mind struggling against obstacles which only grow stronger the more he struggles.

This may happen when the subject of meditation is one's own physical or mental processes, but it may also occur with other subjects. In such a situation, it will be profitable to follow the advice given earlier and to turn one's attention from one's own personality to the inspiring recollection and visualization of the Buddha and the contemplation of his qualities.

The joyful interest, thus produced, may bring about that self-forgetfulness which is such an important factor for gaining concentration. Joy produces calm (*passadhi*), calm leads to ease (*sukha*), and ease to concentration (*samadhi*). Thus devotional meditation can serve as a valuable *aid in attaining mental concentration* which is the basis of liberating insight. This

function of devotional meditation cannot be better described than in the words of the Master:

"When a noble disciple contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time his mind is not enwrapped in lust nor in hatred, nor in delusion. At such a time his mind is rightly directed towards the Perfect One (Tathagata). And with a rightly directed mind the noble disciple gains enthusiasm for the goal, enthusiasm for the Dhamma, gains the delight derived from the Dhamma. In him thus delighted, joy arises; to one who is joyful, body and mind become calm; calmed in body and mind, he feels at ease; and if at ease, the mind finds concentration. Such a one is called a noble disciple who among humanity gone wrong, has attained to what is right; who among a humanity beset by troubles, dwells free of troubles."

— AN 6.10

Notes

1.

See *Life's Highest Blessings*, Dr. R.L. Soni
(Wheel No. 254/256).

2.

See *The Three Refuges*, Bhikkhu Ñanamoli
(Bodhi Leaves No. A5).

3.

See *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*,
Chapter VII.

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Seeing Things as They Are
by
Nyanaponika Thera
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If we contemplate even a minute sector of life's vast range, we are faced with a variety of living forms so tremendous that it defies all description. Yet three basic features can be discerned as common to everything that has animate existence, from the microbe to man, from the simplest sensations to the thoughts of a creative genius: impermanence or change

(*anicca*); suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*); non-self or insubstantiality (*anatta*).

These three basic facts were first found and formulated over 2,500 years ago by the Buddha, who was rightly called "the Knower of the World" (*loka-vidu*). They are designated, in Buddhist terminology, the three characteristics (*ti-lakkhana*) — the invariable marks or signs of everything that springs into being, the "signata" stamped upon the very face of life itself.

Of the three, the first and third apply directly to inanimate existence as well as to the animate, for every concrete entity by its very nature undergoes change and is devoid of substance. The second feature, suffering, is of course only an experience of the animate. But the Buddha applies the characteristic of suffering to all conditioned things, in the sense that, for living beings, everything conditioned is a potential cause of experienced suffering and is at any rate incapable of giving lasting satisfaction. Thus the

three are truly universal marks pertaining even to what is below or beyond our normal range of perception.

The Buddha teaches that life can be correctly understood only if these basic facts are understood. And this understanding must take place, not only logically, but in confrontation with one's own experience. Insight-wisdom, which is the ultimate liberating factor in Buddhism, consists in just this experiential understanding of the three characteristics as applied to one's own bodily and mental processes, and deepened and matured in meditation.

To see things as they really are means to see them consistently in the light of the three characteristics. Not to see them in this way, or to deceive oneself about their reality and range of application, is the defining mark of ignorance, and ignorance is by itself a potent cause of suffering, knitting the net in which man

is caught — the net of false hopes, of unrealistic and harmful desires, of delusive ideologies and of perverted values and aims.

Ignoring or distorting the three basic facts, ultimately, leads us only to frustration, disappointment and despair. But if we learn to see through deceptive appearances, and discern the three characteristics, this will yield immense benefits, both in our daily life and in our spiritual striving.

On the mundane level, the clear comprehension of impermanence, suffering and non-self will bring us a saner outlook on life. It will free us from unrealistic expectations, bestow a courageous acceptance of suffering and failure, and protect us against the lure of deluded assumptions and beliefs.

In our quest for the supramundane, comprehension of the three characteristics will be indispensable.

The meditative experience of all phenomena as inseparable from the three marks will loosen, and finally cut, the bonds binding us to an existence falsely imagined to be lasting, pleasurable and substantive.

With growing clarity, all things internal and external will be seen in their true nature: as constantly changing, as bound up with suffering and as unsubstantial, without an eternal soul or abiding essence.

By seeing thus, detachment will grow, bringing greater freedom from egoistic clinging and culminating in Nibbana, mind's final liberation from suffering.

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Why End Suffering?
by
Nyanaponika Thera
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The Buddha declares that he teaches the Dhamma for the sole purpose of leading beings to freedom from suffering.

If, moved by that teaching, [and] we resolve to make an end of suffering, it is of prime importance that we understand the problem of suffering clearly in its true width and depth. If our grasp of the problem is too glaringly incomplete, our endeavors to eliminate it will also be incomplete, incapable of garnering the strength needed to yield fully satisfactory results.

When asked "Why end suffering?" the obvious answer is that one wishes to end suffering because it is the natural innermost urge of one's being to be free from affliction.

However, in aspiring to the extinction of suffering, we should think not only of our own affliction, but also of the pain and sorrow we inflict upon others as long as we have not

reached the perfect harmlessness of a passion-free heart and the clear vision of a liberated mind.

If we regularly recollect the fact that, on our way through samsaric existence, we inevitably add to the suffering of others too, we shall feel an increased urgency in our resolve to enter earnestly the path leading to our own liberation.

The suffering we may inflict upon our fellow-beings includes, **first**, those cases where other beings become passive objects of our harmful actions.

Our greed robs, impoverishes, deprives and detracts, soils and violates. Our hate kills and destroys, hurts and rouses fear. The turbid waters of our interfering ignorance flood and devastate the neighbor's peaceful shores; our misjudgments lead him astray and leave him in calamity.

Then there is a **second** and even more detrimental way our defilements may cause harm to others.

Our evil or impure actions often provide in others a harmful response that entangles them still more in the meshes of their defilements. Our own greed increases the competitive greed of others; our own lust rouses in others lustful desires which might have slumbered had we not awakened them.

Our own hate and anger provoke hostility in return, starting thus the endless round of mutual revenge. Our prejudices become infectious. By our own illusions we deceive others who, by believing them, lend them increased weight and influence. Our wrong judgments, false values and erroneous views, sometimes only casually expressed, are taken up and expanded by others into extensive systems of deceptive and perverted notions working untold harm on people's minds. In all these cases a good part of

the responsibility will be ours. How careful we must be in what we speak and write!

A **third** way we may cause suffering to others is due to the limited and varying lifetime of our emotions. Our own love towards a certain person may die a natural death, while the person whom we loved still loves us, and, thus, suffers under our neglect. Or, in reverse, while the other's love for us has died, our own still lives and constantly urges him, encroaches upon his need for freedom, disturbs his peace and tears at his heart, causing him sorrow because he cannot help us.

These are quite common situations in human relationships, and their consequences are often tragic. We feel their poignancy particularly strongly because no moral guilt seems to be involved, only the stern impassive law of impermanence impressing its painful stamp upon this scene of life.

Yet here too a moral principle applies, though it is a matter of definition whether we use the word "guilt."

Understood rightly, the situation presents a case of lust, attachment or craving causing pain through lack of fulfillment. Looking at this case in this light, how clear will become the second noble truth: "Craving is the origin of suffering." And so too that seeming paradox: "From what is dear to us, suffering arises." When deeply contemplating that little specimen of life's suffering as presented here, we shall feel indeed: "Truly, this alone is enough to turn away from all forms of existence, to become disenchanted with them, to become detached from them!"

We still have not exhausted all the ways our own imperfections may draw others into the whirlpool of suffering.

But it may suffice here to add a **fourth** and last point. Our own passions and ignorance, whether

they involve another directly or only as an observer, may contribute to his harm by destroying his trust in man, his belief in high ideals, and his will to contribute to the fund of goodness in the world. Our own imperfections may thus induce him to become egocentric out of disappointment, a cynic or a misanthrope out of personal or impersonal resentment. Owing to our own imperfections, the forces of Good will again have been weakened not only in us, but in others too.

There are many who will reply to the Buddhist doctrine of suffering by saying: "We are well aware that happiness and beauty, joy and pleasure, have to be paid for by a certain amount of suffering. But we are willing to pay the price without grumbling, even the last price, death; and we think it is worth the price, and that it adds zest to our enjoyment."

Before those who speak thus, we may place the facts indicated above, and ask them: "Are you

aware that the price you are speaking of is paid not only by your own suffering, but also by the suffering of others? Do you think that it is right and fair for you to make *others* pay for your happiness? Will you still find 'added zest' if you look at your happiness from that angle?" And one's partner — provided he is honest and noble-minded (and only then would it be worthwhile to speak to him) — will pensively say: "I did not think of that. It is true, I must not make others pay for my shortcomings.

If I consider it unfair and ignoble to do so in my everyday dealings, should it not likewise be so in relation to these higher problems of life?" We may, then, be sure that we have planted the seed in his mind and conscience which will sprout in due time.

We return now to our initial line of thought. We have seen how our actions may affect others through many channels, how our shortcomings may drag others into suffering, entanglement

and guilt. Thus our constantly accumulating responsibility for much of the suffering and unhappiness in the world should be an additional and powerful incentive for us to become holy and whole for the sake of others, too.

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

By remaining conscious of the suffering we cause and the suffering we might prevent, we add two powerful motives to those already urging us to enter the liberating path: the challenging sense of manly responsibility, and the fullness of motherly love and compassion.

These complementary ideals of duty and love, which we may call the male and the female principles, will help to keep us unswervingly on the path. Love and compassion towards those who might become the victims of our own imperfections will urge us to fulfill our duty towards them in the only way possible: by fulfilling our duty towards ourselves.

The above lines of thought are tersely expressed by a saying of the Buddha that is much too little known:

By protecting oneself, one protects others;
by protecting others, one protects oneself.
— SN 47.19

In the light of the observations made above, these simple yet profound words of the Master will become still more translucent, charged with a magical power stirring the very depth of our being. By contemplating how our own defiled

actions can have detrimental effects upon others, we shall still better understand that both statements in this passage are complementary: by guarding ourselves we are doing our best to protect others; wishing to protect others against the suffering we ourselves can cause, we shall do our utmost to guard ourselves.

Therefore, for our own sake and for the sake of our fellow-beings, we have to be watchful of every step we take.

Only by a high degree of mindfulness shall we succeed. Thus it is said, in the same discourse, that the method of practicing that twofold protection is in the firm establishing of mindfulness (*satipatthana*), which, here, too, proves to be "the sole way" (*ekayano maggo*):

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

The same idea and method is expressed in a passage of the Buddha's "Advice to Rahula" (MN 61):

"After reflecting again and again, actions by deed, word and thought should be done... Before doing such actions by deed, word and thought, while doing them and after doing them, one should reflect thus:

"Does this action lead to the harm of myself, to the harm of others, to the harm of both?" After reflecting again and again, one should purify one's actions by deed, word and thought.

Thus, O Rahula, should you train yourself."

Again, it is said:

Thus, O monks, should you train yourselves: Considering one's own welfare, this is sufficient to strive untiringly. Considering the welfare of others, this is sufficient to strive untiringly.

Considering the welfare of both, this is sufficient to strive untiringly.

— SN 12.22

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

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Thus ends this document.